

University of Tennessee Gardens - Jackson 2024 Best & Beautiful Report

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This summary and the full trial results are available at:

west.tennessee.edu/ornamentals/

The University of Tennessee Gardens in Jackson trialed more than 225 varieties of annuals, perennials, vegetables, and herbs in 2024. Trials were planted during the month of May, and data was collected at regular intervals from June through September. The growing conditions were favorable with average temperatures and rainfall throughout the growing season. Supplemental overhead irrigation was used as needed in late summer when conditions became dry.

*In the descriptions below, the () following plant names identifies the companies that provided plants/seed to the UT Gardens Jackson for trials and demonstration.

Best in Show

This group of plants were selected based upon the outstanding aesthetic qualities they contribute to the landscape and/or container design.

Begonia l'CONIA® Upright Fire (Dummen Orange) – This tuberous begonia took us by surprise. Unlike most tuberous begonias in the south, it not only survived, it thrived! It did not slowdown in our summer heat, and was stunning in its shaded pot. What really set it apart was the contrast between its dark, almost black, serrated foliage and its large vibrant orange flowers with yellow centers. This plant has a neat upright habit and elegant leaf texture.

Begonia 'Gryphon' (Pan-American seed) – This eye-catching, seed grown Begonia combines a unique beauty with strength and durability. The large palmate leaves are green with silver accents on top, and feature a deep orange-red color on the undersides of the leaves and stems. The showy foliage and interesting colors make it a perfect specimen for a shade pot.

Calibrachoa Bloomtastic Cherry (Dummen Orange) – This semi-trailing, prolific bloomer impressed us by spilling out of a pot with a pop of color that catches the eye. It features cherry red blooms with maroon throats and a subtle yellow centers, blooming from spring to fall without missing a beat.

Celosia 'Burning Embers' (2024 All-America Selections Winner) – A new celosia with outstanding performance in the garden this year is Celosia 'Burning Embers.' It showcases dark bronze foliage and pink veins that contrast nicely with its large bright pink-red flower plumes. It is an easy choice for a pop of season long color in the garden, and an excellent heat and drought tolerant option for both containers or landscape. It is also a favorite of pollinators and makes a great cut flower.

Coleus 'Marble Mania' (Ball FloraPlant) – This new coleus features bright gold-bronze foliage with a beautiful cranberry-colored speckled pattern throughout the entire plant. It is a low-maintenance, high-impact plant that works well in many conditions including containers and landscapes, sunny or shady locations, and is also drought and heat tolerant. Notably, this coleus did not flower, even as the season progressed. This beneficial trait was intentionally selected for during breeding.

Cuphea Enchantia™ White (Ball FloraPlant) – This plant surprised us in the garden this year. When it first arrived, we thought there couldn't be much to this old fashioned white flowering Mexican heather. Overtime, it won us over more and more. The profusion of pure white flowers shine in the garden, contrasting beautifully with its lime green foliage. Its fine texture and neat habit make it perfect for the front of a border looking great all season. As with most cupheas, it is heat and drought tolerant and enjoyed by bees.

Heliotropium Aromagica™ Purple (Proven Winners) – This new variety of heliotrope reset our expectations of performance for heliotrope in southern gardens. Until Augusta® Lavender came to market several years ago, growing heliotrope in the hot humid south was not a realistic endeavor, Augusta® Lavender is not fragrant yet it does not skip a beat in the heat and humidity of Tennessee. When we received Aromagica™ Purple we imagined it would be dead by mid-summer. To our delight, Aromagica™ Purple thrived in the garden all season long. Its deep green foliage holds rich purple blooms that carry a light, vanilla fragrance, attracting pollinators and gardeners alike! It is beautiful at the front of a border, but will also make an excellent addition to containers.

Lantana PassionFruit (Ball FloraPlant) – We love the colors in this spreading lantana whose flowers feature a bright mix of fruity pink, orange and yellow. It never cycles out of bloom like some lantana, and is constantly visited by bees and butterflies! This plant is well suited to pots and performs exceptionally in mass planting as a low border. The plants spread out noticeably reaching 24 - 30 inches in height and up to 3 feet in width.

Portulaca Mojave® Series (Proven Winners) – This series is a great choice featuring a profusion of large, vividly colored flowers that need little to no maintenance to continue blooming until frost. Tolerant of heat and drought, they are the bee's first choice in the mornings. Opening up whenever the sun starts shining, these cheerful little blooms deliver a stellar performance.

Petunia Supertunia Tiara® Blue and Tiara® Pink (Proven Winners) – We are excited about these two new Petunias in the Proven Winners Supertunia series both feature a striking new pattern. A luminescent glow that emanates from the center, darkens gradually into their main hue: blue (which is more of a purple) or princess pink. These medium vigor plants are great in a container as well as landscape beds. They are heat tolerant and pair beautifully with lime green foliage plants.

Top Performers

This group has been selected based upon their season long performance and endurance of growing conditions in the UT Gardens Jackson.

Ageratum Monarch Magic (Ball FloraPlant) – Ageratum Monarch Magic is a new spreading ageratum that grows vigorously and bloom all season long with periwinkle purple, fuzzy flowers. This butterfly magnet works well in the ground, in pots and even in hanging baskets.

Begonia Space Age™ Black Hole™ and Space Age™ Europa™ (Proven Winners) – The foliage on these new rex begonias from Proven Winners is so unique that it hardly looks real. Both forms have shining silver leaves with dark jagged edges. Black Hole™ features a burst of black and burgundy in the center of each leaf. Europa™ has a splash of light lavender in the center contrasting beautifully with dark black veins and edges. They make excellent partners in a pot with other low water use plants or as a specimen.

Calibrachoa Aloha Kona ‘Hula Orange’ (Dummen Orange) – This beautiful Calibrachoa blooms from planting until fall, featuring cheerful light orange flowers with a darker cherry red throat and a spot of yellow in the very center. This is an excellent plant for sunny containers.

Coleus ColorBlaze® Lime Time® (Proven Winners) – This vigorous coleus shines from a distance with its bright chartreuse foliage. It works great in landscape mass plantings or in containers as a thriller. Slow to flower, heat tolerant, adaptable to sun or shade, this coleus is all-around great plant that virtually glows in the garden!

Dianthus Jolt™ Pink Magic (Ball Seed) – Jolt Pink Magic is easily grown from seed. It is quick to bloom and has gorgeous compound pink flowers featuring many shades of light to deep pink. The blooms are long lasting and continuous from spring to fall. They are an excellent addition for the front of a border and cut flower gardens.

Lantana Lucky™ Gold (Ball FloraPlant) – This new lantana is a favorite for its true gold color and reliable performance. This medium vigor lantana offers drought and heat tolerance along with an improved compact growth habit, making it a great choice for landscapes and pots. The plants are well branched growing 20-26 inches tall and wide continuing to bloom from planting until hard frost.

Mandevilla ‘Agate XXL White’ (Ball FloraPlant) – This vine climbs to the top of our list with steady vigor, and eventually graced the top of our trellises displaying extra-large white flowers with sunny yellow throats. The white flowers contrasted beautifully with its deep green glossy leaves.

Portulaca ‘Cupcake Carrot’ 2024 (Dummen Orange) – We are impressed with the performance of Cupcake Carrot in the garden beds and in our containers. This plant is easy to grow in full sun, and requires little water once established. The cheerful peachy orange flowers with glowing yellow centers attract honey bees, and are perfectly suited to spilling out of a containers edge.

Vinca Soiree® Kawaii Series (Suntory) – This tried and true can be relied on for its continuous reblooming power even through the hottest part of summer. These small stature plants top out between 6-10 inches and stay covered in bright blooms held above glossy green foliage. They are useful in pots and also in mass plantings in the garden. Vinca Soiree Kawaii series is an easy choice for gardeners in the south looking for blooming plants with drought and heat tolerance.

Vinca Titan-ium™ Series (PanAmerican Seed) – The vinca Titan-ium series is fast flowering, has improved disease resistance, and is available in a variety of vibrant colors. These vinca are fuss-free in full sun, with five large petals on each flower and many blooms covering mounded plants 12-14 inches in height. They are an easy to grow from seed affordable option that look great in mass at the front of a bed or in containers.

Consumer Favorites

These plants are favorites of those who frequent the garden and most commonly asked about.

Begonia l’CONIA® Portofino Dark Orange (Dummen Orange) – This Begonia has large, layered blooms in vibrant shades of orange that stand out against a background of dark green foliage. These compact plants are best suited for shady containers, and prefer dryer conditions.

Coleus Main Street Broad Street (Dummen Orange) – This Coleus has a perfectly rounded uniform growth habit and maroon-plum colored leaves that are highlighted by a gently ruffled lime green edge. This plant features a reliable habit that works excellently for landscape mass plantings or individually as a tall centerpiece in a pot. This versatile plant is heat and drought tolerant, and can be grown in full sun to shade.

Coleus ‘Premium Sun Crimson Gold’ (PanAmerican Seed) – This bold patterned, rich textured coleus has deep red leaves with golden edges. The plants are vigorous, well-branched, and easily grown from seed. They are perfect for a pot or garden border and are adaptable to sun or shade but look their best with some afternoon shade.

Echinacea ‘Artisan Yellow Ombre’ (2023 All-America Selections Winner) – The uniform, upright yellow blooms of this Echinacea are born on highly branched sturdy flower stalks. They are very consistent in their bloom time and form making them an excellent choice for the landscape. These seed grown Echinacea continue to put on a long-lasting show that attracts pollinators and birds to the garden. ‘Artisan Yellow Ombre’ thrives in full sun, has excellent drought tolerance, and flower spikes reach 18-20 inches in height.

Impatiens Solarscape® XL Lilac Spark (PanAmerican Seed) – This seed grown impatiens stood out for being vigorous in a shady pot. It has large lilac colored blooms that brighten dim areas of a garden. It blooms all season and maintains clean bright green foliage. The new Solarscape series is the first seed grown interspecific impatiens, which are hybrids between New Guinea impatiens and other downy mildew resistant species. We have found that unless you're prepared to water frequently, "sun loving" impatiens perform best in some shade.

Lantana Shamrock™ Red (Ball FloraPlant) – Lantana Shamrock is a butterfly favorite, deer resistant, drought and heat tolerant blooming machine. What more could a gardener want? Its flowers have a vivid red color that stands out in the garden. Its compact mounded habit makes it a great choice for large containers as well as flowerbeds. Growing 20-26 inches tall and wide, it produces blooms continuously until a killing frost.

Mandevilla 'Tourmaline Fuchsia' (Ball FloraPlant) – We are impressed with this bush type mandevilla's bloom power. It was covered in fluorescent fuchsia pink blooms the entire season and made a visual impact from a distance. 'Tourmaline Fuchsia' mandevilla often received compliments from visitors, and proved to be an excellent choice for containers.

Portulaca PortoGrande™ Lemon Creamsicle (Selecta One) – We love the varied pattern of Lemon Creamsicle's flowers. The flowers are mostly yellow with delightful dots of white on the edges of the petals. Like all of the portulacas trialed this year, they thrived in full sun without needing much supplemental water beyond establishment. It showcased an excellent trailing habit both in ground and in pots.

Tomato 'Purple Zebra' and 'Pink Delicious' (2022 All-America Selections Winners) – These two tomatoes are easy to grow from seed and extremely rewarding! Purple Zebra tomatoes offer high disease resistance, and a bountiful crop of medium size (2 inch round) dark red fruits with green stripes and a deep mahogany flesh. They were the sweetest tomatoes grown in the trials this year. Pink Delicious tomatoes live up to their name, producing large pink tomatoes with excellent flavor and texture, combining an heirloom look with hybrid disease resistance.

Vinca Soiree® Flamenco Series (Suntory) – This newer series of vinca sports fringed ruffled swirly bicolored petals that put on a fashion show in the garden. Our favorite performers are the Senorita Pink and Salmon Glow. Senorita Pink has pink blooms that are darker in the center and lighten into frilly white edges, while Salmon Glow is aptly named with salmon pink flowers and a glowing white center. These grew a little bit larger than the Kawaii series, coming in at 8-12 inches tall and 12-18 inches wide grown in full sun.