

THE LABOR DAY REPORT 2014
Summer Survivors
East Texas Ornamental Plant Evaluations

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The summer of 2014 seemed a bit mild by Texas standards. It was still hot, mind you, but we did not break 100F the entire summer. The planting season from mid-April through May was seasonably warm with moderate rainfall and humidity. June continued to be seasonably warm, but “mild” for that time of year with less rain than in May. July brought seasonably hot temperatures, but moderated by the end of the month with some rain. August brought the “dog days” with hot temperatures and very little rain. This pattern continued well into September. 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.

Starting with the A's, ageratum Blue Hawaii (Benary) put in a solid performance with good late season performance as well.

Angelonia Serinita White (Ball) gave a stellar season long show. With 9.5 performance and 8.8 flowering season long averages, this one is hard to beat. The Archangels (Ball Floraplant) also gave a strong show, though flowering was not as strong all summer.

The Whopper (Ball) and Big (Benary) series of begonias gave another outstanding performance in both sun and shade, with the performance in sun being enhanced by the moderate temperatures this year. Also, Pegasus (Proven Winners) gave a wonderful show in the shade as a bold and showy foliage plant. Another good option for our sub-tropical climate!

We always grow calibrachoa in containers, but they also always struggle in our heat. There were a couple of notable exceptions this year. Conga Orange (Ball FloraPlant) and Callie Star Pink (Syngenta Flowers) looked good well into July this year, though they suffered by August. Several held on to look very decent even in August including Lindura Dark Blue (Oro), Lindura Light Blue (Oro), Superbells Frost Fire (Proven Winners), Superbells Strawberry Punch (Proven Winners), and Callie Bright Red (Syngenta Flowers). There is heat tolerance there, but we want to see more of it!

Wow with the new cannas from seed! The Cannova Series (Ball Ingenuity) was exceptional. Six feet tropical foliage topped with color all summer. Hard to believe they were only a few inches tall when planted in May.

Cleome Pequeña Rosalita (Proven Winners) gave a solid performance alongside its taller cousin Señorita Rosalita (Proven Winners) with a nice comeback in late summer. The Sparklers (Goldsmith) started out strong, but faded out in August.

Coleus Marquee Blonde Bombshell (Burpee Home Gardens) stood out in both sun and shade with beautiful foliage and virtually no flowering. Not far behind was Colorblaze Lime Time (Proven Winners) with its bright yellow addition to the landscape. Some like Coleosaurus (Ball FloraPlant) and Ruby Dreams (EuroAmerican) did better in the shade, but had lots of flowers. Marquee Red Carpet (Burpee Home Gardens) performed well, but had a lot more flowers in the sun than in the shade by the end of the season.

Dr. Allen Owings, Louisiana State University, shared a very nice collection of copper plants that were a popular addition to the trials this year. They really all did quite well with Brazen, Fairy Dust, Kapiolani Bronze and Kona Gold getting top ratings. More of my favorites were Fire Dragon Showtime and Tiki Peach Whirl. We do not use these plants enough in our landscapes!

Dahlias are always a challenge for Texas gardeners. In the sun, Dahlinova Hypnotica Lavender (Oro), XXL Chiapas (Red Fox), XXL Hidalgo (Red Fox), and XXL Taxco (Red Fox) performed well early in the

summer, but started to fade in August as most of them did. In the shade, August performance was definitely better than in the sun with XXL Chiapas (Red Fox) and Dahlinova Temptation Pink Bicolor (Oro) leading the way. However, powdery mildew was also worse in the shade, especially on purple foliage varieties. The last variety mentioned shook it off, however, to have a pretty good season as dahlias go here. I see hope for dahlias in Texas when looking at these two series and have been pleased to see the way these perform in 30% shade vs. full sun in our trials.

When looking at geraniums under 30% shade, the Sarita Series (Red Fox), the Calliope Series (Syngenta Flowers), the Caliente Series (Syngenta Flowers) and Timeless Fire (Proven Winners) performed well once again, but they were joined by some newcomers this year. Dixieland Deep Red (Oglevee), Dixieland Orange (Oglevee), Dynamo Bright Lilac (Ball FloraPlant), Dynamo Dark Salmon (Ball FloraPlant), Survivor Pink Passion (Red Fox), and Savannah Coral (Red Fox). The Sarita Series, Calliope Series, Caliente Series and Timeless Fire also performed strongly in the sun, with the Calliope Series being outstanding in that regard. However, Sarita Pink, Dixieland Orange, Sarita Lilac Splash, and Dynamo Dark Salmon were exceptional under full sun conditions. These varieties had performance ratings of 9 or 10 with flower ratings of 8 (on scales of 1-10 with 10 being the best) in full sun during the “dog days” of August. WOW! Geraniums have come a long way and we like the way they are headed!

New Guinea impatiens SunPatiens Series (Sakata) put on the usual stellar showing with SunPatiens Vigorous Orange Green Leaf leading the way. The two new series on the block, Bounce and Big Bounce (Selecta) also made an impressive showing. Bounce White and Big Bounce Lavender were exceptional. All three varieties performed into October, an impressive feat for this species in Texas.

Have you ever seen a really bad lantana? Neither have I. Dallas Red, a standard in the industry, had a 9.5 season average performance rating. At 9.3 were Variegated Skittles (EuroAmerican), Bandana Landscape Gold (Syngenta Flowers), and Bandana Landscape Red. The rest of the pack wasn't far behind. Some great additions for our landscape!

Pentas have proven to be a challenge. Once established, they are great. This year the Starcluster Series (Syngenta Flowers) had the best season long performance, but it was interesting to look at the late September ratings. In addition to the Starclusters, Butterfly Deep Pink (Ball), Kaleidoscope Lilac (Benary), Northern Lights Lavender (Benary), and Nova (from Allen Owings) made it through the season with flowering intact.

Ornamental peppers are always a treat. This year Basket of Fire, Chenzo, Cheyenne, and Loco (all from Vegetalis) led the way) representing a number of different types and sizes. The show held up through the summer and into autumn.

With petunia Tidal Wave Silver (Ball) setting the standard once again, Supertunia Black Cherry (Proven Winners) and Peppy Lavender (Red Fox) showed their stuff! Both represent unique color additions to the trailing petunia world. Other notables were Supertunia Indigo Charm (Proven Winners), Whispers Star Rose (Syngenta Flowers), and Sanguna Purple Edge (Syngenta Flowers). Honorable mentions go to Sweetunia Black Satin (Red Fox) for good performance for this color class and Success! White (Benary) for its superior late summer performance.

Portulaca is a great plant for Texas. The new Lazy Daze and Sun Daze series (both Floranova) did well, with Lazy Daze Red, White, and Yellow and Sun Daze White giving the best season long performance.

Purslane has also entered the scene recently with uniformly strong performance. The RioGrande Series (Ball FloraPlant) with Orange leading the way and the Cupcake series (Red Fox) with Yellow Chrome leading the way were no exception.

The scaevola Bondi Series (Ball FloraPlant) proved to be a great new addition to this great species for southern gardens with two colors.

Most colors of the Endurascape Series (Ball FloraPlant) made a strong entry into the world of verbena. Dark Purple gave the best season long performance. The Wicked Series (Red Fox) were notable for their good late season performance, though they got off to a slow start.

Vinca Titan Romance Mix (PanAmerican Seed) started off with a bang and continued its show all summer long. Titan Lilac Improved (PanAmerican Seed), Cora Apricot Improved (Goldsmith), and Cora Cascade Magenta (Goldsmith) shared the highest season average ratings with Romance Mix. None would be

considered bad. Cobra Rose Eye (Floranova), Cora Cascade Polka Dot and Cobra Apricot all had ratings above 9.2.

The zinnias were all beautiful on Field Day 2014, but Zahara Yellow Improved (PanAmerican Seed) was still standing with tons of flowers at the end of the season.

There were a number of miscellaneous species on the A-list this year. At the top of the list is Cuphea Vermillionaire (Proven Winners) and pennisetum Graceful Grasses Sky Rocket (Proven Winners). The former was in flower all summer long with bright orange cigar shaped flowers that were magnets to pollinators. The grass was a strong grower with very nice flowers that also looked in containers. Caryopteris Blue Fountain (EuroAmerican) presented a cool show of blue flowers all summer. Experimental gerberas from Proven Winners gave a surprisingly good show with large flowers on a garden worthy gerbera. What a concept! The hibiscus Honeymoon Series (Floranova) were compact and flowered late into the season once they got started. All of these are potentially perennial so look for what happens next year. Another great new plant was firebush Lime Sizzler (Greenleaf Nursery). Stunning foliage that will be tested more widely next year.

There were a couple of standouts in the Container trials this year (also see calibrachoa above). Mandevilla Rio Pink with Eye (Syngenta Flowers) was a standout. Then a real surprise was how well the lobelias Bella Bianca 2014 and Bella Cielo (both Red Fox) performed. Both looked terrific into July and held up well into August. Breeding in lobelia has been moving in the heat tolerant direction recently and apparently is still building momentum!

Another year, another great set of new plants to ogle in awe. Keep it up breeders! This is, after all, why we are horticulturists that love to garden!

