

THE LABOR DAY REPORT 2016
Summer Survivors
East Texas Ornamental Plant Evaluations

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The spring of 2016 started with moderate temperatures and moderate rainfall, which was about as close to “average” as we get in this neck of the woods! By June, the temperatures heated up and the rain disappeared. July turned up the heat and was very dry. August started out hot, but the temperatures moderated and the returning rains were welcomed in the latter part of the month. Autumn put in an appearance by late September, but October turned out dry. Just another typical summer challenge for plants new to this part of the world! 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 Serenita Raspberry (PanAmerican) has proven itself to be a top performer once again with the other seed grown entries right behind. Angelface Perfectly Pink (Proven Winners) and Archangel Cherry Red (Ball FloraPlant) put in solid performances, but flowering dipped in the middle of the summer which is the bane of many angelonia. The breeders would love to figure this one out!

The extreme heat of mid-summer overcame the begonias in full sun, but the Doublet series (Dümmen Orange) continued strong into July when most of the rest succumbed to the heat. In the shade, this series led the way in season long performance which was not expected due to the fact that they are double flowered varieties. Doublet Rose was the strongest. Some of the Whoppers (Ball Ingenuity), Megawatts (PanAmerican), and Bigs (Benary) also put on a good show.

The new colors of the canna Cannova series (Ball Ingenuity) continued in the tradition of this excellent series as did the Toucans (Proven Winners). The Sol series (Dümmen Orange) was also solid just showing the range and strength of the new canna genetics from seed these days.

Celosia Fresh Look Red (Benary) stood up to the heat with strong performance into August. The tried and true New Look (Benary) was not far behind.

The top coleus performance in the sun was from Under the Sea King Crab (Hort Couture) and Mainstreet Riverwalk (Dümmen Orange). Flame Thrower Habanero (Ball FlorPlant) also performed well, but had a bit more flowering. Mainstreet Dutch Mill Drive (Dümmen Orange), French Quarter, and Inferno (both Ball FloraPlant) also performed well in sun and shade, but with some flowering by the latter part of the season. Stained Glassworks Burgundy Wedding Train (Dümmen Orange) was superb in the shade, but not in the sun with very little flowering. Mainstreet Dutch Mill Drive (Dümmen Orange) also did very well in the shade, exhibiting better performance and much less flowering than in the sun.

As was last year, the best performance for dahlias was in the shade. Though performance wasn't stellar, XXL Chiapas, Durango, and Veracruz (all Dümmen Orange) and Hypnotica Lavender (Dümmen Orange) held up well. We need more dahlias like this for this region.

Also best in the shade were the geraniums. The Calliope series (Syngenta Flowers) continued a strong showing. Comparing well was the regionally famous pass-along geranium Mary Helen. Encouragingly, Brocade Fire Night (Dümmen Orange) was the best of that interesting series in the shade. Mary Helen gave the strongest performance in the sun followed by Calliope Burgundy. Always interesting to see which geraniums actually survive the summer in the sun!

We proved once again that New Guinea Impatiens are only for the shade in this region and not full sun. The heat proved rough on all the entries this year, but Bounce White (Selecta), Sunstanding Scarlet (Dümmen Orange), Sunstanding Purple (Dümmen Orange), Sunpatiens Variegated Spreading White (Sakata), and Sunpatiens Spreading Shell Pink (Sakata) carried the day. Big Bounce Pink (Selecta) also came on strong, but didn't hold up all season. Bounce White and Sunpatiens Spreading Shell Pink also had exceptionally good performance and flowering even in August for this species!

When it comes to Ipomea, all perform well so we are looking for exceptional excellence. The top performers of this species this year distinguished themselves by getting perfect scores for the last rating in September as well as top scores for the season. All green leaf types, Sweet Caroline Bewitched Green with Envy (Proven Winners), Sweet Caroline (Proven Winners), and Flora Mia Limon (Dümmen Orange) put in stellar showings this year.

Another strong year for lantana! Lucky Red (Ball FloraPlant) had the highest performance and flowering scores for the season with Evita Pink (Dümmen Orange), Luscious Citrus Blend (Proven Winners), and Belle Star Gold (Southwest Perennials), very close behind. All compared closely to New Gold which is a standard for Texas landscaping.

Our climate is pretty tough on marigolds, but the Cheerleader series (Floranova) compared well with the proven Taishan series (PanAmerican) for performance well into August.

In the Miscellaneous Section, alternanthera Purple Prince (PanAmerican) and the lobularia series Yolo Top (Dümmen Orange) took top honors. Salvia Amistad (Pacific Plug & Liner) was also a standout.

The ornamental pepper Basket of Fire (Vegetalis) was a top performer as it has been in numerous past trials and was joined this year by Cayennetta (Vegetalis) with both giving excellent late season performance as well.

It is always nice to see a well established standard top performer top the ratings yet again as petunia Tidal Wave Silver (PanAmerican) did again this year including a stellar performance into September. Pretty close behind was ColorRush Pink (Ball FloraPlant) followed by another couple of now classics, Supertunia Vista Bubblegum and Silverberry (Proven Winners). Supertunia Daybreak Charm (Proven Winners) was another top performer, a great addition to this growing series of smaller flowered types. Others rounding out this elite group was Success White (Benary), Success Rose (Benary), and Sweetunia Johnny Flame (Dümmen Orange).

A large number of purslane were trialed in 2016. Top season average scores were attained by Duet Rose Improved and Rose 'N Yellow (both Sakata). These were followed closely by Cupcake Carrot and Cherry Baby (both Dümmen Orange). The top group was rounded out by SunDance White (Sakata), Pazzaz Yellow Improved, Deep Pink, Pink low, and Orange Flare (all Danziger), and Color Blast Plumberry (Dümmen Orange). When flowering time was recorded on 28 June 2016, the earliest flowering entries had 50% flower opening by 8:15 am including Rio Grande Magenta, Orange, and Scarlet (Ball FloraPlant), Pazzaz Sweet Pink (Danziger), Cupcake Cherry Baby, and Duet Rose 'N Yellow.

The best annual salvias for our area, in my opinion, are the *Salvia coccinea* types. The Summer Jewel series (American Takii) performed very well once again, giving a strong season long performance in the sun. But, this year they were also trialed in the shade, where they did even better! The difference is that they had much better performance during August in shade when compared to the sun. Another option for this top performing plant!

The verbena EnduraScape series (Ball FloraPlant) gave a top-rated performance this year with Purple Improved leading the way. Also, a top performer was Superbena Romance (Proven Winners), another member of this strong performing series Bloomtastic ES Blue Sky (Dümmen Orange) also rounded out the group. A *Verbena bonariensis* type, Finesse (Benary), was the best of this type that I have trialed with strong season long ratings.

No vinca did poorly, but Cora Cascade Cherry, Polka Dot, and Strawberry (all Syngenta Flowers) were exceptional with outstanding season long ratings and strong late summer and early fall performance. Other top performers were among the experimental from EuroAmerican and we can only hope these genetics are picked up for future introductions. Rounding out the top performer group was Vitesse Peppermint and Dark Red (both Floranova) and Valiant Burgundy (PanAmerican).

A *Zinnia elegans* type, the Solmar series (Floranova) gave excellent performance well into August when others of this type have succumbed to disease. Of the *Z. marylandica* types, Zahara XL White and Fire Improved gave excellent season long performance.

Container Performance

The top performers in the full sun were the vinca Soiree Kawaii Coral and Pure White (both EuroAmerican). Again, let's hope someone out there picks up these genetics! Another great performer in the sun was artemisia Silver Bullet (formerly Quick Silver – Proven Winners). It also did well as a perennial (see below).

In partial shade (morning sun only), argyranthemum White Butterfly (Proven Winners) was impressive. This species normally doesn't flower very well in the middle of the summer for us, but this one had good flowering during August and into early October. Awesome!

In full shade, the *Begonia boliviensis* types did surprisingly well. The Bossa Nova series (Floranova) had good season long performance with Bossa Nova White lasting all season. Santa Barbara (Benary) also had strong ratings through August. All of these types suffered from crown rot by the end of the season, which I attribute to overwatering. Future trials will try to address this situation, because it doesn't seem to be the heat that kills them, but simply too much water. On the other hand, the Rex begonias Jurassic series (Ball Ingenuity) did shockingly well. Not only did they have strong season long average ratings, but Silver Point and Silver Swirl had perfect scores! Needless to say the trials of both these types of begonias has been expanded this year.

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. Artemesia Silver Bullet (formerly Quick Silver – Proven Winners) did exceptionally well with an afternoon sun exposure. The calibrachoa Superbells Garden Rose (Proven Winners) also did quite well, which is all the more impressive as this is the only one that I have ever had good luck with in the ground! An exceptional foliage plant has been carex Feather Falls (Pacific Plug & Liner) which looked good even late into the season. The echibeckia Summerina series were spectacular giving several weeks of flowers, but the plants are not going to be perennial here. Many of the phlox offerings show a lot of promise. This includes the Spring series (Dümmen Orange) and the Multi Confetti combos (Dümmen Orange). More information will be forthcoming during the second year of performance evaluation. Several salvias show promise with Amistad (Pacific Plug & Liner) performing strongly with Black and Bloom (Ball FloraPlant) getting nicely established. The sedum Lemon Coral (Proven Winners) did well for a second year in a sunny location. And zexmenia (Southwest Perennials) showed strong potential, even being watered with low quality water in another location by the main building.

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!

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