

# University of Tennessee Gardens - Jackson

## 2023 Best & Beautiful Report

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### This summary and the full trial results are available at:

[west.tennessee.edu/ornamentals/](http://west.tennessee.edu/ornamentals/)

The University of Tennessee Gardens in Jackson trialed more than 165 varieties of annuals, perennials, vegetables, and herbs in 2023. Trials were planted during the month of May, and data was collected at regular intervals between the months of June - September. Overall, the growing conditions were good throughout the season. Temperature and rainfall were average 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 company that provided plants/seed to the UT Gardens Jackson for trials and demonstration.

### Best in Show

*This group has been selected based upon the outstanding aesthetic qualities that they contribute to landscape and/or container design.*

**Bidens Campfire® Marshmallow™ (Proven Winners)** – A vigorous performer, producing a never-ending abundance of white blooms with yellow centers. Unlike other Bidens, which struggle with the heat and humidity in our area, Campfire® Marshmallow™ continued to produce a profusion of blossoms on densely mounded plants until a killing frost. They require no deadheading and only occasional watering once established. Attractive to pollinators, they spread 20-24" wide, 12-16" tall, and thrived in full sun.

**Calibrachoa 'Bumble Bee Hot Pink' (Ball FloraPlant)** – Vibrant, unique bicolor pattern, the bright pink flowers have a yellow star shaped throat. This trailing Calibrachoa bloomed heavily and continuously until frost performing flawlessly in containers with regular watering and fertilizing. It attracts bees and butterflies.

**Lantana Shamrock™ Red (Ball FloraPlant)** – A butterfly favorite, with the bonus of being deer resistant, drought and heat tolerant. 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 16-20" tall and wide it produced blooms continuously until killing frost.

**Nemesia Aromance® Mulberry and Aromance® Pink (Proven Winners)** –Aromance® series is another plant that has surprised us with an uncharacteristic vigor for its genus for the second year in a row. From the time we potted up plugs in March until the killing frosts claimed them in the garden beds, this plant was a winner. They reached 10” tall and 18’ wide. Despite our heat, it continued to flower with the temps in the 90’s with no deadheading or cutting back. Oh! and let’s not forget the fragrance, a lovely mix of vanilla and baby powder.

**Petunia Supertunia® Hoopla™ Vivid Orchid™ (Proven Winners)** – This picotee patterned petunia shows off a profusion of bright purple flowers with crisp white edges. Their cheerful and bold look works well as a spiller in mixed containers and in the front of the flowerbed. They are a continuous and prolific rebloomer, attracting pollinators from planting until hard frost. They grew 4-8” in height and spread 20-24” in our flowerbed.

**Petunia SweetSunshine™ Pink+Red Vein (Selecta One)** – We loved this semi-trailing, double petunia in our mixed containers. Unique pink and red veined color on flowers with a cute swirly center stood out on top of medium green foliage. These durable, heat tolerant plants maintained their color and form from spring until frost. Doubles typically don’t last all summer for us, but this one performed exceptionally well.

**Sweet Potato Vine Sweet Caroline Upside Black Coffee™ Sweet Caroline - Upside Key Lime™ (Proven Winners)** – Both cultivars possess a strong climbing habit and make an impactful statement. Three plants of each cultivar were planted at the base of a 10’ tall by 4’ wide trellis. Black Coffee over took the trellis faster, but the combination was beautiful with hints of Key Lime shining through. The trellis was completely covered by the end of July. For future planting the ratio of Key Lime should be greater than Black Coffee.

**Verbena Lascar™ Orange Lava (Selecta One)** – Excellent glowing orange-red flowers lay flat to the ground and spread about 12-16”, in pots it grew taller, to 6”. This verbena is eye-catching in the landscape because of its unique flower color, it bloomed reliably from spring until frost. It thrived in full sun, bloomed continuously, and growth was more compact than other verbenas making for a neat tidy look.

**Verbena Superbena® Pink Cashmere™ (Proven Winners)** – The large umbels of delicate pink flowers on this verbena won our hearts, with its extreme vigor, producing loads of blooms all season without deadheading. Mounded trailing plants were attractive to bees and butterflies, provided interest all warm season. This sun loving plant is deer resistant and disease resistant, making it an easy choice for containers and flowerbeds. It grew 12-15” tall and trailed 24-30” in our trial bed.

**Vinca Soiree® Flamenco Series (Suntory)** – A new series of fringed, ruffled, swirly bicolored petals that put on a fashion show in the garden. Our favorite performers were 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 that contrasts nicely with its dark green foliage. These grew a little bit larger than the Kawaii series, at 8-12" tall and 12-18" wide in full sun.

### **Top Performers**

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

**Begonia Megawatt™ Pink Bronze Leaf (PanAmerican Seed)** – Very attractive contrast between the oversized, abundant light pink flowers and the full dark bronze foliage. This versatile sun to shade plant grew 16-18" wide and 20" tall but can get bigger. Non-stop flowers on sturdy stems work well in containers and in the ground for an easy show spring through autumn.

**Begonia Spreading Hula™ Pink (PanAmerican Seed)** – Trailing well branched plants produced lots of small flowers in proportion to the foliage. They began flowering early and continued until frost. Six plants from a cell pack filled out a 14" tall and wide square pot with a thriller in the center forming a beautiful skirt. They would make a lovey hanging basket. **Spreading Hula™ Pink** was our favorite followed by **Hula™ Red** and **Hula™ Blush**.

**Eggplant 'Icicle' (2022 All-America Selections Winner)** – Robust 4' tall well branched plants produced an abundance of white Asian type eggplants right up until frost despite flea beetle damage which did not impact the overall vigor and health of the plants. Surprisingly plants did not require staking during the growing season even with their robust vegetative growth.

**Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista® Ultramarine™ and Supertunia Mini Vista® Midnight (Proven Winners)** – We were impressed with the entire Supertunia Mini Vista® series this year. We planted all of the series in the ground and they all performed well, blooming heavily from early summer until frost. They thrived in full sun with occasional watering and created a colorful, solid groundcover, attracting many bees and butterflies. The two new additions to the Mini Vista series performed admirably as expected. 'Ultramarine™' had deep purple flowers and 'Midnight' stood out as well with deep plum colored blooms, that turned nearly black towards the center.

**Scaevola Whirlwind® White 2024 (Proven Winners)** – Excellent trailing over the side of a mixed container, this low maintenance trailing plant is heat and drought tolerant. White fan shaped flowers and light green foliage provide a nice contrast when paired with dark colored pots or foliage. It bloomed continuously from early summer to frost in full sun spilling over the side of the pot to 16".

**Sweet Potato Sweet Caroline Sweetheart Mahogany™ (Proven Winners)** – The beautiful mahogany red heart-shaped foliage is eye-catching and beautiful in the garden and in containers. Especially useful for its versatility, this plant was excellent as a groundcover in mass plantings but

also worked great in a mixed container, adding interest by spilling over a large pot. Heat-tolerant and vigorous, it can be cut back over and over to keep in bounds if need be.

**Tomato ‘Fire Fly’ and ‘Midnight Snack’ Tomato (AAS Edible-Vegetable Winner 2017 and 2019)**

For effortless summer tomatoes these vigorous cherry varieties are our go-to! Two indeterminate, interesting, and disease resistant types with great flavor. Fire Fly produces sweet pale-yellow fruit with a mild acid flavor. Midnight Snack ripens to red with a beautiful black-purple overlay where exposed to sunlight, and has great flavor.

**Torenia *fournieri* ‘Summery Love Pure White’ (2022 All-America Selection Winner)**

– Large white blooms on top of light green foliage, a compact plant growing 8-12” tall by 12-18” wide. We started this Torenia from seed and were impressed with its large white blooms on full bushy plants. These well branched plants would work nicely in a mass planting and are best in shade to part shade in the south.

**Verbena ‘Vanity’ (2022 All-America Selections Winner)**

– The slender stems and narrow foliage provide a softening affect in the garden. Their role in the landscape works well as complementary companion plant that highlights those around it. Plants matured to 26 -30” tall remaining upright throughout the growing season.

**Vinca Soiree® Kawaii Paprika Red (Suntory)**

– We love all the Soiree Kawaii vinca series and can’t say enough good things about them. They are like no other vincas on the market. A profusion of red micro-blooms with white centers, they continued to bloom reliably from planting in spring until frost. This new addition to the colorful Kawaii series can be used to create a showy border or mixed into containers. They enjoy full sun and well-drained soil and work well at the front of the border where they can shine. Compact but vigorous, with glossy green foliage.

**Consumer Favorites**

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

**Celosia ‘Flamma Orange’ (2022 All-America Selection Winner)**

– Intense fiery orange flowers were produced in profusion on strong plants that matured to 2’ tall. The flowers did not fade, justifying its name sake ‘Flamma.’ Well branched with the older spikes continuing to elongate and flower. Late in the summer the mature spikes curve down with new flowers continuing to form at the tips growing up, reminiscent of a festive Chinese dragon head.

**Coleus ColorBlaze® Cherry Drop (Proven Winners)**

– A trailing mounding coleus with petite green/burgundy/pink multicolored leaves, works great in combination containers and also in the flowerbed. Retains vivid coloration in both sun and shade, and tends to form a dense cascading mass that functions great for garden borders. Heat tolerant and deer resistant, it trailed 24-32”.

**Cuphea Sweet Talk™ Deep Pink (PanAmerican Seed)** – These beautiful pink blooms with lavender highlights in the throat are a natural source of nectar, attracting an abundance of pollinators to the garden. This was the best performer of the new Sweet Talk™ series, with the most vigorous growth and abundance of blooms. Drought and heat tolerant, a fun new summer favorite.

**Echinacea x hybrida ‘Artisan Yellow Ombre’ (Kieft Seed)** – Uniform, upright yellow blooms on highly branched sturdy flower stalks are very consistent in their bloom time and form making them an excellent choice for the landscape. Returning from last year’s planting, these Echinacea continued to put on a long-lasting show that attracted pollinators and birds to the garden. Thriving in full sun with excellent drought tolerance, their flower spikes reached 18-20” tall.

**Impatiens Glimmer™ Salmon (Ball FloraPlant)** – This double impatient thrives in full to part shade, producing an abundance of large rose-like blooms with no need to deadhead. Highly resistant to downy mildew, this variety looks best when temperatures cooled, but bloomed continuously all warm season. It forms a neat rounded mound about 16” tall by 12” wide and works great in containers.

**Papyrus Graceful Grasses® Queen Tut™ (Proven Winners)** – Slow to get started in the 3” pots but once planted in the ground it takes off. The plants produced around a hundred 18” stems by the end of the season topped with a cute explosion of tufts. Works great in the ground as well as in containers where a smaller thriller is needed. Cut stems make a nice addition to flower arrangements.

**Petunia ‘Bee’s Knees’ (Ball FloraPlant)** – Cheerful, soft yellow blooms shine in containers and in the ground. This yellow petunia performed well for us, looking especially lush in early and late summer, slowing down in the heat of mid-summer, it bounced back in pots and in the ground. Better performance than is typical of yellow petunias in the southern heat and humidity.

**Petunia SureShot™ Blueberries & Cream (Ball FloraPlant)** – What a great name for a petunia that does indeed evoke blueberries and cream! Plants produced lots of deep blue blooms edged in white all season long. It did well in the ground until August and looked great spilling over the side of the pot until frost without deadheading. Unlike most multi-colored petunias we have trialed in the past, the cream edge remained consistent throughout the season.

**Salvia Unplugged® Pink (Proven Winners)** – A hummingbird, bee, and butterfly magnet! This salvia is constantly covered in visitors, with pink to fuchsia flowers, black calyx and deep green foliage. It tops out around 2’ tall and spreads about 20”, making it compact enough to use in mixed container. It also works great in the ground and blooms all season with no deadheading necessary. Deer resistant, heat and drought tolerant

**Torenia Summer Wave® (Suntory)** – Trailing Torenia has long been our go-to for flowering trailers in a shady to partially shady spot. The Summer Wave® series is no exception. They all look good when used at the front of a border or spilling over the side of a container. One 3” pot was

planted in each corner of a 14" tall and wide square pot. They filled out the pots quickly and trailed to the ground by the end of July. We particularly like the vigor and number of blooms on Large Violet, Large Blue, and Large Amethyst.

### **University of Tennessee Gardens - Jackson**

Located at the UT West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center

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<http://west.tennessee.edu/ornamentals/>

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