

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Playing the Fields

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You thought you experienced some rough weather—well, your local field trials did, too. But despite the heat and the rain and the humidity, many of this year's new crops still managed to put on a good performance. We asked a handful of field trials from around the U.S. and Canada to tell us what stood out for them this past summer.

EAST

Field Trial Location: Penn State University, SE Agriculture Research & Extension Center (a.k.a. Landisville Trials), Manheim, Pennsylvania

Dates Planted: May 23, 24, 25 in 12-in. containers

Top 10 Cultivars:

1. Begonia The new Whopper series from Ball Seed with green and bronze leaves is a large plant (30 to 36 in.), great for landscapes in either sun or shade and can easily compete with Dragon Wing Begonia for toughness. It's similar to Benary Seed's Big Begonia, which is slightly more compact than the Whopper series.

2. Geranium Interspecific Cross Salsarita Dark Red from Dümmer USA was rated "Best of Penn State Trials." An outstanding variety with rich, dark green foliage, dense habit with many flowers.

3. Alternanthera Little Ruby from GroLink is a brightly colored purple-red foliage plant that is dense and low growing. It's good in the greenhouse and continues to perform outdoors in all kinds of weather. It received the "Outstanding Plant Award" in the Penn State Trials.

4. Calibrachoa Can-Can Terra Cotta from Ball FloraPlant is an outstanding, vigorous, orange-striped flowering calibrachoa. It never stopped blooming and was rated "Best Calibrachoa" in the Penn State Trials.

5. Combo Mixis Shea is an excellent newly introduced combo from Danziger USA that was grown in both

hanging baskets and 14-in. pots. It's a combination of blue and white scaevola that rated uniformly outstanding all summer long. Many other combos look good early in season, too; only this one never went out of bloom.

6. Hibiscus Mahogany Splendor is a vigorous, mahogany-red foliage plant that keeps its bright leaf color all summer and will easily grow to a 3-ft. height by late July. It has yet to produce flowers. It's a seed variety introduced by PanAmerican Seed.

7. Coleus Mosaik Thin Mint from Syngenta Flowers is a dense-growing coleus that does well in both sun and shade. The foliage is a reddish brown and bright green. Flexible stems help to keep it from breaking in wind, rain and probably in shipping, as well. Few, if any, flowers were observed, allowing it to display eye-catching foliage all summer.

8. Osteospermum Fides North America's Margarita Dark Pink Bicolor rated as "One of the Best" in 2011. It produces many daisy flowers on a compact, uniformly dense mound. It's called pink, but has more of lavender-pink hue. It was also one of the top varieties in 2010.

9. Otomeria O'Premiera Pink is a new plant species to the floriculture industry introduced by Danziger Flower Farm. It's a vigorous, dense cultivar that blooms extremely well in hot, dry weather, recalling its North African birthright. Keep an eye on this plant as it's going to make a splash in the landscape.

10. Bidens Doubloon is a plant introduced by Henry F. Michell and GreenFuse Botanicals. It's a medium-sized plant with double flowers, producing an excellent flower display on an attractive dense mound. But it may be a little too dense for larger or more vigorous combinations.

Weather Conditions: The weather conditions were quite difficult. Shortly after planting (May 25), we received two weeks of hot weather with daytime temperatures reaching 95F (35C). Then in mid-June, we had excellent growing conditions, allowing the plants to catch up. Then comes July with three weeks of temperatures above 95F and reaching 105F (40.5C). Plants came to a stop as night temperatures hovered around 80F (26C). As we approached mid-August, normal temperatures arrived.

Pest/Disease Outbreaks: In June, Western Flower Thrips attacked with a vengeance during the three weeks of very hot weather and chemical controls were needed. During July, the extreme hot conditions with an occasional rain brought on a leaf blight on petunias caused by *Alternaria*, thus fungicidal sprays were required. In early August, corn earworm began their attack and required pesticide applications.

See editor Chris Beytes' tour of the Penn State Field Trials by visiting www.youtube.com/growertalks.



MIDWEST

Trial Name & Location: Ohio State Annuals Trial at The Ohio State University, Columbus campus

Trial Manager: Lindsay Pangborn

Planting Dates: Typically, we aim to start planting cold-tolerant varieties in early May. This spring was unusually wet, and consequently, we held off until mid/late May to plant the field trials. We began planting May 23 (week 22); planting was complete by June 14 (week 25).

Weather Conditions: Hot, humid and wet (unusually so). High night temperatures typically did not drop below 70F (21C). Something interesting to note is that, this summer, we very rarely had to use supplemental irrigation, as rainfall was regular throughout the summer (we typically experience about a month of drought conditions over the summer and must irrigate once a week). Of the major crops (meaning a significant number of entries), two in particular suffered: petunias and Pelargonium.

Best New Varieties: Hibiscus Mahogany Splendor (PanAmerican Seed), Gomphrena Audray White (Takii), Angelonia Archangel Purple (Ball FloraPlant), Coleus ColorBlaze Mocha Velvet (Proven Winners), Zinnia Uptown White Wall (Ball Seed), Angelonia Alonia Pleasant Pink (Danziger)

Best Overall Performers: Hibiscus Mahogany Splendor (PanAmerican Seed), Caladium Rosemary (Classic Caladiums), Marigold Bali Yellow and Narai Orange (AmeriSeed), Cyperus King Tut and Baby Tut (Proven Winners), Pennisetum Vertigo (Proven Winners), Melampodium Casino Light Yellow (Takii), Cleome Senorita Rosalita (Proven Winners), Zinnia Profusion (Sakata)

Visitor Favorites: Hibiscus Mahogany Splendor (PanAmerican Seed), Rudbeckia Denver Daisy (Benary), Gomphrena Audray White (Takii), Marigold Bali Yellow (AmeriSeed), Melampodium Casino Light Yellow (Takii)

Trial Manager Favorites: Melampodium Casino Light Yellow (Takii), Gomphrena Audray White (Takii), Nierembergia Augusta Blue Skies (Proven Winners), Kniphofia Papaya Popsicle (Terra Nova), Petunia Supertunia White Russian (Proven Winners) (the petunias did not perform well due to the hot, wet weather—but nonetheless, I love the flower on this one!)

Award Winners: We don't have awards, but the plants listed under "Visitor Favorites" were chosen because they received a 4.55 or above in our consumer evaluations, which are completed by our group of Master Gardeners/volunteers. They rate the plants simply on whether they do not like the plant at all (1) or they like the plant a lot (5), so I think those plants represent what would be "Award Winning," as well.

SOUTH



Trial Name & Location: The Trial Gardens at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

Trial Manager: Meg Green

Planting Date(s): Mid-April through mid-May 2011

Weather Conditions: This summer had to have been among the hottest in history. Practically every day from mid-May through mid-September 2011 was above 90F (32C). The weather was also exceptionally dry. The garden received sporadic rains; however, the irrigation could barely keep up with the plants' need for moisture. 2011 will definitely be written into history as a most challenging summer.

Best New Varieties: Calibrachoa Callie White 11 (Syngenta); Ipomoea Sweet Carolina Bewitched Improved (Proven Winners); Otomeria O'Premiera Ruby (Danziger); Torenia Kauai Magenta (PanAmerican Seed); Verbena Magelana White Improved (Syngenta)

Best Overall Performers: Begonia Dragon Wing Red (PanAmerican Seed); Angelonia Serena White (PanAmerican Seed); Coleus Redhead (Ball FloraPlant); Impatiens SunPatiens Compact Deep Rose (Sakata); Ornamental pepper Black Pearl (PanAmerican Seed); Petunia Purple Vein Ray (Danziger); Verbena Tapien Purple (Suntory)

Visitor Favorites: Alternanthera Little Ruby (GroLink); Celosia New Look (Benary); Clerodendrum Starshine (GroLink); Heliotropium Scentopia Dark Blue (Syngenta); Euphorbia Diamond Frost (Proven Winners); Petunia Potunia Papaya (Dümmen)

Trial Manager Favorites: Gomphrena Las Vegas Mix (Benary); Ivy geranium Cascade Acapulco Compact (Syngenta); Otomeria O'Premiera Ruby (Danziger); Petunia Purple Ray Vein (Danziger); Petunia Suncatcher Pink Lemonade (Ball FloraPlant); Ptilotus elatus Joey (Benary)

Award Winners: Angelonia Serena White (PanAmerican Seed); Clerodendrum Starshine (GroLink); Ornamental pepper Black Pearl (PanAmerican Seed); Petunia Purple Ray Vein (Danziger); Petunia Supertunia Vista Silverberry (Proven Winners)

WEST

Trial Name & Location: Oregon State University: Annual Plant trials at Oak Creek Center for Urban Horticulture, Corvallis, Oregon

Trial Manager: Al Shay

Planting Date: Trials were planted on June 15th

Best Overall Performers:

Proven Winners—*Pennisetum purpureum* Vertigo: beautifully colored foliage is an excellent choice for a

background foliage plant in the Pacific Northwest. Grows about 3 ft. tall; *Cyperus papyrus* King Tut is a vigorous, healthy plant with stems growing to 4 ft. topped with interesting clusters of green threadlike parts.

Ball—*Impatiens* Patchwork Lavender has mounds of pretty foliage covered in flowers of pink and lavender; *Osteospermum* 3D Purple exhibited excellent growth throughout the season and retained an exceptional floral display even during hot months when other *osteospermum* had reduced bloom.

Danziger—*Coreopsis* Golden Hoop Solana showed healthy growth with early abundant flowering. Plant sways attractively in a breeze; *Euphorbia* Mystery Diwali has had healthy growth with abundant, tiny delicate flowers throughout the growing season.

Visitor Favorites:

Proven Winners—*Coleus* Lancelot Velvet exhibited excellent uniform growth and color without flowering even late in the season; *Verbena* hybrid Royal Chambray created a dense, low mat with excellent flower coverage and uniformity.

Ball—*Geranium* Frenza Fire: amazing color of this geranium would be great coupled with other warm-colored flowers, and it required less deadheading than other geraniums; *Petunia* hybrid Sun Spun Blue has had excellent growth and abundant flower coverage throughout the growing season. Fragrant flowers are beautiful and retain their color.

Danziger—*Gaillardia* Wild Fire Galya has beautiful, large two-toned flowers. This plant is virtually carefree and puts on an amazing floral display, which is followed by interesting, globe-shaped seed heads. It's a wonderful plant choice to include in a warm color garden and very attractive to pollinators; *Mixis* Shea is new from Danziger and creates a spiky, low-growing groundcover when planted in mass. Beautiful and unique, white and lavender flowers cover plant.

Trial Manager Favorites:

Proven Winners—*Impatiens walleriana* Coral Reef has abundant and beautiful double flowers and has done very well in full sun. Flowers have shown little fading and foliage has remained healthy throughout the growing season; *Ipomoea* Bewitched Purple has beautifully shaped leaves that are very dark in color and do not fade. This plant is excellent when planted in mass, creating an attractive and uniform groundcover.

Ball—*Hibiscus* Mahogany Splendor is one of the winning foliage plants this season. This plant has had excellent growth with attractive, lacy foliage throughout the growing season. It reached over 4.5 ft.; *Angelonia* Archangel Pink had an outstanding floral display, especially when compared to other *Angelonia*.

Danziger—*Petunia* Rim Purple Ray had excellent growth throughout the season with a beautiful fragrant floral display; *Impatiens* Salmon Sun Harmony and Purple Sun Harmony both excelled compared to other *impatiens*. These had healthy foliage and were covered in large attractive blooms throughout the growing season.

CANADA

Trial Name & Location: Jardin botanique Roger Van den Hende trial garden

Trial Managers: Blanche Dansereau, Hélène Corriveau, Marie-Pierre Lamy and Claudette Roy

Planting Date: June 3

Best Overall Performers: Juncus Blue Mohawk, Pennisetum Vertigo, Mecardonia Gold Dust, Angelonia Angelface Pink

Visitor Favorites: Zinnia Double Zahara Fire, Colocasia Tea Cup, Osteospermum Margarita Dark Pink Bicolor, Mandevilla Sun Parasol Star and Stripes, Begonia New Star Red

Trial Manager Favorites: Coleus Wasabi, Begonia Black Fancy, Phlox Cherry Caramel
Award Winners: Lobularia Snow Princess (Exceptionnelle 2010), Pennisetum Sky Rocket (Exceptionnelle 2012)



SOUTHWEST

Trial Name & Location: Oklahoma State University—Oklahoma City, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Trial Manager: Haldor Howard, Assistant Professor

Planting Date: Early May

Weather Conditions: It became quite hot early and stayed that way. Nighttime lows stayed warm, typically above 80F (26C). More days were over 100F (37C) than previously recorded. This was the most intensely hot trialing period we have experienced.

Best New Varieties: *Portulaca grandiflora* Happy Hour Banana, Verbena Garden Leader Experimental Blue

Best Overall Performers: Lantana Evita Red Neblan, *Tagetes patula* Bonanza Deep Orange

Visitor Favorites: *Melampodium paludosum* Casino Light Yellow, *Salvia nemorosa* Snow Hill

Trial Manager Favorites: *Petunia x hybrida* Mini Me Purple, Dahlia Imagine Power Rose

Award Winners: *Lobelia erinus* California Dark Blue with Eye, *Torenia fournieri* Kauai Rose **GT**