

Consumer preferences for Hawaiian orchids revealed

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Orchids are the fastest-growing group of potted flowering plants in the United States, outranked only by poinsettias in sales. The wholesale value of potted orchids in the U.S. has risen 80% in the last decade (to \$126 million in 2007), but information concerning consumer preferences for orchids is still very limited. To help Hawaiian garden centers and orchid growers gain insights into consumer attitudes and preferences, researchers from Texas A&M University designed a study that analyzed consumer preferences affecting orchid purchases and the relative importance of different orchid "attributes", including species, price, size, and color.

California, Florida, and Hawaii are the major potted orchid producing states in the [United States](#), accounting for 94% of total production. Hawaii provides ideal conditions and the perfect natural environment for [orchids](#) to grow year-round. Despite these perfect growing conditions, Hawaiian potted orchid production has remained relatively flat since 2002 due to increasing competition from foreign suppliers and larger domestic producers. Though orchids have experienced a growth in consumer popularity in the last decade, producers need more information concerning orchid markets and consumer preferences.

Marco A. Palma, Yu-Jen Chen, Charles Hall, David Bessler, and David Leatham from Texas A&M conducted the survey in Akatsuka Orchid Gardens, headquartered on the Island of Hawaii, in 2008. The full study was published in the latest issue of *HortTechnology*. When consumer preferences for orchid attributes were analyzed, the results revealed that

most respondents (57.8%) were able to identify the specific orchid species they have just purchased, but 42.2% of consumers could not identify any orchid species.

The analysis results also revealed that price was the most important factor affecting consumers' purchasing decisions, representing 30.90% of influence, followed by size (26.28%) and species (25.58%). Color was found to be the least important orchid attribute. Although specific colors were not used in the choice experiment design, consumers stated that they preferred multicolor orchids.

According to Palma, "the most preferred or first-choice product would be the attribute combination having the highest utility values, which is a large multicolor bamboo orchid at the lowest price of \$8.00". The researchers observed that orchid growers in the state of Hawaii could benefit by growing larger orchid pots (five and six-inch diameter pots) with less expensive species that can be sold at a lower price.

"While these results cannot be extrapolated to represent preferences of the total population of orchid consumers in the U.S., they provide insights for consumers on the Island of Hawaii, and may also be useful in designing an extension of this article to determine flowering plant buying preferences in other regions of the country," the researchers concluded.

More information: The complete study and abstract are available on the ASHS HortTechnology electronic journal web site:

[horttech.ashspublications.org/ ... nt/abstract/20/1/239](http://horttech.ashspublications.org/...nt/abstract/20/1/239)

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