



New Plant Product Combinations Adding Value to Container Nursery Stock

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Nature of Work: Combination plantings are used with annuals and perennials to improve retail plant sales. Only rarely are woody plants included to add height to the mix. The use of unique or unusual plants seem to be necessary to attract interest from retail consumers. Combinations that are compatible together and could be produced by wholesale growers need to be identified. The uses of pleasing combinations would improve the price over the individual costs of single plants.

Nursery crops are often sold as impulse items identified by their color (i.e. flowers, leaves or bark) or for their unique growth habit or form (contorted or weeping types). Other plants are purchased for a specific use or need. No where in the nursery trade do we offer a combination or single package of plants to serve multiple used or act as a design element in the landscape. The objective of this study is to produce plant combinations in the same container and determine customer acceptance of the end product. Many new plants were introduced and evaluated as container combinations. This venue may also provide an excellent way to introduce new crops to the end consumer.

Seven gallon pots were planted with several different plant combinations. Combinations were planted that combine an upright tree or shrub element and a lower ground cover running over the pot surface. Other combinations included plants of similar growth habit that could grow together with intermingled branches, flowers, leaves and fruit.

The combinations were potted in spring and through out the summer, and maintained under nursery conditions. All were in full sun. Seven gallon *Loropetalum chinense rubrum* 'Sizzlin Pink' and *Abelia* × 'Canyon Creek' were grown the entire season with out any pruning.

Results and Discussion: Plants have been growing together for one or more seasons. A reasonable amount of growth has been produced. The plant combinations listed in Table 1 appear to have the greatest appeal to consumers. Producers remain skeptical of the possibility of producing and selling mixed combination containers. These selections have been developed over several seasons.

Significance to the Industry: Retailers and growers are always looking for new ways to market their plants. I think there is an opportunity for the smaller speciality grower to expand his palette of offerings by growing combination plantings. Combination plantings could also be provided by more traditional growers to add new speciality products. I think these types of products fill the same nitch as topiary junipers and trellised camellias. They are a premium product that uses uncommon plants to appeal to impulse purchasing. Combination plantings are not for everyone but they could provide new specialities for some growers.

Table 1. Combinations that have the greatest promise for consumer acceptance.

Major Plant	Minor Plant
<i>Acer palmatum</i>	<i>Mazus reptans</i>
<i>Acer palmatum</i>	<i>Pratia pendunculata</i>
<i>Cycas revoluta</i>	<i>Cordyline australis</i> 'Red Sensation'
<i>Ensete ventricosum</i> (Red Banana)	<i>Mazus reptans</i>
<i>Ilex crenata</i> 'Sky Pencil'	<i>Abelia</i> × 'Rose Creek'
<i>Loropetalum chinense rubrum</i> 'Sizzlin Pink'	<i>Abelia</i> × 'Canyon Creek'
<i>Thuja occidentalis</i> 'Golden Globe'	<i>Acorus gramineus</i> 'Variegatus'
<i>Thuja occidentalis</i> 'Degroot's Spire'	<i>Acorus gramineus</i> 'Variegatus'
<i>Trachycarpus fortunei</i>	<i>Rubus pentalobus</i>
<i>Trachycarpus fortunei</i>	<i>Carex</i> 'Frosty Curls'