

Flower Trials no longer

New colours, bigger flowers and many inspiring ideas for marketing were presented during the increasingly popular Flower Trials held in the Netherlands. Growers and traders from all over Europe visited the greenhouses of many Dutch breeders and propagators. FlowerTech presents a short impression of the trials, which again this year received more visitors than previous years.

By: Florentine Jagers op Akkerhuis

The Flower Trials held for the fourth year in the Netherlands are growing rapidly in popularity. Eighteen breeding and propagating companies presented their current assortment of bedding plants and pot plants and introduced many new varieties. All participating companies received remarkably more visitors than last year.

Growers from all over Europe, from Italy to England and Hungary to Denmark visited the Westland and the Aalsmeer regions to get an impression of the recent developments. Besides the decorative value, cultural aspects, such as a shorter cultivation period or energy efficient production, were in the spotlight.

Pelargonium: Improving security and uniformity



Geranium Pacific Red Star

Pelargonium is very vulnerable to bacteria and virus infection, such as Xanthomonas and Ralstonia. The delivery of healthy plant material is therefore an essential issue for all partners in the production chain. For this reason S&G Flowers has developed its own extended certification programme. The programme consists of the common certification plus an extra control on the nuclear stock, the propagation stock and the production stock. S&G has also jointly developed a new method for transplanting together with TTA, a Dutch company which specialises in equipment for plant handling, plant selection and internal transport. The young plants are highly uniform which greatly improves the automation of transplanting.

Selecta introduces a series of pelargonium with decorative dark coloured leaves, the so called Moonlight-series while Dümme/Red Fox introduces more pelargonium's with new colours including the very striking double-coloured Pacific Red Star.

Marketing in the picture

Many breeding and propagating companies are developing marketing concepts and a whole chain approach for selling their products. For example, they give the consumer ideas about how to plant several different plants in their garden with the so called 'one-two-three' concept of Dümme/Redfox. The company presents a six pack of different flowering plants which fit together well in a garden. There are several colour combinations presented in this concept. S&G Flowers introduces the

'Calendar Colours' in which for each month they present a complete assortment of flowers. In this way the company aims to make it is easier for the grower to always have a complete and flowering assortment.

Another approach is the pink wave-idea from Ball Plants. This company has developed a special pink pot which comes with a series of pink petunias (Shock Wave, Early Wave, Wonder Wave and Tidal Wave). The idea is that the consumer will recognise and remember the pink pot and will ask for this particular petunia in the showy pink pot again next year.

Beekenkamp developed the complete new concept of 'wellife', in which they present specials herbs in a decorative package, for example bathroom herbs and kitchen herbs.



'Wellife' Herbs Concept



'One-two-three' Concept

r a sideshow

Begonia: Decorative leaves Petunia: Melting of good qualities



Leaf Begonia (no name yet)

For a long time begonia has been considered as an old fashioned plant, but it is now enjoying renewed popularity both for in the garden as well as for indoor use. Benary is bringing a series of new double flowered begonias and the Dutch begonia-specialist M. Koppe is developing new types with decorative leaves. M. Koppe is also working on self branching types.

Petunia is one of the main crops presented in the Flower Trials with several companies showing interesting novelties.

For the first time ever Florensis presented an orange petunia in the Viva series, called Forest Fire. The colour is not yet a very convincing orange, but this introduction will set a trend according to the breeder.

Sakata introduced a complete new variety: the intergeneric hybrid SuperCal which combines characteristics of both petunia and calibrachoa.



SuperCal



Forest Fire

SuperCal petunias can tolerate a sub-optimal pH, both on the bench and outdoors. They are easier to handle because they have no sticky residue on the leaves like standard petunias. SuperCal is said to have a high disease tolerance and outstanding performance in all types of weather extremes.

All breeders are working on varieties which do not require the dead flowers to be pinched off, so-called 'self cleaning' plants. This characteristic is becoming more and more common amongst petunia.

Celosia: Growing popularity

Celosia was on display at a remarkable number of places during the Flower Trials 2007 and it is expected that this plant will become popular in gardens in the coming years. There are three types of celosia: plumes, crests, or spikes. All Celosias have very bright colours, red, yellow, cream, orange, rose, deep magenta or pink. They also have a high tenability. Royal Van Zanten, Combifleur and Benary demonstrated a wide range.



Bright Magenta Coloured Celosia

Helianthus: Pollen free and EC trials

Combifleur introduces a new Helianthus variety, which is pollen free. Helianthus 'Sunsation' is a F-1 hybrid with a big flower and a black centre. The dark centre stays an eye-catcher because the centre does not become dirty. The flower does not produce pollen and because of that, the plant has a much longer tenability in comparison with existing varieties.

The new Helianthus is a compact plant which can be grown using less growth regulators. Combifleur has also completed extensive trials with this variety which made clear that there are more possibilities to grow a more compact plant by using a higher EC. The new Helianthus has a shorter cultivation period compared with other varieties, according to the breeder.



Helianthus 'Sunsation'

Culture aspects

Breeders are paying more and more attention to cultural aspects. The physiology behind germination problems of seed is a hot item: For example, Kieft Seeds is working on more reliable grass seed while Benary has improved the germination rate of begonia. Beekenkamp has made the germination of several difficult species one of its priorities and it hopes to find possibilities for new decorative plants. Danziger is working on vegetative propagation, instead of seed, in order to speed up the cultivation period by three to four weeks. Other companies are working on varieties, which grow faster, resulting in a shorter period in the greenhouse.

Energy is also becoming an item of interest because this is an important development, particularly for growers in moderate climate zones. Kooij is introducing pot carnations which can be grown under cool conditions in a greenhouse. Sakata presents a whole new series of so-called 'energy savers'. This series consists of 21 different varieties, such as anthirrhinum, begonia and calendula, which can be grown under low temperatures.



Pot Carnation Citrien

Osteospermum: new colours and shapes



Osteospermum or Cape Daisy is still enjoying great popularity and again new colours and shapes have been introduced. Several companies presented the so-called 'spider'-types and new colours are offered such as the Flower Power Pink Sand from Selecta.

Flower Power Pink Sand

Flower Trials 2008

The Flower Trials are held in the Westland and in the Aalsmeer region. About 20 breeding and propagating companies present the latest varieties and the current assortment of pot plants and bedding plants. Next year the Flower Trials will be held on 12, 13 and 14 July. More information on www.flowertrials.nl