

The University of Tennessee Gardens 2004 Best Plants Report

Prepared by:

Dr. Susan Hamilton, Director of the UT Gardens

James Newburn, UT Gardens Curator

Betty Tipton, UT Gardens Assistant

There are no other words to describe weather conditions for this past growing season other than "extremely wet"! Rainfall was above normal for both June and July and temperatures were below normal. Knoxville received almost 8 inches of rain in July, which was 3 inches above normal! We had the 17th wettest July on record in TN. As a result, we had our share of root rot diseases and botrytis blight. The following categories of plants include cultivars which were top performing plants throughout the growing season in the UT Gardens.

Annual Species Summaries

Best in Show - Celosia 'Fresh Look Red' and 'Fresh Look Yellow' AAS Winners. Outstanding for large plumes, season-long, profuse blooming, and intense color. Self-cleaning and uniform habit. Wet and drought tolerant!

Best New 2004 Variety - New Guinea Impatiens 'Super Sonic Salmon 2004' from Fischer, USA. Impressive for dark burgundy foliage against extremely large, deep salmon flowers.

Best Old Variety - 'Explosive Embers' Ornamental Peppers from Syngenta. Deep purple foliage loaded with purple peppers turning bright red in late summer.

Top 5 Performers:

Coleus 'Kong' series from Ball Seed. Compact plants with mammoth leaves make this series dramatic and notable in the landscape. A real showstopper in the garden. Grown from seed!

Gallardia 'Arizona Sun' AAS Winner. Large, 3-4" blooms were loaded on plants all season-long. Compact habit growing to 10". Bright, showy red and gold color. Self-cleaning!

Verbena 'Temari Bright Pink' from Jackson & Perkins. Uniform habit, compact, profuse blooming, and showy color. Fast-growing habit that quickly adds large clusters of intense pink blooms to containers, window boxes, and the front of borders. Plants are resistant to powdery mildew and thrive in heat and full sun.

Vinca 'First Kiss Blueberry' AAS Winner. Impressive new color. Large blooms. Uniform in habit and fleuiferous.

Zinnia angustifolia x elegans 'Profusion Fire' & 'Profusion Apricot' from Sakata. Great new colors for this hybrid zinnia. 'Fire' is flaming red-orange and 'Apricot' is a soft creamy-apricot. Profuse blooming, self-cleaning, and uniform habit.

Other Notables:

Alternanthera 'Red Threads' - Impressive fine-textured, 1/8" wide ruby-red foliage. 'Red Threads' forms a mound 6" tall and 16-30" wide; a single plant contrasts beautifully with broader leaves and bold flowers, while a mass planting looks like a lawn of red grass! Its frilly texture and rich color are a designer's delight.

Begonias

Tuberous Begonia 'Non-stop Deep Red' from Benary. Impressive for super large blooms and its heat tolerance. Quite exotic looking!

Waxleaf Begonia 'Olympia Sprint Deep Pink' and 'Braveheart Rose Bicolor' both from Benary. Covered with loads of flowers all season with no disease problems. Great colors for this durable landscape plant. 'Braveheart Rose Bicolor' saturates the garden with beautiful rose and white blooms in sun or shade. Fills containers and beds quickly, sets flowers early and keeps flowering all summer long.

Hiemalis Begonia 'Betulia' series from Fischer is impressive for its heat tolerance and incredible blooming habit. Impressive large, full flowers really stand out making this type begonia and series a must in the garden. 'Red', 'Light', and 'Pink' were all impressive varieties of this series.

Calibrachoa - Colorful Expressions series with 'Blue', 'Rose', and 'Goldrush' from Twyford. 'Milkyway Light Blue' from Twyford is unique with usually small, lavender-blue flowers but loads of them. Best for container use and not landscape beds.

Coleus - Favorite sun coleus among our visitors for their striking and colorful foliage included the seed variety 'Kong' with three different varieties from Ball Seed; 'Solar Eclipse', 'Purple Emperor', 'Fishnet Stockings', 'Gold Brocade', 'Sparkler', and 'Saturn' from Glass House Works; 'Dabbled Apple', 'Black Prince', 'Old Lace', 'Juliet Quartermain' all from Proven Winners were outstanding.

Cosmos 'Cosmic Red' is an outstanding cosmos. Semi-double flowers bloom all season on short, compact plants. The color is vibrant and incredibly showy. Vigorous plants provide abundant, bright scarlet-orange 2-inch blooms all summer. Basically pest and disease free. This is a "no fuss" annual that will thrive on minimal care.

Dianthus 'Garden Spice' series from Twyford provide ever-blooming bouquets of flowers and great garden performance all year!! We have had them all year in the UT Gardens and they flower throughout all the seasons! Only growing to 6", great for a border or for containers.

Geranium Vegetative types: 'Rocky Mountain' series from Fischer; 'Patriot', 'Red Coat', 'Puritan', 'Quaker', 'Faith', 'Abigail', 'Beth', 'Amy' 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.

Impatiens - The new Xtreme series from Goldsmith was outstanding. Varieties 'Red', 'Salmon', and 'Violet' were loaded with flowers all season and plants grew into a showy mound about 30" tall.

Jewel of Opar 'Kingswood Gold' - This neat, old-fashioned flower has made its way into the modern garden. Chartreuse green foliage loaded with spikes of bronze stems and flowers makes a unique feature in the landscape.

Lisianthus 'Forever Blue' is an AAS Winner which will provide gardeners their favorite blue color throughout the gardening season. The large 2½-inch single blue flowers decorate the vigorous plants. Plants have a distinct branching habit, producing loads of blooms and a dense plant. Plants will grow to 12 inches when mature. Proven to be heat tolerant, 'Forever Blue' plants will benefit from deadheading like all other eustoma (lisianthus). Great as a border plant or in containers.

Marigold - The African/American type 'Moonstruck' series from Syngenta was compact and uniform and covered in large, fully-double flowers.

New Guinea Impatiens - 'Sonic' and 'Super Sonic' Series from Fischer always put on a great show. You are guaranteed success with selections from either of these series. Favorites from the Sonic series include: Sonic 'Magic Pink', 'Hot Rose on Gold', 'Light Pink', and 'Scarlet'. Favorites from the Super Sonic series include: Super Sonic 'Burgundy', 'Salmon 2004', 'Pink', 'Magenta', 'Lilac', 'Flame', and 'Red 2004'.

Pentas (Star Flower) - The Graffiti series from Benary was short, compact and uniform with good color all season and loads of flowers. Non-stop blooming and no deadheading required.

Petunia - From seed, 'Double Cascade Blue' and 'Dreams Sky Blue' from Pan American were weather tolerant, bloomed prolifically, and had great blue color. Also, 'Avalanche' series from Bodger was a vigorous spreader. Vegetatively reproduced and groundcover types: Surfinia 'Baby Yellow Compact', 'Baby Blue Compact', and 'Baby Purple' from Jackson & Perkins; Supertunia 'Giant Pink' and 'Bordeaux' from Proven Winners were all impressive. The 'Double Wave' series from Twyford was impressive, vigorous, and carefree in the gardens.

Plectranthus 'Silver Shield' from Pan American. Grown from seed and growing up to three feet tall. Great silver foliage and soft pink stems offer great texture for mixed containers and landscapes.

Salvia 'Salvatore' from Benary. Short and compact and covered with bright red flowers all season.

Senecio confusus - Orange Glow Vine, Mexican Flame Vine - Loads of brilliant orange daisy-like flowers abound on this vining annual from mid-summer on. Great to attract butterflies.

Sweet Potato Vine ‘Sweet Caroline’ series - The hottest ornamental potatoes are known as the Sweet Caroline series. They are coming courtesy of the J.C. Raulston Arboretum in North Carolina. Though the potatoes are from the arboretum, they are being marketed through Paul Michells, a partner with Bodger Botanicals. There are four colors in the Sweet Caroline series: green, bright lime green, purple (actually a dark burgundy) and a bronze that has everyone talking. The bronze can best be described as rust. All of the series has deeply toothed leaves similar to the ever popular Blackie.

Torenia (Wishbone Flower) ‘Summer Wave Amethyst from Jackson & Perkins and ‘Catalina Blue’ and ‘Catalina Pink’ from Proven Winners were impressive for their bright vibrant colors and cascading growth habit. The "Snapdragon" like flowers are produced in abundance all season long.

Vinca - ‘Jaio Dark Red’, ‘Sunshower White’, ‘Sunglow Scarlet with Eye’, and ‘Sundress White w/ Eye’ all from Syngenta. The Titan series from Ball - ‘Burgundy’, ‘Polka Dot’, and Lilac’ all had large, showy blooms.

Zinnia - The Magellan series from Goldsmith was covered with loads of double flowers and was self-cleaning. Extremely disease resistant looking great late into the season! Beautiful, large 5- to 6-inch blooms are radiant on plants 15-19 inches tall.

Ornamental Grass Species Summaries

Eragrostis elliottii ‘Wind Dancer’- Love Grass from Pan American grown from seed. Impressive blue foliage and large billows of soft plumes growing to 3 feet.

Pennisetum macrostachyum ‘Burgundy Giant’ Fountain Grass

Pennisetum macrostachyum 'Burgundy Giant' is the larger cousin to red pennisetum-it kind of looks like red fountain grass on steroids with its overall coarser texture, greater height and larger flower spikes. The species name, *macrostachyum*, comes from *macro*, meaning "large," and *stachyum*, meaning "spike." So, it stands to reason that *P. macrostachyum* would have larger flower spikes than most other *Pennisetums*.

Saccharum arundinaceum - Plume Grass, Hardy Sugar Cane

This hardy sugar cane will perform well down to zone 6! The handsome gray-green foliage resists lodging and provides a wonderful tropical feel and vertical accent to the garden. The effect is heightened in fall when flower panicles are produced in large numbers and tower to as much as 15'. The plumes begin as soft pink, open to silver, and will look great through the winter. Singing Springs Nursery.

Perennial Species Summaries

***Coreopsis grandiflora* 'Rising Sun' - FleuroSelect Winner** 'Rising sun' presents a color breakthrough in double flowered Coreopsis. This outstanding perennial variety produces masses of golden yellow flowers with mahogany bases all summer long within the first year of planting. The double, fringed blooms of this easy to grow beauty provide color impact in summer gardens. The fact that Coreopsis grandiflora 'Rising Sun' is early and has a compact and neat habit makes it ideal for professional production as well as for the creation of spectacular containers and stunning border fronts.

***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.

***Dahlia* 'Ellen Houston'** - Rich flowering double orange/red flowers; incredible dark black leaves. Grows to 18"-24". "Classic Summertime" has soft yellow flower that is a striking contrast to its dark, weathered bronzy leaves; large plant; 2'-4'. Both from Brent & Becky Bulbs.

***Gladiolus* 'Flevo Junior'** - A dwarf selection with striking deep blood red flowers; each petal veined with white, an echo to its white stamens; dark green leaves; a very dramatic statement! From Brent & Becky Bulbs.

***Ruellia brittoniana* (Mexican Petunia, Texas Petunia)** - A tender perennial which produces tubular blue, 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. Singing Springs Nursery.

***Salvia involucrata* 'Bethellii'** - **Rosebud sage.** Flowers are unique knobby, rose-pink buds that look exactly like old-fashioned rounded rosebuds. The buds burst open into delightful, 2" long, deep pink blossoms. 'Bethellii' shoots up to 5' tall by late summer taking its pink flowers to the sky, where it can mingle with chocolate-colored Saccharum 'Pele's Smoke'. Flowers from mid-August to frost. A tender perennial. Singing Springs Nursery.

***Salvia madrensis* - Forsythia Sage.** A huge yellow-flowered salvia! Forsythia sage is a very large and robust salvia that can get as much as 10 ft tall with a spread of 4-5 ft. The square stems are very distinctive, with well developed ridges on the corners, and they can be more than 1 in across. Forsythia sage grows in a spreading clump. It has large, bright green, heart shaped, rather rough leaves. The leaves and the spreading branches are produced in pairs, originating on opposite sides of the stem. The flowers are canary yellow and borne in 12 in spikes from early fall until first frost. Forsythia sage is a tender perennial and will require winter mulching. Singing Springs Nursery.

***Tradescantia* hybrid** 'Zwanenburg Blue' from Mouse Creek Nursery flowers abundantly off and on all summer. 'Zwanenburg Blue' has narrow purple-veined foliage that is medium green with clusters of brilliant blue flowers.

Tropical Species Summaries

***Acalypha wilkesiana* - Copper Plant, Jacob's Coat** - 'Obovata' and 'Chartreuse'. Spectacular foliage to compliment lots of different color schemes. 'Chartreuse' is valued for its creaming yellow and bright green foliage which is unusual in the world of *Acalypha*. Randolph's Greenhouses.

***Anisacanthus wrightii* - Hummingbird Bush**

This herbaceous shrub is covered with light orange to dark red tubular flowers that regularly bring in the hummingbirds from June to October. Although it usually freezes back every Winter, once established, Hummingbird Bush attains 3'-4' in height and width and thrives with little water. The self-fertile plant throws its seed quite some distance and forms colonies if given the chance. Singing Spring Nursery.

***Canna* 'Cleopatra' and 'Australia'**- Like a black hole in the garden, *Canna* 'Australia' draws every eye with the deepest, darkest burgundy-black leaves ever seen in the world of cannas. No other canna comes close to the color saturation of these glossy, 18" leaves! Not only that, but 'Australia' holds its rich color through the season without fading—a first among dark-leaved cannas. And if you think the foliage sounds good, you should see it when its brilliant stoplight-red flowers top the 5' stalks from summer to frost! Exotic *Canna* 'Cleopatra', with its unusual burgundy and green leaves marbled in a broad, almost ying-yang pattern, has got to be the most unusual canna. 'Cleopatra' also produces some solid burgundy stems as well as a few all green ones (prune these out to prevent them taking over), and get this: flowers are sometimes solid red, sometimes pure yellow, occasionally half yellow/half red all in one blossom, but often yellow speckled with red! Singing Spring Nursery.

***Colocasia esculenta* 'Nancy Revenge'** - Variegated elephant ear. The 2' leaves unfurl green, but as temperatures heat up, they develop a creamy white patch along the mid-vein that then slowly spills out along side-branching veins. Mature leaves are dazzling, especially since 'Nancy's Revenge' shoots up to 6' tall, making sure no one will miss the show. This species is also among the hardiest of colocasias, guaranteeing its return in areas where many elephant ears fail to put in a repeat performance. Singing Springs Nursery

***Hibiscus tiliaceus* 'Variegata'** - This unusual variegated hibiscus has huge heart shaped tropical leaves which are speckled, splashed, and striped in shades of green, cream, pink, and deep burgundy. An excellent splash of color and interest for a sunny garden or patio. It is grown for its foliage, and the new growth is so brilliantly maroon as to appear to be blooms from a distance.
Randolph's Greenhouses.

***Homalocladium platycladium* - Ribbon Plant, Tapeworm Plant.** Ribbon plant is one of the most intriguing plants I've ever seen. A definite conversation piece in the garden! You've likely never seen anything like it. These flat stem segments keep adding new joints to grow into an upright, somewhat arching plant 2-3' tall. Tiny leaves match the stems in color but don't compete for visual attention. Singing Springs Nursery

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

***Stachytarpheta jamaicensis* - Porterweed.** This plant was considered a weed for so long but now is being cultivated for the best of gardens. Available in purple, bright salmon-pink, and red. Grows to 3-4' and flowers long colorful spikes.

***Xanthosoma atrovirens* 'Albomarginatum' - White-variegated Elephant Ear.** This is one wow plant in the garden! Its deep green arrowhead-shaped leaves bear wide, irregular blocks and bands of gray-green, soft sage green, rich cream and pure white. At the tip end, the leaves curl to form a pouch that sometimes proves watertight, making a nifty little cache-pocket for visiting insects to drink from. Grows to 2-3'. Singing Spring Nursery

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

BioComp, Edenton, NC

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

Randolph's Greenhouses 1690 Airways Blvd., Jackson, TN (731) 422-2768

Singing Spring Nursery, 8802 Wilkerson Road, Cedar Grove NC 27231

plants@SingingSpringsNursery.com

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

