

# ECKE FRESH NEWS

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www.ecke.com

## Lesson's Learned in 2002!

**B**ased on reports from growers, the poinsettia season of 2002 was certainly not the best or the worst season. Most have survived another year. Of course we want to see stronger pricing, sales and distribution of the crop. It seems the goal becomes less obtainable each year. To become more profitable, growers have cut input costs to the point that no further cuts are feasible. Further reductions seem impossible to realize. But rather than give up, here are some things that can be looked at to improve profitability with poinsettias.

**REDUCE SHRINK.** Retailers and growers both know opportunity exists by reducing losses at the point of shipping and sale. The most common problems



*Prestige Stems*

come from stem breakage, disease or poor durability. Potential solutions are found through improved culture (there is always an opportunity to do better). However, a big step towards eliminating these issues can be realized through use of genetics best suited for the market served. Testing conducted at sites like the University of Florida support that dark leaf cultivars are more durable in shipping, making them a better choice for growers servicing markets requiring product to be sent to a central warehouse for redistribution. These poinsettias are also less sensitive to most bract damage problems, like bract edge burn that can lead to botrytis.

One of the most serious post-production problems for growers and retailers is stem breakage. The use of support rings does not guarantee that the stems will not break off during routine packing, unsleeving or handling of plants. The introduction of new genetics with strong stem strength and upright branch position, like

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Prestige, provides plants that are genetically less susceptible to problems of stem breakage.

**CONTROL TIMING.** Crop timing is often not as expected due to weather conditions and variables affecting the crop during flower initiation. Growers should pay particular attention to what is happening in the weeks leading up to, and immediately after initiation dates to compensate for conditions that can alter the normal maturity dates of the crop. Heat delay was experienced in 2002

due to unusually hot summer conditions that extended into late September. Some regions were further impacted due to cloudy weather during October. Although

heat is difficult to manage, keep in mind that night temperatures above 72° F cause the most significant delay. Attention should be given to increase airflow exchange and use cooling methods to manage temperatures effectively. If blackcloth is used, adjust the time to cover greenhouses from night to early morning to take advantage of opening the greenhouse for maximum cooling in the



*Botrytis*

## Lesson's Learned ...

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night. Pulling the cloth on 30 minutes prior to sunrise assures no disruption to photoperiod control. Keeping the greenhouse covered until 9:30-10:00 AM takes advantage of the coolest part of the day and the angle of the sun, avoiding rapid build up of heat that might cause further problems. Cool, cloudy conditions are easier to deal with provided growers react appropriately through use of lights and heat in the greenhouse to prevent early induction issues. By controlling flower induction, it is possible to have product ready for market at the appropriate time, making the crop and you as a supplier, more dependable.

**NOVELTY GENETICS.** Another approach to preventing loss of profitability with poinsettias is to stay ahead of the market with unique novelty genetics and differentiated product forms. Rather than competing with everyone else for the same customers using the same products and forms, try something different that gives you an edge.

Unique colors and forms make it possible to gain the attention of buyers and the market when

growers introduce products at an early stage of distribution.

Remember the prices that were being paid the first two years of Winter Rose?

Those growers who took the risk and offered this

novelty before it was widely grown

benefited. Not only did the

growers realize stronger pricing,

but their buyers benefited from

offering truly unique blooming plants in

a highly competitive market place. Don't wait until

everyone else figures out if a new poinsettia is going to work out. Information

on production is made available to help growers do a good job with the plants and get good results. Novelty

poinsettias may only have a 5-year market life and it is during the first 2 years that are the most profitable! Strawberries & Cream is a recent example of a new poinsettia with strong consumer appeal. Chianti is another example that provides this same opportunity.

**PRODUCT FORMS.** Doing something other than what your competition is doing makes sense. Competing against the loss leader will not provide a platform to negotiate prime pricing. Go around that wall by developing forms different from what can be easily accessed. Extreme examples would be the

"Texas Sized" poinsettias grown and marketed by Ellison Greenhouses of Texas. At 6 foot by 6 foot, these incredible poinsettias are produced and sold to high profile display venues (the Galleria Mall in Houston, etc.). At the other side of the scale are miniature poinsettia trees grown and marketed by Peace Tree



"Texas Sized" Poinsettias

Farms in Pennsylvania. These single pinch trees are grown in 4" specialty terracotta pots and take up the same bench space as a normal 4" pot, but are sold for significantly higher value.

So, the lessons learned from 2002 should be put to use in 2003! Take on low prices and returns by focusing on reduced shrink through crop culture and new genetics that meet the needs of your market. Don't let weather conditions take control of the crop. Manage timing through timely reaction to the environment. Don't compete with product forms and cultivars found in every greenhouse and retail outlet! Look for novelty products and forms to provide an edge with your customers. Growing value goes a long way to assuring success when others have lost focus and are fighting head-on with the crowd.



Holly Point™

## Chat Room

Never have poinsettia growers pleaded more urgently for tools to simplify and differentiate their programs in their effort to reduce risks and improve profitability. Our breeding program took note of these needs years ago resulting in the new vase-



*Prestige™ –  
A Sturdy  
Poinsettia*

like architecture in Prestige™. Prestige not only reduces losses and risks from branch breakage but the upright form allows more plants per square meter. Our Product Development team is focusing now on “nailing down” the finer points of response time to take full advantage of this cultivar’s ability to fit main season timing without black cloth or

lighting. Our breeders are working intensely on delivering the full family of colors, including an early flowering red selection with the goal of a very programmable single “cultivar-family” solution.

Many growers have already been using unique product forms and novelty type varieties as a way to differentiate and to improve margins. Understanding the need to “feed” these programs with new cultivars and forms, a limited commercial quantities trial package will be available for the 2003 season. In addition to several completely new novelty forms, this collection will include a more compact earlier flowering Winter Rose Red. Its timing with other main red varieties, compactness and novelty forms will make it a winner on all levels. Contact your Customer Service Rep immediately for information to order the trial package.

The 6 cm single stem “mini” product form has been under-exploited in the North American market where less than 1 million are traditionally sold compared to

the European market where more than 10 million are consumed. The short crop time, high density on the bench, and late cutting used give this product one of the highest returns per square foot of any. Further major red varieties like Freedom™, Prestige and Winter Rose™ are all ideal choices for this winning niche form. The “Punch Family” and Jester work nicely as well. Find every thing you need to know about producing this form at [www.ecke.com](http://www.ecke.com) <<http://www.ecke.com>>

Future breeding goals will address the need to make production of the traditional poinsettia more “fool proof” while also recognizing the appetite of the “X” generation for totally new colors like Plum Pudding™.

## TECHNICAL Q & A

### Season Extenders from The Flower Fields!

**Q** “With so many new crops to choose from, how can I use everything that is available today with my limited greenhouse space?”

**A** There is never enough space or product to fill the demand for spring blooming plants. However, on either side of the peak there is opportunity for growers to use crops targeted for the cool, early spring sales or the hot, summer sales.

Argyranthemum is one species that is ideal for use in the early-season. The new range of colors available and ease of production make this crop desirable for growers and retailers alike. Because Argyranthemum can be grown cool, avoid excess irrigation when plants are



*Argyranthemum - Comet Pink*

## Season Extenders ...

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*Chandler Snapdragons - Deep Pink*

young and pathogens are favored by the cool, wet conditions. Feed with complete, balanced fertilizers at 200-250 ppm nitrogen (CLF), using a balanced fertilizer such as a 15-5-15 Cal-Mag or similar material. This fertilizer works well for cool temperature production and supplies both the magnesium and minor elements required by the crop. Establish cuttings at 65°F and pinch out the growing tip 1-2 weeks after transplanting. Grow at 60+° F day temperatures and night temperatures of 50+° F. *Argyranthemum* responds to most PGR's, but Cycocel applied at 1,000-1,500 ppm or B-Nine at 1,500-2,500 ppm within 4 weeks of pinching helps prevent stretch. The warmer the crop is grown greater attention will be needed for PGR applications. For more detailed information on production, go to: [http://www.ecke.com/html/fastfax/ff\\_ffx\\_arg.html](http://www.ecke.com/html/fastfax/ff_ffx_arg.html)

Other good crops for early, cool season production include *Osteospermum*, *Nemesia*, *Diascia* and *Snapdragon*.

On the other side of spring is a market for warm temperature crops. *Angelonia*, which is commonly called the Summer Snapdragon because of its flower form and excellent heat tolerance, is



*Osteospermum - Cape Daisy Beira*



*Angelonia - Carita Lavender*

an excellent choice. This plant is best finished in 1gallon pots or larger, although 4" pots are common. Transplant and pinch 10-14 days later, leaving 5-6 nodes. A second pinch is helpful on 4-6" pots while larger containers with only 1 cutting may require a third pinch. High light increases branching and decreases internode stretch. If PGR treatments are needed, good results have been had from tank mixes of Cycocel and B-Nine at 1500ppm and 3000ppm respectively.

Because of the warm production temperatures, most any complete and balanced fertilizer can be used provided it works with the irrigation water quality. For more detailed information, use the following link to our Ecke Fresh newsletter:



*Coleus - Golden Bedder*

[http://www.ecke.com/html/fastfax/pdfs/PE2102\\_EckeNewsFall\\_v4.xp.pdf](http://www.ecke.com/html/fastfax/pdfs/PE2102_EckeNewsFall_v4.xp.pdf) or our website technical support at [http://www.ecke.com/html/fastfax/ff\\_ffx\\_ang.html](http://www.ecke.com/html/fastfax/ff_ffx_ang.html)

Other good crops for warm temperature production include *Coleus*, *Portulaca* and *Verbena*.

# THE DIFFERENT PHASES OF PRESTIGE

9/24



Under normal conditions, Prestige initiates flowering in late September

10/01



Prestige grown in the warm temperatures of the South initiates flower in early October

11/11



Color development should be evident in early November

11/19



Maintain normal temperatures for optimum color and expansion of bracts

11/26



Prestige should be ready for sale in most regions by late November

12/4



Cool temperatures and light shade prevent fading of bracts in December in areas of high light

**ECKE**  
RANCH