



Ti PLANT: *more than just foliage*

Traditionally used as a foliage plant, Cordyline also makes a great component plant in mixed containers, as well as a specimen plant in the landscape.

By Rick Schoellhorn

Most everyone who has been to Hawaii has picked up a “Ti Log.” It’s one of those souvenirs we bring back to prove we’ve been places, and while many of us have grown this plant at one time or another, its use has waned in the last 10 years.

While attending the Tampa Bay Wholesale Growers trade show last month, I happened upon a booth from St. Germain’s Dracaena Farm that was filled with new hybrids of this durable plant, and I was amazed at the color and variety that is now available. In light of this, it seemed like a good time to revisit a plant that has such potential not only for interior use but also as summer patio color for both northern and southern markets.

TI BASICS

The foliage color spectrum for *Cordyline terminalis* ranges from green to chocolate brown and from reds and oranges into pinks and multi-color hybrids. Many of the cultivars available in the United States come from Southeast Asia where there is a lot of independent breeding of this crop. Also, Hawaii is providing some interesting new novelties and dwarf forms.

In talking with the folks at St. Germain’s, the following cultivars were suggested as being strong performers with a tolerance of northern conditions and minimal color fade in bright conditions:

‘Dr. Brown’ – deep burgundy-mahogany older leaves shading upwards to deep cerise

new growth, excellent foliage color and strong growth habit.

‘Xerox’ – similar to Dr. Brown but cerise and burgundy tones are retained into older leaves. New growth is a deep, strong pink.

‘Bally Red’ – Older foliage is green, shading upwards through burgundy, and new growth is fluorescent cerise. Very strong.

‘Pink Integrity’ – Pale pinks are generally slightly weaker plants than the darker colors, but Pink Integrity is a strong performer. Greenish purple leaves at base, shading

upwards into multicolored pink and green leaves, new growth is clear pale pink.

Other forms I personally thought were interesting include :

‘Classic’ – red to pink tones with curled leaves similar to a winter rose poinsettia form.

‘Chocolate’ – deep burgundy, brown leaves with rounded tips, dense and full growth habit.

‘Pastel’ & ‘Exotica’ – Pale pink and true green leaves. Although less vigorous, these lighter colors really provide contrast. ♦

Culture Quickie

Fertilization. In most cases, 150 ppm liquid feed or low levels of slow release are adequate for holding and short turns.

Watering. Normal production irrigation is fine, with a bit of drying between waterings. Northern growers should avoid irrigating with extremely cold irrigation water.

Avoiding Fluoride toxicity. Ti Plants are very sensitive to fluoride, try to avoid using fluoridated water if at all possible as it leads to marginal burning of the foliage. AVOID PERLITE, as it acts as a concentration point for fluoride.

Media. Peat lite medias with polystyrene and well drained bark and peat mixtures work well. A pH of 6-7 and high EC will increase tip burn and root damage.

Production Temperatures. Optimum is 60-85° F, below 50° F growth slows dramatically; cool temperatures can help with holding plants. Avoid temperatures below 40° F.

Light level. Plants are pretty flexible in most cases — 2,000-5,000 foot candles. In the west, shading may be required to keep foliage from fading.

Propagation. All are propagated by cuttings or tissue culture.

Crop timing. When purchasing finished or pre-finished plants, the crop is salable immediately. When growing, crop timing varies from 14-30 weeks, depending on temperature.

Flowering. While the plant does flower, it is not desired as it reduces foliage quality.

Pests. Both spider mites and thrips can damage new growth; a high humidity environment will reduce these pests. No sensitivity noted to common pesticides. Insecticidal oils may be a problem on new growth.





Again, with this crop, what we need to do is focus on new uses in the retail market. These plants will make a strong centerpiece in mixed containers and provide season-long color, along with a killer tropical effect. Pre-finished 2- to 3-gallon material will work best for northern growers and will provide a specialty sales item that can help prolong summer sales.

PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

Cordyline is closely related to Dracaena and shares most of its production requirements.

During production, it is important to provide bright lighting to retain strong foliage coloration. For southern growers, full sun to part shade works well. In northern climates plants will probably need 30 percent shade in production, but can also be sold for shade plantings as well as for interior plantings. Older growth is generally darker or becomes solid green or dark green, with newer growth providing the maximum color.

Like Dracaena, Cordyline is a tropical plant and, as a result, will not grow well when temperatures are below 50° F, as the plant is frost sensitive. Northern retailers and growers should view this as a specialty annual and promote it for spring and summer sales to emphasize the tropical effect and continual color all season.

Ti plant is prone to spider mite problems under indoor conditions, so careful monitoring will be necessary to keep plants clean and free of this pest. Due to the high pigmentation in the leaves, they are easily damaged by mites and occasionally thrips, so stay alert. For outdoor sales, the bug incidence drops almost entirely, and normal irrigation will rinse any insects from the leaves.

So try these extremely colorful plants to add something different to your spring line-up. While you're at it, consider some of the Dracaenas as well to provide a unique upright shade impact in your customers' gardens this year. All of these plants give a strong tropical impact, and once spring temperatures warm, up they make great summer sales extenders. GPN

Rick Schoellhorn is associate professor of horticulture at the University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. He can be reached by phone at (352) 392-1831 x634 or E-mail at rksch@ufl.edu.



Forty of St. Germaine's most popular Cordyline cultivars.



LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to www.onhort.com/LM.CFM/gp050207