

Vineland unveils new sweet potato, resistant rose

Researchers were able to showcase their latest varieties at an open house



BY LILIAN SCHAEER
The writer is a freelance journalist based in Arkell

Vineland - The promise of roses and sweet potatoes drew a capacity crowd to the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre's research farm on July 25 despite the sweltering temperatures.

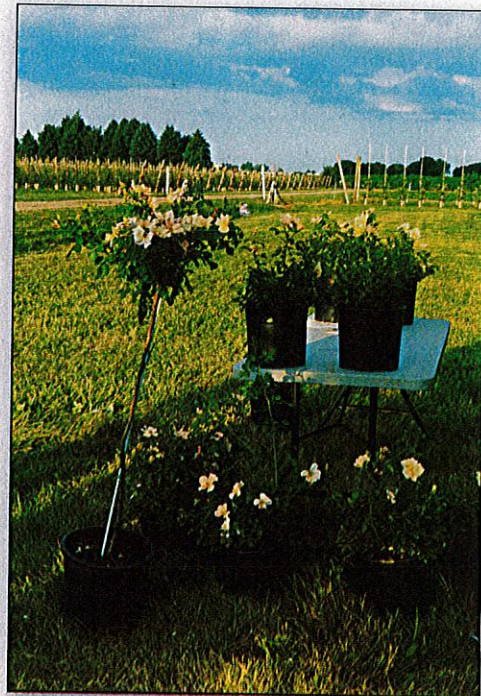
The annual 'What's Growing On?' open house showcased two Vineland innovations that will be hitting the market in 2019: Radiance, a made-for-Canada sweet potato variety, and Chinook Sunrise, a new rose that will be part of the 49th Parallel Canadian rose collection.

Radiance is the outcome of the sweet potato breeding program that started in Vineland in 2012, a variety adapted to Canada's comparatively short growing season.

Canada imports 66,000 tons of sweet potatoes annually from the United States, according to breeder Valerio Primomo, and what little production there is in Canada is mostly in the Norfolk County area.

"Radiance is a short season variety that bulks up quickly and matures in 105 to 110 days, which is ideal for Canada, especially Ontario," Primomo said.

Many Canadian retailers target Thanksgiving in early October



Chinook Sunrise is the second rose in Vineland's 49th Parallel Collection, which features Canadian-bred cold hardy and disease resistant varieties. It will come on the market in 2019.

for sweet potatoes, which means the tubers must be out of the ground by early September to allow for enough time to cure or harden the skin, washing, packing and shipping. That's not possible for Canadian growers who use the currently available varieties, like Covington, which need a longer, warmer growing season to mature.

About 15 acres of Radiance are being grown commercially in Canada this year, mostly in Ontario, but with some production also in Nova Scotia. The goal, according to Primomo, is ultimately to be able to grow

sweet potatoes across the country.

Sweet potatoes are grown from cuttings called slips - all slips currently come from the U.S., so Vineland has developed a partnership with greenhouse propagator Roeland Farms to produce Radiance slips for Canadian growers. They expect to have enough slips to support 150 acres of production in 2019, and will take orders from interested growers on a first come, first served basis, Primomo said.

"We've developed a sweet potato variety for local production, but also a slip production

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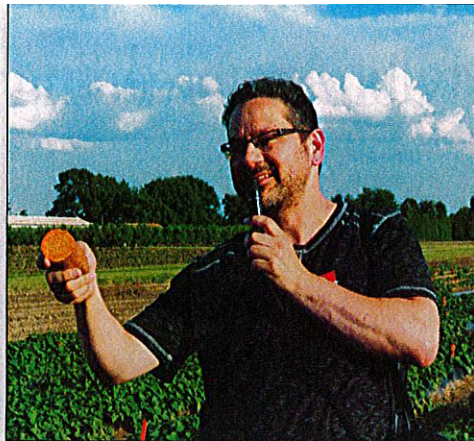
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Vineland's new sweet potato variety, held here by breeder Valerio Primomo, is liked by consumers for its flavour, texture, aroma and deep orange colour.

industry that local greenhouse producers could add to their rotation, as the sweet potato slips would fill a greenhouse during a three month period where it would normally be empty," he added.

Radiance in particular was popular with Vineland's consumer testing panel, which gave it high marks for flavour, texture, aroma and its deep orange colour. Additional sweet potato varieties are still being evaluated in Vineland's development pipeline.

Vineland is also known for its hardy Canadian rose breeding program. Last year marked the release of Canadian Shield, a disease-resistant red rose, which in 2019 will be joined by the bright coral Chinook Sunrise rose.

"We are looking for plants that are bullet-proof – as long as it is fed and watered, it will grow and doesn't need any special treatments," said John Bakker of J.C. Bakker Nurseries in St Catherine's, Vineland's nursery partner in the 49th Parallel collection.

That means resistant to common rose diseases like Black Spot and Powdery Mildew, as well as being low maintenance and able to withstand Canada's cold winters.

Vineland's rose breeding program began in 2010 when the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association (CNLA) obtained the rights to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's hardy rose breeding program which dates back to the 1950s, and struck an agreement with Vineland to have it take over the research program.

It takes about 10 years to bring a new rose to market. From the thousands of crosses started every year, the most promising ones are pulled from Vineland's selection block for further trials both at Vineland and with partner nurseries – the goal is to end up with one or two that meet all market and grower

criteria.

A third rose in the 49th Parallel series, the bright pink Aurora Borealis, will be available on the market in 2021.



This is what can happen when a few rows of potatoes don't get an insecticide at planting. The bugs had a field day. (PHOTO BY EUGENIA BANKS)



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