

THE LABOR DAY REPORT 2018
Summer Survivors
East Texas Ornamental Plant Evaluations

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The 2018 trial season will be remembered as the year that summer came early and with an attitude. By mid-May during planting season, daily highs were pushing 90F with less than 1 inch of rain for the entire month which is usually wet time for us. June ushered in highs in the lower to mid 90sF which is 3 or 4 weeks earlier than usual. July was very hot with the heat continuing into August with a couple of inches of rain per month. Rains returned and temperatures moderated as we moved into September. The early heat took a toll on many species as it occurred during the establishment phase, but then others thrived. One can always be cautioned that plant entries will get a challenge here each year, but each year can be different. Isn't that why we do trials! 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. 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

Angelonia Angelface series (Proven Winners) gave a strong showing this year with Blue Improved and Cascade Blue leading the pack. Steel Blue was also strong but flowering faltered late season.

There was a nice selection of basil this year with basil Amazel (Proven Winners) leading the way. These big beefy plants flowered very little all summer and filled the air with fragrance. Boxwood (Burpee) also did well and has a nice compact habit. The rest still had good performance with characteristics such as Siam Queen (Burpee) with a spicy aroma and purple foliage such as Purple Ruffles (Burpee).

Sun performance was out of the question this year, but begonias continue to be on tops in the shade. The Whopper series (Ball Ingenuity) and Big series (Benary) continue to be my standards, but the Baby Wing series (PanAmerican Seed) gave a strong performance especially the Bicolor, White, and White Bronze Leaf. A novelty that performed quite well was Canary Wings (Ball Ingenuity) which held its chartreuse foliage and looked fresh all season long.

The canna Cannova series (Ball Ingenuity) gave another strong showing. Notable was Mango which continued to flower heavily into September and October.

Celosia Bright Sparks series (Floranova) didn't perform all season long, but was strong into August. Burgundy and Deep Rose were particularly strong in August as was New Look (Benary).

I always look to the sun to test coleus performance. This year ColorBlaze Royal Cherry Brandy (Proven Winners), ColorBlaze Golden Dreams (Proven Winners), Main Street Chartres Street (Dümmen Orange), and Main Street Ocean Drive (Dümmen Orange) stole the show in both sun and shade. Peter's Wonder (Benary) also performed well, but did not do quite as well in the shade. Additional stand-outs in the shade were Main Street La Rumbra (Dümmen Orange), ColorBlaze Chocolate Drop and Strawberry Drop (Proven Winners), and Premium Sun Mighty Mosaic (PanAmerican).

Also not a good year for geraniums in the sun, though the regionally famous pass-along variety Mary Helen looked decent in July and persisted longer than the others – Breeders please take a hint!!! Shade performance overall wasn't too much better, but other than Mary Helen which performed well, Calliope Medium Crimson Flame (Syngenta Flowers) put on a pretty decent show. For Yankees, that means that the geranium was awesome – We have realistic expectations for this species in our heat!

This was not the best year for New Guinea Impatiens. The early summer was hard on establishment. Despite that, Sunpatiens Vigorous Magenta (Sakata) put on a nice show. Sunpatiens Vigorous Orange (Sakata), and Vigorous Shell Pink also hung in there. Note the Vigorous in the names of these best performers!

The hotter the better for Ipomoea which loved the early summer. All the selections from the FloraMia series (Dümmen Orange) and the Sweet Caroline series (Proven Winners) gave stellar performances. So that takes us to personal preference. I was impressed with the foliage color combinations of FloraMia Red Rosso as one of the nicest I have seen. Also the Sweet Caroline Kiwi is a nice yellow form that has a dissected leaf and did not burn in the sun.

Lantana is also quite the heat lover as every good southern gardener knows. Luscious Citrus (Proven Winners) was an impressive size without being leggy and maintained flowering in late summer with good early fall flowering. The Bandana series was more compact with Red Improved and Pink flowering heavily at the end of the season.

Pentas can be challenging to get established in this part of the country. One thing I have noticed over the years is that the pinks and rose colors tend to be the strongest performers. This year Kaleidoscope Deep Rose and Pink (Benary) had the best season long averages. There were several Experimentals (Benary) entered which are now known as Graffiti 20/20. The Red had the highest scores with Deep Rose and Hot Pink close behind. Falling Star Hot Pink (Syngenta Flowers) was also in the top group. Other entries with strong performance were Lucky Star Raspberry (PanAmerican), BeeBright White Improved (Syngenta Flowers), and Falling Star Rose (Syngenta Flowers).

There are two petunias that I use as standards each year and Tidal Wave Silver (PanAmerican) and Supertunia Vista Bubblegum (Proven Winners) came out on top yet again demonstrating why they are the ones to beat. Close on their heels were Dekko Star Coral and Star Rose (Syngenta Flowers). Tidal Wave Red Velour and Cherry (PanAmerican) were also top performers. The next group includes Supertunia Sky Blue and Vista Paradise (Proven Winners), Sumo Bold Lilac and Plum (Suntory), and Easy Wave Violet Improved (PanAmerican).

Portulaca seldom disappoints. Though all performed well, Muffin Red and Rose (Benary) led the way with Cupcake Upright Lavender (Dümmen Orange) right behind them.

New salvias are always viewed with anticipation. Mystic Spires Improved (Ball FloraPlant) lived up to its name. Big Blue (PanAmerican) was close behind. It has the same look, but is from seed and is a little slower to come into flower. The rest of the large salvias suffered from the early summer showing the benefit of early planting to get the plants established before full summer heat sets in.

New series of scaevola hit the scene this year. Abanico Blue (Benary) gave a stellar performance with season long flowering. Surdiva Classic Light Blue (Suntory) also put in a solid performance.

The early and hot summer heat was pretty tough on verbena. Samira Deep Blue (Benary) was the strongest with flowering still showy into September. Also strong was Superbena Raspberry (Proven Winners) and EnduraScape Hot Pink (Ball FloraPlant). Superbena Red (Proven Winners), Empress Sun Pink (Dümmen Orange), and Firehouse Red (Ball FloraPlant) gave good performance as well.

Vinca stands up to summer whenever it shows up! All the vinca performed in the top tier of the trial, but Cora White (Syngenta Flowers), Valiant Apricot (PanAmerican), and Valiant Lilac (PanAmerican) distinguished themselves. Right behind them were Valiant Orchid and Pure White. And

Soiree Kawaii Pink (Suntory) thrived with uncountable flowers despite a late planting and an early summer!

The marylandica type zinnias in the Zahara series (PanAmerican) demonstrated once again the heat tolerance of this type of zinnia.

Some of the miscellaneous species also loved the heat. Cuphea Tiny Mice (Benary) is another great plant from this group with season long performance. The dwarf red porterweed is also a great heat tolerant plant and is one of the most compact of this butterfly attracting group. Gomphrena Fireworks (PanAmerican), blue porterweed, and Alternanthera Purple Prince (PanAmerican) also put on a show as they have in past trials.

Container Performance

In full sun, delosperma Wheels of Wonder Hot Pink and Fire (Benary) stole the show. Melinis Savannah (Benary) was also stunning with its light pink flowers. Thunbergia Lemon Star (Benary) also performed well, but was pretty vigorous for a container. Trifolium Limerick Isabella (Ball Ingenuity) was the best of that group and makes a great spiller. Celosia Intenz Dark Purple (Ball Ingenuity) was impressive with heavy flowering well into September. Hypoestes Pink Hippo (Proven Winners) is at its best as a foliage plant which is showed off all summer. And the vinca Soiree Double Pink (Suntory) was stunning. These small flowered vincas may be at their best in containers.

In partial sun with afternoon shade, delosperma Wheels of Wonder Fire (Benary) was as good as in full sun. Hypoestes White Hippo (Proven Winners) was better here than in full sun and is also best for its foliage. Osteospermum Bright Lights Pink (Proven Winners) was a pleasant surprise for this species. Though flowering was not as much as would be liked, the plants stood up to the heat and were showy on their own. What a great improvement in what we would usually think of as a heat sensitive species.

In the shade, begonia Canary Wings (Ball Ingenuity) was stunning. The chartreuse foliage held its color in the heat and looked fresh all summer long. Talk about lighting up the shade! Coleus Premium Shade Kong Jr. Lime Vein (PanAmerican) also did well with nice foliage all season and much less flowering than the other colors in this series.

Perennial Performance

Many of the top performing perennials in the trial this year have been in the garden for a number of years. Carex Feather Falls (Pacific Plug and Liner) was perfection with nothing but top scores all season long. The foliage even survived 6F with no burning. Pretty awesome! Napier grass Black Stockings (Plug Connection) was also awesome foliage, but many magnitudes taller! The canna Cannova series (Ball Ingenuity) continues to wow in the second year in the garden. Mango and Yellow were the top colors. Another long time resident is rudbeckia Autumn Sun which is in spectacular bloom for several weeks at the height of summer.

Newcomers to the garden include echinacea Tres Amigos (Darwin Perennials) which wowed the crowd at Field Day and was covered with rich color for weeks. Another newcomer was salvia Blue by You (Darwin Perennials) which is the best *Salvia nemerosa* type I have ever seen. Flowering was heavy most of the summer and fall and intrigued me to do a trial of almost 30 selections in 2019. Hardy gloxinia was also a beautiful mat of foliage all summer with graceful flowers for weeks. Hard to believe this species loves the hot summer and full sun!

2018 was another challenging year for gardening, but that makes the top performers all the sweeter. Nothing like a hot summer to give us a glimpse of what can truly take the heat! Congratulations to the breeders. Keep up the good work. And to all us gardeners – Happy Gardening!