

**THE LABOR DAY REPORT 2017**  
**Summer Survivors**  
**East Texas Ornamental Plant Evaluations**

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The 2017 trial season can be described as one of the wettest in recent years. The only dry month of the season was September, though distribution is always a challenge. We even got almost three inches in July! Temperature wise, April was typically cool with a warm May. June was nice with few highs over 90F. July was typically hot with August giving way to periods of rain and below average temperatures between the typical hot days of that season. September continued warm with autumn weather not really showing up until mid-October. Another summer challenge for plants new to this part of the world where the weather is never average! Weather details can be seen at <http://etweather.tamu.edu/>. More information on how we perform the trials can be found at [http://flowers.tamu.edu/files/2010/08/hortech11\\_3.pdf](http://flowers.tamu.edu/files/2010/08/hortech11_3.pdf). As observed many times, the proof in the pudding are the many great looking plants showing off great landscape performance at Labor Day.

**Field Performance**

Once again the Big and Whopper begonias showed off in the heat, even in full sun. The tops this year was Whopper Rose Bronze Leaf Improved (Ball Ingenuity) and Big Rose Bronze Leaf (Benary). Of significant note was the great performance of Big Rose Green Leaf and Big Red Green Leaf (Benary) giving that option in sun in southern gardens. In the shade, the Sprint series (Benary) stepped forward with Rose and White giving near perfect performance.

Caladiums (Abbott-Ipco) were an important addition to the trials this year. The fancy leaf types were trialed in the shade. Moonlight and Radiance topped the list with beautiful colored foliage. Creamsickle also stood out with season long performance. The strap leaf types were trials in sun and shade. In the shade, Gingerland excelled with Chinook, Debutante, Red Glamour, and Desert Sunset not far behind. In the sun, performance decreased in general, but Desert Sunset moved to the forefront with Puppy Love, Red Glamour, and Red Ruffles close behind.

Cannas from seed are still relatively new to the scene with new colors still entering the market. Toucan Dark Orange and Toucan Rose (Proven Winners) along with Cannova Lemmon and Cannova Red performed well all summer and were still flowering strongly in October.

Despite a shorter list of new coleus than usual, Flame Thrower Salsa Verde (Ball FloraPlant) gave a stellar performance in both sun and shade with very little flowering as late as September and October. For all entries flowering was less in shade than in full sun.

New Look Red celosia (Benary) is a classic that floated to the top once again in the heat of the summer. Smart Look Red (Benary) also excelled with flowering of both still strong into late August.

Marcada Magenta and Marcada Pink (Selecta) did well in the shade trial which is the best way to trial geraniums in the Texas heat. Performance in the sun was only average with flowering falling off by September. However, Mary Helen, a favorite pass-along variety in these parts, gave stellar performance in shade with flowering remaining high through the summer and into October. Performance was not as strong in sun, but still above average for a geranium in Texas.

SunPatiens Spreading Shell Pink (Sakata) has become a standard for New Guinea impatiens in these trials and this year was no exception, though this species is only at home in the shade in this part of the country. But there were several others that also rose to this level of performance including SunStanding Neon Rose (Dümmen Orange), SunStanding Purple, SunStanding Salmon, SunPatiens Compact Orange, and SunPatiens Variegated

Spreading White. Flowering of these selections was strong even in August. The improvement of breeding in this species continues to amaze me!

The summer is always a great time for lantana. All entries were above 9.5 out of 10 for overall performance. As for flowering, Havana Sunshine (Dümmen Orange) led the pack with Havana Sunrise, Havana Sunset, and Luscious Royal Cosmo (Proven Winners) also steadily producing color.

Marigolds succumbed to the summer heat, which is not unusual. However, Cheerleader Yellow (Floranova) and Bonanza Yellow (PanAmerican Seed) gave strong performances through late July.

There was a nice selection of Pentas to look at this year. Butterfly Mix (PanAmerican), Northern Lights (Benary), and Lucky Star Deep Pink (PanAmerican) started well and performed nicely into October when flowering was still strong. The Kaleidoscopes (Benary) and Lucky Star Pink (PanAmerican) had a slower start, but were steady color producers through the season.

Peppers are always fun. Mad Hatter (PanAmerican) gave a nice show of fruit for which the shape was truly unique. A nice addition to edible landscapes. And the classic Basket of Fire (Floranova) was again outstanding and will be promoted as a Texas Superstar® in 2018.

It was a tough year for petunias! A wet season is never kind to petunias. Also, this year we had the trial in a new field and found out that a section of the field allowed water to stand in some places which made survival a challenge for some of the plots. Despite all of this, Tidal Wave Silver (PanAmerican), a standard for our region, was still flowering strong in October. A few other notables included Experimental Easy Wave Yellow (PanAmerican), Supertunia Vista Silverberry (Proven Winners), and Supertunia Royal Magenta Improved hung in there. Suntunia Neon Rose (Dümmen Orange) performance dipped in late summer, but it rebounded well by October.

Despite a late June planting, four colors of portulaca Cupcake series (Dümmen Orange) showed well which is also a testament to this species. Great for mid-summer replacement color!

The May planted verbena also had some standing water issues, but they powered through it. Imagination (Benary) and Empress Sun Red (Dümmen Orange) were the standouts. Empress Sun Violet also performed well. Superbena Cherryburst (Proven Winners) found August a challenge, but bounce back in September. Six colors of the Empress Sun series was planted in late June, and Empress Sun Red was the clear winner in that group. Flowering was good all summer, which is not always seen with this species in our summer heat.

Vinca always loves the heat! All varieties showed season long landscape performance averages over 9 out of 10. Cora Deep Lavender (Syngenta) and Cora Lavender were near perfection with Vitesse Dark Red (Floranova), Cora White, Valiant Lilac (PanAmerican), and Cora Apricot Improved right behind them.

Surprisingly, the elegans type zinnias from the Magellan series (Syngenta) held up well through September, despite the wet late summer. Leaf spot diseases usually take their toll. However, Ivory and Salmon looked particularly well. Not surprisingly, the marylandica type Zahara series (Ball) did quite well with XL Fire Improved and Double Salmon Rose flowering well all season and well into October.

There were a lot of fun plants in the Miscellaneous category this year. Top performers were scaevola Scala White (Dümmen Orange) and salvia Mystic Spired Blue Improved (Ball FloraPlant), both with near perfect scores. Salvia Mysty (Ball FloraPlant), salvia Evolution Violet (Benary), thunbergia A-peel Lemon (Proven Winners), Dwarf Purple Porter Weed (LSU Plants with Potential), three colors of ipomoea Flora Mia series (Limon, Rosso, and Verdino – Dümmen Orange), melinis Savannah (Benary), and hypoestes Hypnotic Rose (Proven Winners) also flaunted season average performance scores above 9 of 10 to provide endless flower and foliage color power.

### **Container Performance**

Top performers in full sun were pepper Basket of Fire (Floranova), cuphea Floriglory Diana (Dümmen Orange), pepper Midnight Fire (Ball), and cuphea Fairy Dust Pink (Proven Winners). The peppers Blaze (Ball) and Mad Hatter (Ball) were also fun. Calibrachoa seldom score highly over the season, but Kabloom White Improved (PanAmerican Seed), MiniFamous Neo Vampire (Selecta), Superbells series colors Over Easy, White Improved, and Plum Improved (Proven Winners), Bloomtastic Lavender (Dümmen Orange), and MiniFamous Neo White plus Yellow Eye (Selecta) took the heat pretty well.

In partial shade (morning sun only), sedum Lemon Coral (Proven Winners) and melinis Savannah (Benary) ruled the day. Also notable was artemisia Silver Bullet (Proven Winners and Angelonia Angel Mist Spreading Bluebird (Ball FloraPlant). And I do need to point out that the argyranthemum butterfly series (Proven Winners) exhibited some flowering in late July which is unusual for this species in this region.

The shade trial was all begonias this year. The Jurassic series were outstanding once again and they did not suffer from the late summer rains as much as the other types. The boliviensis types from Benary and Floranova performed well, but this species succumbs to overwatering which was provided in the form of August rains this year. They would be best in containers in a location where the watering can be controlled. They are fine in the heat, but overwatering will spell their demise!

### **Perennial Performance**

Perennials trials are done in the Demonstration Garden at the Main Headquarters Building of the Overton Center. These trials have been expanding with all the new offerings that are now available. Plants returning from earlier plantings that performed well include salvia Amistad (Pacific Plug and Liner), carex Feather Falls (Pacific Plug and Liner), coreopsis Sun Kiss (PanAmerican), echinacea Jack Quisenberry, phlox Early series colors Pink Blush and White (Dümmen Orange), phlox Multi Confetti Spring 1 (Dümmen Orange), phlox Spring Dark Pink, Dianthus Beauties colors Doutzen, Kate, and Naomi (Dümmen Orange), and gerbera daisies Garvinea series (Florist Holland) colors Lydia, Sweet Glow, Sweet Sixteen, Sweet Spice, and Sweet Surprise along with Hello series (Proven Winners) colors Miss Scarlet, Pumpkin, and Sunshine.

Plants performing well as new plantings were led with salvia Mystic Spires Blue Improved (Ball FloraPlant), which was superior to the unimproved form, and salvia Playin' the Blues Improved (Proven Winners). Also doing well were elephant ears Tea Cup and Upright (Abbott-Ipco), echinacea Sombrero Sangrita (Darwin), dahlia Mystic Illusion (Proven Winners), and the coreopsis series Uptick (Ball – some early flower data was missed which was heavy). Many others were planted so we will look at them next year to see how they do after establishment.

Another great year for gardening and, as I have said before, what a great time to be a horticulturist! To the breeders – keep sending us great new heat tolerant plants. To the growers – please keep growing them. And, to all of us who test and consume these wonderful products – Happy Gardening!

