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GROWERTALKS

IDM Resistance in the Summer Trials

How Beacon (upper left) and
Imara XDR (lower right) fared
across the country, page 36.

Silver Treasure Begonia

By Chuck Pavlich, Terra Nova Nurseries

Begonia Silver Treasure caught the imagination of growers and buyers alike at Cultivate'19 in Columbus, Ohio. Not only was it the most favored plant at the Terra Nova Nurseries booth, but it was also an award winner in trials across the United States.

A fourth-generation hybrid, Silver Treasure was bred for the potted crop and perennial market. Silver Treasure and its sibling, Begonia Silver Lace, are by far the most cold-tolerant and hardy begonias Terra Nova Nurseries breeds. This is, in part, due to our sourcing of materials mostly from the Yunnan region in China and its Mount Lijiang, famously known as Snow Dragon Mountain.

The parentage is mostly *B. grandis* spp. Evansiana, which gives Silver Treasure a good amount of hardiness, though other species played a role in this trait as well. *B. grandis* is USDA Zone 5 hardy, but it's not very ornamental and can sometimes grow too tall and flop over in cultivation.

In breeding Silver Treasure, we knew it had to overcome the bad habits of *B. grandis* while also keeping the hardiness. The habit of Silver Treasure is nothing like its majority parent; it's compact, beefy and well branched. The almost mirror-silver top surface contrasts with the rich burgundy back and is the perfect foil for the foliage. Its flowers are relatively insignificant and held mostly below the foliage, but are never a bother and don't need to be constantly cleaned up.

The rhizomatous root habit is extensive and adds to the hardiness of the plant overall. If the root mass were bulbous, the possibility of freezing is greater. Fine-fibered roots are less likely to rot in wet soils as well.

Silver Treasure is a multi-use plant; in a mixed container, it's a marvelous blender, uniting a broad range of colors. Impatiens, fuchsias, coleus and heuchera are great companion plants for begonias, as are ferns and azaleas. As an in-ground plant, Silver Treasure brightens a shady spot, reflecting light and colors unlike any perennial before, and is quite stunning.

When planted as an understory plant, perhaps under rhododendrons or azaleas, it adds another dimension to the ▶



Silver Treasure Begonia.



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Kaleidoscope of Color



The mirror-silver top surface of the leaves contrasts with the rich burgundy back.

garden, making the understory the show-piece when the rhododendrons have finished blooming. Mixing Silver Treasure with subtropical plants like fatsia or ferns will add an unrivaled eye-catching pop of color and texture. As a solitary plant in a container, Silver Treasure is a classic look that bridges shabby chic to ultra-modern and beyond.

Culture for Silver Treasure is relatively easy. From a Stage 3 plant out of tissue culture, Silver Treasure forms a well-rounded plant with excellent branching. It needs no pinch and PGRs are neither required nor recommended.

For Silver Treasure to reach 4 in., expect the liner to finish time to be four to six weeks. Additionally, a Silver Treasure liner can reach 2.5 quarts in eight to 10 weeks.

Silver Treasure holds exceptionally well on the shelf and shipping is easy because of its cold tolerance. Additionally, the variety can ship earlier and stay on shelves later than virtually any other begonia on the market. They respond well to slow-release fertilizers as a potted crop and should be fed well at about 150 to 200 ppm.

Silver Treasure is a very healthy plant, rarely visited by disease or insects. Shade is still essential for success; morning sun is fine, but not required for good growth.

Marketing this plant is quite easy and opportunities for sales are extensive. For example, spring annual and perennial sales are a given, not to mention winter houseplant and holiday sales, as it can give holiday poinsettias an exciting option for a companion.

Silver Treasure marks a new era in begonia breeding and has the ultimate hardiness, habit and ease of cultivation wrapped into one. Our goal at Terra Nova Nurseries has always been to be the first and best in breeding and this begonia doesn't disappoint.



counts. The vibrant orange-red, fully double flowers keep coming and coming—they don't cycle. And the foliage shows truly impressive blackspot resistance, even in the multi-year, no-spray trials at Swarthmore's Scott Arboretum.



Photo: Saunders Brothers

Echinacea Kismet Intense Orange.

■ Since 2002, when Jim Ault first showed that *Echinacea purpurea* and *E. paradoxa* could make colorful babies, breeders released scores of beautiful cultivars—the majority of which sold like gangbusters, but failed in the landscape. I don't know if "echinacea burnout" is an official thing, but I know I grew numb to new releases for a while. I'm happy to report our group trials show breeders have turned the corner and we now have varieties that are both grower-friendly and reliable landscape performers. While there are too many to list, two standouts are Kismet Intense Orange from Terra Nova and Sombrero Lemon Yellow Improved from Darwin Perennials. Both have multiple breaks at the crown, making a full plant in production and both overwinter admirably in the ground.

■ The **Helleborus** Frostkiss series doesn't bulk as quickly for growers as some other series in the industry, but the finished product is reliably worth the wait. We certified four cultivars in the series for 2020: Anna's Red, Penny's Pink, Glenda's Gloss and Dorothy's Dawn. The first of the series, Anna's Red was an "impossible" cross by Rodney Davey, resulting in a previously unseen combination of large, dark reddish-purple flowers, stunning marbled foliage and a robust habit. The marbling to the foliage is pink on young growth, quickly turning silver as the leaf matures. Mature plants can easily reach 18-in. high and 24-in. wide with 50 or more open flowers.

Penny's Pink boasts dusty rose-colored flowers on the same stunning foliage as Anna's Red. Glenda's Gloss takes the flower show a step further with a wide raspberry margin that ▶

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