

State Botanical Garden of Tennessee
2024 Best & Beautiful Report
University of Tennessee Gardens, Jackson
University of Tennessee Gardens, Knoxville

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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 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.

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 shade pot. What really set it apart was the contrast between its dark, almost black, serrated foliage and its large vibrant orange with a yellow centered flowers. This plant had 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) – A semi-trailing, prolific bloomer. This cheerful calibrachoa impressed us spilling out of a pot with a pop of color that catches the eye. It featured cherry red blooms with maroon throats and a subtle yellow center. Bloomed 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, bred for its beautiful dark bronze foliage and pink veins that contrast nicely with its large bright pink-red flower plumes. An easy choice for a pop of season long color in the garden. Excellent choice for containers or landscape, drought and heat tolerant. A favorite of pollinators and make a great cut flower.

Coleus ‘Marble Mania’ (Ball FloraPlant) – This new coleus features bright gold-bronze foliage with beautiful cranberry-colored speckling pattern throughout the entire plant. A low-maintenance, high-impact plant that works well in many conditions, pot or in the ground, sunny and shaded areas. Drought and heat tolerant. Notably this coleus did not go to flower for us, even late in the season, which is a beneficial trait it was selected for.

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 shined in the garden, contrasting beautifully with its lime green foliage. Its fine texture and neat habit made it perfect for the front of the border and it looked great all season. As with most all cupheas it is heat and drought tolerant and enjoyed by bees.

Delphinium grandiflorum Cheer Blue (Fleuroselect) – Shimmery neon blue flowers spikes of cheer illuminated from the garden this spring. Delphinium thrives earlier in the season and contrasts perfectly with hot-pink blooms Bigleaf Hydrangeas and rose-pink canna lilies. This true-blue bloomer was easy to grow from seed in the greenhouse and into the garden as transplants until temperatures really started to rise in summer. (Knoxville)

Helianthus annuus Concert Bell F1 (All-America Selections) – This sunflower is a giver with multiple stems of flowers lined in bright yellow with light brown centers surround a tall sturdy stalk. These are robust and full of color with bloom time lasting longer than other varieties. The size of the plants and the number of happy yellow flowers make this sunflower worth growing in the garden. (Knoxville)

Helianthus annuus Desire Red (Fleuroselect) – This is another multi-branched sunflower that produces numerous large dark red flowers with dark brown centers. The foliage is deep green with dark colored veins which add to its uniqueness. Bees love visiting the large centers of these bold, long blooming sunflowers. (Knoxville)

Heliotropium Aromagica™ Purple (Proven Winners) – This new variety reset our expectations of what was possible. Until Augusta® Lavender came to market several years ago, growing heliotrope in the south was, well frankly, a waste of time and space. Augusta® Lavender does not skip a beat in the heat and humidity of Tennessee but it is not fragrant. When we received Aromagica™ Purple, fragrant and beautiful, we imagined it would be dead by July. To our delight, Aromagica™ Purple thrived in the garden all season long. Deep green foliage held rich purple blooms that carried a light, vanilla fragrance, attracting pollinators and gardeners alike! We grew it at the front of the boarder but it will make an excellent addition to containers.

Lantana PassionFruit (Ball FloraPlant) – We fell in love with the colors in this spreading lantana, flowers featuring a bright and beautiful mix of fruity pinks, orange and yellow. Never cycles out of flower like some lantan! This plant is well suited to pots and also performed excellently as a mass planting border. Constantly visited by bees and butterflies. Plants spread out noticeably, reaching 30-36” tall and at least 3’ wide.

Lavandula angustifolia Cleo-Patio® Blue Lavender (Evanthia) – This lavender did very well in the Kitchen Garden raised beds. Plants grew relatively fast from easily germinated seed. Compact and uniform mounds of grey green foliage had numerous spikes of lavender-purple flowers that the bees absolutely loved. The foliage and flower color looked great against darker green rosemary. (Knoxville)

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 delivered stellar performance.

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

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) – A new spreading ageratum that grows vigorously and flowers all season long with periwinkle purple, fuzzy flowers. Works well in the ground, pots and even hanging baskets. Another butterfly magnet!

Begonia Space Age™ Black Hole™ and Space Age™ Europa™ (Proven Winners) – These new rex begonias from Proven Winners have such interesting foliage that they hardly look real. Both types 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 of each leaf, 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 stayed in bloom 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.

Calibrachoa Bloomtastic Purple (Dummen Orange) – This series of calibrachoa does very well in containers, but Bloomtastic Purple did best in ground this year. They grow well in spring and hold on through the heat and humidity of summer. When the temperatures start to reduce towards fall, these came back with a vengeance. Large uniform mounds of deep purple flowers with a yellow center stood out in the late days of the trial beds. (Knoxville)

Coleus ColorBlaze® Lime Time® (Proven Winners) – This vigorous coleus shines from afar 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 is all around a great coleus that virtually glow in the garden!

Dahlia Virtuoso™ Vibrant Violet™ (Proven Winners) - Exceptional performance by a dahlia and is also powdery mildew resistant. These plants grew well and bloomed all summer and into the fall. Healthy uniform mounds were consistently full of deep purple violet blooms with yellow centers. Easy to grow and no need to dead head. They will continue to thrive until a hard frost. (Knoxville)

Dianthus Jolt™ Pink Magic (Ball Seed) – Another plant that is easily grown from seed. Jolt Pink Magic was quick to bloom, pretty compound pink flowers featuring different many shades of light pink to deep pink. Its blooms were long lasting and continuous from spring to fall. They are an excellent for the front of the border and cut flower gardens.

Dipladenia Flordenia Red Velvet (Dummen Orange) – Dipladenia is extremely drought resistant and will flower all summer long. This one was especially beautiful with deep red flowers and a yellow throat. Plants filled containers quickly creating a mass of upright and flowy branches covered in flowers that beautifully draped over the edges. (Knoxville)

Impatiens interspecific Solarscape® XL Pink Jewel (All-America Selections) – These were a top performing showstopper. Large lavender pink flowers covered uniform mounds of dark green foliage. The sparkly blooms contrasted well with blues and pinkish reds. The plants have bloomed non-stop into the fall. The AAS Winner is also disease resistant especially to downy mildew. (Knoxville)

Lantana Lucky™ Gold (Ball FloraPlant) – This new lantana was a favorite for its true gold color and reliable performance. This medium vigor lantana offers drought and heat tolerance along

with an improved habit, making it a great choice for landscapes and pots. Well branched plants grew 20-26 inches tall and wide and continued to bloom from planting to frost.

Lantana Heartland Neon (Dummen Orange) – This lantana stood out with highly complementary bloom colors of deep rose with orange and yellow. Plants formed uniform mounds that flowered throughout the summer. Plants thrived with high heat and humidity giving way to larger masses about 24-30” tall. By September the plants were covered in the bold multi-colored blooms. Plants were attractive all season but really thrived in late summer and early fall. (Knoxville)

Mandevilla ‘Agate XXL White’ (Ball FloraPlant) – This vine climbed to the top of our list with steady vigor, eventually gracing the top of our trellises with extra-large white flowers that have a sunny yellow throat. The white flowers contrasted beautifully with its deep green glossy leaves.

Petunia Supertunia Vista® Bubblegum (Proven Winners) – By far the most vigorous, hardy, and floriferous of spreading petunias. These formed a carpet of bubblegum pink with large, numerous blooms. They were not affected by heavy rain or the dog days of summer. Once established, they needed little irrigation. These will last until a very hard frost. (Knoxville)

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

Schizachyrium scoparium ‘Sandhill’ PPAF Little Bluestem (Intrinsic Perennial Gardens, Inc.) – Upright and tidy grass that was not phased by high heat, humidity, or rain. Attractive blue-green blades with accents of purple near the base make this grass stand out in a mixed perennial bed. With cooler temperatures, the foliage changed to a darker reddish-purple color perfect for autumn. (Knoxville)

Vinca Soiree® Kawaii Series (Suntory) – This series is one we have come to rely on for its continuous reblooming power even through the hottest part of summer. These delightful little plants top out between 6-10 inches and stay covered in bright cheerful blooms on top of glossy green foliage. Useful in pots and also in mass plantings in the garden, this is an easy choice for gardeners in the south looking for flowers with the most drought and heat tolerance.

Vinca Titan-ium™ Series (PanAmerican Seed) – Fast flowering, improved disease resistance, and a variety of vibrant cheerful colors. These vinca are fuss-free in full sun, with five large petals on each flower and many blooms covering mounded 12-14 inch plants. Easy to grow from seed, these are an easy affordable option that look grate 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) – large, layered blooms in a vibrant shades of orange stood out against a background of dark green foliage. We discovered these compact plants are better suited for shade pots than in ground, preferring to be on the dry side.

Coleus Main Street Broad Street (Dummen Orange) – Perfectly rounded, uniform mounds of marron-plum colored leaves, highlighted by a lime green gently ruffled 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, 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. Well-branched, vigorous plants grown from seed 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) – 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. These seed grown Echinacea continued to put on a long-lasting show all season that attracted pollinators and birds to the garden. Thriving in full sun with excellent drought tolerance, their flower spikes reached 18-20" tall.

Impatiens Solarscape® XL Lilac Spark (PanAmerican Seed) – This seed grown Impatiens stood out for being vigorous in a shady pot with large lilac colored blooms that stood out in a dim area. It stayed in bloom all season and looked lovely with 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 Impatiens species. Unless you're willing to water a lot, we have found "sun loving" impatiens do best in some shade.

Lantana Shamrock™ Red (Ball FloraPlant) – A butterfly favorite, deer resistant, drought and heat tolerant and a blooming machine, what more could one 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" tall and wide it produced blooms continuously until killing frost.

Mandevilla 'Tourmaline Fuchsia' (Ball FLoraPlant) – We were impressed with this bush type Mandevilla's bloom power. It was covered in fluorescent fuchsia pink blooms the entire season that made an impact from afar. A great choice for a pot on the patio, Tourmaline Fuchsia often received complements and interest from visitors passing by.

Portulaca PortoGrande™ Lemon Creamsicle (Selecta One) – We loved 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 we trialed this year, they thrived in full sun without needing much water. Excellent trailing component both in ground and in pots.

Tomato ‘Purple Zebra’ and ‘Pink Delicious’ (2022 All-America Selections Winners) – These two tomatoes were easy to grow from seed and extremely rewarding! Purple Zebra tomatoes offered high disease resistance, and a bountiful crop of medium size (about 2 inch round) dark red fruits with green stripes and a deep mahogany interior. They were most sweet tomatoes that we grew this year and they cooked down excellently for tomato sauce. Pink Delicious lived up to its 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 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.