



## Horticultural therapy: Garden State agriculture harvests viable seeds

*Fall sales of ornamentals of mums, pansies and flowering cabbage, has increased in the last 10 years to the point where home decorating in the fall is rivaling sales for Christmas decorating.*



**New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas Fisher touring the Fall trials of ornamental flowers at Kube Pak Open House September 27th in Allentown. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)**

The colors of fall are a cornucopia of plant textures, sizes, shapes and fragrances that tantalize the senses and create a market place of consumers eager to buy at retail garden centers and greenhouses.

Fall sales of ornamentals of mums, pansies and flowering cabbage, has increased in the last 10 years to the point where home decorating in the fall is rivaling sales for Christmas decorating. This in turn has helped the bottom line of growers throughout the state. Plants add benefit to the environment, economy and health and wellness.

The history, and evidence-based studies on the benefits of flowers and plants continue to gain notoriety. It makes sense as we would not survive without plants. We wear and grow plants. We use plants to make medicine and many other health supplements. We use in sickness, and in sorrow. The therapeutic practice of gardening has proven to have significant physical, social and cognitive benefits and has been specialized in the field of horticultural therapy.”

Plant breeding and research creates and makes possible the abundance of materials used by us, the consumer across the Garden State and up and down the East Coast. The materials are showcased every September in Fall Trials at Kube Pak Open House, in Allentown, N.J.

Kube Pak is a wholesale grower of garden plants, custom-grown plugs, rooted cuttings and finished annuals and perennials. The growers at Kube Pak use non-chemical approaches for pest control in the greenhouses to support environmental-friendly practices. The open house is a massive, indoor display of thousands of mums, pansies (violets), carnations, (dianthus), as far as the eye could see. This year event was a cornucopia of the best this fall season has to offer in flowers and flower combinations, displayed in every direction, vertically and horizontally, It drew more than 200 landscapers and retail customers who sell to their clients from Washington, D.C. to Pittsburgh, and up to Boston.

“They represented garden centers, landscapers, mom and pop operations, large landscape operations,” including Bright View Landscape Services (formerly Brickman, said John Swanekamp, Kube Pak family-owner. In addition, a group from Trenton Psychiatric Hospital attended the event for field trip.

“Our first open house was outside, with maybe 100 pots of mums lined up on a rainy afternoon, with 25 or 30, buyers. After that rainy show, we decided to move indoors,” Swanekamp added.

I talked with Kube Pak family owners, and two of the four leading breeders in the world: Gediflora, in Belgium, breeders and propagators of chrysanthemums, and PanAmerican Seeds, leader of seeds for Violas (pansies), Dianthus (carnations), many annuals and perennials which is based out of West Chicago. Kube Pak grows and sells the root cuttings and seeds bred by these companies.



Pansies as far as the eye can see. (Photo: ~Courtesy Laura DePrado)

“This is the most unique venue to display seasonal product along with other genetics like mums that are complementary to our seeds,” said John Cotton of PanAmerican Seeds retail and development division. “It’s an opportunity to interact with local growers with the ideal of furnishing them with the best seeds products possible for this season in this region.”

PanAmerican Seeds, a Ball Horticulture Co., is the leading flower seed breeder in the world. For more than 60 years it has marketed its products to wholesale and retail distributors around the globe. According to company literature, it strives to solve grower production and sales issues with high-quality products whose benefits are carried all the way to the consumer level.

In the United States, mums are sold August through October. There are 350 commercial varieties on the market, and Gediflora Belgium Mums has 100 varieties. Most of the mums sold in Europe are sold only for “All Saints Day,” Nov. 1. According to Elien Pieters, managing director, Gediflora, and a third-generation owner, “Garden mums, (chrysanthemums), are one of the very few crops that cannot be imported from outside the U.S. This creates jobs for U.S growers.” She added, “I had no plans to get into horticulture. My father’s passion became mine.”



Hionis Greenhouses fields of mums. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

I asked Bernard Choydyla, Gediflora Mums product manager U.S. and Canada, what benefits he gets out of his work in the industry.

"It makes me happy," he said. "All horticulturalists love plants. People are happy. We do this for the enjoyment."

There are five major colors in mums: Yellow is the top color seller at 35 percent. Second in sales at 20 percent each are pink/purple, bronze/orange, and red, while white mums are third in sales, at 5 percent. "The open house, gives the "Wow effect" displaying genetics that Kube Pak has grown that started as 2-inch-long unrooted cuttings to 20-inch tall garden mums," Choydyla said.

"The nursery/greenhouse/sod industry in New Jersey, is the state's largest agriculture sector with 42 percent gross sales. This includes nursery, sod, horticulture and floriculture," according to New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Alfred Murray, assistant secretary, who attended the open house. "Nationally, New Jersey continues to be an important player in this industry. According to recent statistics, our state ranks sixth in the nation in floriculture sales valued at \$196 million, and fifth in all horticultural sales valued at \$356 million.

"To be at Kube Pak's open house and see the commitment of buyers who were present underscores the industry's appreciation for New Jersey horticulture and floriculture products," Murray added. "The NJDA is proud to support Kube Pak, and Rob Swanekamp, past president, and vice president of the New Jersey Board of Agriculture. This operation at Kube Pak represents one of the many family-owned farms in the state that is the trademark of which is a prime example of New Jersey's agriculture industry."



**“The Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod Industry in New Jersey, is the State’s largest Agriculture sector with 42 percent gross sales. This includes nursery, sod, horticulture and floriculture,” according to New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Alfred Murray, Assistant Secretary. (Photo: ~Courtesy Laura DePrado)**

The State Board of Agriculture is unique in that it creates and sets policy, (as compared to any other in the U.S.), that is voted upon by delegates at the State Agricultural Convention conducted in Atlantic City in February each year for the past 100 years. In 2013, and every year since the Board voted and passed resolutions supporting “Horticultural Therapy Week”-- the third week of March -- in support of SJR12 (Bateman/Vitale), and AJR13 (Simon/Vanieri-Huttle). Governor Chris Christie signed into law in May 2015.

“As a farmer and as the spouse of a horticulturalist, I recognize firsthand the healing powers of working with one’s hands in the soil and with plant life,” said Paul Hlubik, New Jersey executive director of the U.S.D.A. Farm Service Agency, who also attended the open house. “As a public advocate for every segment of New Jersey agriculture with growers and my colleagues I commend such awareness and unyielding support of the horticultural industry here in the Garden State.”

*Laura DePrado is a horticultural therapy practitioner. Email [laura@finaltouchplantscaping.com](mailto:laura@finaltouchplantscaping.com).*