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PELARGONIUM PROFILE – WHERE DO NEW CULTIVARS COME FROM?

By Dr. Wayne Handlos

Do you ever wonder where all those varieties of geraniums come from?

As amateur growers we frequently grow the plants that appeal to us in some way or other. We

like the unusual color of a flower; a variegated leaf may be particularly attractive; maybe we like the compactness

of a miniature variety; maybe the flower is especially large; maybe the leaf has a scent we find

pleasant or intense. We have no pressure on us to grow or not grow any particular plants.



Patriot Salmon Chic



Galleria Bright Sunrise



Elegance Camelot

In the larger word however, the growing of plants and flowers has become very commercialized and competitive. Other factors come into play in evaluating each variety offered for sale. How fast does a cutting develop roots? Can small plants in cell packs withstand shipping in closed containers? How fast can a plant in a 4" pot produce flowers. Is each variety resistant to diseases and insect pests? With Ball FloraPlant in our backyard, we are familiar with lots of pretty zonal and ivy geraniums. But if we look closely at their offerings we find that they have "lines" or "series" of geraniums. Each series consists of a group of plants with similar characteristics which suit them to particular purposes or customers. For instance, in ivy geraniums Ball offers three series – Colorcade, Galleria and Starstruck. The first is the traditional double flowered ivy geranium. The Galleria series are zonal/ivy crosses which tend to be more compact and generally resistant to budworms and rust. The last series consists of plants that produce large single flowers. Their zonal series – Allure, Designer, Fantasia and Showcase, each have their distinctive characteristics.

We are likely to encounter plants from these various series when shopping at our local nurseries

and even at the mass marketers. With the Oglevee facility nearby in Lompoc we have become familiar with the Elegance and Maiden

series of regal geraniums. Oglevees also developed several lines of zonal geraniums (Maestro, Candy and Patriot lines), as well as their

Global ivy geraniums. Even though Oglevees were bought out by the Ecke company (best known for poinsettias), the Oglevee name

continues to be used.

Both Ball FloraPlant and Oglevee/Ecke have active breeding programs to create new and (hopefully) improved cultivars of

these three types of geraniums. But are there more companies developing other varieties of geraniums? Of course, the answer is "Yes."

Also in Lompoc is the Bodger Seed Company and they offer their line of "Bodger Botanicals" – vegetatively reproduced plants which includes the Solstice series of regal geraniums with seven colors.

Another company whose varieties we see in the local market is the Fischer Company from Germany whose geraniums are sold under the "Pelfi" label – *Pelargonium Fischer*.

We see their ivy series – Blizzard (7 colors), Cascade (12 colors), and Freestyle (2 colors) They also offer many zonal cultivars under individual varietal names but also the Rocky Mountain series (4 colors) and the Tango series (7 colors).

In the past year another German company Dummen has become associated with the local grower Greenheart of Nipomo – just down the road from Ball FloraPlant. We should expect to see more of their cultivars locally. They sell under the name Red Fox and offer

four series of zonals (Survivor – 15 colors, Pinnacle – 11 colors, Countryside – 3 colors, and Savannah – 9 colors). In addition, they

have two series of ivy geraniums – Pacific (13 colors) and Atlantic (2 colors). The large pot at our local sale raffle was 'Red Fox Pacific

Hot Pink Improved.'

I think I have made the point that there are lots of new (and newer) cultivars of *Pelargonium* available to us. While we may love lots of the older varieties there is a lot of other stuff out there.

I've only touched the surface of companies developing new *Pelargoniums*. In another newsletter I'll cover some other companies

who are originating new cultivars of *Pelargonium*.

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