

## The University of Tennessee Gardens 2003 Best Plant Report

### Prepared by:

Dr. Susan Hamilton, Director of the UT Gardens  
James Newburn, UT Gardens Knoxville Curator  
Jason Reeves, UT Gardens Jackson Curator  
Betty Tipton, UT Gardens Evaluation Assistant

The University of Tennessee Gardens were initiated 20 years ago and are one of 34 All-America Selections Flower and Bedding Plant Test Gardens located around the country. The purpose of the Gardens is to promote interest and use of herbaceous plants in the landscape, determine the landscape performance of various herbaceous plants under Tennessee's climatic conditions, and to introduce new plants into the trade. Over 1000 different herbaceous plants including annuals, perennials, and herbs are tested and evaluated each year from a landscaper's perspective for maintenance, flower and foliage integrity, profuse blooming, and insect and disease resistance. In 2003, the Knoxville Gardens expanded their trial site to Jackson, Tennessee, which is in the Western part of the state about an hour east of Memphis. Having trial locations in both the Eastern and Western portions of the state provides the industry with evaluations from the different climatic regimes found in these different regions of Tennessee. Both test Gardens are open and free to the public during daylight hours and are designed for self-guided tours.

**The 2003 Growing Season:** The second wettest spring in Tennessee history along with tornadoes and flooding delayed planting by a month. Knoxville had only 3 sunny days between the end of May to the end of June while Jackson had 15 sunny days. We had lots of root diseases and botrytis fungal disease, especially in Knoxville, due to the excessive rainy season. When irrigation was required, in Knoxville it was done primarily with subirrigation soaker hoses though overhead irrigation was used in some areas of the garden. All irrigation in Jackson was overhead but it was only used approximately 5 times during the growing season due to good amounts of rainfall spaced well through most of the summer. No pesticides were used to control any insect or disease problems. In Knoxville, an organic fertilizer with a 4-4-2 analysis was incorporated into the planting beds prior to planting at the rate of 40-lbs./700 sq. ft. Jackson incorporated 50 lbs. of 15-15-15 per 800 sq. ft.. Both gardens topdressed with ammonium nitrate in June. Treflan tm pre-emergent herbicide was applied 2 weeks after all variety trials were planted. The soil pH for the trial evaluation beds was 7.2. Pine needles were used as mulch around all trials in Knoxville while Jackson used hardwood mulch on everything except geraniums, which was mulched with soil conditioner compost.

### Annual Species Summaries

**Argyranthemum** 'Madiera' series from Ball FloraPlant– Profuse flowering all season atop uniform and vigorous foliage.

**Angelonia** 'AngelMist White Cloud' from Ball FloraPlant is shorter and stockier than other selections and with loads of flowers. Great for containers or bordering a bed.

**Begonia (Hiemalis)** 'Solenia' series from Oglevees – Large and extremely showy blooms in bright vibrant colors and longlasting flowers.

**Begonia (Double Fiberous)** 'Doublette' series from Oglevees – Double flowers bloomed prolifically all season. Quite showy.

**Calibrachoa** 'Starlette Sunset' and 'Starlette Yellow Improved' from Ball FloraPlant; 'Million Bells' series from Jackson & Perkins all had great color and lots of blooms.

**Celosia** 'Fresh Look Yellow' and 'Fresh Look Red' from Benary were loaded with huge, bright colored blooms on compact plants.

**Coleus** 'Lava' series from Ball FloraPlant was compact and spreading with good color. Other selections with outstanding foliage patterns and color included: 'Aurora', 'Collins Gold', 'Japanese Giant', 'Diane's Gold', 'Oompah', 'Defiance', 'Tilta Whorl', 'Greenings Yellow', 'Carefree Mix', 'Fright Night', 'Gay's Delight', 'Stunning', and 'Crimson Velvet'.

**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 'Enferno', 'Chocolate Ruffles', 'Haleakala', 'Macrophylla', 'Obovata', 'Macafeeana', 'Cypress', 'Obovata' and 'Cypress Elf'.

**Diascia** 'Wink Strawberry' from Ball FloraPlant had a beautiful color and flowered prolifically through the heat of the season.

**Dianthus** 'Dynasty' series from Ball Seed – Double blooms growing to about 18" tall. Nice cutflower. Long-lasting and showy colors.

**Gaillardia** 'Torch Yellow' & 'Torch Flame' from Ball FloraPlant – Self-cleaning and profuse flowering all season. Bright, showy colors.

**Geranium** Vegetative types: 'Rocky Mountain' series from Fischer; 'Patriot', 'Red Coat', 'Puritan 2', 'Quaker White', and 'Anne' from Bartlett were all prolific bloomers on uniform plants with dark foliage. These selections survived the wet, rainy weather the best. From seed, "Black Magic Rose", an AAS Bedding Plant Award Winner was impressive. The unusual bicolor leaf pattern distinguishes it from all other seed geraniums.

**Hibiscus (*Hibiscus acetocella*)** 'Maple Sugar' from Proven Winners has outstanding brown/bronze foliage. Between coarse texture and dense, colorful foliage, it is a dramatic plant in the garden. Great in combination with Red Banana. 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.

**Impatiens** 'Accent series' from Goldsmith; 'Accent Midnight Rose' from Goldsmith had soft purple flowers and great uniformity.

**Impatiens (Double)** 'Fiesta Ole Sparkler Purple' from Ball FloraPlant – Large, showy blooms on compact and uniform plants.

**Impatiens (Mini)** 'Pixie Hot Rose' from Ball FloraPlant was compact but produced loads of blooms. Great for containers.

**Irisine** 'Purple Lady' from Pan American was a dramatic foliage groundcover grown from seed. The vibrant purple foliage makes a striking contrast to surrounding flowers.

**Lantana** 'Landmark' series from Ball FloraPlant was really floriferous and showy as well as uniform.

**Millet** 'Purple Majesty' from Pan American is a unique AAS Winner and striking in the garden for form and foliage color. 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.

**Nemesia** 'Aromatica Compact White' from Ball FloraPlant was profuse, compact, and stood the heat. New Guinea Impatiens 'Sonic' and 'Super Sonic' series from Fischer – Large flowers against strikingly dark foliage.

**Osteospermum** 'Soprano' series was showy with compact form and showy blooms and colors.

**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.

**Petunia** 'Ramblin' series from Goldsmith was fast spreading. Really compact and incredibly uniform. Loads of blooms. The 'Ruffle' double petunias from Ball FloraPlant were showy and impressive as well as disease resistant. 'Surfinia Baby Red' from Jackson & Perkins was a show stopping red with compact form and quick spread.

**Plectranthus** 'Silver' is striking in the garden for its bold texture and silver-white foliage. Looks great with pink-colored flowers. Grows to 3 feet.

**Portulaca** 'Margarita Scarlet' from Pan American Seed. Blooms stay open into late afternoon. Bright, showy color.

**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.

**Salvia** 'Picante' series Goldsmith Seeds – Compact and uniform with rich colors.

**Smoke Tree (*Euphorbia cotinifolia*)** This tropical smoke tree has *Cotinus*-like purple foliage on a 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.

**Verbena** 'Temari Patio Rose' and 'Temari Bright Pink' from Jackson & Perkins; 'Tapestry Light Pink' from Proven Winners, and 'Aztec Cherry Red' from Ball Floraplant all filled-in quickly and were profuse bloomers all season.

**Vinca** 'First Kiss' series from Benary Seeds – Uniform and profuse flowering habit. Showy colors.

**Zinnia** 'Swizzle Cherry & Ivory' and 'Swizzle Scarlet & Yellow' from Goldsmith – Unique swirled bicolored flowers. Novel.

### Perennial Species Summaries

**Canna** 'Constitution' is an introduction from Longwood Gardens. Has apricot flowers on short and stocky foliage which has a bronze color. Not reliably hardy.

**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.

**Dianthus gratianopolitanus** 'Blue Hills' is a great small and compact dianthus. Great blue foliage color and mounds of bright pink blooms in spring.

**Hibiscus mochetus** 'Lord Baltimore' is a striking selection which grows to 8 feet. Flowers all season with bright red blooms.

**Iris** 'Volunteer Orange' and 'April in Paris' were two outstanding Bearded Iris in our gardens. Striking colors.

**Sedum spectabile 'Matrona' (Matriarch Stonecrop):** This upright hybrid sedum grows 18-24" tall with deep red stems, rich fleshy leaves, with large pink flowers in Aug-Sept. This new German introduction will thrive in sunny gardens in average to dry soils and will top out at 4-6" taller than Sedum 'Autumn Joy'.

### Herbs:

Dwarf Golden Feverfew

Basil 'Mammouth', 'Purple Ruffle', and 'Spicy Globe'

Black Hollyhock

'Fernleaf' Dill

'Afrodite' Curly Parsely

'Redbore' Kale

'Minus' Thyme

'Grosso' Lavender  
Bronze Fennel  
Sage 'Tricolor' and 'Purple'  
Polish Amaranth

**Tropicals:**

**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

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

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

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