

Spring Trials Evaluate New Variety Performance



Top: Ageratum 'Patina Delft'. Middle: Coleus 'Big Red Judy'. Bottom: Coleus 'Lancelot Velvet Mocha'. (Photos: University of Florida)

Learn how varieties performed during the University of Florida's Spring Trials.

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Each year during California Pack Trials, new varieties for the upcoming year are introduced to the industry. They almost always look good, thanks (in part) to a great climate. What's unknown is how they will perform across the rest of the country. Will these varieties be strong regional performers or will they have nationwide performance?

University trial sites are a great way to get independent information on the garden performance of new varieties.

Listing The Facts

The University of Florida garden, with a late March plant date is one of the first trial sites with results each year. Plants remain in-ground until August, and we split our evaluations into two seasons — spring (April and May) and summer (June and July). The spring evaluation period gives the industry a good idea of what will perform in the Southeast in spring and in

the rest of the country during summer. Average April and May temperatures were 80/52° F and 86/59° F, respectively, this year. We had no significant rainfall until mid-May and then two substantial rainfalls after that during the spring evaluation period.

Plugs and liners arrived late February, were transplanted into 80-mm Jumbo Ellepots and grown for 3-4 weeks before planting in the trial beds. Slow-release fertilizer was pre-incorporated into the beds and irrigation is by a drip system. Our annual Floriculture Field Days, May 15-17, 2007, gave approximately 300 growers, industry professionals and Master Gardeners the opportunity to view more than 700 varieties in the garden this year.

Three sets of awards were selected for the spring period: "Best New Varieties," "Outstanding New Varieties" and "Best of Trials." Varieties were selected for consistent, excellent garden performance with little or no maintenance required. The focus of this article will

Best New Varieties

Cultivar	Breeder/Marketer
Ageratum 'Patina Delft'	S&G Flowers
Coleus 'Big Red Judy'	Proven Winners, bred by UF-IFAS
Coleus 'Lancelot Velvet Mocha'	Proven Winners, bred by UF-IFAS
Coreopsis 'Corey Yellow'	Fischer USA
Lobelia 'Magadi Blue White Eye'	Selecta First Class
Petunia 'Potunia Pink'	Dümmen USA
Petunia 'Shockwave Ivory'	PanAmerican Seed
Salvia Sparkler series	Proven Winners
Vinca 'Cora' series	Goldsmith Seeds
Zinnia 'Solcito'	PanAmerican Seed

Figure 1. The best new varieties at the 2007 University of Florida Trial Garden.

be on the Best New Varieties from our trial that were introduced during Pack Trials this past April. These are promising varieties and will be excellent choices for consumers at retail next spring.

Best New Varieties

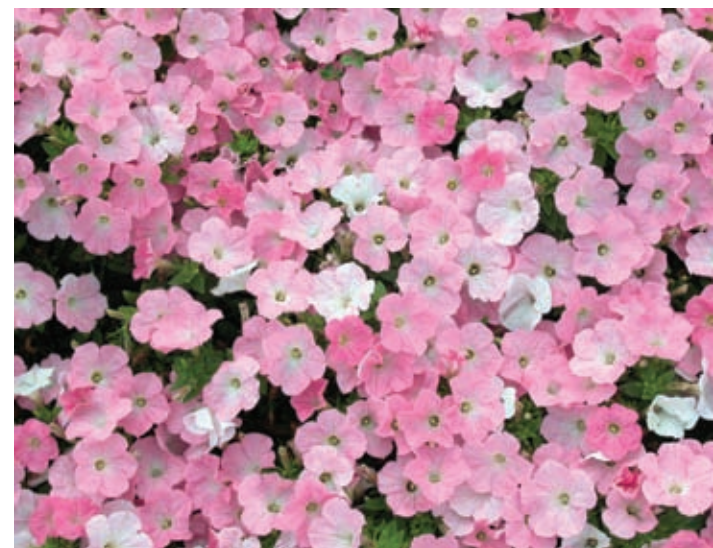
Ageratum ‘Patina Delft’ (S&G Flowers). ‘Patina Delft’ is a new bicolored ageratum from S&G Flowers. The flower buds are white, and the flowers have white centers with light-blue fringed petals. Due to problems in shipping, this variety got a late start in the garden but quickly caught up in size to the rest of the garden. It is a medium-vigor ageratum and was 18 inches tall as of June 1. The newer flowers emerge just above the older flowers and effectively cover them, eliminating the need for deadheading. This two-toned flower provides a nice contrast in mixed containers but definitely has potential as a stand-alone crop in the landscape.

Coleus ‘Big Red Judy’ (Proven Winners). Coleus is a great foliage plant that can be grown in sun or shade, depending on cultivar. ‘Big Red Judy’ has great heat and humidity tolerance, and also is vigorous enough to quickly fill an area when grown in cooler climates or for early-season sales. It can be grown in partial shade, but performs best and will have a more vibrant-red color when grown in full sun. This variety can grow 3-4 ft. tall in the landscape and is sturdy enough that it does not lodge or split. ‘Big Red Judy’ is best suited for a gallon container program, but also can look nice in a 10- or 14-inch monoculture pot at high-end garden centers.

Coleus ‘Lancelot Velvet Mocha’ (Proven Winners). ‘Lancelot Velvet Mocha’ has long, narrow, chocolate-colored leaves and a more compact plant habit than ‘Big Red Judy.’ On June 1, it was 2-2½ ft. tall in the garden. ‘Lancelot Velvet Mocha’ has the potential for

a wide range of uses, including monoculture pots and as a mid-level plant in the landscape, as well as an excellent foliage component in mixed containers. Like ‘Big Red Judy’, it is also a selection from the University of Florida coleus breeding program.

Coreopsis ‘Corey Yellow’ (Fischer USA). ‘Corey Yellow’, a new coreopsis from Fischer, drew plenty of “oohs” and “aahs” from the Master Gardeners that visited the garden this spring. The flowers have rich-yellow petals and a red ring around the center. It began flowering in May, was in full color for almost four



Top: Coreopsis ‘Corey Yellow’. Middle: Lobelia ‘Magadi Blue White Eye’. Bottom: Petunia ‘Potunia Pink’.

Outstanding New Varieties

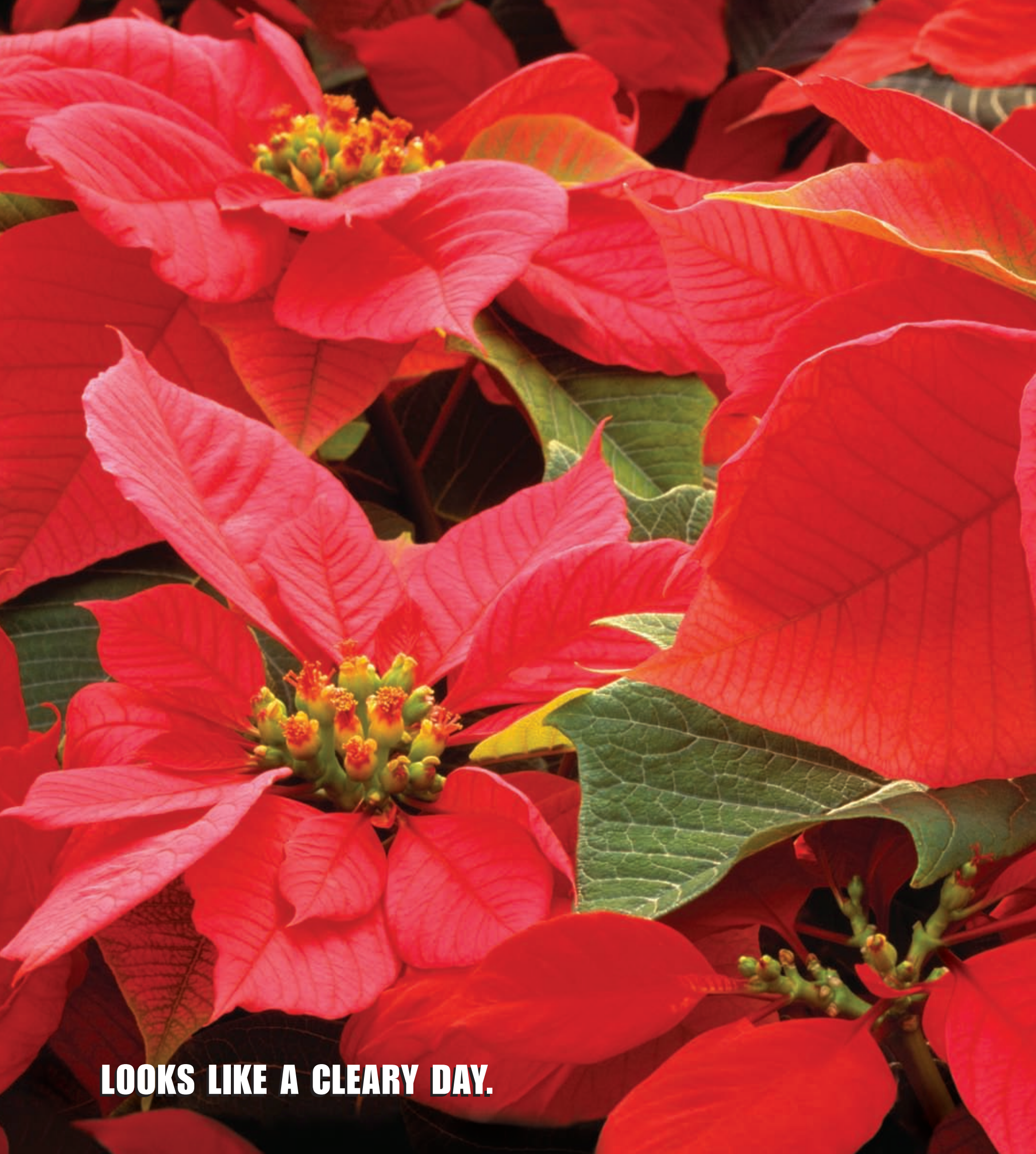
Cultivar	Breeder/Marketer
Angelonia ‘Alonia Pink’	Danziger “Dan” Flower Farm
Basil ‘Pesto Perpetuo’	Proven Winners
Calibrachoa ‘MiniFamous Compact Watermelon’	Selecta First Class
Dianthus ‘Supra Red’	Hem Genetics
Gerbera ‘Patio Enduring Burgundy’	Ball Seed
Geranium ‘Mystical White’	J.P. Bartlett
Musa ‘Little Prince’	Agri-Starts
Nemesia ‘Experimental Rose’	Sakata Seed America
Osteospermum ‘Sideshow White’	Sakata Seed America
Petunia ‘Littletunia Pink’	Danziger “Dan” Flower Farm
Pseuderanthemum ‘Black Varnish’	GroLink
Scaevola ‘Surdiva White’	Suntory
Talinum ‘Limon’	PanAmerican Seed
Verbena ‘Empress Strawberry’	Dümmen USA
Verbena ‘Lanai Purple Star’	Fischer USA

Figure 2. The outstanding new varieties at the 2007 University of Florida Trial Garden.

Best of Trials

Cultivar	Breeder/Marketer
Begonia ‘Ambassador Pink’	Sakata Seed America
Bracteantha ‘Basket Yellow’	Selecta First Class
Coleus ‘Black Knight’	Proven Winners
Coleus ‘Big Red Judy’	Proven Winners, bred by UF-IFAS
Dahlia ‘Mystic Illusion’	Proven Winners
Diascia ‘Darla Pink’	Fischer USA
Geranium ‘Anne’	J.P. Bartlett
Geranium ‘Caliente Coral’	Fischer USA
Lobelia ‘Magadi Blue’	Selecta First Class
Petunia ‘Shockwave Ivory’	PanAmerican Seed
Petunia ‘SuperCal Neon Rose’	Sakata Seed America
Petunia ‘Supertunia Vista Bubblegum’	Proven Winners
Phlox Intensia series	Proven Winners
Salvia ‘Mystic Spires Blue’	Ball FloraPlant
Zinnia ‘Solcito’	PanAmerican Seed

Figure 3. The best of trials at the 2007 University of Florida Trial Garden.



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Top: Petunia 'Shockwave Ivory'. Bottom: Salvia 'Sparkler Red'.

University trial sites are a great way to get independent information on the garden performance of the new varieties.

weeks and was still flowering at the end of June. Deadheading will help improve its appearance in a landscape. The plants will reach about 2 ft. tall with the flowers extending another 10-12 inches above the plant canopy. It is vigorous enough for a gallon container and will work well in a mixed container if given adequate space.

Lobelia 'Magadi Blue White Eye' (Selecta First Class). 'Magadi Blue White Eye' is one of three new lobelia introduced by Selecta this year, bringing the series total to seven varieties. Lobelia is always a difficult crop for us in Florida. We only have a short window of time in which it looks good before it quickly declines as the day and night temperatures increase going into summer. During the first week of June, as we made the final selections for spring winners, more than half of the lobelia varieties in the trial were beginning to brown out and show signs of dieback. This variety, however, was still flowering profusely and showing no symptoms of heat stress. With its mounded habit, it makes for a great fit in

mixed containers and small pot production.

Petunia 'Potunia Pink' (Dümmen USA). The Potunia series from Dümmen is a new compact petunia line and currently contains five colors — Red, Pink, Deep Purple, Neon and White. 'Potunia Pink' has pale, bright-pink flowers that provide a soft appearance, yet are bright enough to be seen from a distance. Its compact nature makes it a great variety in production — less growth regulators to apply, it can be grown on tight spacing, and it won't overtake a mixed container. However, consumers need to be aware this petunia is designed for hanging baskets, window boxes and small garden areas. If they are looking for a petunia that can spread 3 ft. across, this is not it. However look at the next entry...

Petunia 'Shockwave Ivory' (PanAmerican Seed). The newest addition to the Wave petunia family is Shockwave. This very vigorous petunia series has smaller flowers than other Waves but is designed to have better weather tolerance. Ivory has been the best performer in the series and one of the top-performing petunias in the

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Top: Vinca 'Cora Mix'. Bottom: Zinnia 'Solcito'.

trial. We have not had as much rain this spring, but when it has rained, we have received a lot in a short amount of time. Both the plant itself and the flowers bounced back extremely well. It is a mounding monster in the garden, attempting to take over adjacent plots, but has not begun to fall apart in the center. This will definitely need growth regulator applications during production to keep it from becoming overgrown prior to shipping or at retail.

Salvia Sparkler series (Proven Winners). The Sparkler series is a very vigorous *Salvia splendens* that can grow 3-4 ft. tall in just 6-8 weeks. It currently is available in three colors — Coral, Red and Purple. They are fairly uniform in habit, although Coral is slightly less vigorous. All started blooming in the greenhouse before we transplanted them into the garden and are still blooming close to three months later. The flower coverage has not always been at peak, but there has been enough color for a consumer to be satisfied with its performance. These may be grown in 4-inch pots, but are best suited for gallon production.

Vinca Cora series (Goldsmith Seeds). There is now a Phytophthora-resistant vinca available from seed! Currently, the Cora series has six colors plus a mix, and all plants have an upright growth habit. This series will be a nice complement to the Nirvana series already on the market, but it will not be a complete substitute because Nirvana still offers a wider range of colors and plant habits. Both series are planted in our trial and the side-by-side performance is comparable. After our first rainstorm this spring, some of the other vinca in the garden started showing some symptoms

of Phytophthora, but neither Cora nor Nirvana was affected. This looks like a promising breakthrough, especially for 4-inch production.

Zinnia 'Solcito' (PanAmerican Seed). This is not your typical large-flowered zinnia. Instead, it has small yellow flowers with brown centers, similar to a Black-Eyed Susan, and a dense, mounding growth habit. The plants branch extremely well and the flowers are located uniformly across the entire plant canopy. The plant habit is such that it continuously grows over the old flowers, hiding them deep within the canopy and eliminating the need for deadheading. This zinnia has great potential to be used as a landscape zinnia as well as in a hanging basket or monoculture pot. Though we tend to have disease issues with zinnias here in Florida (leaf spots), we have not observed any problems yet with this variety. A light application of growth regulators should help bring the flowers into a tighter mass of color at retail while providing an extended shelf life. **GPN**

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