

University of Tennessee Gardens - Jackson

2020 Best & Beautiful Report

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This and the full trial results are available at:

west.tennessee.edu/ornamentals/

The University of Tennessee Gardens in Jackson trialed more than 230 varieties of annuals, perennials, vegetables, and herbs in 2020. Trials were planted during the month of May, and data was taken June - September. Overall, the growing season was good. Temperatures and rainfall for the most part was normal. Supplemental overhead irrigation was used as needed.

Best in Show:

Vinca Soiree Kawaii® (Suntory) – We love all the Soiree Kawaii vinca and can't say enough good things about them. They are like no other vinca we have grown. Plants were covered from time of planting until frost with flowers 1/2 the size of standard vinca. The plants were bushy and extremely well branched. We were particularly fond of Blueberry Kiss, Coral Reef, Red Shades, and White Peppermint. They looked great in containers as well as planted in the ground in a sunny location and in well-drained soil.

Colocasia Heart of the Jungle™ (Proven Winners) – Stand back! This vigorous grower did not disappoint. Three-inch pots went into the ground in mid-May and by late June they were the talk of the garden. Beautiful and lush, the dark-green leaves have a hint of blue with a velvety matte sheen. The plants were vigorous and reached six feet tall by the end of July, producing lustrous dark purple stems and black runners along the ground. We love the tropical yet cooling effect Heart of the Jungle lends to landscape.

Coleus ColorBlaze® Royale Pineapple Brandy™ (Proven Winners) – We are so excited about the new addition to the ColorBlaze® series of coleus, Royale Pineapple Brandy™. With a mix of chartreuse and golden foliage the plants take on a luminescent glow. The veins, petiole, and stems along with the edges of the leaves are burgundy adding to the beauty. The plants were dense and well-branched and reached 1.5-2' tall and 2-2.5' wide

Salvia 'White Flame' (Ball FloraPlant) – Pure white 4-6" flower spikes were produced from time of planting until a killing freeze on bushy plants that reached 2-3' tall. The tubular white flowers emerging from mealy-white dense calyxes were a bee favorite. Unlike most of the newer vegetative produced salvias, it does not cycle in and out of bloom over the course of the summer. Another added bonus is that the fading white flowers don't distract from the beauty of the plant, as is common with other white - flowering plants. White Flame is a hybrid of *S. longispicata* x *S. farinacea* (mealy cup sage) and looks like a *farinacea* on steroids.

Tomato 'Fire Fly' F1 (All America Selections) – A juicy favorite. Each plant produced an abundance of medium-sized cherry tomatoes with pale-yellow color and scrumptious flavor. This cherry tomato is the

perfect size to eat whole, and the translucent skin is just the right thickness: thick enough to keep well without interfering with the pleasure of eating the fruit.

Calibrachoa Superbells® Coral Sun (Proven Winners) – Melon-colored flowers with yellow-orange throats were a bright, colorful plant in pot arrangements. When in full bloom, the plants practically glowed from the vibrant color.

Ipomoea Sweet Caroline Medusa™ Green (Proven Winners) – Like tentacles on a jelly fish, the deeply lobed leaves provided a lacy texture in the garden. This more compact selection has bronze-tinted new growth that ages to medium green.

Tecoma Sun Trumpets® Yellow (Suntory) – Sun Trumpets® Yellow Tecoma looks like a yellow trumpet vine in bush form. We did not find these to be compact and good for containers as we thought, but they were outstanding in the landscape as thrillers in the beds. We planted 3-4" plants in May and by late August they were 6' tall. This heat-loving plant with vertical, architectural branches grew like nothing else we have. It bloomed with gorgeous, yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers all summer long attracting bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

Vinca Tattoo™ Series (PanAmerican Seed) – We love the dark indigo eye that gradually fades to cheerful and tropical color. They are more compact than most other series of vinca making them ideal as a border and container gardens. All of the Tattoo series were pleasing, but we especially enjoyed Papaya, Raspberry and Tangerine.

Top Performers:

Eggplant 'Asian Delite' F1 (PanAmerican Seed) – An excellent producer of 8-12" long Asian style eggplant on plants that reached 24-30" tall. Plants continued to produce right up until frost and worked well in pots as well as the ground. The seeds remain small even as the fruit gets larger and were delicious sliced and grilled.

Lantana Luscious® Royale Red Zone™ (Proven Winners) – The Luscious® series of lantana has performed exceptionally well over the years with its nonstop flower power and ability to perform in heat and drought. The flowers start out reddish orange and age to deep red. Plants have reached 2.5-3' tall and wide. Older foliage is darker green contrasting with the lighter green of the new, adding to the overall appeal.

Gomphrena Truffula® Pink (Proven Winners) – We first trialed this plant in 2018 and fell in love. Dense 18" compact plants are half the height of the seed grown cultivar 'Fireworks'. The hot pink inflorescences are identical to 'Fireworks' but are produced in greater abundance and six weeks earlier. Truffula® Pink works well in the landscape as well as in mixed containers.

Helianthus Suncredible™ Yellow (Proven Winners) – One of our tops picks last year, this plant was just as outstanding this year as well. This bright yellow sunflower produces a profusion of 3" flowers that continues all summer. The plants reach 3' x 3' and make a delightful addition to the garden.

Coleus Dragon Heart (Ball FloraPlant) – The striking contrast of chartreuse foliage with hot pink and maroon veins added a splash of unexpected color to the garden. Plants reached 18-24" with mounding habit.

Cuphea Honeybells (Ball FloraPlant) – We trialed this last year and fell in love with this petite blooming workhorse of a Cuphea. Small, tubular, bicolor flowers were rose-colored, tipped with light yellow, and produced in great abundance all summer. Plants reached 10-12” tall and 14-16” wide. It was a good performer in the ground but with its semi-trailing habit looks great hanging over the side of a pot.

Echinacea Artisan™ Collection Red Ombre, Soft Orange F1 (Kieft Seed) – These seed grown coneflowers were transplanted into the garden from a jumbo six pack in May and took a bit of time to get started. However, once they were established, they were covered in flowers from August until frost.

Begonia Surefire® Red (Proven Winners) – The large, glossy, bright-green foliage and the candy apple red flowers make a bold statement in shady locations. The plants are upright reaching from 12-24” tall and 18-24” wide.

Tomato Midnight Snack F1 (All America Selections) – A flavorful snack with beautiful bicolor fruit. The top half of each large cherry tomato is black-purple and fades to a red bottom half when it is ripe. Plants continued to bear delicious fruit until frost.

Ipomoea Desana® Bronze (Suntory) – The large, heart-shaped leaves grew in abundance on sweet potato vines, providing coarse texture for the front of the border or spilling over the side of a pot.

Consumer Favorites:

Zinnia Holi Pink (All America Selections) – These are well-branched, bushy, 24" plants with a profusion of vibrant, dark-pink, 3" flowers. Like all *Z. elegans*, they developed powdery mildew late in the season, but the gorgeous blooms and overall longevity of the plants warrant it as a favorite.

Calibrachoa MiniFamous® Neo Double PlumTastic (Selecta One) – The bicolored flowers have soft purple petals and dark purple centers. These elegant blooms look great spilling over the side of a pot.

Vinca Soiree Double® (Suntory) – We were pleasantly surprised by the Orchid, Pink, and White Soiree Double® vinca. Although not overly attractive in their 3” pots, they took off when we put them in the ground. The three colors look great mixed together in a planting.

Coleus Beale Street (All America Selections) – Robust plants that do not produce blooms to distract from the large, burgundy leaves. We were pleased with the rich color of the foliage. Plants reached 24-36” tall by the end of the summer.

Impatiens Beacon® Series (PanAmerican Seed) – Although they had a slow start early in the season, once established the downy mildew resistant Beacon® were beautiful until frost. Our favorites in the series were **Rose** and **Violet Shades**.

Petunia Surfinia® Sumo Plum (Suntory) – A vigorous mounding petunia with beautiful magenta blooms. They were a standout amongst the other Sumos in the Surfinia® series.

Petunia ColorRush™ (Ball FloraPlant) – Both **ColorRush™ Pink** and **ColorRush™ White** were good performers. The blooms of the pink are a richer color compared to other pink petunias. The white was crisp and held up well into September, unlike any white we have trialed in the past.

Salvia Lancelot (PanAmerican Seed) – We got a late start on this seed grown salvia in the greenhouse, so when we planted the 2-3” tall plants in May we had our doubts. The plants reached 1’ tall by 2’ wide. The silvery-white felted leaves are reminiscent of an overly fuzzy small-leafed lamb’s ear. They produce flower spikes of rosy lavender bracts and tubular flowers. The plants have a pleasant sage fragrance.

Torenia Summer Wave® (Suntory) – Trailing Torenia has long been our go-to for flowering trailers for 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. We particularly like the unique yellow and purple bicolor flowers of Bouquet Gold and the exceptional vigor of Large Violet.

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