

UT Gardens 2015 Best & Beautiful Plants

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UT Gardens website at <http://utgardens.tennessee.edu/>

UT Gardens Jackson at <http://west.tennessee.edu/ornamentals/>

Top Annuals of 2015

Best in Show – Petunia Tidal Wave® Red Velour - PanAmerican - This outstanding cultivar was a 2015 AAS Flower Award Winner and we couldn't agree more. This seed-grown variety certainly lived up to, if not surpassed, the Tidal Wave reputation. Like the others in the series, it spread nicely and mounded as it should to a height of about 20". The strong stems and flowers withstood rain and wind. While blooming consistently throughout the summer, it never became leggy or scraggly, always looking fresh and unweathered. Factor in a rich, plush, true red color and this selection is a winner for growers, landscapers, and homeowners.

Best New Variety – Sedum Lemon Coral™ – Proven Winners - Our specimens were planted next to pavement in full sun and couldn't have been in a more challenging site. Lemon Coral, however withstood these conditions and flourished. An outstanding selection that caught everyone's eye, the bright chartreuse colored foliage and fine texture developed a tinge of coral color in the cooler temperatures of fall. Ideal for massing together or using in combinations.

Best Repeat Variety - Vinca Cora® Strawberry – Syngenta – Introduced in 2012, this seed grown variety is outstanding for its vigor, disease resistance and color. A real "set it and forget it" variety that tolerates Tennessee's heat and humidity. Provides non-stop color through the entire growing with large blooms of bicolor saturated pinks.

Best New Series (tie) – Ipomoea SolarPower™ series - Ball FloraPlant – The SolarPower series of sweet potato vines exhibited two great attributes that our evaluators really liked. One was the color. SolarPower Red maintained its bronze red color all summer and the deep red-pink veins and undersides of the leaves provided a dimensional richness that made this a standout. SolarPower Black's color was also outstanding with its equally rich blue-black foliage. The second appealing aspect was the manageability the plants exhibited. Both were not too aggressive nor prone to legginess which made either variety ideal for containers or landscape beds. Great foliage plants for combinations.

Best New Series (tie) –Portulaca Mojave® series - Proven Winners -The Mojave series of portulaca was outstanding because the blooms stayed open longer than what is typically expected with portulaca.

Also, the color selection was outstanding. We evaluated **Mojave® Pink, Yellow, Tangerine, Fuchsia, and Red** and all were deep enough in tone to not be washed out in bright sunlight. Thick, spreading growth habit formed a dense mat that few weeds could get a foothold in. Great groundcover and foreground plant.

Top Twenty Annuals of 2015 (alphabetical order)

Agastache 'Astello Indigo' Van Hemert & Co. – This FleuroSelect Gold medal winner of 2012 got our attention again this year. Planted in full sun this year it bloomed more prolifically and with greater uniformity. A seed-grown perennial that blooms its first year we treat it as annual and were not disappointed with the dark blue flower spikes that began appearing in mid-June and continued on through the season.

Angelonia Archangel™ Orchid Pink - Ball FloraPlant – Angelonia almost always performs well in Tennessee. We love the fact that it is heat and drought tolerant and low maintenance (none really). Though this year this variety exhibited a slightly shorter bloom time in the UT Gardens (longer getting started in one garden and faded out in late August in another) the large blooms, uniformity and deep color more than make up for any small deficiency in bloom time. Color and spiked flowers make it fun to pair with other flowers in mixed containers.

Begonia Baby Wing® Bicolor - PanAmerican – This begonia was early to flower and bloomed all season long, performing well even into to late fall. Marketed as extremely heat tolerant we found that to be exactly the case as this begonia was trouble free. The gradient bi-color bloom gives results in a nuanced peachy-coral flower.

Calamintha 'Marvelette Blue' Van Hemert & Co. - Another champion brought to our attention by the European Fleuroselect organization was this calamint which is designated a Gold Medal for 2016. It has a small bushy form with semi -dark green foliage similar in shape to oregano leaves with blue flower spikes. Its very uniform habit reached about 8 inches tall. A perennial, this plant blooms its first year from seed and can be used like an annual in the landscape bed, herb garden, container or flower pot.

Calibrachoa Can-Can® Neon Pink -Ball FloraPlant – Nothing could be brighter than this truly neon pink calibrachoa. And with the tiny yellow center the pink stands out even more.

Canna Cannova® Lemon NEW - Ball Ingenuity – In 2014 we awarded the Cannova seed-grown canna as our best in show. This year we trialed the new lemon color and the results were still the same. A light primrose yellow, the color is more reminiscent of the pulp of a lemon rather than the outside. Same dwarf habit as the others in this series (36 -42" tall) with great heat tolerance and consistent bloom.

Cleome Seniorita® Blanca IMP - Proven Winners - Nice sturdy stems supported the masses of flower blooms on this exceptional variety of the popular spider flower. Attracted pollinators and would be a great choice for the mid- or background area of landscape beds. Height about 32".

Celosia 'Flamingo'- Hem Zaden – We haven't had a wheat style celosia in our trials for several years. Although 'Flamingo' isn't that new, our attraction to this plant was renewed because of its great color,

heat tolerance, and prolific blooming. It adds a nice “wildness” to the garden bed without being too untidy in its appearance. We suspect other wheat celosias will be coming down the pike soon to add to the palette of this great everlasting annual. (hint, hint)

Coleus Flame Thrower™ series - NEW- Ball FloraPlant – Three new introductions of coleus that perform well in sun or shade. Slightly more compact plant (18-24”) with great branching is ideal for the bed or containers. **Spiced Curry** was our favorite with bold contrast of golden-chartreuse and burgundy bicolored foliage and a soft purple underside. **Chili Pepper** had slightly more narrow leaves with shades of lime green, yellow, pink, and scarlet throughout. A great foil for solid-colored flowers in mixed containers. **Chipotle**, also with more narrow leaves had wine and lime colored foliage that stood up to wind and rain.

Dianthus Jolt™ Pink - NEW - PanAmerican – An interspecific dianthus that holds up in the heat. Flowers bloom on sturdy 10-12” stems. Pink, a 2015 AAS winner, joins Cherry in this series. Spent blooms can be cut back to further promote its season long color.

Euphorbia ‘Glamour’ - NEW – PanAmerican – It’s great that there is a top performing seed grown cultivar of this wonderful garden plant available now. The “baby’s breath” of the landscape world, Glamour has dark green foliage and pure white flowers. This heat tolerant, drought resistant plant is truly a “set it and forget it” addition to containers, hanging baskets or landscape beds.

Gerbera Hello!™ series – NEW – Proven Winners – Hello! Who wouldn’t want a gerbera daisy that is consistently disease resistant, low-maintenance, and prolific bloomer in an exciting range of bright colors? This new series has slightly smaller blooms (about 3.5-4”) but more of them than other gerberas. We were most impressed that powdery mildew wasn’t a problem which we often see in the mid-south. **Hello! Sunshine, Magentamen, Miss Scarlet, and Pumpkin**, were the selections evaluated. All performed equally well in bright, rich solid colors.

Impatiens Rockapulco® Wisteria - NEW - Proven Winners – This delicate looking double impatiens has blooms that resemble small rose buds. The blooms of soft magenta blushed with white brighten the shade garden, and prolific blooming provides an abundance of refreshing color.

Lantana Luscious® Pinkberry Blend™ - Proven Winners – Wonderful combination of pink and yellow florets makes for a stand out specimen of this heat loving plant. In fact, the warmer it got the more this selection rose to the occasion, becoming a mass of color above the foliage. Vigorous grower ultimately grew to about 36” tall and flowered till frost with no decrease in the number of blooms.

Marigold Hot Pak™ series – PanAmerican – French type with very compact and uniform growth habit with an abundance of blooms make this whole series a winner. Very heat tolerant and disease resistant. Here at UT we of course preferred **Hot Pak™ Orange** but **Fire, Flame, Gold, Harmony, Spry** and **Yellow** also performed well.

Ornamental Chili Pepper NuMex Easter - A top twenty designee from last year we still love this 2014 AAS winner. With its orange, yellow, and even lavender fruit standing well above the foliage, this compact variety brightens up any sunny location. Its small size makes it ideal for containers or for a low border, and of course it tolerates heat and drought. Provides a bright spot in any garden.

Petunia - There were four **NEW** cultivars of **Supertunia**® from **Proven Winners** that got our attention this year. All had a profusion of blooms throughout the summer without becoming leggy or stretched, and as typical with supertunias we have trialed in the past were vigorous growers. **Latte** was outstanding in containers and striking with its slightly creamy white color with a purplish-brown throat. **Picasso in Burgundy**™ is a new color to the Picasso line with a green margin and rich burgundy center. For cultivars that have an exciting bi-color star pattern **Violet Star Charm** and **Pink Star Charm** were **outstanding**. Though with slightly smaller blooms, they still had the supertunia characteristics of heat tolerance and vigorous growth. Still though, our two top performers, as in previous years, are **Vista Bubblegum** and **Vista Silverberry**. In Knoxville, our finest container petunia by far was **Cascadias**™ **Indian Summer** from **Ball FloraPlant**. It's unique color does harken to the fall palette but looks great all summer. Blooms open sunset- orange then lighten to a yellow-peach with maturity.

Verbena bonariensis Meteor Shower™ - **Proven Winners** – We loved the compact growth habit and multiple branching of this garden favorite. Reaching 28-30” tall this pollinator attractor wasn't nearly as unkempt as the straight species and could either be massed together or used in mixed containers as an effective treatment.

Vinca Valiant™ **Lilac** - **PanAmerican** – Bright, bright color makes this selection (along with other colors in this series) a standout. Vigorous growth habit and large flowers create a mound of color that can withstand almost anything nature throws at it.

Zinnia Double Zahara® **Yellow** - **PanAmerican** – This double flowering yellow zinnia is another winner in the disease resistant Zahara series. The bright, clear, yellow color was eye-catching in the landscape and did not fade in the sunshine. Very uniform growth habit.

Incredible Edibles

'Jambalaya' okra, *Abelmoschus esculentus* 'Jambalaya'—Robust, compact plants started producing when plants were still quite small. The okra pods have consistent shape and flavor. After a late season (late August for Knoxville, TN) pruning—cutting the whole plant back by 1/3, the plants continued to look healthy and full and provided a steady supply of fruit up until the first frost. By far, the most attractive and well behaved okra we have tested. Seed available online at Park Seed and Johnny's.

'Pretty N Sweet' pepper, *Capsicum annuum* 'Pretty N Sweet'— This variety lives up to the name. The plant produces an abundant supply of small “lunchbox” peppers on essentially carefree plants. We planted them in regular garden soil, staked them and side dressed them once with a general fertilizer. The only thing we had to do after that was keep up with the picking. Fruits ripened earlier than other full size red pepper varieties. 2015 All America Selections winner.

'Butterscotch' butternut squash, *Cucurbita moschata* 'Butternut' — Small, early ripening squash with excellent flavor. A winter squash for smaller spaces. We chose this as top edible because the plant looked good throughout the season, produced well and had a second wave of squash after the first had been harvested. Good disease resistance. Developed by Johnny's traditional breeding team. 2015 All America Selections Winner.

Remarkable Roses

Love and Peace™ - A perennial staff and visitor favorite, this hybrid tea has a bushy habit resulting in lots of blooms of soft yellow and rich pink. Consistent in bloom size and color.

Rainbow Sunblaze® – As colorful as its name implies, this mini rose blooms deep rich yellow with rich pink margins fading to a reddish-pink as each bloom ages. Very floriferous, blooming all season long.

Twilight Zone – This double flowered grandiflora rose has an old-fashioned appeal. Its deep velvety magenta-purple petals and strong scent make it appealing as specimen, mixed with other roses or in a group.

Spellbound™ - Disease resistant hybrid tea with large blooms and clear coral blooms.

Sugar Moon™- Large-flowered hybrid tea with pure white blooms and wonderful fragrance.

Promising and Proven Perennials

***Lavandula x intermedia* 'Phenomenal'** - Vigorous grower, needs well-drained soil to survive the persistent problems associated with lavenders in heavy wet soils, but this cultivar has a great mounding habit with foliage that is robust and has a silver-grey color. Foliage persists in winter providing interest.

***Echinacea* 'Cheyenne Spirit'** – We are still enamored with this 2013 AAS winner because of its ability to reliably flower from seed its first season. The seedlings produce a variety of warm colors from soft, pastels to rich, deep shades of red, yellow, and orange.

***Cyclamen hederifolium*, Hardy Cyclamen** – Small pink and white flowers appear in mid-fall with foliage emerging a few weeks later. Hardy cyclamen is best suited for shady woodland type areas of dry shade. Naturalizing where planted these gems can add a splash of flower power when the other colors in the landscape are from fall foliage. Mottled foliage remains evergreen throughout winter, disappearing in early spring.

***Sedum* Rock 'N Grow™ 'Pure Joy'** – This low-mounding sedum from Proven Winners only reaches a height of about one foot. Develops a huge head in summer covered with pink blooms that eventually turn to a dried seed head which can provide fall and winter interest.

***Geranium* 'Gerwat' Rozanne** – Perennial Plant of the Year in 2008, this long blooming hardy geranium looks great when massed together. Can take full sun when well-watered, otherwise can use afternoon shade. Performs best with well-drained soil.

Dendranthema 'Igloo' series, Hardy Mum from Blooms of Bressingham® – We featured 'Fireworks Igloo' in the past and as more colors are introduced we find results are the same. This standout mum develops a perfect mound of flowers. These tidy deer resistant and butterfly attracting perennials will bloom in June and then again in September. The flowers last well into frost. Their domed habit creates a mound of 2' tall by 2.5' wide. Mass them in mixed borders with ornamental grasses, asters and stonecrops. Many colors with clever names like 'Cool Igloo' (raspberry), 'Frosty Igloo' (white), 'Rosy Igloo' (coral red), 'Sunny Igloo' (yellow) and 'Warm Igloo' (orange/bronze).

Hibiscus Summerific® 'Summer Storm' from Proven Winners – Long blooming hibiscus blooms summer through fall. Huge 8-10" light pink flowers bloom against burgundy foliage. Height reaches 48-60" with a 40-48" spread. For bushier plants with more blooms 1-2 pinches will do the trick.

Agastache Kudos™ Gold, Dwarf Hummingbird Mint from Terra Nova® – Dwarf variety that is very hardy and resistant to downy mildew. Great pollinator attractant with large compact spikes. About 18" tall and 20" wide. Starts blooming in late May and keeps blooming until frost. Can be sheered back in mid-summer to reinvigorate.

Amsonia hubrichti, Arkansas Blue Star – One of our old favorites. Feathery foliage up to 3' tall gives this plant a very airy feel as it blows in the wind. Add striking blue flowers in spring and brilliant golden to copper fall color and you have a win-win for this underutilized plant.

Tremendous Trees & Shrubs

Cercis canadensis 'Whitewater', Whitewater Eastern Redbud – This tree has it all! Weeping form, variegated foliage, and rose-purple blooms. Leaf variegation is very pronounced. Cross between 'Silver Cloud' and 'Covey' out of NC State. Filtered afternoon shade should help keep variegation from burning. Stake as high as you want it to grow.

Little Lime® Hydrangea paniculata 'Jane', Little Lime® Hydrangea Jane – We find we are utilizing this dwarf hydrangea more and more because its scale fits well into so many landscapes. Grows from 3' up to 5' tall with soft green blooms turning to pink in fall. Tolerates part sun to full sun.

Juniperus virginiana 'Taylor', Taylor Juniper – Ideal plant for that Tuscan feel. This columnar juniper maintains its dense upright form with no tendency of lodging. Blue-green foliage can add a dramatic effect in the landscape. Reported to stay 3' wide up to 30' tall.

Acer palmatum 'Mikawa Yatsubusa', Mikawa Yatsubusa Japanese Maple - Dwarf specimen tree with tightly-layered green leaves that turn yellow to orange in fall. Reaches 3'-4' in ten years.

Acer palmatum 'Tsukasa Silhouette', Tsukasa Silhouette Japanese Maple – Columnar form developed in Japan by Yutaka Tunaka. Named in the US by Don Shadow reflecting the nursery from which it came and its growth habit. Rich deep green in summer that turning orange to bright red in fall. Can reach 15-20 feet tall by 6-7 feet wide.

BloomStruck® *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'P11HM-11', BloomStruck® Bigleaf Hydrangea – Another in the line of Endless Summer® re-blooming mophead hydrangeas. Displays vivid purple or rose-pink flower heads on sturdy red stems. Smaller flowers than other cultivars but more of them. Does best in partial shade with well-drained moist soil. Height 3-4' x 4-5'. Change the color by adjusting pH. Acid for blue alkaline (sulphur) for pink. Heat tolerant and disease resistant.

First Editions® *Loropetalum chinense* var. *rubrum* 'PIILC-1' Crimson Fire™, Crimson Fire Chinese Fringeflower - Low-growing fringe flower with a compact and spreading habit . 24" - 30". Rich ruby red foliage with neon-pink foliage. Improved cold hardiness is one improvement which we are still testing. Spring planting is best. Zone 7-9.

***Lagerstroemia* 'PIILAGIII' Red Rooster®, Red Rooster Crapemyrtle** - Great new crapemyrtle with true red flowers with an upright, mid-size growth habit. Resistant to powdery mildew.

***Illicium parviflorum* 'Florida Sunshine', Florida Sunshine Anise Shrub.** - Has chartreuse gold foliage during the spring and summer that brightens to screaming yellow in the fall becomes a bit more muted in winter with the upper stems taking on a red cast, contrasting with the leaves. Best grown in average to moist soil in light shade to prevent leaf scorch. Its mature size is unknown but expect it to reach 5' tall x 3' wide in 7 years.

***Spiraea thunbergii* 'Ogon', Ogon Spirea** - As Carol Reese says "a plant that offers very early spring bloom, gorgeous golden foliage throughout the summer and lingering fall color. Ogon spirea moves softly in the breeze, adding a diaphanous quality in direct contradiction to its sturdy constitution. It makes a brilliant contrast against plants with leaves, or even better, with plants of purple or bronze foliage."

***Ginkgo biloba* cultivars** - Several cultivars are available that have desirable characteristics. '**Autumn Gold**' is said to exhibit the most striking fall color, but '**Presidential Gold**'™ and '**Golden Globe**' are also favorites. '**Chase Manhattan**' is a dwarf, small-leafed cultivar that can reach 6 x 6 feet in 10 years. The UT Gardens, Knoxville, has a dwarf, high-graft, multi-branched cultivar named '**Merikan**' that is about 6-foot tall and looks like a golden lollipop in fall. Both of these cultivars are ideal for the smaller landscape.

***Salix* x '**Flame**', Flame Willow** – Wonderful graceful shrub willow displays brilliant orange-red stems in winter, similar to shrub dogwoods. Can get 20 x 15' at maturity but can be kept in check for smaller areas by rejuvenation pruning which also promotes new growth that will have better color. In summer the lanceolate leaves create a graceful shrub. Fall color is golden yellow. Very forgiving plant that can be grown in a variety of conditions from dry to moist, but does best in full sun.