

2004 Bedding Plant Trials

Three universities put varieties to the test to see which ones are best suited for garden performance.

By Jim Klett, Colorado State University;
Alan Michael, Penn State University;
and Brent Pemberton, Texas A&M University

Another year, another trial — here, in *GPN*'s fourth annual trial report, is the latest and greatest of varieties chosen by leading trial managers.

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

In 2004 all the flowers were at the Annual Flower Trial Garden, located at College and Lake Street in Fort Collins, Colo., on the Colorado State University campus.

There were a few new things at this year's trials, including two new evaluation beds with drainage and a new irrigation system. Four season beds were planted in spring 2004. Mid-June was cold and wet with high temperatures on June 17, 18 and 21 of 56°, 51° and 58° F, respectively. The low temperatures on the same dates were 49°, 44° and 51° F. Also, unusually cold temperatures and rain occurred in mid-July. However, no hail or major storms were recorded in 2004.

Verbena 'Aztec Red Velvet' (Ball FloraPlant)

Good Qualities. Dazzling cardinal red flowers carpeted a wide spreading, vigorous plant. Superior aesthetics were obvious from a distance and close up. Growth habit was very uniform, and flowers were long lasting. This variety has dark green foliage and resistance to powdery mildew.

Additional Comments. Aztec Red Velvet won Best in Show in this year's trial.

Geranium 'Survivor Cherry' (Dummen USA)

Good Qualities. Abundant flowers had a fluorescent color and were very showy. Plants were robust with a very even growth habit. Flowering peaked in August but continued late into the season.

Additional Comments. Survivor Cherry was named Best Zonal Geranium.

New Guinea impatiens 'Celebrette Pink Jewel' (Ball FloraPlant)

Good Qualities. Very floriferous plants had good vigor in both container and ground. Flowers and plants were relatively large when compared to most New Guinea impatiens.

Problems. This plant did peak in bloom a little earlier than some but was still outstanding.

Additional Comments. Celebrette Pink Jewel won Best New Guinea Impatiens.

Petunia 'Whispers Blue Rose' (Fischer USA)

Good Qualities. Showy and abundant smaller flowers had a unique color. Plants had a uniform, low-spreading growth habit.

Problems. Some of our petunias did not perform as well, especially our grandifloras and multifloras, due to being placed in a new bed that had some initial nutrition problems.

Additional Comments. Whispers Blue Rose was awarded Best Petunia in our trials.

Oenothera hybrida 'Lemon Drop' (Proven Winners)

Good Qualities. Intense yellow flowers bloom from spring through fall. Flowers stay open for long periods and are borne above a background of good green foliage. Plant was noted for exceptional vigor.

Problems. The plant did not have a large number of flowers in bloom at any one time, and blooms often lasted just for a day, but they were continuous. The flowers were also smaller in size.

Additional Comments. Lemon Drop won Best New Variety in this year's trial.

Zinnia 'Magellan Orange' (Goldsmith Seeds)

Good Qualities. This zinnia was selected for a unique orange color and abundant flowers. Very uniform overall appearance. Flowers were self-cleaning.

Problems. Only very late in season did we see some mildew on the leaves.

Additional Comments. Magellan Orange won Best Zinnia at this year's trial.

PENN STATE UNIVERSITY

Penn State University has two flower trials: University Park primarily evaluates seed-grown annual and perennial bedding plants in ground beds, and the newer trial at Landisville, Pa., evaluates vegetatively propagated annuals in above-ground containers. Penn State Landisville tested 932 cultivars, and University Park evaluated about 400. ♦



Left to right: 'Aztec Red Velvet'; 'Survivor Cherry'; 'Celebrette Pink Jewel' (photos courtesy of Jimm Klett); 'Whispers Blue Rose' (photo courtesy of Goldsmith Seeds); 'Lemon Drop' (photo courtesy of Proven Winners).