



Classic City Garden Awards Series:

2013's Best New Plants from the Trial Gardens at the University of Georgia



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The Trial Gardens at the University of Georgia were established in 1982 by Dr. Allan Armitage and Dr. Michael Dirr. In July of 2013, Dr. John Ruter took over as director of the Trial Gardens (Figure 1). The mission of the Trial Gardens continues to include teaching, research, and new plant introductions. The gardens are an essential trialing site for heat and humidity tolerance for many of the world's annual and perennial ornamental breeding companies, due to the number of days (between 50-60) reaching ≥ 90 degrees F.



Figure 1. Director of the Trial Gardens at UGA and Allan Armitage Endowed Professor of Horticulture, Dr. John Ruter.

Teaching programs in the garden focus around two classes taught by Dr. Ruter: HORT 3500, which is taught during the fall semester and emphasizes annuals, vines, and fall-blooming perennials, and HORT 3510, which is taught in the spring and emphasizes bulbs, spring ephemerals, and early-flowering perennials. Both classes are taught as half-semester courses. The Trial Gardens are also utilized by classes from the departments of Agricultural Communication, Entomology, Landscape Architecture, Plant Pathology, and others from the arts and science disciplines.

The research and trialing garden works with over 20 of the major ornamental breeding companies from around the world. In 2013, the Trial Gardens evaluated over 750 annual taxa via 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 three-quarters of an acre (Figure 2). Several plants have been introduced to the trade through the garden over the past 20 years (see ugatrial.hort.uga.edu). The tradition continues as Dr. Ruter releases plants from his ornamental breeding program at UGA.



Figure 2. An aerial image of the Trial Gardens at UGA. The area depicted in this photograph is roughly three-quarters of an acre and houses 2,000 trial plants seasonally.

Trial Establishment And Data Collection

Seed of slower-growing crops such as begonias and geraniums are received and sown during January, with most other seed crops sown in February and March. Cuttings for propagation are generally received during the first two weeks of March. Propagules are transplanted into 3.75-inch containers and grown in the greenhouse using standard cultivation protocols. Growing substrate is a custom mix from OldCastle Lawn and Garden. Hanging baskets that are made from recycled newspaper (Western Pulp, OR) 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 and covered with pine straw mulch before planting. Pelargoniums and cold-tolerant annuals such as petunias and calibrachos are placed in 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 June and is taken every two weeks until the end of September. All data is taken by Meg Green, Trial Gardens supervisor. A single evaluator is essential for consistency in data collection. Data is entered into Excel (on a tablet) in the garden, and then it is uploaded to the Trial Gardens' website (ugatrial.hort.uga.edu). Plants are rated on a scale of 1-5 (5 being best) on overall vigor, appearance, flower production, and pest resistance. All evaluation data can be found on the Trial Gardens' website, which graphically tracks each variety being evaluated (Figure 3). Graphing of performance data by date is important as it shows how the plant performed from early summer until fall. Data is also shared with the National Trials Database (see www.planttrials.org).



The Trial Gardens at UGA

Research, Teaching and Crop Introduction


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We welcome you to The Gardens at UGA. The Gardens trials the newest varieties of annuals from all over the world and puts perennials to the test to find those that stand up to southeastern heat and humidity. The Gardens at UGA is open all year and is a great source of ideas and information for students, gardeners, and industry professionals. We invite you to visit.

What's New: Important dates to remember:




**CHECK OUT
OUR WEEKLY
"PLANTS OF
DISTINCTION"**

Garden Trials
The performance ratings are based on number of flowers, leaf color, uniformity of habit and flower, resistance to insects and diseases and overall appearance.




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Figure 3. Screenshot of the Trial Gardens at UGA homepage, located at ugatrial.hort.uga.edu.

During the third week of June each year, ornamental breeders and growers are invited to attend the industry open house. Two weeks later, there is a public open house. These events allow industry professionals and the gardening public to see a variety of plants all growing at the same location. During each event, attendees are asked to select five outstanding plants in the garden as favorites. This data is collected and shared on the website and through email communications.

Every week, 10-12 plants are selected as “Plants of Distinction” for their extraordinary performance in the garden. These plants the season’s end, the “Classic City Awards” are given to the 10 plants that exhibited excellent performance all summer. The best cultivars for each genus are also listed under the “Best of the Best” link on the website.

In this publication, we will showcase the plants that were awarded the “Classic City Award” in 2013.

Classic City Award Winners For 2013

Acalypha 'Inferno'

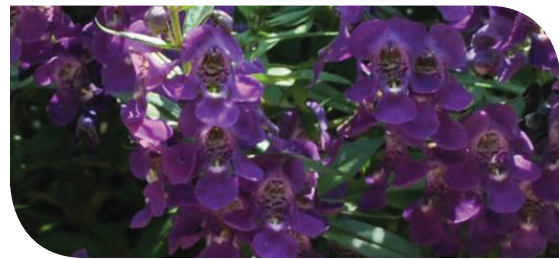
— Peace Tree Farms



Acalypha (copper leaf) bushes have provided an incredible variety of colors and textures to our garden for several years. Originally from Australia, 2013's top eye-popping *Acalypha* was 'Inferno,' sent to us by Lloyd Traven of Peace Tree Farms. Since receiving these plants in early April, the foliage of 'Inferno' was a bright fiery red. It continued to intensify in color throughout the heat and rain of our 2013 summer, becoming more beautiful each day. Our plants were about 3-feet tall (never pinched/pruned) and never flowered. This annual to tender perennial (USDA hardiness zone 10), based on your location in Georgia, grows best in sunny locations and should be planted only after the threat of frost has passed.

Angelonia 'AngelMist Spreading Dark Purple' (PP 25,558)

— Ball FloraPlant



Angelonia has become a favorite in our Trial Gardens over the years, with many performing beautifully and some performing moderately well. 'AngelMist Spreading Dark Purple' was sent by Ball FloraPlant as was 'AngelMist Spreading White' (PP 19,034). Both are worthy of high merit, but the purple cultivar edged out the white cultivar slightly. Both cultivars were planted in hanging baskets as well as in the ground and thrived in each location. 'AngelMist Spreading Dark Purple' was a profuse bloomer for the entire summer with no downtime, remaining a tight mound (6-inches tall x 18-inches wide) of dark purple beauty all summer.

Caladium 'Summer Breeze' PPAF

— *Classic Caladiums*



Caladium species saved the shady areas of the Trial Gardens, where few plants grow, much less thrive. Most visitors to the Trial Gardens went wild for the *Caladium* plants, with most varieties earning “Plants of Distinction” honors throughout the summer. ‘Summer Breeze’ outshone its siblings, as it produced more and more leaves that were a beautiful, clean white with rosy red veins, growing 18-inches tall.

These plants thrived in early morning sun (1-2 hours) as well as in deep shade.

Calibrachoa 'Lindura Light Blue'

— *Oro*



Out of the 80-plus *Calibrachoa* cultivars in the Trial Gardens in the summer of 2013, ‘Lindura Light Blue’ was the best overall cultivar. It remained covered in lovely and truly light-blue flowers for the entire summer, maintaining a compact 6-inch-tall x 24-inch-wide footprint. We’ve trialed this cultivar for a few years, during which time it has always performed superbly. This award is a bit overdue for ‘Lindura Light Blue,’ but at last it has received well-deserved respect.

Euphorbia 'Star Dust Super Flash'

— Red Fox



Gomphrena 'Las Vegas Purple'

— Benary



The Las Vegas series of *Gomphrena* has been impressive at the Trial Gardens for several years. In particular, 'Las Vegas Purple' made a bold statement in our trials during the 2013 summer. Its large gumball sized flowers dot the plants, resembling decorative holiday lights. The dark purple flowers contrast pleasantly with the clean green leaves. As summer warmed, these purple balls multiplied and doubled in size. 'Las Vegas Purple' resisted any potential disease pressure and remained upright throughout our frequent summer rains. It flowered well into the fall.



When many think of *Euphorbia*, they automatically think of poinsettias. However, in the last 10 years, many new species of *Euphorbia* have been introduced into the market, with the goal of developing outstanding garden annuals capable of season long flowering. One species is *E. hypericifolia*, of which the well-known cultivar 'Diamond Frost' (PP 17,567) belongs to. In recent years, we have trialed several cultivars of this species (as well as other *Euphorbia* species) and all have been completely maintenance-free, beautiful, and profuse bloomers. *Euphorbia* 'Star Dust Super Flash' (PP 15,120) is no exception and a fine improvement to 'Diamond Frost.' After establishing itself in a container, this *Euphorbia* produced endless white flowers and attained a size of 18-inches tall x 24-inches wide. Its habit is carefree, spilling its flowers over the edges of containers. As temperatures dropped in the fall, this cultivar went into overdrive, producing more flowers than leaves, which resulted in a spectacular floral display.

***Hibiscus* 'Panama Red' (PP 20,121)**

— UGA



Hibiscus 'Panama Red' is an ornamental variety developed at the University of Georgia by Dr. John Ruter. The plants display an intense red color when planted in full sun. Features include deeply cut foliage, stable foliage color, very large purple flowers, thriving in hot and humid conditions, and flowering heavily during short days (November to April) in USDA hardiness zone 10. It is a very fast grower, requiring 3 to 4 feet of space at maturity, yet unlike many other *Hibiscus* cultivars, 'Panama Red' tends to stay more upright and bushy. Early pinching will encourage a more full appearance, and some trimming may be necessary if this plant is grown in a crowded location.

New Guinea Impatiens (sun): 'SunPatiens Compact Hot Coral' PPAF

— Sakata



Early in development, New Guinea Impatiens were bred to be grown in greater sun than traditional *Impatiens* cultivars. Now, growing in the bright Georgia sunshine, these cultivars thrive beyond imagination as the summer's heat attempts to bake them. Month after month, 'SunPatiens Compact Hot Coral' from Sakata exploded in large, brilliant deep-coral flowers. These plants were indeed compact (12- to 18-inches tall) and never lodged after heavy rains.

**New Guinea Impatiens (sun):
'Sun Harmony Salmon'**

— Danziger



'Sun Harmony Salmon' from Danziger 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, SunPatians®; you now have a strong competitor! Congratulations to Danziger for broadening, as well as brightening, the field of New Guineas for the sun.

Petunia 'Surfinia Summer Double Rose'

— Suntory



Petunia 'Surfinia Summer Double Rose' was practically perfect the entire 2013 summer. Elegant, double-rose-colored clusters of flowers billowed from its container continuously for months. The foliage of 'Surfinia Summer Double Rose' remained attractive even through the unusually rainy summer, resisting disease and thriving in the summer heat. This cultivar far outlived other *Petunia* cultivars and remained a winner into the fall.

***Solenostemon* 'Stained Glassworks Luminesce'**

— *Ecke*



Coleus has become a mainstay in many sun gardens, including the Trial Gardens. Many cultivars have been phenomenal, especially during hotter weather. 'Stained Glassworks Luminesce' falls into this category. It thrived in 2013, becoming more colorful as the sunshine intensified. Its compact habit enabled us to skip cutting the plants back mid-season (all other cultivars were pruned), and despite this, 'Stained Glassworks™ Luminesce' produced very few flowers in late summer. This cultivar was more maintenance free than all other coleus varieties in the Trial Gardens.

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