



# AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION of The Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Ala.

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## EFFECTS of CONTAINERS on AZALEA SALES

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**E**ACH YEAR people engaged in industry search for ways to sell more products. Packaging has developed into tremendous importance. It is not enough, however, to simply package a product. Research conducted reveals that colors used, designs, and even shapes of packages definitely influence the sale of a product.

Container-grown plants are displayed as "packaged" plants by some nurserymen. If these are package plants, a logical question is: Does the style and color of containers influence the sale of the plants? Tests were conducted at the API Agricultural Experiment Station from January to July 1957 to determine the answer to this question.

### Materials and Methods

Azaleas were selected for these tests and varieties used were Hexe (scarlet flowers) and Pink Pericat (deep rose flowers). Different types of metal containers used and their colors were: Plantainer, green; Lerio, green; No. 10 cans, untreated; Robell, green; and Robell, black. Plants of each variety in different containers were graded and placed in retail sales yards. These yards were in Columbus, Georgia, and Montgomery, Alabama.

In Columbus, containers were placed along side a drive leading from the sales office to a sale area for shrubs. Traffic was heavy in this area. Initially the plants were offered at 77 cents each. This price was actually lower than that of similar plants in the nursery. After approximately one-

half the plants were sold, the remaining ones were offered at one-half price.

In Montgomery, the containers were placed on the ground and on a rack to be clearly visible. The location was near the sales office at the end of a drive. The display could be seen as customers entered the establishment. Plants were offered at 69 cents each throughout the test.

A printed sales tag listed the plant name, price and description of the variety. Clerks in both establishments were instructed, whenever possible, to allow customers to select their own plants.

### Results

The appearance of containers during the test and rate of accumulated sales are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Results showed the best appearing container to be Plantainer. The color had faded but otherwise the condition was good. In descending order the other containers were: Lerio, No. 10, Robell green, and Robell black. The container apparently had little influence on sale of products.

TABLE 1. KIND OF CONTAINER  
AND CONDITION WHEN SOLD

Container	Color	Condition
Plantainer	Green	Color faded; otherwise excellent.
Lerio	Green	Color good with few rust spots. No holes in side of can.
No. 10	Untreated	Rusty, with few holes, especially at the soil line.
Robell	Green	Poor, rusted at soil line and around base.
Robell	Black	Same as Green.

\* Resigned.

As many or more plants in poor containers (containers that had deteriorated and were poor in appearance) as in the better looking containers were sold. This held true regardless of whether the containers were seen.

### Conclusions and Summary

These tests were conducted because of differences of opinion among retail nurserymen concerning the effect of containers on sales of plants. Results indicate that containers did not influence sales of plants. The best looking container was the Plantainer as it held the original color and had not rusted. Actually more plants in some of the other containers were sold. The differences were not large enough to be a reliable measure of differences in preferences.

This conclusion is further borne out by observations during the tests. While the clerks were instructed to allow customers to select plants, many of the customers hesitated in doing so and had clerks select the "best ones." Plants had been graded before the test, and only uniform plants of equal value were sold in one location. Customers wanted to discuss their purchases, and apparently had little confidence in their opinions and judgments. Nursery stock is not yet thought of as an item for complete self service.

Customers looked only at the plants in making their selections. The plants with open flowers were the first to sell. This may indicate the following: (a) The customer in the past had bought misrepresented plants (intentionally or accidentally) and wanted to be sure of their purchases; (b) the

customers were not familiar with varieties and did not read the descriptions needed to become better informed; and (c) seeing a shrub in bloom increased the prospective customer's desire to purchase the plant.

Many sales were made in units of 4, either 2 of each variety in the test, or 4 of a kind. Landscape plantings by landscape architects usually use odd numbers of plants. Since the intended use was not determined, it is not possible to describe the reasons for buying in even numbers.

Containers were important only when buyers intended to use them in the home or as gifts to sick friends. However, they usually inquired about suitable materials for wrapping the container. The container color and type become unimportant under these conditions. Their only value would be to be serviceable and not mar furniture.

Consideration was not given the appearance of the container as adding or detracting from the sales area. At the time of the test, sales areas used could not be classed as a modern garden center. The containers did not influence the appearance of the area during the test. However, owners of modern garden centers attempt to keep their centers neat and inviting. Here the container would influence the appearance of the display and customers possibly would not purchase plants in poor appearing containers.

Container-grown plants are still relatively new in the trade and the consumer may not be accustomed to them. Results also indicated other factors needing attention when marketing nursery stock in containers. Prospective customers expect reliable information about plants offered for sale.

TABLE 2. COMPARATIVE RATE OF SALES OF AZALEAS ON ACCUMULATIVE PER CENT BASIS IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF CONTAINERS AT TWO LOCATIONS

Date	Pink Pericat					Hexe			
	Plantainer Green	Lerio Green	No. 10 Can Rusty	Robell Green	Robell Black	Plantainer Green	Lerio Green	No. 10 Can Rusty	Robell Black
<b>MONTGOMERY</b>									
1/14/57	0.0	0.0	8.2	0.0	2.5	7.1	0.0	1.7	6.3
1/31/57	2.5	6.0	8.2	5.4	2.5	23.8	11.8	20.3	12.5
2/7/57	32.5	50.0	38.8	26.1	15.4	54.7	38.2	37.3	40.6
2/22/57 <sup>1</sup>	42.5	57.2	42.8	32.7	15.4	66.6	66.6	47.5	87.5
3/19/57	20.0	28.5	42.8	32.9	30.6	47.3	61.1	50.0	90.5
7/5/57	70.0	80.0	71.4	81.8	84.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>COLUMBUS, GA.</b>									
3/18/57	26.8	47.2	47.0	32.4	57.6	31.7	40.0	53.5	18.0
7/2/57	94.5	96.5	82.5	91.8	96.8	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

<sup>1</sup>Additional plants delivered here.