Colorful Hybrids Brighten Gardens Across America

University of Connecticut

Millions of home gardeners have beautified their yards with colorful flowers developed by Professor Ron Parker, Ph.D., at the University of Connecticut-Storrs. Parker's plant-breeding work was highly unusual in that he made extensive use of naturally growing wild plants from around the world — most notably Catharanthus and Impatiens.

Catharanthus is an annual flower that can withstand extremes of heat and sunlight, making it a favorite among gardeners. Although hardy, it was available in only two or three rather bland colors. In 1991, after 12 years of plant development at the University of Connecticut, Parker released three varieties with striking pink and rose-colored blossoms: "Pretty in Pink," "Parasol" and "Pretty in Rose." The flowers feature glossy green foliage and large pink, deep rose, magenta or bright white blossoms. Annual sales of seeds for these varieties of Catharanthus have reached as much as $1 million a year.

> *All three flowers won All-America Selection awards, the horticultural equivalent of winning an Oscar.*

Impatiens, another top-selling bedding plant for commercial growers and home gardeners, was also known for its limited color options. With funding from the Bodger Seed Co., Professor Parker and Maryke Cleland developed Impatiens hybrids with pale yellow to gold-yellow petals and profuse branching. These hybrids were transferred to Bodger Seed under a development and sales agreement, and four of the University of Connecticut hybrids are the subject of separate U.S. plant patents. Bodger used the new plants as the foundation for developing a colorful series of Impatiens that was introduced to the market in 1998 that included yellow, apricot, peach and tangerine hues. These plants continue to be sold in 2007.

This story was originally published in 2007.

To see available technologies from research institutions, click here to visit the AUTM Innovation Marketplace.