

# The Collegiate Plant Initiative: Connecting College Students to Horticulture

## Program Summary

The Collegiate Plant Initiative (CPI) is a program based at the University of Florida (UF). As a student-powered entity, it uses the ideas and efforts of college students from all majors to accomplish CPI's main goal- making people who love plants. CPI was formed after a group of students took an introductory horticulture class at UF, Plants, Gardening & You (PG&Y) and became inspired to share their new passion for plants with other students. Along with the instructor, they formed CPI to help cure plant blindness on college campuses across the United States.

Over 350 students representing every undergraduate college at UF enroll in PG&Y every fall and spring semester to learn more about horticulture and to take home plants every week. These students not only serve as continuous new talent for CPI and industry partners but can also be surveyed about their plant preferences and other topics on a weekly basis.

A major component of CPI's outreach is Plant Drop events. These events bring 1,000+ free plants to the center of university campuses where they are given to eager college students, along with care instructions and information about CPI. These events aim to connect students passing by with a free plant or cut flowers so they can experience gardening for the first time- which many PG&Y students say was the beginning of their gardening hobby. Since October 2017, CPI has hosted 15 Plant Drops at 10 universities in 9 states.



*Above: An overhead view of a UF Plant Drop.*

### Utilization of the American Floral Endowment's Funds

Over three years, the American Floral Endowment has supported the CPI program with a total of \$24,000 in funding to support direct and indirect costs. These funds have been utilized for Plant Drop travel expenses, study staff, and indirect costs mandated by the University of Florida's Office of Research. Funding was used in conjunction with additional grants and internal funding.

Beyond Educational Grant Funds, the American Floral Endowment has also provided valuable guidance and connections to the floral industry. Thousands of college students have received cut flowers- often for the first time- through cut flower donations made by FloraLife. American Floral Endowment Board Members were able to witness one of these plant and flower giveaways at Texas A&M University, when CPI and TAMU horticulture students distributed 1,200 red and white cut carnations donated by FloraLife and 1,000 Viola 'Admire Red Blotch' donated by Altman Plants.



*Above: Two students enjoying free plants and cut carnations at a TAMU Plant Drop.*



## Results of Plant Preference Experiments

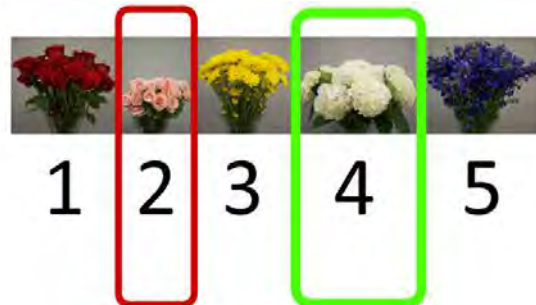
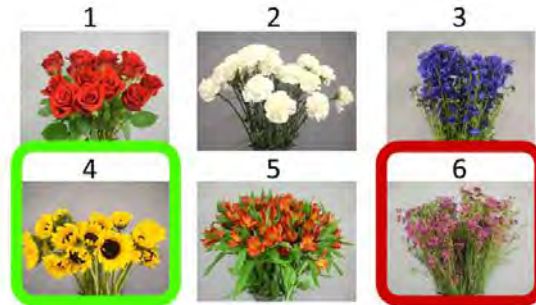
College students are the next generation of affluent consumers, and surveying students in PG&Y about their plant preferences may give valuable insight into future trends. These students may come from different academic and demographic backgrounds- but they are all united by their interest in plants and their willingness to spend their time and tuition enrolling in the class.

To find the plants people love, displays of 5-6 plants or cut flowers were shown to students enrolled in PG&Y. Students wrote down the number of their favorite option on their attendance cards. An example of one week is shown below:



The following pages will show images of every experiment in fall 2018 and spring 2019, in addition to the "winners" and "losers" for each week. Plants with a green circle were the favorite choice when considering all students. Plants with a red circle received the fewest votes from all students. If the favorite plant for men or women were different than the overall favorite, those plants are circled in blue or pink. During some experiments, choices were tied. In those cases, there are two circles of the relevant color.

# Fall 2018 Experiments 1-6



  Winner, Most Votes Overall

  Loser, Least Votes Overall

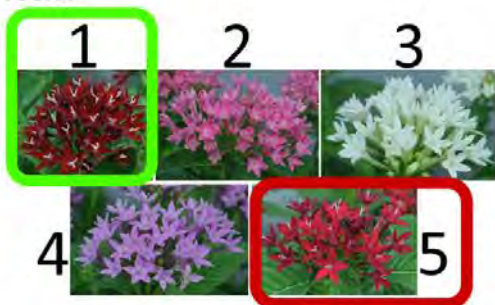
  #1 Choice for Women  
(If it wasn't the Overall Winner)

  #1 Choice for Men  
(If it wasn't the Overall Winner)

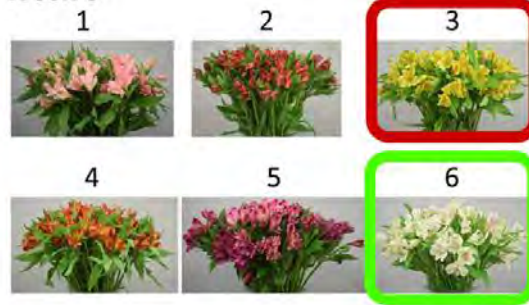


# Fall 2018 Experiments 7-12

Week 7



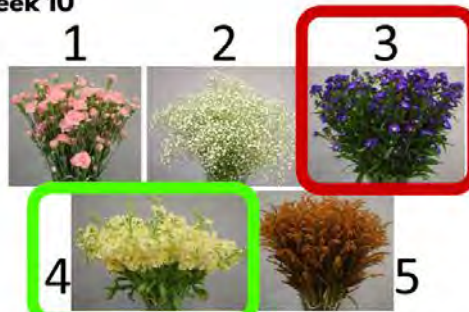
Week 8



Week 9



Week 10



Week 11



Week 12



Winner, Most Votes Overall



Loser, Least Votes Overall



#1 Choice for Women  
(If it isn't the Overall Winner)



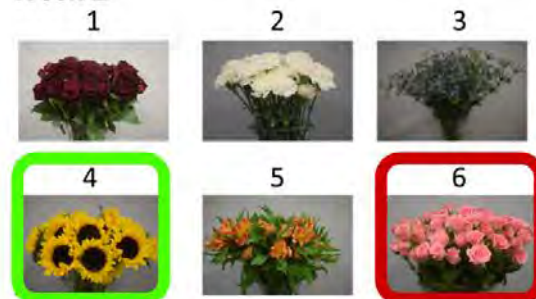
#1 Choice for Men  
(If it isn't the Overall Winner)

# Spring 2019 Experiments 1-6

Week 1



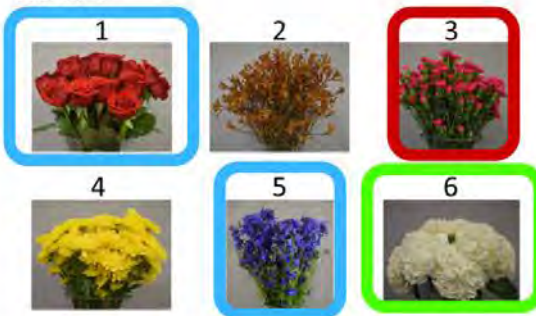
Week 2



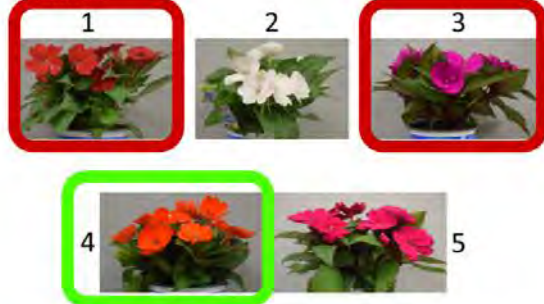
Week 3



Week 4



Week 5



Week 6



Winner, Most Votes Overall



Loser, Least Votes Overall



#1 Choice for Women  
(If it isn't the Overall Winner)



#1 Choice for Men  
(If it isn't the Overall Winner)

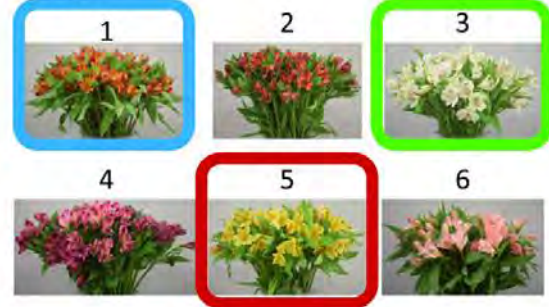


# Spring 2019 Experiments 7-12

**Week 7**



**Week 8**



**Week 9**



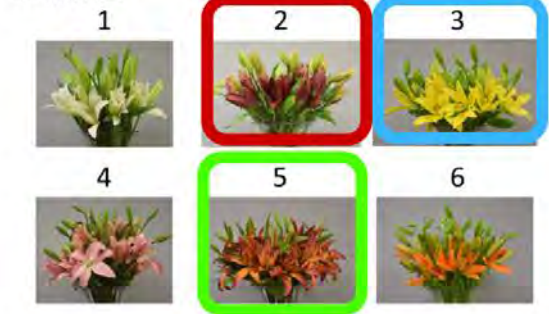
**Week 10**



**Week 11**



**Week 12**



**Winner, Most Votes Overall**



**Loser, Least Votes Overall**



**#1 Choice for Women**  
(If it isn't the Overall Winner)



**#1 Choice for Men**  
(If it isn't the Overall Winner)



## Results of Plant Drops

Plant Drops go beyond the average “free event” found on college campuses. Plant Drops give students without a history with plants the opportunity to try gardening for themselves with a plant specifically chosen to be easy to care for in a dorm environment. By building their self-confidence with a free plant, students feel more secure about making future plant purchases. In a survey following an event at UF, 84% of participants responded “Yes” when asked if the Plant Drop increased their interest in plants. Another student reached out through CPI’s Instagram and commented "30+ plants in my collection started with a coleus from UF's CPI Plant Drop!!!"

Event Date	University	People Reached	“Going” or “Interested” Responses	Response Demographics
10/13/17	University of Florida	Unavailable	4.7k	Unavailable
3/22/18	Texas A&M University	Unavailable	1.7k	Unavailable
4/5/18	Penn State University	Unavailable	1k	Unavailable
4/11/18	University of Florida	Unavailable	577	Unavailable
10/12/18	University of Florida	Unavailable	2.8k	Unavailable
2/25/19	Texas A&M University	Unavailable	2.4k	Unavailable
3/13/19	University of Florida	Unavailable	2.3k	Unavailable
4/23/19	NC State University	11.2k	742	86% Women
4/24/19	Clemson University	21.3k	621	85% Women
4/25/19	University of Georgia	22.5k	1.5k	85% Women
9/23/19	University of Michigan	63.5k	5k	78% Women
9/24/19	Michigan State University	47.2k	3k	85% Women
9/25/19	Ohio State University	19.9k	1.5k	82% Women
10/3/19	Cornell University	26.1k	2.2k	79% Women
10/9/19	University of Florida	13.1k	1.4k	84% Women

*Above: Facebook data from 15 Plant Drop events. The number of people reached includes anyone who saw content related to the Facebook event. Most students who responded to events were women, which is also reflected in images from each event. Data listed as “Unavailable” were due to Facebook insight limitations.*

While CPI uses multiple social media platforms to promote Plant Drops, Facebook events are the primary way to track RSVP figures and share timely updates with participants. Using Facebook also has the advantage of collecting student names and overall demographic estimates, including gender and age ranges.



*Above: Students from Penn State University's Horticulture Club volunteering at a Plant Drop.*



*Above: A flyer distributed at a Texas A&M University Plant Drop featured CPI's information and current sponsors, while the opposite side (not pictured) featured care instructions.*



## **Future Plans**

CPI will continue programming and outreach events at UF and beyond, with an emphasis on virtual outreach and student development for the 2020-2021 academic year. While COVID-19 may pose a challenge that disrupts CPI's typical outreach plan, it also provides an opportunity to revisit CPI's goal of connecting students across the country. Since meetings and events will take place virtually, students from any college or university will be able to participate and develop connections with other students and potentially industry members. Regardless of the delivery method, CPI will continue to recruit the next generation of consumers and employees for the plant, produce, and floral industries.



CPI will continue to share information about AFE scholarships with students to help guide new talent to the floriculture industry and provide students with opportunities to gain practical experience.