



Classic City Garden Awards Series:

2015'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 because of the number of days reaching 90 degrees F and above (between 50-60, annually).



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

The research and trialing garden works with over 20 of the major ornamental breeding companies from around the world. In 2014, the Trial Gardens evaluated more than 750 annual taxa via in-ground beds, hanging baskets, and containers (Figure 2). In the last 20 years, several plants have been introduced to the trade through the garden (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

Plants for the Trial Gardens are produced from seeds and cuttings sent to UGA. Seeds 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 4-inch containers and grown in the greenhouse using standard cultivation protocols. Growing substrate is a custom mix from OldCastle Lawn & 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 and April, with appropriate soil amendments 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 calibrachoas, 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 with several different fertilizer products during the growing season.

Data collection begins in June and occurs 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 and is graphically tracked for 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.plantrials.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:



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OUR WEEKLY
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Plants of Distinction



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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.

Each year during the third week of June, ornamental breeders and growers are invited to attend an 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 growing at the same location. During each event, attendees are asked to select five outstanding plants in the garden. This data is collected and shared on the website and through email communication.

Every week, 10 to 12 plants are selected as “Plants of Distinction” for their extraordinary performance in the garden. These plants are featured on the website and information about them is emailed to interested parties. At the season’s end, the “Classic City Awards” are given to the best 10 plants that exhibited excellent performance all summer. The best cultivars for each genus also are 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 2015.

Classic City Award Winners For 2015

Begonia

Baby Wing® 'Bicolor'



Many of our begonias performed well this summer; however, Baby Wing® 'Bicolor' stood out as being brighter than others. Its unique coloration (rose with white center) attracted all eyes to it, eliciting smiles from all onlookers. The plants were compact, growing to 20 to 22 inches, never lodging or coming apart. Its dark-green foliage provided pleasant contrast to the unique flowers.

Caladium

'Debutante'



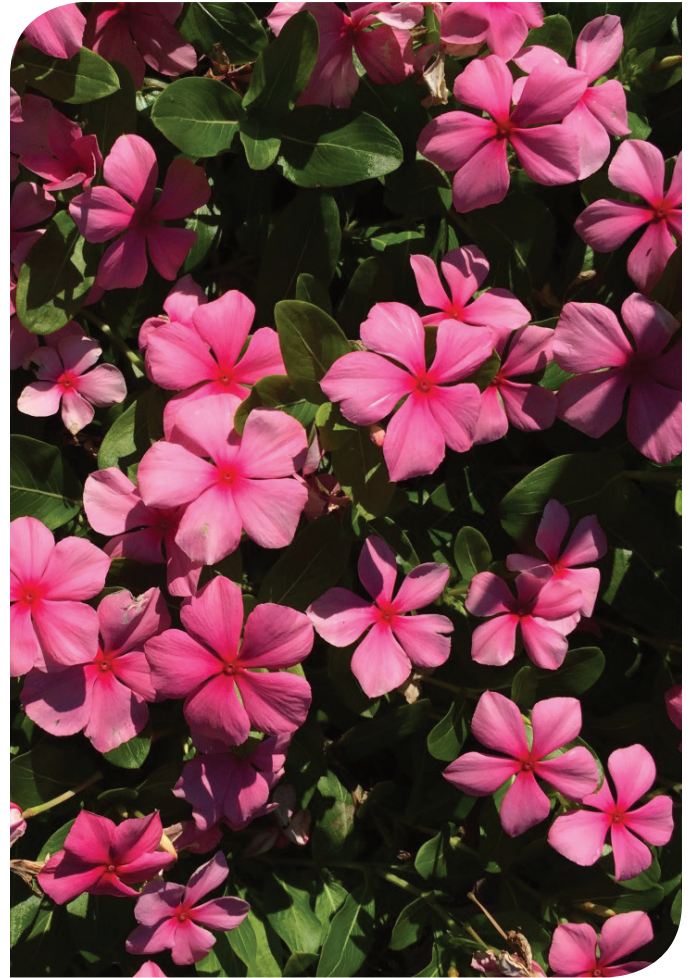
All of Robert Hartman's caladiums excel in the least desirable, shadiest spots of our garden. Every cultivar emerges quickly and shows bright color only weeks after planting. 'Debutante' was exceptionally stellar this year. Its sturdy, dark stems grew 15-20 inches and supported equally tough, white leaves with undulating edges and deep-green veins. The leaves reddened as the weather cooled. 'Debutante' made a stellar public outing and should be used to fill gardens with its beauty.

Capsicum
'Basket of Fire'



Even though 'Basket of Fire' has been around for some time, it is still among the best of the ornamental peppers that we have trialed at UGA. The plants are less than 12 inches tall and a bit wider. They are covered in 2-inch, slender fruits that transform from yellow to orange to red. The plants produce countless colorful peppers that withstand all types of weather conditions for the entire summer.

Catharanthus
Cora® 'Cascade Strawberry'



This summer was not the best year for annual vinca in our garden, but many still did well. Cora® 'Cascade Strawberry' performed as well, or better than, the other varieties this summer. It is a spreading vinca that filled in rapidly, but it did not rot early in the season. These healthy plants produced large, dark-pink flowers with a rose center over the entire plant mass. It was far more rugged than its competitors and thrived until the end.

Impatiens

Sun Harmony™ 'Pink'



New Guinea impatiens (NGI) for the sun have become a mainstay in our garden and have performed exceptionally well in the blazing-hot Georgia sunshine. Sun Harmony™ 'Pink' is one such sun tolerant NGI. The plants maxed out at 20 to 26 inches tall. They withstood heavy rains, wind, and other impediments, and outperformed all other varieties. The plants remained covered by large, bright-pink blooms for the entire summer.

Lobularia

Lavender Stream™



For the past few years, the Stream series of *Lobularia* from Danziger has proven to be phenomenal whether it is the white, lavender, bicolor, or now, raspberry variety. This summer Lavender Stream™ has proven itself to be one of our absolute bests. Week after week, despite the weather, this variety continued to flourish, growing into a blanket of zillions of fragrant, tiny, lavender blooms. If history is any indication, Lavender Stream™ and its siblings will thrive well into our winter.

Petunia
Tidal Wave® 'Silver'



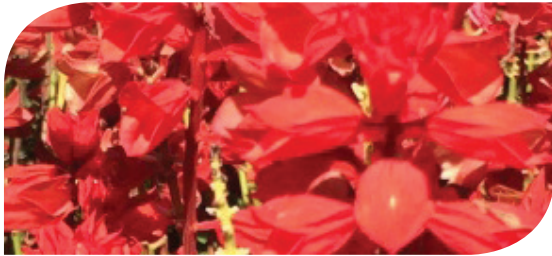
The fact that any petunia survived our wet, early summer followed by the extreme heat and drought for the rest of the summer is a miracle. Tidal Wave® 'Silver' not only survived, but it flourished for several months. Its performance outlasted all other petunias this summer. The plants grew into a nice mound, covered in flowers that were whitish purple with a purple center. Month after month, Tidal Wave® 'Silver' astonished everyone with its ability to thrive in the heat. This selection has been around awhile; it was an All-America Selections (AAS) winner in 2002.

Petunia
Supertunia® 'Violet Star Charm'



For years, Proven Winners has produced many fabulous petunia varieties that have done well in our trials. Supertunia® 'Violet Star Charm' is one of many in the Supertunia® series, and it followed suit with its relatives. The plants quickly grew into a compact mound of small white flowers with violet stripes that blanketed the plants. It was in full bloom for months, and it withstood the Georgia weather effortlessly.

Salvia
'Mojave Red Improved'



We have had several *Salvia splendens* varieties in recent years, so it was good to see one as splendid as 'Mojave Red Improved.' The plants grew to a height of 18 to 20 inches and produced numerous red flowering stalks. This salvia withstood miserably hot growing conditions but flourished regardless. 'Mojave Red Improved' is an excellent reminder of how great this salvia can be.

Scaevola
'Scalora Jewel'



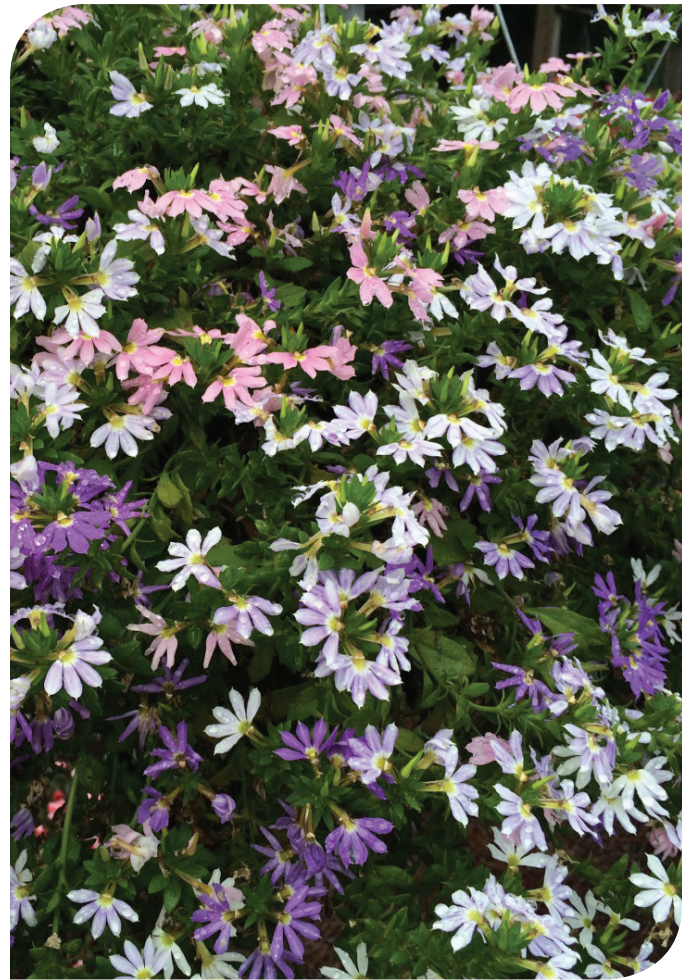
Scaevola has come a long way in a short period of time. 'Scalora Jewel' is another representative from this superior series of fan flowers that has excelled in our garden. The plants quickly grew into a compact mass of light violet fan-like blossoms. Despite the early rains and later drought, 'Scalora Jewel' succeeded in wowing us all summer. As with its sibling 'Scalora Amethyst' that won this high award last year, 'Scalora Jewel' is to die for.

Solenostemon
'UF12823' Campfire



We were smitten with Ball's 'Redhead' coleus, and now Ball FloraPlant has produced an equally glorious 'Campfire.' It was evident in early summer that this coleus would be incredible, but it continued to awe us throughout the summer. Campfire was maintenance free in that it seldom flowered. It grew to 36 to 42 inches tall and remained erect all summer. Its warm orange-red leaves shone quite brightly, and it withstood many long, hot days better than many other coleus plants. While we have not forgotten 'Redhead,' 'Campfire' is definitely a hot contender in our hearts.

Scaevola
Trixi® Fairy (3-in-1 Combo)



Scaevola breeders have made huge leaps in developing cultivars that can withstand excess rain as well as tremendous heat. Trixi® Fairy is a combination pot comprised of blue, pink, bicolor, and white *Scaevola*. The combination was absolutely perfect all summer. The balanced mix of flower colors, growth habits, durability, floriferousness, and heat tolerance could not have been better. Too often one variety of a combination completely overwhelms the others in its mix. This was not at all the case with 'Fairy.' Each variety behaved itself and did not have to be a bully for space.

Stay tuned for the next publication in this series, which will feature the Classic City Award winners for 2016.

Come and visit us in Athens! The Trial Gardens at UGA is located behind Snelling Dining Commons and next to the Pharmacy building, near the corner of Sanford Drive and W. Green Street in Athens, Georgia. For more information visit ugatrial.hort.uga.edu.

extension.uga.edu/publications

Annual Publication 116-3

November 2015

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