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Behind the Variety: An Early Nightfall

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In plant breeding right now the focus is largely on bringing plants to market that solve consumer problems. If they're easy for growers to manage—producing and shipping—all the better. Each year, hundreds of new introductions hit the shelves, but only a few have long-term staying power. Salvia Sallyrosa April Night, a trademarked plant from Danziger, has been for sale for three years now and it shows no sign of decreasing in popularity.

April Night, an offspring of the ever-popular May Night, has managed what all parents hope for their kids—combining the best qualities from both and taking the world by storm. April Night consistently blooms two to four weeks earlier than May Night and with a more uniform performance.

Mike Fernandez, the North American Product Manager for Danziger, said it typically takes two or three years of crossing and growing on seedlings for the company to determine which plants to take to trials. Once trialing starts, it takes four years of testing to arrive at a "finished" plant.

"The breeding site is in Israel. We trial the plants all over the world, including at my farm in Michigan, a test spot in Belgium, of course in Israel, and then at universities around the North America," Mike explains, adding April Night was the result of a specific project to improve May Night. "We ended up with several new varieties out of that breeding project."

April Night's claim to fame is twofold. On the consumer side, it blooms two to four weeks before May Night and has a much more compact growth habit than its parent. It will re-bloom in the fall. It's hardy to USDA Zone 5, so it has a wide range of marketability. As a drought-tolerant perennial, it falls neatly in line with what consumers in areas with water restrictions are looking for in summer color.

On the grower side, this salvia is much easier to produce than some. "You can grow this one like an annual," Mike says. "If you grow it warm, you can have a finished plant 12 weeks from the time you stick the cuttings." April Night requires no cold treatment for flowering.

"Because of the uniformity of flowering, it's also easy to ship," Mike adds. "You might have to pick through a crop of May Night plants in order to find enough that are flowering at the same time." That's not a problem with April Night. Its extended bloom time (flowering well into July) makes it easy for retailers to stock and sell, too.

April Night is propagated from vegetative cuttings. Those cuttings are produced at farms in Guatemala, Kenya and Israel. They're then shipped to North America and Europe for finishing.

"This plant is available for all segments of the market—from large propagators, rooting stations, large growers, retail growers and independent garden centers that grow for themselves. It's available in a rooted liner form, as well," said Mike.

For more information on salvia or any of Danziger's products, call (972) 3-9602525, email danziger@danziger.co.il or visit www.danziger.co.il.

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