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Features

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Creating Celestial Blooms

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The “night sky” style of petunias from Selecta One hit the consumer market with a bang in 2016, providing a unique look that hadn’t been seen before. Now, there’s a new twist: a double version.

“Upon its initial presentation, consumers reacted with disbelief, wondering ‘Can this possibly be for real?’” said Becky Lacy, product manager for Selecta One North America. “Since its debut, the Night Sky Petunia has evolved into one of the most easily identifiable varieties among consumers. Just explore #nightskypetunia to witness its popularity.”

Let’s go back to that first iteration to better understand how such uniqueness came about. Becky said it was a genetic mutation that changed the pigment distribution in the petals, which resulted in irregular pigmentation patterns that mimicked a night sky with stars and galaxies.

“This unique genetic trait was then refined and stabilized through selective breeding and cultivated, giving rise to the distinct appearance of Night Sky Petunia,” she added.

The challenge initially was to keep the pattern stable since environmental factors change it. “Lower night temperatures result in more prominent white spots, whereas warmer night temperatures reduce the visibility of the sky pattern,” she said. “Furthermore, applying B-Nine can lead to substantial white patches, albeit this effect might be less preferable.”



However, Becky noted once they figured out the key factors involved, creating more variations became effortless. Since that original deep purple-hued variety came out, there have been 11 more sky-patterned options for multiple uses and sales periods. For instance, the compact early season series Starlet, the medium-spec core spring series Headliner, and the vigorous, trailing basket series Mainstage.

Which leads us to the newest introduction and once again, the first of its kind— SweetSunshine Magenta Sky. It's the first double-flowered, sky-patterned petunia.

"The flower is intricate and complex, presenting a double-layered structure with a white picotee edge and a spotted 'sky' pattern," Becky said.

It took more crosses to keep the sky pattern and achieve the double blooms, which Becky said are formed when some stamens (a.k.a. the male reproductive parts) in the flower transform into an extra set of petals, giving it the ruffly look consumers love.

"For several decades, double-flowered petunias have been available, yet only a select few showcase extraordinary patterns, such as SweetSunshine Magenta Sky," she added. "After several years of evaluating varieties with these characteristics, Selecta One achieved the successful crossbreeding in 2019 that gave rise to SweetSunshine Magenta Sky."

Of course, we've talked in this space before about the amount of trialing that happens before a variety is released to market, hence the 2024 consumer debut. So how do retailers make sure Magenta Sky puts its best blooms forward for customers? There are six keys to success:

- Ensure they're adequately watered without becoming waterlogged
- Position them in direct sunlight
- Avoid extreme temperatures
- Promote proper air circulation
- Feed with a balanced liquid fertilizer
- Consistently remove faded or wilted flowers to stimulate continuous blooms

SweetSunshine Magenta Sky is pretty versatile, too—it can be grown as a monoculture in gallons or hanging baskets, and plays well in combinations, thanks to its medium vigor and mounded habit. It also works in the landscape.

"While other single-flowered spotted petunias are accessible in the market, SweetSunshine Magenta Sky stands out as the pioneering double sky-patterned variety," Becky said. **GP**

For more info, GO HERE.