



Evaluation of *Abelia* Selections to Withstand Cultural Conditions in Containers

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Nature of the Work: We have been developing new cultivars of *Abelia* through interspecific hybridization. Seedlings are being evaluated in field plots in Griffin and Blairsville for cold hardiness, flower and sepal color, compact plant form, attractive foliage and heavy blooming. Selections that have outstanding characteristics in the field need to be further evaluated in containers, to ensure that any cultivar releases are easy to propagate and grow well under nursery conditions, particularly during the hot summer months. During the past three summers, various selections have been evaluated in containers at the CANR and in Griffin. Three of these selections have been named and will soon become available. This report describes these new releases, as well as the performance of additional selections that were evaluated in containers during the summer of 2005 in full sun at the CANR and in Griffin.

Twelve selections and two cultivars were included in this year's study. Selections evaluated at the CANR for the first time were as follows: Plants 00-53-5, 00-53-44, 00-53-50, 00-53-58, 00-53-81, seedling selections from the cross 'Francis Mason' × '*A. parvifolia* (syn. *A. schumanii*); selection 01-8-7, from the cross 'Edward Goucher' × 'John Creech'; selection 01-13-2 from 'Francis Mason' × *A. ×grandiflora*; plant 01-14-2 from the cross 'Golden Glow' × *A. chinensis*; and plant 02-8-11 from parents 'Edward Goucher' × *A. parvifolia*. Selections approved for release as new cultivars were evaluated for the second year at the CANR. These selections are: 'Raspberry Profusion' and 'Lavender Mist', seedling selections from 'Edward Goucher' × *A. chinensis*; and 'Plum Surprise', a seedling selection from 'Edward Goucher' × 'Francis Mason'. Two cultivars, 'Edward Goucher' and 'Rose Creek' were grown to provide a comparison to commercially available cultivars.

Three plants per selection or cultivar were repotted from 1-gallon containers into 3-gallon containers on May 24 using McCorkle's growing medium consisting of 6:1 bark:sand, 4 lb lime/yd³, 1.5 lb micromax/yd³, 1.5 lb gypsum/yd³, 2lb Talstar/yd³ and Osmocote pro 22-4-6 at 4 lb/yd³. The plants were placed on gravel and were irrigated with overhead water. On August 17, the height and width of each plant at the CANR was measured. Sun scald, leaf drop, amount of flowering and overall quality were rated on a scale of 1 to 10, with one indicating no sun scald, leaf drop, flowering, or very low quality, and 10 being high sun scald, severe leaf drop, a high rate of flowering or high quality. Plants in Griffin were also measured and evaluated.

Results and Discussion: All of the *Abelia* selections and the two cultivars evaluated grew and performed well in containers at the CANR. Results of container evaluations are shown in Table 1. Among the 00-53 selections, 00-53-44, 00-53-50, and 00-53-81, have yellow-green foliage. Sun scald is typically seen on yellow-green foliage, though it varies for different selections. Sun scald was most severe on 00-53-81, significantly reducing the appearance and therefore the quality rating for this selection. Sun scald was also evident, but to a lesser degree, on 00-53-44

and 00-53-50. In the field, 00-53-50 forms an attractive, weeping mound., and this weeping form is evident in the pot as well, earning this selection a quality rating of 7. Selection 00-53-44 has dark lavender flowers with pink sepals. New growth is orange. The most notable trait of this selection is that the flower panicles are long and narrow. In a pot, the plant is very compact and heavy flowering. Selection 00-53-5 has dark green foliage. The lavender flowers with red sepals contrasts with the dark foliage, causing the plant to “pop out” in the landscape. This selection is also a very heavy bloomer. Plant 00-53-58 is similar to 00-53-5, though blooming is somewhat less.

Selection 01-8-7 is a highly unusual abelia, and has drawn many favorable comments from growers. It is a true dwarf, and has a very compact, natural meatball form. In addition, the flowers are cream-colored with pink sepals. New growth is a pale orange. Flowers are borne in small clusters, and flowering is relatively sparse. This plant is very attractive in a container. Plant 01-13-2 is a beautiful abelia in the field. Foliage is dark green and glossy, though shoot tips are red. Flowers are white with dark pink sepals. Plant habit is upright and tall. Selection 01-14-2 has yellow-green foliage, and showed a moderate degree of sun scald. Pot form was irregular, and some leaf drop occurred, earning this selection the lowest quality rating of all plants evaluated. Selection 02-8-11 was a beautiful plant in a container, and had among the highest ratings for quality. This plant formed a compact mound in a pot, with dark lavender flowers and attractive green foliage. In the field, 02-8-11 is a very early bloomer. Field evaluations are continuing on these selections, where effect of cold, drought and other conditions are being assessed.

The three new releases, ‘Raspberry Profusion’, ‘Lavender Mist’ and ‘Plum Surprise’, were evaluated for a second year in containers. ‘Raspberry Profusion’ is a very early and very heavy bloomer, both in containers and in the field. Sepals are raspberry-colored, and flower clusters are large and many. The dark green foliage is nearly obscured by the flower panicles. ‘Raspberry Profusion’ scored well on all ratings in the pot. ‘Lavender Mist’ has gray-green foliage with lavender flower clusters scattered among the foliage. This plant has an attractive form in a container, and it also scored well in all container ratings. ‘Plum Surprise’ is a weeping abelia, with green foliage in the summer that turns red in the fall and purple in the winter. Foliage is fine-textured, and leaf retention is high even under drought conditions. ‘Plum Surprise’ is relatively dwarf, and makes a pleasing appearance in a container, as foliage cascades down over the pot. Flowers are borne in clusters of two to three and are scattered throughout the plant.

Significance to Industry: New cultivars are in demand by the nursery and landscape industries. *Abelia* is a drought tolerant, pest resistant shrub that is widely grown, but novel flower and foliage characteristics and improvements in growth habit, container performance and other traits are needed. Selections evaluated in this study performed well in containers, as well as in previous landscape studies. Some of these selections show promise as new cultivars, with unusual and attractive flower and foliage colors, flower cluster size and form, sepal color and novel plant habit.

Table 1. Average height, width, leaf drop, sun scald and degree of flowering of *Abelia* selections and cultivars at the CANR in Dearing, GA. Data collected on Aug. 19, 2004.

Plant ID	Height (cm)	Width (cm)	Leaf Drop Rating¹	Sun Scald Rating²	Flowering Rating³	Quality Rating⁴
00-53-5	40	67	2	1	7.3	6.0
00-53-44	33	57	2	3	8.0	6.3
00-53-50	33	86	1	2	5.0	7.0
00-53-58	44	72	1	1	5.0	6.0
00-53-81	38	71	2	5	3.7	4.0
01-8-7	36	69	1	2	1.3	6.3
01-13-2	54	77	1	1	3.7	6.0
01-14-2	51	67	2	3	4.3	5.3
02-8-11	30	55	1	1	4.7	7.7
'Raspberry Profusion'	48	68	1	1	7.7	7.3
'Lavender Mist'	45	86	1	1	6.7	7.7
'Plum Surprise'	30	79	1	1	6.0	6.0
'Edward Goucher'	54	78	2	1	3.7	5.7
'Rose Creek'	64	68	2	1	6.3	5.7

¹Leaf drop rating: 1 = no leaf drop; 10 = 100% leaf drop.

²Sun scald rating: 1= no sun scald; 10 = 100% sun scald.

³Floriferousness rating: 1 = no flowers; 10 = very many flowers.

⁴Quality rating: 1 = poor quality; 10 = high quality.