

THE LABOR DAY REPORT 2015
Summer Survivors
East Texas Ornamental Plant Evaluations

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The spring of 2015 started with mild temperatures, but a lot of rain. We had one of the wettest Mays ever recorded with temperatures staying mild, by Texas standards, through June. Needless to say, planting season was challenging! Then came July and August with temperatures near or at 100F and no rain in site. Welcome to our world! Fortunately, the temperatures moderated by late August and autumn actually showed up on time this year. 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 usual, many great looking plants showing off great landscape performance made it to Labor Day this year.

Field Performance

The angelonia Serenita series (PanAmerican) continues to be improved with the Pink Experimental turning in a solid performance. Serenita Sky Blue wasn't far behind.

The hot, dry weather of late summer proved too much for begonias in full sun, but shade performance was a different matter. The Big series (Benary) gave peak performance as expected, but were joined by the new colors of BabyWing (PanAmerican), Bicolor and Red, which exhibited exceptional season long flowering.

The canna Cannova series (Ball Ingenuity) continued a strong performance with some new colors added from last year. Also, the new Sol series (Dümmen Orange) made an impressive showing despite the shorter final stature of the plants. Both series stayed in good flower for the season.

Shade performance for coleus was generally strong, but the sun trial is where the strong ones excelled. Sovar (EuroAmerican) was exceptional with season long performance and very little flowering. Stained Glassworks Burgundy Wedding Train (Dümmen Orange) was also right there with it with a pleasing low and spreading habit. Also, Main Street River Walk (Dümmen Orange), Flame Thrower Spiced Curry (Ball FloraPlant), and CicolorBlaze Apple Brandy (Proven Winners) were also standouts and compared well to the old standard Alabama Sunset.

The heat was also too much for the dahlias in full sun, but the shade reps yielded a couple of entries worthy of mention. The XXL series (Dümmen Orange) has shown good performance in the past with Veracruz, Yucatan, and Chaipas surviving the summer. Notable mention should also go to Dahlinova Hypnotica Lavender (Dümmen Orange) and Mystic Illusion (Proven Winners). Dahlias are still a challenge in Texas, but these entries give us hope for the future of this species in this region.

Geranium performance followed the theme of going down by late summer when in full sun. In the shade, Cumbanita Lilac (Dümmen Orange) was the only one putting in a noticeable performance.

Gerberas continue to be promising yet frustrating when looking for good field performance. Garvinea Sweet Sixteen (Florist Holland) was the only one to survive the season in the field, but they all performed better in the Demonstration Garden where there was some protection from the elements. Best performance has been in limited morning sun with shade the rest of the day so that I think further testing is warranted as a shade plant. Flowering is best in spring and fall.

The heat of late summer was really rough on the New Guinea impatiens. However, it allowed one to really shine. SunPatiens Spreading Shell Pink (Sakata) still looked good in October despite most of the other

entries being long expired. Not too far behind were Bounce White (Selecta) and Big Bounce White (Selecta). Let's hope that the breeding efforts continue!

Ipomea loved the heat! It is hard to find a bad one. I think that FloraMia Nero (Dümmen Orange) really stood out due to the fact that it flowered most of the summer with pink flowers that complimented the purple foliage nicely. The SolarPower series (Ball FloraPlant) was also nice. The lime was less sun tolerant than the Black and Red, and the Red was an exceptional color. Sweet Caroline Sweetheart Lime (Proven Winners) was a nice addition to that series.

Lantana is always great in the heat! Two entries really stood out. One was Evita Pink Improved (Dümmen Orange), a strong performer from this new series. The other was Luscious Pinkberry Blend (Proven Winners) which joins a series that has exhibited very strong performance in these trials through the years.

Lobularia is a crop that has exhibited great heat tolerance, but some are better than others. In 2015, Yolo Top Lavender (Dümmen Orange) really stood above the others which is a nice color to add to the heat tolerant palette in this species. Yolo White wasn't far behind.

A heat tolerant French type marigold? You can imagine my skepticism. Yet the Hot Pak series (PanAmerican) actually survived an entire season. Late summer performance wasn't stellar, but this definitely a step in the right direction!

In the Miscellaneous category, this was the year for basil. Floral Spires White and Lavender (Vegetalis) were a treat with very showy flowers. Balsamic Blooms (EuroAmerican) with its very unique edible flowers was also quite impressive. Cleome Seniorita Blanca Improved (Proven Winners) lived up to its namesake with all season flowering. Gomphrena Pinball Purple (Dümmen Orange) is a terrific addition to this species with bushy plants of moderate height all summer long. The hibiscus Honeymoon series (Floranova) continues to wow. Flowering had a lull in late summer, but picked back up with the cool nights of autumn.

Ornamental pepper Basket of Fire (Vegetalis) continues to do its thing which is to produce tons of colorful fruit on small bushy plants. Cayannetta was also nice with a multitude of red chili type fruit.

Tidal Wave Silver (PanAmerican), Supertunia Vista Bubblegum (Proven Winners), and Supertunia Vista Silverberry (Proven Winners) showed us once again why they are the standards in the trailing petunia category for this trial. They had some company. Cascadias Indian Summer (Proven Winners) gave a very strong performance with a unique flower color. Easy Wave Silver (PanAmerican) was standout for that series. The Charm section of the Supertunia family (Proven Winners) also continued to wow us with Violet Star Charm and Pink Star Charm. And Surprise Blue Sky (Dümmen Orange) gave a strong performance with one of the most popular colors at our annual Field Day.

The only series of Portulaca was the Mojaves (Proven Winners). But, they really impressed us with strong season long color on beefy plants. The depth of the new offerings of this species is really making an impact on what is available to us for summer color.

Verbena Superbena Coral Red (Proven Winners) once again showed us the standard to be measured against. Standing up to the challenge was Endrascaple Blue and Dark Purple (Ball FloraPlant). All of these even had good flowering through the hot days of August.

The lowest season average for performance was 9.7 out of 10 for all the vinca entries. What a great species for this region! The Soiree series (EuroAmerican) hit the scene with clouds of small flowers. And the Valiant series (PanAmerican) compared very well with the standard Cora series (Goldsmith) and also gives another choice when a disease resistant variety is needed.

Container Performance

The standout in the sun and partial shade (afternoon shade) section of the trial was the sedum Lemon Coral (Proven Winners). It was a lovely splash of foliage color. The calibrachoa Aloha Tiki Neon (Dümmen Orange) gave us a show and the Summer Romance series mandevillas (Ball Ingenuity) also put on a nice performance.

In partial shade (afternoon shade), I have already mentioned sedum Lemon Coral showing the versatility of this entry. Also, the browalia Endless Illumination (Proven Winners) gave a surprisingly good performance. I didn't know this species would have any heat tolerance.

In the shade, some different types of begonias did pretty well. The Unstoppable Upright series (Dümmen Orange), especially White, lasted through the summer. Also, the Sun City series (Benary) help up well for this type of begonia and would have probably done better without some overwatering problems we had. We are learning the hard way that overwatering will kill the plants much quicker than lack of water. Imagine that – a container plant that doesn't have to be watered everyday in Texas heat!

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. And, to all of us who test and consume these wonderful products – Happy Gardening!

