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## Poinsettias get practice run Greenhouse has 50 varieties of the holiday plant



Alicia Bostdorff-Timm measures a 'Christmas Carol' poinsettia, which is one of the new varieties the greenhouse has cultivated. Bostdorff's has been growing the experimental flowers since 1999.

( THE BLADE/LORI KING )



[Zoom](#)

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**BOWLING GREEN** - Dick Bostdorff likens the 50 varieties of poinsettias getting a tryout this fall at his greenhouse on State Rt. 25 to the colors and fabrics an interior decorator brings to a homeowner wanting a new look.

"We're saying, 'You want something on your coffee table that's different,' " he said. "People may even look at it and say, 'What is that? It doesn't look like a poinsettia.' "

Indeed, amidst the sea of poinsettias that is only half red are flowers of differing sizes, shapes, colors, shades, and likelihood of ever appearing on a retailer's shelf. Since 1999, Bostdorff Greenhouse Acres has grown the experimental holiday flowers for the poinsettia cultivars trials run by Ohio State University and the Ohio Florists Association.

"There are basically five poinsettia breeders in the world, and they are asked by the land grant colleges to submit new varieties that they have been breeding for research," explained Mary Ann Bostdorff. "They want to find out, will this work in a wholesale greenhouse? Will this work in a retail greenhouse? Is it easy to grow? What are the problems? How much growth retardant will they possibly need?"

Of course, they also want to know if people will buy them.

For the next three days, people who stop by a poinsettia sale at OSU will be asked to step inside a campus greenhouse and rate the 50 varieties grown at Bostdorff's and three wholesale greenhouses in Ohio.

Claudio Pasian, an associate professor and extension floriculture specialist at Ohio State, said the information is invaluable to breeders who are constantly improving varieties. And why would the public want 50 new varieties of poinsettias?

"For the same reason why Ford, GM, and Toyota come out with a new model every year," Mr. Pasian said. "There is no other reason. It's a marketing tool."

Strolling down the aisles at Bostdorff's just north of Bowling Green, co-owner Alicia Bostdorff-Timm identifies each variety by name like an old friend.

"Visions of Grandeur" has soft, luscious pink leaves. The "Cinnamon Star" sports salmon-colored leaves. "White Glitter" has red leaves flecked with white. The "Valentine" looks like a traditional poinsettia crumpled into carnation-style blooms.

Some of the varieties just aren't that pretty, and it's likely they'll be shelved by breeders. "Santa, Jr.," for example, has tiny red leaves on a scrawny stem.

Bostdorff's also asks customers to rate the varieties they would be most likely to purchase. The trials, as they call them, will be inspected by growers during an industry open house Monday, then sold to the public along with the 3,500 or so other poinsettias raised for the holiday season.

The business is not paid for taking part in the trials, but Mr. Bostdorff said the experience has helped them become better poinsettia growers, and it gives the public a voice in what they'd like to see in the greenhouse.

"It gives us an advantage to be able to look at a new variety one year before everyone else, and we know how they're going to grow, what they need," he said.

Chris Smalley, stewardship coordinator for the Wood County Park District, said checking out the poinsettia trials is a nice pre-holiday outing for anyone, not just gardeners.

"Everyone has this picture in their head of what a poinsettia is and until you get to see some of the colors and varieties out there, you have no idea," Mr. Smalley said. "We're very lucky to have this right in our backyard."

The park district is organizing a tour of the poinsettia trials at 11 a.m. Friday. Those planning to attend the free tour are asked to register with the park district and meet at park district headquarters on Mercer Road where they'll carpool to Bostdorff's.

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