

University of Tennessee Gardens - Knoxville 2025 Best & Beautiful Report

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This summary and the full trial results are available at:

<http://utgardens.tennessee.edu>

University of Tennessee Gardens, Knoxville trialed over 100 varieties of annuals and perennials in 2025. Trials were planted mid-April through May. Data was collected at regular intervals June – August. Temperatures were average, rainfall was consistent, and overhead irrigation was used just a couple of times as needed.

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

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Best in Show

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

Begonia l'CONIA® Lemon Berry (Dümmen Orange) – This unique beauty has double blooming soft lemon-yellow blooms with outer very light pink petals on dark green foliage and lime green veins. This variety performed the best out of the l'CONIA® series grown this year and looked excellent draping over containers.

Dahlia Black Forest™ Ruby (2025 All-America Selections Winner and 2025 Fleuroselect Gold Medal Winner) – This new introduction has gorgeous dark dentated foliage and stems with dark and light ruby red blooms. A dahlia grown from seed that does well late into the season and is a mystical eye catcher.

Evolvulus glomeratus 'Beach Bum Blue' (Dümmen Orange) – A true blue uniform mounding spreader with medium vigor is perfect for borders in full hot sun. Durable in heat and humidity and drought resistant once established.

Petunia Supertunia® Bubblegum® (Proven Winners) – This spreading petunia is a great example of flower power in the garden. Plants form a vigorous sea of hot pink that

does not fade until extreme cold weather. Mass plantings accentuate paths, beds, and overstory trees and shrubs.

Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista® Pink Cloud™ (Proven Winners) – This petunia is so charming with a light hot pink color and white eye with ruffled petals. These filled in nicely in beds and were tolerant of heat and humidity for the entire summer. This also contrasted well with the Supertunia Mini Vista® Yellow.

Helianthus annuus ‘Desire Red’ (2024 Fleuroselect Gold Medal Winner) – Easily grown sunflower with a longer average bloom time. A real bee charmer with dark flowers and foliage that contrasted well with neighboring yellow sunflowers. This is a dwarf, multi-branching sunflower that produces new blooms after the initial main bloom starts extending flowering.

Heuchera ‘Changeling’ (Terra Nova) – This coral bell had different colored leaves that changed from when they first emerged new growth to when they grew older. The larger leaves turn to different colors. A collage of color that never had a dull moment.

Aster ‘Thunderdome’ (Intrinsic Perennial Gardens) – The most uniform aster growing in the garden. Super hardy, no fuss aster that drowns in purple late September. They emerge in spring as a lovely oblong ball of bright green attractive foliage.

Portulaca oleracea ‘Cupcake Yellow Chrome’ (Dümmen Orange) – High vigor, long lasting, large spread, mass of yellow blooms that thrived all summer. This portulaca was full of yellow blooms that covered the spreading plants nicely.

Sporobolus heterolepsis ‘Golden Needles’ (Intrinsic Perennial Gardens) – A lovely ornamental grass with great texture, summer hardiness, and bright chartreuse eye-catching color. This looked great against its neighboring darker foliaged ‘Pinot Noir’ Penstemon.

Top Performers

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

Begonia benariensis Surefire® Series - Rose (Proven Winners) – All the begonias in the Surefire® series performed well through summer and really shined into the fall. They are bold and beautiful and looked beautiful in mass. Surefire® Rose has an excellent saturation of deep pink that looks amazing in garden beds and containers.

Petunia Supertunia Vista® Cool Jazz™ (Proven Winners) – This petunia produced a mass of light lavender-pink blooms that had very good vigor and did well through the summer heat. A new addition to the Supertunia Vista® series that lived up to expectations.

Crossandra fortuna Watermelon (Dümmen Orange) – This is a wonderful summer annual to use in the garden for full sun and gives an awesome tropical feel. Watermelon crossandra is a unique coral pink color that covered the plant into late summer and early fall. It had good spread and vigor and is a nice addition to the Crossandra Orange.

Ipomoea Sweet Caroline Medusa™ Green (Proven Winners) – Attractive dentated leaves covered this vigorous spreader. It contrasted well with darker colored plants like the Stardiva® Blue fan flower and produced a robust mound of colorful vibrant green foliage. Displayed well as massive groundcover.

Helianthus Suncredible® Yellow (Proven Winners) – Multi-branching sunflower that was a blooming powerhouse. Bees love this high vigor plant, and it dominates anywhere it is planted in the best way. In Knoxville, it has performed very well in garden beds, kitchen garden raised beds, and even in the old blue truck!

Coleus scutellarioides ColorBlaze® Wicked Witch™ (Proven Winners) – Amazing vigor and ability to fill spaces in width and height that held up to heat and humidity. They formed a colorful filler that contrasted well with other layers of flowering and foliage annuals, especially the ColorBlaze® Royale Pineapple Brandy™ coleus.

Lantana Luscious® Royale Red Zone™ and Luscious Basket Tange glow® (Proven Winners) – Hardy series of lantana with medium vigor and a great shape covered in multi-level, multi-colored blooms all over. Plants grew to be a little over two feet high with a two-foot spread that excelled in the late summer heat.

Impatiens interspecific Solarscape® XL Pink Jewel (2024 All-America Selections Winner) – Easy to grow from seed and in the garden. High vigor, uniform mounding interspecific impatiens that can take sun. Shimmery hot pink petals covered the plants all over making a showstopper.

Lantana Heartland ‘Sunrise 2025’ and ‘White 2025’ (Dümmen Orange) – Extremely vigorous and summer hardy. These lantana grew amazingly all season until a hard frost. The pollinators loved these. Some of their fluttering visitors included the yellow swallowtail and buckeye butterflies.

Schizachyrium scoparium ‘Sandhill’ (Intrinsic Perennial Gardens) – A stellar fool proof ornamental grass that is attractive all year. This gave a nice erect structure and had lovely texture with multi-colored blades. I enjoyed watching how this grass changed color from blues, greens, and reds spring to fall.

Customer Favorites

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

Begonia l’CONIA® First Kiss Del Sol (Dümmen Orange) – This had a very pleasing orange color that was light orange in the center of the double blooming blooms that merged into darker orange outer petals. These contrasted amazingly with dark green foliage with nice veining.

Heliotropium arborescens Aromagica™ Purple (Proven Winners) – Large umbel heads of fragrant purple blooms that will bloom all summer even in high heat and humidity. Purple is such a good color in the garden, and this was no exception with the tons of tiny blossoms on each head. Bees loved this and it looked lovely in a raised bed in the kitchen garden this summer in Knoxville.

Helianthus annuus ‘Concert Bell’ (2022 All-America Selections Winner) – So many pictures were taken of this multi-branching medium headed classic yellow petaled, brown centered sunflower. Very easy to grow with good vigor, it grows well with other sunflowers and is always a hit!

Oenothera hybrid Superlophus™ Sunglow (Proven Winners) – Bright yellow flowers covered these nicely compact and spreading plants holding up to heat and humidity with little attention. Delicate feathery green foliage intertwined with crinkly lemon-yellow petals and cute yellow stamens that looked like a starburst in the center of the flower.

Helianthus annuus ‘Lemon Cutie’ (2023 Fleuroselect Gold Medal Winner) – Dwarf sunflower with unique shape and soft yellow color all the way through the flower head. This color and texture really popped below the other traditional sunflowers.

Celosia ‘Flamma Orange’ (2022 All-America Selections Winner) – Stunning bright orange color that is one of the hardiest heat loving annuals in the gardens. Unique large plumes showed off in the garden and could be caught out of the corner of your eye from across the gardens.

Zinnia Profusion Red Yellow Bicolor (2022 Fleuroselect Gold Medal Winner) – This low mounding and spreading zinnia has bright red and yellow colors on the same bloom and will fade to darker shades that add interest from mid-spring to late summer and is a fan favorite.

Zinnia Double Zahara ‘Fire’ (2010 All-America Selections Winner)– Firey red orange blooms blasted open on perfectly mounded plants that thrive in the summer heat. The double blooms add textural interest and festive pops of color that accent and border well in summer garden beds.

Geranium maculatum ‘Huggy Bear’ (Intrinsic Perennial Gardens) – This hardy geranium stands out with darker burgundy colored large foliage with charming delicate lavender blooms in early to mid-spring. The unique colors and size of geranium foliage make this stand out and a curiosity.

Agastache ‘Pink Pearl’ (Terra Nova) – This perennial excelled with the summer heat and bloomed like crazy late summer into fall. Covered in multiple spikes of varying light pink blooms on a compact plant, this was a showstopper.