

## Features

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### Celebrating Staying Power

*Katie Elzer-Peters*

How many plants get loaded onto trucks while the truck drivers are serenaded by a marching band outfitted in shirts that match the plant's marketing materials? Or are celebrated with a hot air balloon? The Sun Parasol Mandevilla from Suntory Flowers might be the only one.

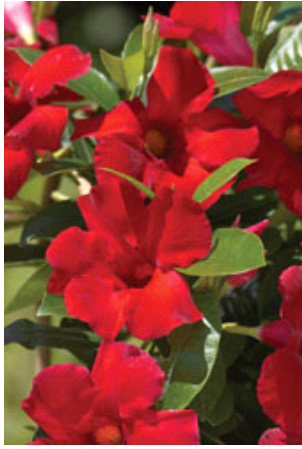
Sun Parasol debuted in Japan in 1998 and in the United States in 1999 and received the red-carpet treatment in 2010 with the big "Secrets of Sun Parasol" marketing campaign with the aforementioned marching band. Costa Farms, then a producer, organized and filmed a 30-truck caravan of plants being delivered to far corners of North America to celebrate the beginning of spring. Videos of the event are actually kind of moving—trucks wrapped with banners that showcase Sun Parasol's velvety red flowers, spreading joy across the nation.

It was a bumpy road from the undisclosed location where the parent of Sun Parasol was discovered to those trucks to the eventual home of Sun Parasol plants on patios and porches around the world.

Suntory Holdings, LTD, the parent company of Suntory flowers based in Japan, is actually a beverage company. The company motto is "Yatteminahare" or "Go for it!" To get into the plant business, they formed a team of breeders, including Ryuichi Tachibana and Tomoya Misato, who would eventually breed and bring Sun Parasol to market.

Applying the "Go for it" mentality of the rest of the company, the plantsmen traveled near and far to look for plants in the wild that could possibly be propagated and brought to market. While in the middle of the wilderness admiring plants that would eventually become part of the Sun Parasol genetics, Tomoya was robbed at gunpoint, losing all of his cash, passport and other travel documents.

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## Top Sellers

### Sun Parasol Giant series:

- Giant Crimson
- Red Emperor
- Giant White

### Sun Parasol Original series:

- Crimson
- Pink
- Stars & Stripes

## Primary Sources For Sun Parasol

Sun-Fire Nurseries—[www.sunfirenurseries.com](http://www.sunfirenurseries.com)

Aris Horticulture—[www.arishort.com](http://www.arishort.com)

Botany Lane Greenhouse—[www.botanylane.com](http://www.botanylane.com)

*Pictured: Sun Parasol Giant Crimson*

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With genetics in hand, breeders went back to the lab to work on developing plants for commercial production, but kept encountering roadblocks. It was difficult to get the plants to produce seeds, and without seeds, there's no way to crossbreed the plants and get results. When they were able to harvest seeds, they then had to get them to germinate outside of the plant's natural habitat.

"We were overcome with emotions when we finally saw the first plants originated from F1 seed grow healthily," said Ryuichi and Tomoya.

A white variety was released in Japan in 1998, but breeding stock was plagued with instability that got passed to consumers. The duo went back to the original source of genetics and started over with breeding stock plants for production, culling through 2,000 crosses to arrive at stable mother plants that would produce the results needed for success as an international brand.

Over a decade on, Sun Parasol and associated varieties are widely embraced in the consumer market. A new introduction, Garden Crimson—a shorter, more compact variety—takes mandevilla full circle, back to the garden as a bedding plant.

Delilah Onofrey, Flower Power Marketing for Suntory Flowers, says, "The positive response to Sun Parasol has been universal. Most garden centers stock it in the tropical section along with hibiscus and other blooming tropicals. Sun Parasol will shine all season until temperatures dip in the fall."

The company helps retailers capitalize on consumer enthusiasm by creating free online tools. "These include downloadable/customizable bench cards and posters, a photo gallery, YouTube videos that can be shared, as well as fun, engaging apps for iPads. These can be found at [www.suntorycollection.com](http://www.suntorycollection.com)," Delilah says.

What looks like a delicate flower, Sun Parasol is from hardy stock that not only survived, but thrived growing

along rocky cliffs or in marshy bogs. That translates well into the garden, resulting in easy-care color all summer. **GP**

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