

Summary of Cut Flower Centre (CFC) trial results for a new range of Solomio and Star spray carnations from Hilverda Kooji (2012)

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Introduction

Hilverda Kooji has recently introduced a new range of 'novelty' spray carnations called Solomio and Star. The varieties trialled were Solomio 'Fen', 'Sem' and 'Vin' as well as Star 'Cherry'.

Solomio are the latest addition to the Sparkz assortment of flowers and are marketed as having their blooms held horizontally high on the stem creating a unique product.

Cultural and cropping information

Planting date and spacing

The crop was delivered as rooted plugs in week 14 but owing to the very wet weather these could not be planted immediately so the decision was taken to transplant them into 9cm pots. These were then planted into a Spanish tunnel in week 18 and outside in week 21. The crop was planted through 20cm x 17cm wires with 1 plant per square giving a density of 30 plants/m². The crop was pinched to 5 to 6 leaves, three weeks after planting in week 21.

General cultural information

A fertiliser base dressing was applied to bring the soil nutrient indices up to standard levels for cut flowers (aiming for index 2 for N, index 4 for K, index 5 plus for P and index 4 for Mg) following which the crop was fed weekly with a liquid feed of 15:30:25 N:P:K at 2% of the stock solution. The crop was initially watered with a hand lance immediately after planting, but once established most of the irrigation was applied through three trickle irrigation pipes per bed.

Cropping time and yield

There was considerable variation between the varieties and unfortunately the Star 'Cherry' proved very attractive to rabbits which found their way into the trial site despite it being surrounded by rabbit netting. As a result no marketable stems were produced by the Star variety. Owing to the very wet weather, the outdoor crop performed very poorly and was therefore not assessed for performance.

The Solomio 'Sem' was the earliest variety to crop with the first flower stems being marketed in mid September (week 37). The Solomio 'Fen' and 'Vin' started flowering slightly later (about

2 weeks) but flowering was very slow and by the 5 November (week 45) any remaining stems were cleared in order to be able to unskin the Spanish tunnels. However, many of the stems were not ready for harvesting and a number were blind especially in the case of Solomio 'Fen'. If this crop had been produced in a glasshouse the cropping period could have been slightly extended but in a better season the stems would probably have been ready 2 to 3 weeks earlier anyway. The earlier flowering Solomio 'Sem' produced stronger stems than the later flowering Solomio 'Fen' and 'Vin' but this could have been because of the very poor light levels and low temperatures in October. The yields from the 2012 trial are shown in the following table:

Variety	Flower colour	Total stem count	Stems/plant	Stems/m ²
Solomio 'Fen'	Rich pink	333	5.0	151
Solomio 'Sem'	Red with light pink fringe	385	5.8	175
Solomio 'Vin'	White with purple fringe	503	7.6	229
Star 'Cherry'	Pink with white flecks	0	0	0

The price per plant has been quoted at about 40 Eurocents per plant ex nursery (this could be cheaper for larger volumes of plant material).

Vase life

Initial studies of samples harvested from the CFC at a more mature stage than traditional spray carnations have shown the average vase life to be 6 days at the consumer stage and 10 days for the total vase life including transport etc.

Summary

The spray carnation crop received a positive market feedback owing to its unusual flower form. It was thought that it could be marketed in a more advanced stage of flower development than traditional spray carnations and branded appropriately. Owing

to the fact that only the Solomio 'Sem' flowered completely before the tunnel had to be uncovered, the 2013 work at the CFC will look at earlier plantings (if the weather allows). The 2012 crop will also be overwintered to see how it performs in 2013.

Images of the 2012 trial



Solomio 'Fen'



Solomio 'Sem'



Solomio 'Vin'



Star 'Cherry'



Partially pinched crop



Remaining plant following flower harvesting

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