

# TIMELY INFORMATION

## Agriculture & Natural Resources

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October, 2009

### Sakata's Champion Series Canterbury Bells: A Winner for the Deep South!

For the past nine years I have had a small part in Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers annual national cut flower evaluation. I say a small part not so much because I am one of many cooperators involved in this effort, but rather because most of the information that comes from the Mobile, AL area is actually the product of the hard work of my grower-cooperators, Ann and Warren Boutreis of WAB Farm; Fairhope, AL. Every year we find a cultivar or two that become part of WAB's production and every once in a great while we come across a cultivar that REALLY stands out. This year we had the luck to test a new group of cultivars that surprised everyone.



One of my favorite cut flowers is Canterbury bells, *Campanula medium*. These flowers give a lot of bang for the buck: attractive, long lived and they have a slight fragrance. What more can you ask of a cut flower? I have tried to grow these beauties in Mobile before with mixed luck. Some eventually flowered but it took over a year for them to produce their beautiful bounty. Now I like flowers, but I don't have the patience to wait that long. This year four Canterbury bells cultivars developed by Sakata were included in our cut flower evaluations: Champion Improved Blue, Lavender, Pink and White. Seeds were sown uncovered in 72 cell pack trays in a mist greenhouse set at a minimum temperature of 60°F on December 12, 2008. They were kept in the greenhouse until they were planted in the field on February 12, 2009.

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From the time we got the seeds until the time that WAB started selling flowers the Boutries were very skeptical. It seems they had tried growing Canterbury bells in the past with poor results. So I was very surprised in May when I got a call from WAB telling me how happy they were with the new Canterbury bells cultivars. They told me that they were selling like hot cakes and were one of the most popular flowers that they'd had at their spring markets. I had planted a few plugs in my home garden and was pleased with the results but when I got the call from WAB I knew we had a winner. Comments WAB wrote in their evaluations of these cultivars include, "most popular spring flower at market," "customers kept asking for more," "a must grow."

According to Sakata, plants bloom in 130-150 days from seeding without any need for cold treatment (vernalization). (With our December planting date, we were in the 130 day range.) They recommend covering sowed seed but germination was fine in our mist benches without covering. While not much of a test of cold hardiness, temperatures as low as 26°F did not damage the foliage. You can find much more cut flower and potted plant cultural information at the Sakata Seed America website: <http://www.sakata.com/>.

If you are looking for a flower to add to your spring cut flower or potted plant production mix or if you want to impress your neighbors with a showy "new" flower in your garden, I would highly recommend trying the Champion series Canterbury bells. I think you'll be surprised and very please with the results, especially if you've tried, and been disappointed by, Canterbury bells before.

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