



Shades of red

Consumer fascination with hues of red, pink and burgundy is fueling a growing tropical plant trend

BY EMILY HOARD

Tropical plants with red leaves or flowers have been popular for a long time, but consumer fascination shows no signs of waning. In fact, the trend has now broadened to include plants with hues of pink and burgundy.

Mackenzie Allaert, office manager and HR director at wholesale grower **Youngblood Nursery Inc.** in Salem, Oregon, said she's seen a rise in plants with red, pink and burgundy tones. They are very good holiday plants for Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Christmas.

But beyond holidays, she said, growers are



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increasingly producing new varieties with pink and red tones, making them more accessible in the retail market and therefore more popular.

Color sells

Ann Patterson, houseplant buyer at two-location retailer **Portland Nursery** (Portland, Oregon), said just like in any retail situation, color sells.

“Pink and red variegated plants can look really marvelous,” Patterson said. “They can pop in a group of plants so I can see why they’re popular.”

“Who doesn’t love a pink plant?,” said Michelle Bundy, the foliage lead at wholesale grower Casa Flora in Dallas, Texas. “As the foliage lead for Casa Flora, I have seen the increase in sales among our pink and purple plants and the constant desire for anything with a pink leaf.”

Variation

Variiegated plants have been popular for a long time, as a theme that is important in the American market, said Andrej Suske, owner of **Cascade Tropicals** in Snohomish, Washington.

“In general, we see the yellow and white variegation as the most popular and I haven’t really seen that change,” Suske said. “If you can add some red or pink tones to a white or yellow variegation, that is definitely something that is popular, but it’s also a bit more rare to see that.”

He added that plants that have purple or red leaves are not rare at all so they’re not as popular unless they have clear lines of white or pink in the leaves.

“But anything that makes a leaf more interesting is a good thing,” Suske said. “Ultimately we need to have everything so the consumer can see many things and then they’re going to pick something that is more shiny or more different than most of it.”

How it started

Suske said around 2010, young people started waking up to houseplants.

“It was very clear that houseplants gained traction around 2010, and it was especially young people buying them, which was not recognized by many



Pteris Candy Stripe. PHOTO COURTESY OF CASA FLORA



Begonia 'Cracklin Rosie'. PHOTO COURTESY OF YOUNGBLOOD NURSERY

people in our industry because we were so focused on old consumers — that old lady who was thought to be a ‘garden center person,’” Suske said. “And these younger people from 25–40, they always wanted something that looked different, and they shopped by seeing something on Facebook and Instagram so they had a different way that they chose plants.”

One of the best-known pink plants is *Philodendron* ‘Pink Princess’.

“The ‘Pink Princess’ was one of the very early extremely popular plants before COVID,” Suske said. “In 2019, one plant would be sold for \$500 or \$1000, very high prices.”

By the pandemic in 2020, people were spending more time at home and had money to spend, and Patterson said the ‘Pink Princess’ was the big thing at the time.

“It was expensive and I had them in a locked box so they wouldn’t disappear,” Patterson said.

Bundy also said this particular green vine streaked with pink was where it all began.

“‘Pink Princess’ has been around for many years, but it wasn’t until the tissue culture labs got a hold of it that it became the widespread phenomenon it is,” Bundy said.

Tissue culture produces plants at a faster rate, bringing more of these popular plants to market.

Patterson said these once sought-after expensive *Philodendrons* are now on sale for \$12.99 at Portland Nursery.

“A longtime grower said tissue culture ruins everything,” Patterson said. “Tissue culture has changed a lot and he can’t compete with the quantities that can be produced with tissue culture.”

But Suske said this quantity also revealed the variegation’s instability.

“‘Pink Princess’ had the problem of reverting at a young age, so there was not any variegation left in 50% of the plants after a relatively short time,” Suske said.

He said the original ‘Pink Princess’ has been replaced with the *Philodendron* ‘Pink Princess Marble’, a variety that has more stability in keeping its variegation over time.

Patterson said she walked through >>



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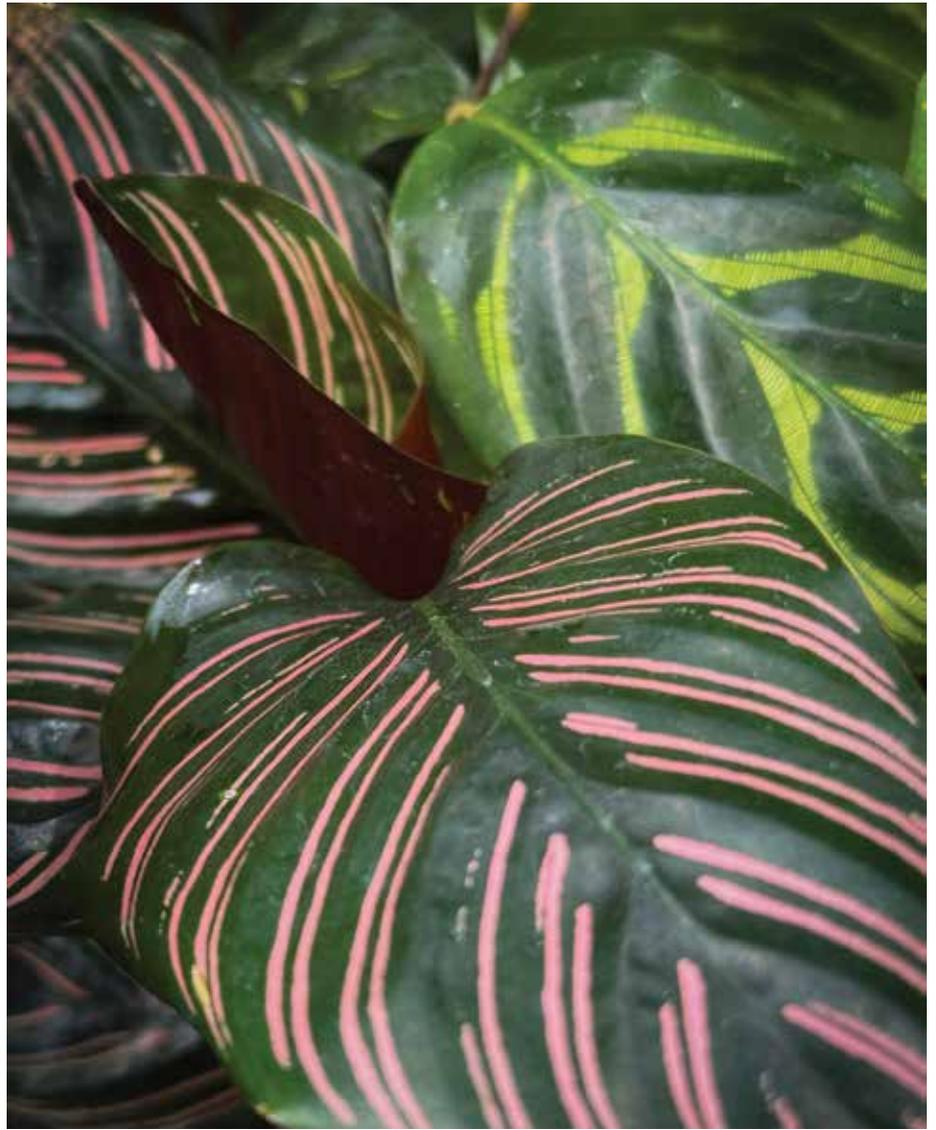
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From top: *Fittonia albivinis* 'Zalm Ruby Lime', *Tradescantia* 'Zebrina Red', *Begonia brevirimosa* 'Exotica' and *Begonia bipinnatifida*. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASCADE TROPICALS



Calathea ornata. PHOTO COURTESY OF PORTLAND NURSERY



Philodendron 'Red Heart'. PHOTO COURTESY OF YOUNGBLOOD NURSERY

a greenhouse and found 15 examples of tropical plants with red or pink tones without trying. She said there are many other *Philodendrons* that have red variegation, as well as several *Begonia*.

“The *Ficus elastica* ‘Ruby’ is easy to grow,” Patterson said. “And there’s the trailing inch plant *Tradescantia*, and a lot of others like *Calathea* and *Hypoestes phyllostachya* ‘Polka Dot,’” Patterson said.

Allaert also named a few examples, including the *Philodendron* ‘Red Heart,’ *Aglaonema* ‘Siam Aura,’ *Philodendron* ‘Strawberry Shake,’ *Begonia* ‘Cracklin Rosie,’ and *Ludisa discolor* ‘Sea Turtle’.

Suske said the *Tradescantia albiflora* ‘Nanouk’ is one of the best examples of why red and pink is very popular.

“It’s easy to grow and hard to kill, and not very expensive,” Suske said. “It’s a good entry plant for those getting into houseplants and hopefully they will buy others

like the *Begonia exotica*, which is also not as expensive and it’s easy to grow.”

He said one of his favorite colorful succulents is *Portulacaria afra* ‘Mediopicta’. A new *Philodendron* being developed in tissue culture is the ‘Pink Bikini’.

Bundy said from *Calathea* to *Aglaonema*, more pink varieties continue to be brought to market.

“Collectors online go wild when they have a plant that pops out a rouge pink leaf,” Bundy said.

Looking ahead

Bundy said she sees the trend of tropical plants with red and pink hues continuing, especially as they are becoming more affordable and less exclusive, like with the ‘Pink Princess’.

“As far as new plants being developed, I’d look towards the rare sports that are becoming more stable,” Bundy said.

Patterson said growers keep selecting for new varieties. “Growers and collectors are always looking for a new plant that looks different, and then they start propagating that and it’s the next big thing,” Patterson said. “I hope growers are looking for healthy, robust plants with healthy variegation instead of one with too much white or yellow variegation that weakens the plants because they have less chlorophyll.”

Allaert said she thinks the trend will always be sought after but might slow down as the next best thing comes out.

“Especially with tissue culture being such a prominent source of plants for producers, there will be plenty of new varieties coming out,” Allaert said.

Suske said he thinks social media will continue to drive trends too, as it did for the pink and red variegated plants.

“If there are cool pictures that get enough traction, people are going to >>

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Begonia brevirimosa Exotica
Begonia 'Cracklin Rosie'
Begonia maculata 'Pink Spot'
Aglaonema 'Lady Valentine'
Cissus javana
Euphorbia trigona 'Rubra'
Ficus elastica 'Ruby'
Maranta leuc. erythronera
Musa nono 'Pink'
Bromeliad neoregelia
Peperomia caperata 'Buenos Aires'
Peperomia caperata 'Cayenne'
Philodendron 'Cherry Red'
Philodendron 'Pink Bikini'
Philodendron 'Pink Princess Marble'
Philodendron rubri 'El Choco Red'
Portulacaria afra 'Medio-Picta'
Pteris aspericaulis 'Tricolor'
Selaginella erythropus 'Sanguinea'

FAVORITES OF MICHELLE BUNDY (CASA FLORA)

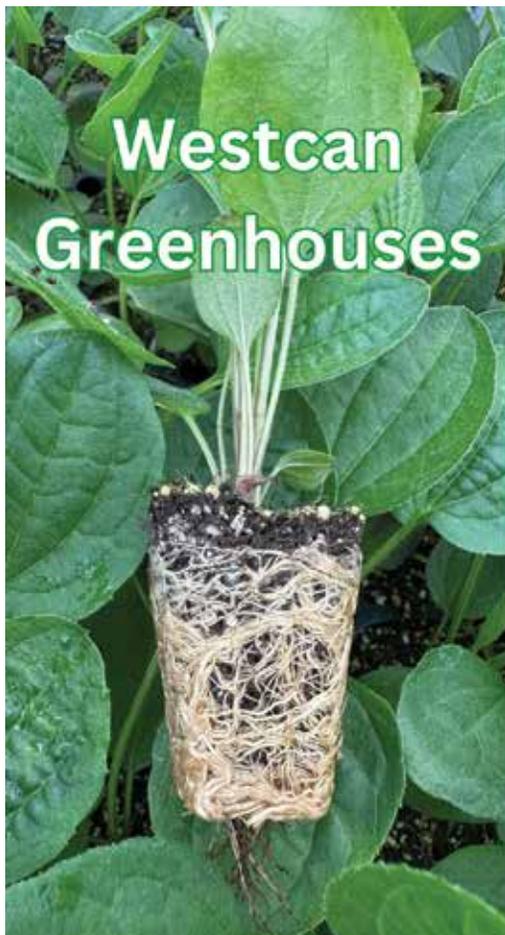
Ficus 'Ruby'
Geogenanthus poeppigii
Philodendron 'Pink Princess Marble'
Alocasia 'Red Secret'
Philodendron 'Cherry Red'
Philodendron 'Choco Red'
Calathea 'Purple Rose'
Calathea 'Rosy'
Calathea 'Peacock'
Calathea 'Pinstripe'
Calathea 'Rattlesnake'
Syngonium 'Neon'
Syngonium 'Pink Perfection'
Alocasia brancifolia 'Pink Passion'
Pteris asperaulis 'Tricolor' Candy
 Striped Brake Fern
Adiantum hispidulum Rosy
 Maidenhair
Blechnum Brasiliense Brazilian Tree
 Fern

gravitate to them. And as soon as those are replaced by something else, they will move on to that," Suske said.

Suske said he thinks variegation will always be popular. "I think what will happen is that now that more breeding is happening in houseplants — because breeders see there's money there — there's a big market," Suske said. "We will likely see more plants that have variegation and maybe more plants that have white and pink variegation on the same leaf."

He said if a plant breeder developed a new *Monstera* with pink variegation, it would be very successful because people look for the mix of pink and green on one leaf. ☺

Emily Hoard is an Oregon-based freelance journalist covering business, environmental and agricultural news. She has a background in community reporting and a master's degree in multimedia journalism. You can reach her at Hoarde123@Gmail.com



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