

The University of Tennessee Gardens 2002 Best Plant Report

Prepared by:

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Our 2002 gardening season became quite challenging as the season progressed. We started off with great temperatures and frequent rainfall but that all ended around July. From mid-summer on we had above normal temperatures with long drought periods making watering the number one garden chore. The heat and drought really tested our trial plants and many did prove their merit. Of the 598 different varieties we evaluated, 40% were from cuttings. The following classes include those cultivars which were top performing plants throughout the growing season from the UT Gardens.

Annual Species Summaries

Alternanthera - An unusual and distinctive new annual from Pan American Seed. You have to try the need seed grown variety, 'Purple Knight'. Bold masses of dark purple leaves on vigorous, fast growing plants - a great choice for mid-border hedges or instant spots of deep rich color. The purple stems spread out wide, loaded with glistening, two-toned foliage - purple on top, burgundy below. Give 'Purple Knight' a lot of space, it grows big and fast, up to 3' tall and 3' across. It looks spectacular also in large containers. Other vegetative alternantheras we liked from Glasshouse Works included 'Christmas Clover', 'Gold Threads', 'True Yellow', 'Snowball', and *A. polygonoides rubra*.

Begonia - The new 'Doublet' begonias are the darlings of the wax-leaf begonia world. Grown from vegetative cuttings rather than from seed, Doublet begonias will maintain their uniquely powder-puff, double flowers until frost. These wonderfully floriferous plants are at home in the garden, or in patio containers. Available in white, pink, and red. We also selected, for the first time, a heat-tolerant tuberous begonia. The 'Solenia' series was impressive with its double blooms and prolific bloom habit.

Canna - This brilliant 'Tropical Yellow' canna from American Takii is an extra dwarf variety, growing only 24 to 30 inches and flowering 85 to 120 days after seed is sown in the spring. Also available in Red, Rose, and Salmon, these varieties are naturally branching, making them promising in the garden and in pots.

Cat's Whiskers - Is excellent for the garden as bees, butterflies and hummingbirds are attracted to the tropical and exotic blooms for their nectar. Flowers may be white or bluish-purple, and when the blooms open, they have a long spike full of flowers and stamens, similar to a cat's whiskers. Grow in full sun or part-shade. Grows to 2 feet and spread 3 feet wide. Dramatic when used in mass.

Coleus - Favorite sun coleus among our visitors for their striking and colorful foliage included 'Japanese Giant', 'Tilt-a-Whirl', 'Gay's Delight', 'Marissa', 'Othello', 'Crispy Critter', 'Aurora', and 'Raber's Delight'. All from Glasshouse Works.

Dichondra ‘Silver Falls’ - This is a new seed raised and vigorous silver-leafed plant released by Pan America Seed. Very heat and drought tolerant and its wonderful vigorous cascading habit makes it an excellent choice for mixed containers or hanging baskets. It has rounded, fan-shaped silver foliage on silver cascading stems which can grow up to 4 ft long. Tolerant of full-sun to part-shade.

Gaillardia - ‘Sundance Bicolor’ is an outstanding 2003 AAS winner. Its bright gold and bed bicolored flowers bloom all season. It is self-cleaning and grows to 1.5 feet. Tolerant of full-sun to part-shade and drought.

Golden Shrimp Plant - A great flowering house-plant (*Pachystachys lutea*) which has a dramatic effect in the garden. Use in containers or a real impressive show in mass. Grows to 1.5 feet and flowers non-stop all season. Yellow and white bi-colored flowers are striking against its dark green foliage. Grow in full-sun or part shade.

Melampodium - ‘Lemon Delight’ from Takii offers a new color to the few melampodium varieties available. It is a soft, light-yellow color and is uniform and self-cleaning. Grows to 2 feet.

Nierembergia - The ‘Summer Splash’ series from Jackson and Perkins is low and mounding and covers itself all summer in cup-shaped blooms. Tolerant of drought and heat. Great for mixed containers or in mass in the garden. ‘Summer Splash Blue’ is a light, lavender-blue color which really is striking in the garden.

Ornamental Millet ‘Purple Majesty’ - This new AAS winner for 2003 is one of the "hot plants" of the moment. It looks like a purple cornstalk with stiff foot-long purple plumes covered in a dusting of pollen. Goldfinches love the seeds. Grow in full-sun and use in containers or in the garden. Can grow to 4' tall.

Petunia - Though it was a great season for petunias to shine in the garden, only the groundcover types won our ‘top performance’ award. The winning series include: ‘Ramblin’ series (Goldsmith), ‘Avalanche’ series (Bodger), ‘Surfinia Lime’ and ‘Surfinia Giant Purple’ (Jackson and Perkins), ‘Suncatcher’ series (Ball FloraPlant), ‘Wave’ series. Be sure to check out the new 2003 AAS winner ‘Blue Wave’. ‘Merlin Blue Morn’ from Sakata is a 2003 AAS winner. Displaying a unique color pattern and habit, this variety features excellent garden performance. It joins ‘Red Morn’ and ‘Pink Morn’ in the series.

Plectranthus - We had numerous selections in our gardens this past summer and all we incredible performers. The new ‘Nicodemus’ had a spreading, low habit and was great in containers or as an annual groundcover. ‘Variegata’ had the same vigor and growth habit. Upright selections we loved included ‘Silver’, ‘Athen’s Gem’, ‘Green on Green’, ‘Uvongo’, and ‘Erma’.

Rudbeckia hirta - I can’t imagine a garden without the new ‘Autumn Colors’ and ‘Prairie Sun’ varieties from Benary. ‘Prairie Sun’ is an AAS winner for 2003 and has huge gold blooms with

a yellow ring around its green-eyed center growing to 2.5 feet. 'Autumn Colors' is a beautiful bronze-colored selection with a brown-eyed center growing to 2 feet.

Sunflower - The new AAS winner 'Ring of Fire' was impressive with bright gold flowers with a burgundy ring around their centers on multi-branching stems. Grows to 4 feet.

Torenia - 'Duchess' series from Goldsmith was extremely uniform and compact. Flowers best in partial sun to shade but will tolerate full sun. 'Summer Wave Amethyst' from Jackson and Perkins was also impressive with its trailing habit and its large, dark blue-purple flowers.

Vinca - 'Big Ruby' from Pan American was impressive for its great clear, cherry-red color and huge blooms; 'Heatwave Blue w/ Eye' from Bodger has a wonderful light lavender-blue color; 'Sunstorm' series from Syngenta offers many great colors and is uniform in habit.

Tropical Species Summaries

Bush Morning-glory (*Ipomoea fistulosa*) - Related to the sweet potato and has a large, edible root. Very drought tolerant due to its large tuberous root system. Can grow to 15' and covers itself in rose-pink morning-glory flowers. Dramatic in the back of a bed.

Fire Bush (*Hamelia patens*) - Colorful tropical shrub with tubular red/orange flowers and bright red fall foliage. Can grow to 4-5' and is very attractive to hummingbirds. Great in full-sun and a well drained soil. Versatile in the garden either in mixed containers or as a specimen or in mass. Hardy in zones 9-10.

Caricature Plant (*Pseuderanthemum atropurpureum*) - 'Tricolor' is a beautiful selection with thick, burgundy and pink leaves. Grows to 3 feet tall with a striking erect form.

Variegated Angel's Trumpet 'Snowbank' (*Brugmansia*). A fragrant peach colored bloom of immense proportions emerges from some of the most brilliant and broad margined foliage you have ever seen. The First tetraploid Brugmansia. From Terra Nova.

Copper Plant, Jacob's Coat (*Acalypha wilkesiana*) - Many selections are available and all have vivid foliage colors, ranging from dark plum reds to shades of pink, red, orange-red and cream. Some have large heart-shaped leaves, others have smaller, serrated leaves. Acalyphas make striking accent plants. Bears catkin-like flowers often hidden among the leaves. Grow in moist but well-drained soil. Hardy to zone 10. Prefers partial shade to sun. Choice selections we have tried include 'Haleakala', 'Macrophylla', 'Obovata', 'Macafeana', 'Cypress', 'Obovata' and 'Elf'.

Coral Bean, Cherokee Bean (*Erythrina herbacea*) - Coral bean generally has one bloom period, in March-April-May, but its bright-red flowers may occasionally appear in late summer. Flowers are borne on narrow, leafless spikes 8-13 inches long, and they contrast sharply with the plant's deep-green foliage. It grows quite well in heavy clay soils and is hardy to zone 6. Coral

bean will grow to 15 feet tall and spread 4 feet. The fruit is poisonous and hallucinogenic.

Purple Sugar Cane (*Saccharum officinarum violaceum*) - 'Pele's Smoke' from Polynesia is a dramatic plant wherever it is used. It's like a 'Purple Majesty' ornamental millet on steroids! This sugar cane with dusty-purple leaves can grow up to 12 feet tall. Dramatic when used in mass and in the back of the garden. Good in large containers as well. Tolerant of full-sun to part-shade.

Red Banana (*Ensete ventricosum*) - 'Maurelii' is one of the best red bananas for its deep intense burgundy tones and res stems. Great as a specimen in the garden when used with complimentary foliage and flowers. Grows to 12 feet and does best in morning sun and afternoon shade. Likes moisture.

Red Shield Hibiscus (*Hibiscus acetocella*) - The only hibiscus valued for its foliage. Produces beautiful maroon/burgundy foliage all season and though it flowers, the flowers are inconspicuous and not seen. Use in mass or as specimen plants. Great in containers as well. Prefers full sun and a moist, well-drained soil. Grows 3-8 feet in one season. Easily reseeds.

Tropical Smoke Tree (*Euphorbia cotinifolia*) - Wonderful *Cotinus*-like purple foliage on this tree-like Euphorbia. Loves full sun and heat, our display plant grew into a 5' tree with over 1" caliper trunk! Funky little flowers and evasive seeds in summer. A great specimen plant in the garden. Combine with complimentary flowers and foliage.

Variegated Tapioca (*Manihot esculenta*) - Variegated Tapioca is a tropical with deeply lobed leaves accented by radiating bright yellow central stripes. The stems are bright red, which contrast nicely with the foliage. Tapioca is a great accent plant for containers or the landscape and is very heat tolerant. Plants can reach 6-feet tall, but typically grew to 4-5 feet in our garden by the end of the summer. Foliage color never faded, despite daylong full sun exposure. The root is extremely poisonous when eaten raw.

Perennial Species Summaries

Abelmoschus esculentus (Musk Mallow) - A tender perennial which readily reseeds. Pale yellow bloom with purple center makes it a striking plant in the garden. Grows to 4 feet. Prefers sun to part shade.

Digitalis lutea (Small Yellow Foxglove) - Charming pale yellow, tubular flowers on slender 3 foot stalks in spring. Flowers the second season from dark green clumps. Evergreen Perennial.

Echinacea purpurea 'Kim's Knee-high' (Compact Purple Coneflower): Introduced by Niche Gardens in 1999. A compact purple coneflower with deep pink blooms. It has an incredibly long season of bloom, and sturdy height, typically topping out a foot shorter than the species. Typically grows 15-30" tall. (Niche Gardens)

Echinacea tennesseensis (Tennessee Coneflower) - This species is on the endangered species list. Grows 2 to 3 feet tall. Flowers are deep pink with pinkish green centers and upturned

petals, and leaves are medium to dark green and narrowly lance-shaped. Tennessee coneflower adapts well to cultivation and is easy to start from seed though it's not quite as cold-hardy as other coneflowers. The Tennessee coneflower is a perennial, hirsute herb with a large, carrotshaped rootstock and up to four unbranched stems. The leaves are narrow, alternate and untoothed.

***Centaurea gymnocarpa* (Dusty Miller Centaurea)** - Valued for its silver-white foliage which is finely textured. Flowers in spring with a pale lavender bloom. Prune after blooming and enjoy the foliage the rest of the year. Is semi-woody so don't prune till spring. May require heavy pruning to keep full and compact. A great accent plant in the middle of border. Grows to 2' tall and prefers full sun and a well drained site.

***Cuphea micropetalia* (Tall Cigar Plant)** - A tender perennial native to Mexico. Grows 3-5' tall and 3' wide. The hummingbirds have wars over the flowers of this plant. The long tubular flowers are perfectly suited for their long bills. The colors draw them in as well. Flowers are bright gold, orange, and red. The plant slowly spread by runners. Considered a hardy annual as plants are hardy into the teens but the above ground growth will die back in the mid 20's. The main blooming season is in the late summer and Fall. Use as specimen or in mass of 3-5 plants. Nice cutflower. Prefers full-sun and well-drained soil. Propagate by division or cuttings.

***Eryngium yuccifolium* (Rattlesnake Master)** - A strikingly yucca-like plant with thorny looking leaves and a thistle-like flower which looks like something from an alien planet. The distinctive, waxy-green foliage lends the plant a bit of an unusual air, and the white "spiky golf ball" flowers that show up in July are truly unique. Makes an excellent specimen, planted individually or in groups of three. Native Americans brewed a tea of the root as an antidote to rattlesnake venom. Does best in medium and dry soils, reaching a height of three to five feet.

***Oxalis regnellii* 'Purpurea'** - I have admired this plant for a long time. The beautiful purple color in the leaves is hard to beat. The long stems for the ground are topped with a cluster of three deltoid-shaped leaflets, which are one and a half inches long. The leaflets fold at the mid-vein and resemble purple butterflies. Does well in shade and even full-sun! Use in containers or in the front of a bed. Produces pink to white flowers during mid-summer.

***Persicaria microcephala* 'Red Dragon (Red Dragon Persicaria)** - The clumping rootstock of this new perennial emerges in spring with dark burgundy-red stems which grow 3-4' tall x 4-5' wide. Each stem is lined with exquisite tricolor and patterned leaves of purple, silver, and green. From midsummer through fall, the tips of the plant are covered in tiny white baby's-breath-like flowers. P. 'Red Dragon' is great in the perennial border as well as in a mixed container planting. Makes a nice groundcover as well.

***Ranunculus repens* 'Susan's Song' (Creeping Buttercup)** - Introduced by Alan Armitage, this this Ranunculus has it all: beautiful variegated foliage, golden yellow flowers and an amazing tolerance to heat and humidity. It forms a tight cushion of foliage and blooms in the landscape. Grows best in full sun and is heat and humidity tolerant. Grows 8-11" tall.

***Ruellia brittoniana* (Mexican Petunia, Texas Petunia)** - A tender perennial which produces tubular purple or pink flowers all summer. Likes good, fertile soil with moisture, but survives dry spells once established. Prefers sun to part-shade. Use towards the back of a flowering border either in mass or as specimen, or as the centerpiece in a container.

***Salvia guaranitica* 'Black and Blue' (Anise Scented Sage)** - This new cultivar has cobalt-blue trumpet flowers backed by black bracts. A sunny site with average-to-lean soil is perfect for the strong, summer-long blooming plants; hummers will be regular visitors." Full Sun. 4' tall, 3' spread

***Thermopsis villosa* (Carolina Lupine)** - Spires of bright yellow, lupine- or pea-like flowers bloom cheerful, tall and early in the garden atop 3-4' plants. Perfect for mid-border, Carolina Lupine thrives in sun and average soil. Flowers fade to long-lasting flat seed pods atop hairy seeds. An underused and easy to grow native with a wide hardiness range. Southeastern native.

Herb Species Summaries

***Agastache foeniculum* 'Golden Jubilee' (Golden Anise Hyssop)** - Golden Jubilee is a golden-leaved perennial hyssop that thrives in full sun to partial shade. Heat tolerant, it produces dense spikes of lavender blue florets in mid to late summer. This leaves give off a minty smell when crushed. Grows to 3 feet all. Great to attract butterflies. The plant was named Golden Jubilee to commemorate the 50 year reign of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

***Amaranthus tricolor* 'Illumination' (Joseph's Coat, Chinese Spinach, Hinn Choy):** This striking cultivar is beautiful in the garden for its colorful scarlet-red and maroon leaves which are edible. Grows 3' to 4' tall and extremely showy in the garden. Young leaves are eaten either cooked or raw like spinach, but contain more calcium and iron. Very tender with distinctive bittersweet flavor. Stems can be cooked like asparagus. Park Seed.

***Anethum graveolens* 'Dwarf Fern Leaf'** - A short and compact dill growing to just 2 feet. Longer blooming period as well. Great in the foreground of the garden.

***Brassica juncea* var. *rugosa* (Giant Red Mustard)** - A hardy annual herb. Grows 1-2' x 1-2'. Coloration occurs at temperatures below 60E°F. Bronzed foliage with bright white midribs. Vigorous growth habit, excellent in mass or as a specimen in the landscape or in containers. Grow in full-sun to partial-shade. Extra large, highly decorative leaves of deepest red with a medium mustard flavour. Sow from spring onwards to use as 'cut and come again' or in summer/autumn to overwinter. Great for salads and stir-fries.

***Capsicum annuum* 'Chilly Chili' (Ornamental Pepper)** - New AAS winner for 2003 from Pan American Seed. The first mild-tasting ornamental pepper, 'Chilly Chili' grows less than 8 inches tall and thrives in hot, dry weather. As its peppers mature, they turn from yellow to orange and red.

***Lavender multifida* (Fernleaf Lavender)** - This tender perennial herb is valued for its fern-like foliage and summer-long bloom habit. Produces showy spikes of lavender blooms all season.

Easy to start from seed and blooms the first year. Prefers full sun and a well drained site. According to Richter's, blooms all winter (we shall see....)

***Ocimum* 'Magical Michael', 'Sweet Dani'** - 'Magical Michael' is a 2002 AAS Winner. This ornamental and edible sweet basil has a clearly refined plant size and shape. 'Magical Michael' is uniform and reliably 15 inches tall. The uniformity is has is rare in sweet basil plants. The lush aromatic, green leaves can be harvested within 30 days of transplanting and are rich in essential oils for cooking. Plants may flower when mature in about 80-90 days from seed. The small flowers are a curiosity since the calices are purple and corollas white. They are attractive for use as a garnish, adding color to any salad. Add disease resistance to it's list of attributes. Lemon Basil 'Sweet Dani' is a past AAS winner. Greatly improved lemon basil desirable for culinary and ornamental use. Strong lemon scent. Easy to grow from seed or bedding plant. Best in a full sun garden.

***Perilla* 'Magilla'**- New from Ball FloraPlant. 'Magilla' perilla is a showy, coleus-like foliage that displays unbeatable heat tolerance and striking contrast to flowering annuals. 'Magilla' handles temperature fluctuation better than coleus and will perform well in both sun and shade.

***Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Athen's Blue Spire', 'Salem'** - A new introduction from Dr. Alan Armitage and the University of Georgia, 'Athen's Blue Spire' is a large rosemary growing to 8 feet and proven to be winter hardy. Bright blue flowers are showier than most rosemaries. 'Salem' is also a tall, vertical rosemary which is winter hardy and produces light-lavender flowers.

***Salvia leucantha* 'Santa Barbara' (Dwarf Mexican Sage)** - This amazing introduction from California is a breakthrough in the world of salvias. It only grows 2' tall and has a spread of 3-4'. The foliage is topped with spikes of fuzzy purple, with a nicely contrasting lighter purple lip, from mid-September until frost. (Plant Delights Nursery)

***Spilanthes* 'Olerac Peek-a-Boo' (Toothache Plant)** - A new selection from Pan American Seed. Dark burgundy-green foliage with yellow and maroon bicolored blooms flowers all season. Makes a great annual groundcover. Nice when combined with purple basil.

***Tanacetum parthenium* 'Aureum' (Golden Feverfew)** - With its bright golden green scalloped foliage and low spreading habit, this cheerful little plant can provide a delightful accent to the edge of borders and foundation plantings or in a rock garden. The myriad of tiny daisy flowers, 1 in diameter, with their bright yellow disc florets and white ray florets are displayed on branches above the foliage in mid summer to autumn. Blooms late in the first year from seed.

***Teucrium chamaedrys* 'Bright Rose' and 'Variegata' (Germander)** - Both these selections are great to have in the garden. 'Bright Rose' has a more pronounced and showy pink bloom than most germanders and 'Variegata' has striking green and white variegated foliage. Both grow 1' tall and have evergreen foliage.

Seed and Plant Sources

Special thanks are extended to each of the following companies for providing either the seeds or plants for the UT Gardens and supporting the efforts of the trial program:

All America Selections, 1311 Butterfield Rd., Suite 310, Downers Grove, IL 60515

American Takii, 301 Natividad Rd., Salinas, CA 93906

Ball Seed Company, P. O. Box 355, West Chicago, IL 60185

Ball FloraPlant, 622 Town Rd., West Chicago, IL 60185-2698

Beaty Fertilizer Co. Inc., P.O. Box 2878, Cleveland, TN 37320

Benary Seed Company, 1444 Larson St., Sycamore, IL 60178

Berger Peat Moss, 121, R.R.1, Saint-Modeste (Quebec) Canada G0L3W0

Bodger Seed Company, 1800 Tyler Ave., El Monte, CA 91733-3618

Daehnfeltdt, 1308 State Rd. 114 West, P.O.Box 38, North Manchester, IN 46962

Farmen Seed, P.O.Box 13408, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406-3408

Fischer USA, 2995 Wilderness Place, Suite 102, Boulder, CO 80301

Glass House Works. <http://www.glasshouseworks.com/>

Grimes Seed Company, 210 W. Main Street, Box 398, Smethport, PA 16749

Goldsmith Seed Company, P. O. Box 1349, Gilroy, CA 95021

J.P. Bartlett Co., 578 Boston Post Rd., Rte 20, South Sudbury, MA 01776

Jackson & Perkins, Box 9100, 2518 South Pacific HWY, Medford, OR 97501

Oglevee Ltd., 152 Oglevee Ln, Connellsville, PA 15425

Pan American Seed Company, P. O. Box 438, West Chicago, IL 60185

Syngenta Seeds, 5300 Katrine Ave., Downers Grove, IL 60515