

Flowering Shrubs: Shaking Up the Market®

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Spring Meadow has a long reputation for seeking out and introducing new and interesting shrubs. About 25 years ago we decided to make a concerted effort to work directly with plant breeders to protect and introduce new shrubs and to sell them under an umbrella brand. We currently represent breeders in Japan, Korea, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, England, Poland, France, Belgium, and the United States. Initially we sold plants under the name ColorChoice®, and 3 years ago we partnered with the marketing co-op Proven Winners® and now sell our new shrubs under the Proven Winners ColorChoice™ brand. From the beginning our intention was to change the way people view flowering shrubs. If you look at the plants that we've introduced and the way we market them you can see that in many ways we are emulating the perennial market.

In determining which plants to introduce under the Proven Winners brand we developed a selection criteria that is based heavily on a criteria list developed by J.C. Raulston. Past experience in producing and selling perennials also influenced the criteria. The criteria we utilize keep us focused and help us to define what makes the Proven Winners ColorChoice program unique and different from other branded programs. While no plant meets all the criteria, we seek to obtain as many characteristics as possible.

PROVEN WINNERS COLORCHOICE PLANT SELECTION CRITERIA

- 1) The plant must root from cuttings. We have passed on some really good plants that are propagated by budding or grafting, but we are a propagation nursery by trade so it only makes sense to choose plants that root from cuttings.
- 2) The plant has to perform in production. We have to be concerned that the plant grows well for our customers as well as for us. We work with about 80 licensed growers and sell to about 3,000 customers so we have to be concerned with production.
- 3) A plant must look good in a container. After all this is how the majority of our plants are produced and sold.
- 4) The plant has to have retail appeal, or better said "impulse appeal." Garden centers don't have many salespeople so the plant needs to sell itself.
- 5) We look for plants that are colorful during the spring selling season. The vast majority of plants are sold from April to mid-June. If a plant is in bloom or is at its best during this time it will sell at a much great level than if it blooms in August when no one is in the store.
- 6) We want plants that have attractive or colorful foliage. Plants with beautiful foliage sell regardless of bloom. It's a bonus if they also bloom in spring but if they have red foliage they'll sell even when they're done flowering. This extends the selling period, and it offers the end-consumer a plant that is attractive all season long in their garden.

- 7) We look for plants that grow over a wide geographic area. When you are promoting a plant on a national level you want it to perform on a national level. A plant like Limelight hydrangea grows from Manitoba to Orlando, which makes doing a national marketing campaign possible.
- 8) We look for plants that have multiple seasons on interest. The more interest the longer selling period, and it provides more pleasure to the end-consumer.
- 9) We want plants that have a unique new look or use. New forms offer new landscape and garden uses and broadens the number of applications in which a plant can be used.
- 10) We actively seek out plants that are dwarf or compact. My Monet® weigela is the perfect example of this. Typically a large shrub is used as a specimen; the dwarf My Monet weigela can be used as a ground cover and hence in much greater quantities. People don't have the knowledge or the time to prune, and these plants solve that problem.
- 11) Last but not least, the plant has to perform in the landscape or garden. It has to be more than just new; it has to perform, because for better or worse, people will have an experience with your brand and they will remember it is a good experience or a bad experience.

The end result of our selection criteria is to: (1) Provide growers with value in that they are easy to grow and easy to sell; (2) Provide retailers value in plants that sell faster and over a longer period of time; and (3) Provide the consumer with plants that are easy to grow and incredibly colorful. To be commercially successful a new plant must provide value to everyone down the line a plant.

Now let's look at some of the plants Spring Meadow has introduced. All of them are easy to grow and root, and most grow over a wide geographic area and look good in a container so I will just concentrate on just a few of the other criteria. Many of these plants have multiple selling characteristics but for the sake of time I've placed the plants in the most applicable heading.

SELLING CHARACTERISTICS

Colorful or Attractive Foliage.

Golden Anniversary™ abelia (*Abelia × grandiflora* 'Minipan')

Silver Anniversary™ abelia (*A. × grandiflora* 'Panache')

Sunshine Blue® bluebeard (*Caryopteris incana* 'Jason')

Golden Shadows® pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia* 'W. Stackman')

Blondy® euonymus (*Euonymus fortunei* 'Interbolwi')

Dream Catcher™ beautybush (*Kolkwitzia amabilis* 'Maradco')

Golden Lanterns® pheasant berry (*Leycesteria formosa* 'Notbruce')

Coppertina™ ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Mindai')

Black Lace™ elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* 'Eva')

Snow Storm™ spirea (*Spiraea media* 'Darsnorm')

'Eyecatcher' (*Weigela florida*)

Wine & Roses® weigela (*W. florida* 'Alexandra')

Colorful Foliage and Compact.

Summer Wine® ninebark (*P. opulifolius* 'Seward')

Fine Wine® weigela (*W. florida* 'Bramwell')

Midnight Wine® weigela (*W.* 'Elvera')

My Monet® weigela (*W. florida* 'Verweig')

Dwarf or Compact.

English Butterflies™ Series (*Buddleia davidii*): 'Adokeep', Adonis Blue™
butterfly bush; 'Peakeep', Peacock™ butterfly bush; 'Pyrkeep',
Purple Emperor™ butterfly bush

Petit Bleu™ bluebeard (*C. ×clandonensis* 'Minbleu')

Arctic Fire™ redosier dogwood (*C. sericea* 'Farrow')

Arctic Sun™ bloodtwig dogwood (*C. sanguinea* 'Cato')

Lil' Kim™ rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus* 'Antong')

Cityline™ Series (*Hydrangea macrophylla*): 'Venice Raven', Cityline® Venice;
'Berlin Rapa', Cityline® Berlin; 'Paris Rapa' Cityline® Paris; 'Vienna Rawi',
Cityline® Vienna

'Little Lamb' (*H. paniculata*)

Little Henry® virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica* 'Sprich')

Impulse Appeal.

Chiffon Series™ rose of Sharon (*H. syriacus*)

Satin Series™ rose of Sharon (*H. syriacus*)

Hydrangea macrophylla 'Claude'

Hydrangea macrophylla 'Shamrock'

Pinky Winky™ panicle hydrangea (*H. paniculata* 'DVPinky')

Unique Use or Look.

Castle Wall® holly (*Ilex ×meserveae* 'Heckenfee')

Castle Spire® holly (*I. ×meserveae* 'Heckenstar')

Fine Line® buckthorn (*Frangula alnus* 'Ron Williams')

Pink Parasols™ spirea (*S.* 'Wilma')

Multiple Seasons of Interest.

White Dome® smooth hydrangea (*H. arborescens* 'Dardom')

Quick Fire™ panicked hydrangea (*H. paniculata* 'Bulk')

Cardinal Candy™ linden viburnum (*Viburnum dilatatum* 'Henneke')

Brandywine™ smooth withered viburnum (*V. nudum* 'Bulk')

Blooms During the Spring Selling Season.

Chardonnay Pearls® deutzia (*Deutzia gracilis* 'Duncan')

Show Off™ forsythia (*Forsythia × intermedia* 'Mindor')

Bangle™ woadaxen (*Gensita lydia* 'Select')

Outstanding Performance in Production / Garden.

Fire Ball® winged euonymus (*E. alatus* 'Select')

Gold Splash® wintercreeper euonymus (*E. fortunei* 'Roemertwo')

Pink Shira™ bigleaf hydrangea (*H. macrophylla* 'Sonmarie')

Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight'

Oso Easy™ Roses

Fragrant Spreader rose (*Rosa* 'Chewground')Paprika rose (*R.* 'ChewMayTime')Peachy Cream rose (*R.* 'Horcoherent')Techny Gold™ arborvitae (*Thuja* × *media* 'Walter Brown')Spring Grove® western arborvitae (*T. plicata* 'Grovpli')