

The Labor Day Report 2022

Summer Survivors

East Texas Ornamental Plant Evaluations

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The 2022 trial season has been a hot one! The 90 degree highs began in May this year as we planted in the fields. June brought our first daily high over 100 degrees with 24 days in the month over 90 and only a half of an inch of rain for the month. In July we only had 4 days over 100 but 29 days over 90. Whew! We did receive nearly three inches of rain in July (that fell on 2 days of the month basically). August has brought some relief, at least after the 19th (which is kind of weird to say in east Texas). Out of the first 19 days – high temps on 17 of them were over 90 but since the 20th only a couple of days have been over 90. AND rain returned to the tune of over 4 and a half inches! Hello mosquitos! For weather details at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research & Extension Center in Overton, TX please see: <http://etweather.tamu.edu/>. For specific scoring by crop, cultivar and date taken please go to : www.flowers@tamu.edu and select the “Summer Trial Results” section.

With this summer’s heat hitting us in early May it made for a tough summer trial for many of our entries. The plants really did not have time to get established in the field before they were blasted with a hot sun and a very dry wind. Even with the high temps we are astounded by the performance of some of the entries that we received this year.

Field performance:

We have 2 nice vegetative bicolor Angelonia Angel Dance this year: bicolor Violet & bicolor Fuchsia (Ball FloraPlant). The plants have grown vigorously in the field. And when, in bloom, they are definitely eye catching. They do tend to cycle in and out of bloom in the field, however, they are still blooming well in our demonstration garden and container trials.

We were surprised to receive 25 cultivars of unrooted Argyranthemum (Benary+) this year. The cuttings rooted well but the sun & heat got to them immediately in the field. They have grown better in containers and have produced some nice flowers and foliage.

We had a large number of Begonia in our trial this year. The Begonia certainly have not disappointed us in the shade beds. The plants in the sun have struggled, but Begonia Surefire Cherry Cordial and Surefire White from Proven Winners have done a good job of staying in bloom and maintaining healthy foliage and growth. The contrast between the dark bronze foliage and the blooms on Surefire Cherry Cordial is

super attractive. In the shade we have been impressed by the Hula series (Pan American) including the red, blush (which was pretty much white here), pink and red white bicolor. The foliage on the Hula series is wavy which adds nice texture, and the blooms never stop! The entire Surefire series (Proven Winners) has been very vigorous with consistently heavy bloom in the shade. We were impressed by BIG Pink bronze leaf and BIG Red bronze leaf improved (Benary) as well as Megawatt Rose green leaf and Megawatt White green leaf from Pan American. Viking Explorer Rose green leaf (Sakata) stood out in the shade trial from the very beginning.

The show put on by the Heart to Heart Caladium collection (Proven Winners by way of Abbott Ipco Inc, Dallas, TX) in the shade beds has been stunning! This year we had 11 cultivars, 6 of which are new for 2022. We have been very impressed by the red foliage color of Hot-2-Trot, especially in the shade. Other standouts include Snow Flurry, Hot Flash and White Star, but all of the cultivars have done very well in the shade. We did try 7 of the cultivars in the full sun, and they struggled, but we saw good performance from Scarlet Flame and White Star even through the struggle.

We had the Fresh Look series of Celosia (Benary) this year, and they have done very well in the hot weather. The clearest, bright bloom color was on "Fresh Look Red" through the end of August!

We normally have quite a few Coleus in our summer trials, and this year was no exception. We give the cultivars a chance to show us what they've got in the full sun and in the shade each year. We are looking for great foliage color and late or no bloom set. This year the cultivars that stood out the most are: ColorBlaze Golden Dreams, ColorBlaze Mini Me Watermelon, ColorBlaze Pineapple Brandy (all from Proven Winners) and Main Street Ocean Drive from Dümme Orange. We have 2 unique coleus in the trial from the Trailblazer series (Ball FloraPlant) named Glory Road and Road Trip. They have a spreading habit and unique foliage patterns and shape. Vigorous is a good description of these cultivars.

Geraniums definitely had better luck in the shade than in the full sun this year. Our long time favorite, Mary Helen, has been the strongest this summer, but the new Mantra Pink from Syngenta held it's own while continuing to bloom through the summer.

Impatiens...Well, they've seen better days. All of the impatiens struggled this year even under the shade. Please understand we use 30% shade cloth, and with the heat we've had this year it was not much help for impatiens. We do have a large oak tree next to the shade beds, that provided some well appreciated extra shade for part of the shade beds but it was still a struggle. We were very hopeful to compare the vegetative Sunpatiens series (Sakata) with the seed grown Solarscape series (Pan American), but it did not work out as we planned. From the Sunpatiens we did see the best look out of Compact Lilac Improved, Vigorous Pretty Pink (new) and Compact Purple Candy (new). The bloom color on compact Purple Candy is outstanding, by the way – large dark purple star in the center of the bloom with lighter purple surrounding. Out of the Solarscape series we had the best look from the White Shimmer and XL Salmon Glow.

Lantana is normally a pretty good bet in east Texas for summer color, and this year has been no exception to that. We had some really nice varieties this year. Syngenta sent in their Bandolista series, and they have been very mannerly and have kept the color coming. The Bandolista Pineapple has been a very nice, clear yellow mound. Benary+ sent us 7 cultivars from their Evita series, and they have been very nice. With the exception of their Evita Yellow, the plants are compact and full of color. Their Evita Sunrise and Evita Orange have not stopped blooming since before field planting, and can be spotted

from the other side of the trial field! The Evita yellow is a strong bloomer as well but it has been taller and a little wild in it's growth habit compared to the rest of the Evita series. The Lantana Luscious® Royale Red Zone™ from Proven Winners had so many People's Picks flags in it after our open house field day, you could barely see the plants! Very nice bloom color and plant habit. Another great Lantana this year is Lantana Shamrock Peach Improved (Ball FloraPlant) which has been in full bloom 95% of this trial season. It has a very full, compact habit too. Very nice Lantana show this year!

We received some ornamental grasses from Proven Winners this year and have been VERY impressed with Cyperus Graceful Grasses Queen Tut. We have it planted in the field and in our demonstration garden and both groups are outstanding! Very nice texture. Juncus Graceful Grasses Curly Wurly and Blue Mohawk have done very well also.

The wild deer around here were very happy to see us plant ornamental sweet potatoes in the field this year...until the electric fence went in. Deer from miles around can find ornamental sweet potatoes and boy, do they love sweet potato salad! Proven Winners have added some nice climbers with their selection of Sweet Caroline Upside series. Their Upside Black Coffee gives a bicolor look because the new growth is green and the older leaves are dark purple – and it really does climb! They also sent in their Illusion Penny Lace which is a very attractive color, and Sweet Caroline Medusa Green which has a very nice leaf texture and is actually a “mannerly” sweet potato (at least for us).

We still struggle a bit with Pentas in the field here. It appears that Pentas do not care for the soil we have in our current trial fields. The cultivar that produced the strongest plants this year (and the last few years for that matter) was Benary's Northern Lights Lavender. We saw good performance from Graffiti 20/20 OG Lavender, Graffiti OG Lipstick, Graffiti 20/20 True Pink, Graffiti 20/20 White, and Graffiti 20/20 Lavender Pink. (all from Benary).

We had a large Petunia trial again and have been pleasantly surprised by some cultivars from Proven Winners. Their Supertunia Mini Vista Yellow has blown everyone away! It has been COVERED with hundreds of small blooms from the day we planted them in May through Labor Day!! They have made a very nice mound of color that can be spotted from the end of the field. Other varieties that have done a great job this year include: SureShot White (Ball FloraPlant), Cannon Ball Coral (Ball FloraPlant), Supertunia Vista Jazzberry (Proven Winners), Tidal Wave Silver (Pan American), Color Rush Pink Star (Ball FloraPlant), and Opera Supreme Rose (American Takii).

We had several Rudbeckia in the field this year. The Denver Daisy (Benary) was a big hit at our open house field day on June 30– receiving the highest number of votes for favorite plant in the field. They were beautiful around the end of June / beginning of July, but as July rolled on they struggled. The GoldBlitz (Keift Seed) and Goldsturm (Benary) have come on late and are in full bloom now at Labor Day.

A huge stand out this year has been Salvia Blue Chill from Ball FloraPlant. When we first received this salvia we could tell they were going to be vigorous just by the size of the foliage & health of the plugs. They have been OUTSTANDING in their plant habit and tremendous number of blooms all summer. The bees are flying into each other trying to get to the flowers! And when Ball says they are a season extender – they are not kidding. This one is a winner!

Another dependable group for us is Vinca. This year we have the Cora XDR series (Syngenta) and some the Soiree Kawaii series (Suntory). All of the colors of Cora XDR are very nice for us, but the White has

been especially showy this year. The Soiree Kawaii come as rooted liners and they are awesome. Little balls that stay in full color all summer – they are amazing! “Kawaii” means cute in Japanese, and that is a perfect name for these adorable plants!

The zinnia trial provided another one of the highest ranking People’s Picks at this year’s open house. Zinnia Zesty Purple (Pan American) was covered with pink and blue flags. The Profusion Red Yellow bicolor (Sakata) performed very well again this year. The unusual bicolor of the aging blooms makes this cultivar stand out as the older blooms add to the display instead of detracting from it. We were able to grow the new Zinnia Belize series from American Takii. We received 5 colors and saw a very nice double white in the series. The Profusion Double Red from Sakata has such a deep red colored bloom. The Zahara Double Fire from Pan American has nice foliage and bloom color. Syngenta submitted their Zydeco series and the Zydeco Deep Yellow and Zydeco Fire are both very strong performers.

We received some miscellaneous submissions from Proven Winners this summer. They include: Portulaca Mojave Yellow 2023 (a TREMONDOUS amount of open flowers every day with serious bee activity), Heliotropium Augusta Lavender (you would not expect it but this one is very strong & blooms like crazy all summer), Cuphea Vermillionaire , and Gomphrena Truffula (super butterfly attractor).

Container performance

In full sun the Alocasia Classic Green Upright (Abbott Ipco, Inc) has made quite a display As we saw in the field we had outstanding performance out of Salvia Blue Chill (Ball FloraPlant), which still looks great today.

In the partial sun trial (receives late afternoon shade) the Begonia Hula series (Pan American) has bloomed & grown vigorously all summer, as have the Dragon Wing Red, Pink and new White (Pan American). We see our best results from Calibrachoa with plants that we grow in containers, and this year they are in our part sun areas. We’ve seen good performance out of Calibrachoa Superbells Double Twilight and Yellow 2023 (Proven Winners). They have bloomed all summer long. Early in the summer Calibrachoa Cabaret Midnight Kiss (Ball FloraPlant) really caught everyone’s eye, but they struggled in the high temps. They do have a striking bloom color though. Calibrachoa Superbells Prism Pink Lemonade (Proven Winners) has hung in there through the heat. The bloom has cycled a bit, but they are pepping up with the ‘cooler’ temps now. Cuphea Honeybells (Ball FloraPlant) have performed nicely in the container this year and have been compact and blooming heavily. Osteospermum Bright Lights Sunset (Proven Winners) has surprised us this summer by filling out the container and blooming steadily through June and again in August. We received 2 Headliner petunia cultivars from Selecta One that have performed nicely. The 2 colors were Light Pink Sky and Pink Sky 23, and even though they lost the white speckle pattern on the flower petals in the peak of our heat, the pattern has returned with our recent ‘cooler’ weather. Sedum Coral Reef (Selecta One) has really filled out the 14 inch containers and has a bold texture.

The container trials under shade have shown some great performance by the Begonia Hula series (Pan American) and Dragon Wing series (Pan American). The new Double Impatiens Glimmer series (Ball FloraPlant) bloomed up a storm early but struggled a bit in the middle of July. Now they are back - filling out nicely and blooming again

Perennial performance

Coreopsis Candlelight (Proven Winners) has been blooming most of the summer. It has an airy habit and light yellow blooms. The new Echinacea Artisan Yellow Ombre from Kieft Seed is very strong and stands out as part of the Artisan series. The Echinacea Cara Mia Yellow and Kismet White (both Terra Nova) from 2021 look great as well as Tres Amigos (Darwin Perennials) from 2018! Gaura Gambit Variegata Rose (Benary+) has filled out well with striking variegated foliage and constant pink hovering butterfly-like blooms this summer in the field and garden! Still being impressed this year with Phlox Super Ka Pow Fuchsia, Super Ka Pow Lavender and Super Ka Pow Pink (all Darwin Perennials). These plants have bloomed all summer long even in the heat. A phlox that stands out in early spring is Minnie Pearl. It doesn't typically bloom all summer, but when it's in bloom it draws attention. As new rhizomes take hold, they will bloom later in the summer. Salvia Rockin' Deep Purple 2023 and Blue Suede Shoes (both Proven Winners) have been a nice addition in the garden this year. There are 2 other salvias that have been in our demonstration garden for a couple of years -Salvia White Flame (planted in 2020, Ball) and Salvia interspecific Big Blue (planted in 2018, Ball) that are still outperforming newer plants with their heavy blooming and healthy foliage. A couple new standouts are Veronica Skyward Blue and Skyward Pink (both Darwin Perennials). They are healthy outside and have been blooming strong in our display garden this May through Labor Day (at least!).

We have continued with the container shade trial of perennial Heucheras in search of cultivars that are strong enough for high temps & high humidity this summer. We received Heuchera Southern Comfort and Black Forest Cake this year from Terra Nova, and they are growing nicely. Out of the cultivars that Terra Nova sent us in 2021, our favorites are: Grande Amethyst and Norther Exposure Purple. We also really like Big Top Caramel Apple from Darwin Perennials. These plants were overwintered in their containers between our greenhouses.

Another couple of plants I must mention here is Hibiscus Summerific® Perfect Storm and the All American Selections 2021 perennial hibiscus entry that's being tested next to it. We have participated in the AAS trials for the last couple of years, and these hibiscus were sent to us last year as part of their perennial trial (trialed for 2 years in ground at each location). These plants are compact, hardy hibiscus with burgundy foliage and large disc shaped dark pink and white blooms. The entry is smaller than Perfect Storm and the blooms are darker pink but the burgundy foliage is very similar on both. The folks that attended our June 30 open house field day gave these plants the second highest number of votes for favorite plant, and we would have to agree.

As you can see there is a lot to say about the great plants we have been able to trial this year! We have great potential to help identify new plants and new cultivars that are tough enough to thrive in east Texas and the south! A big Thank You goes out to the Smith County and Rusk County Master Gardeners for all of your help in sowing, watering and planting the trials in the fields and garden. This year would not have happened without you!!!! Another big Thank You to the breeders for all of the great entries. You are really turning out some great new plants for us.

We continue to learn as we grow!