

Classic City Garden Awards: Best New Plants from the Trial Garden at UGA[®]

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INTRODUCTION

The Trial Gardens at the University of Georgia (UGA) were started in 1982 by Dr. Allan Armitage and Dr. Michael Dirr. Dr. John Ruter took over as Director of the Trial Gardens from co-founder Dr. Armitage in July of 2013. The mission of the UGA includes teaching, research, and new plant introductions. The UGA is an essential trialing site for heat and humidity tolerance for many of the world's breeding companies. During most summers there are 50-60 days reaching $\geq 32^{\circ}\text{C}$ (90°F).

Teaching in the garden focuses on two classes taught by Dr. Ruter, HORT 3500 taught during the fall semester which focuses on annuals, vines, and fall-blooming perennials, and HORT 3510, taught in the spring which focuses on bulbs, spring ephemerals, and early-blooming perennials. Both classes are taught as half-semester courses. The Trial Gardens are also utilized by classes from Agricultural Communications, Entomology, Landscape Architecture, Plant Pathology, and other departments from the Arts & Sciences.

As for research and trialing, we work with over 20 of the major breeding companies from around the world. In 2013 we evaluated over 750 annual taxa in ground beds, hanging baskets, and containers. Trials also include numerous perennials and 180 landscape roses. Overall there are approximately 2,000 different taxa growing on less than 0.3 ha (0.75 acre). Several plants have been introduced to the trade via the Trial Gardens over the past 20 years (<http://ugatrial.hort.uga.edu/>). This tradition will continue in the future as Dr. Ruter releases plants from his breeding program at UGA.

TRIAL ESTABLISHMENT AND DATA COLLECTION

Seed of slower-growing crops such as begonias and geraniums are received and sown during the month of January. Most other seed crops are sown in February and March. Cuttings for propagation are generally received during the first 2 weeks of March. Propagules are shifted into 3.75-in. containers and grown in the greenhouse using recommended protocols. Substrate is a custom mix from OldCastle Lawn & Garden. Hanging baskets made from recycled newspaper (Western Pulp, Oregon) are also planted and grown-out during this time. In-ground trial beds are rototilled in March-April and appropriate soil amendments are added based on soil tests. In-ground beds are irrigated with drip irrigation placed on top of the bed that has been covered with pine straw mulch before planting. Pelargoniums and cold-tolerant annuals such as petunias and calibrachos are placed out into the garden at the end of April, with all other plants going out during the month of May. Plants are liquid-fed during the growing season using several different fertilizer products.

Data collection begins in early June and is taken every 2 weeks until the end of September. All data is taken by Meg Green, Trial Garden supervisor. Having a single evaluator is essential for consistency of data collection. Data is entered into Excel on a tablet in the garden and is uploaded to our Trial Garden web site (<http://ugatrial.hort.uga.edu/>). Plants are rated on a scale of 1-5 (5 being best) on overall vigor, appearance, flower production, and disease and insect resistance. All this data can be found on the web site and is graphically tracked for each plant being evaluated. Graphing is important as it allows for viewing of performance over time and shows how the plant performed from early-summer until fall. Data is also shared with the National Trials database (www.planttrials.org).

During the 3rd week of June each year breeders and growers are invited to attend our Industry Wide Open House. Two weeks later we host a public open house. These events

allow industry professionals as well as the gardening public to see a variety plants all growing at the same location. During each event participants are asked to select five outstanding plants in the garden. This data is collected and shared on the web site and through email communications.

Every week 10-12 plants are selected as “Plants of Distinction” for their extraordinary performance in the garden. These plants are posted on the web site and are also emailed out to all interested parties. At the end of the season the “Classic City Awards” are given to the best 10 plants that had excellent performance all summer. The best cultivars for each genus are also listed under the “Best of the Best” link on the web site.

CLASSIS CITY AWARD WINNERS FOR 2013

***Acalypha* ‘Inferno’ – Peace Tree Farms**

Acalyphas have provided an incredible range of colors and textures to our garden for several years. Originally from Australia, this year’s top eye-popping *Acalypha* has been ‘Inferno,’ sent to us by Lloyd Traven of Peace Tree Farms. Since receiving these plants in early April, the foliage of ‘Inferno’ has been a bright fiery red. It has continued to intensify in color throughout the heat and rain of our summer, becoming even more beautiful every day. Our plants were about 3’ tall and never flowered.

***Angelonia* ‘Balangsparkl’, AngelMist™ *Angelonia*, Spreading Dark Purple – Ball FloraPlant**

Angelonia has become a favorite in our trial garden over the years, with many performing beautifully and some performing less well. AngelMist Spreading Dark Purple was sent by Ball FloraPlant as was AngelMist™ Spreading White. Both are worthy of high merit, but the purple cultivar edged out its white sister slightly. Both cultivars were planted in hanging baskets as well as in the ground and thrived in each location. AngelMist™ Spreading Dark Purple has been a profuse bloomer for the entire summer. It never had any downtime, remaining a tight mound of dark purple beauty all summer.

***Caladium* ‘Summer Breeze’ – Classic Caladiums**

Caladiums have saved the shady areas of our garden where few plants grow, much less thrive. Practically every visitor to our garden went wild for our *caladiums* and most of the cultivars earned our “Plants of Distinction” honors throughout the summer. ‘Summer Breeze’ outshone its siblings as they produced more and more leaves that were a beautiful clean white with rosy red veins. These plants thrived in early sun as well as in deep shade.

***Calibrachoa Lindura*®, ‘Light Blue’ – Oro**

Out of the over 80 cultivars of *calibrachoa*s in our trial garden this summer, *Lindura*® ‘Light Blue’ has been the best cultivar of all. It remained covered in lovely truly light blue flowers for the entire summer. We have had this cultivar for a few years, during which time, it has always performed superbly. This award is a bit over do for *Lindura*® ‘Light Blue’, but at last it is receiving its well-deserved respect.

***Euphorbia* ‘Star Dust Super Flash’ – Red Fox**

The *euphorbias* we have trialed in the past few years have all been completely maintenance free, beautiful, profuse bloomers. *Euphorbia* ‘Star Dust Super Flash’ is no exception. After establishing itself in a container, this *euphorbia* produced endless flowers. Its habit is carefree as it spills its flowers over the edges of containers. As temperature dropped in the fall this cultivar went into overdrive producing more flowers than leaves that resulted in a spectacular floral display.

***Gomphrena* ‘Las Vegas Purple’ – Benary**

The Las Vegas series of *gomphrena* has impressed us at UGA for several years. In particular, ‘Las Vegas Purple’ has really made a bold statement in our trials this summer.

Its large gumball sized flowers dot the plants similar to holiday decorative lights. The dark purple flowers contrast pleasantly with the clean green leaves. As summer warmed, these purple balls multiplied and enlarged. 'Las Vegas Purple' resisted any potential diseases and remained upright throughout our frequent summer rains. It flowered well into the fall.

***Hibiscus* 'Panama Red' PP20,121 – UGA**

Hibiscus 'Panama Red' is an ornamental cultivar developed at The University of Georgia by Dr. John Ruter. The plants display an intense red color in high light, deeply cut foliage, stable foliage color, very large purple flowers, thrives in hot and humid conditions and flowers heavily during short days (November to April) in Zone 10. 'Panama Red' can be grown in the garden or in a container. Plants of 'Panama Red' tend to stay more upright and bushy compared to other cultivars. Some trimming may be necessary if this plant is grown in a crowded location.

Impatiens New Guinea Group (Sun): SunPatiens[®], 'Compact Hot Coral' PPAF – Sakata

Early in their development, New Guinea Impatiens bred to be grown in full sun was an anomaly. Now, these beauties growing in the bright Georgia sunshine thrive beyond imagination as the summer's heat attempts to bake them. Month after month, 'Compact Hot Coral' from Sakata has exploded in large brilliant deep coral blooms. These plants were indeed compact and never lodged after any rain shower.

Impatiens New Guinea Group (Sun): Sun Harmony[®], 'Salmon' – Danziger

Sun Harmony[®] 'Salmon' from Danziger has thrived all summer in our unusually wet and not quite blistering hot weather of 2013. These plants were sturdy and covered in large salmon New Guinea Impatiens flowers. Look out SunPatiens[®]! You now have a viable competitor. Congratulations to Danziger for broadening as well as brightening the field of New Guineas for the sun.

***Petunia Surfinia*[®] Summer Double[™] petunia Rose – Suntory**

This petunia was practically perfect for the entire summer. Elegant, double rose colored clusters of blooms billowed from its container continuously for months. The foliage of 'Summer Double Rose' remained attractive even through our rainy summer, resisting disease and thriving in the summer heat. This cultivar far out lived other petunias and remained a winner into the fall.

***Solenostemon scutellarioides* Stained Glassworks[™], 'Luminesce' – Ecke**

Coleus has become a mainstay in many sun gardens, including our trial garden. So many cultivars have been phenomenal especially the hotter the weather becomes. 'Luminesce' thrived, becoming more colorful as the sunshine intensified. Its compact habit enabled us to skip cutting the plants back mid-season as all others were and 'Luminesce' produced very few flowers. This cultivar was more maintenance free than all other coleus in our trials.

