

pack trials

Trialing The Varieties

The University of Florida Field Day attracted approximately 300 attendees. (Photos: Jennifer Boldt)

The varieties always look good at Pack Trials, but we wanted to know how they performed in an independent trial.

By Jennifer Boldt, Jessica Boldt and Jim Barrett

Each year, the California Pack Trials show us a plethora of new varieties, but everything seems to look so perfect at the trials. How can you be sure which of those varieties will work when you get them home? How do you know if the ones you like will have the right habit or bloom long enough?

University trials are one of the best ways to get independent information about varieties. They are conducted at sites around the country and often evaluate the most promising of the new introductions. Because of its location in the Deep South, the University of Florida trial gardens are the first of the university trials to finish and publish results. So in an evaluation of the new introductions from Pack Trials, the results from the University of Florida can provide valuable information available nowhere else.

What We Did

We recently held our annual field days May 25 and 26, and gave the industry an opportunity to observe the in-ground performance of 657 entries, including 238 new varieties. Liners were received mid-February, transplanted into 80 mm Jumbo Ellepots and planted into the trial beds the end of March.

Plant evaluations are split into two seasons — spring (April 1-June 1) and summer (June 1-August 1). The spring season gives growers a good idea of how varieties will perform in the Southeast during spring and in the Northern and Midwestern states during summer. Average April and May temperatures were 83-58° F and 88-61° F, respectively, with no significant rainfall. Temperature extremes ranged from a slight frost to mid-90s.

Varieties that have held up extremely well in the gardens this spring have national summer performance potential.

Of the three sets of awards given out this spring, this article focuses on the “Best New Variety” honorees (see page 22 for a list of “Best of Trials” winners). All varieties were chosen based on consistent, excellent garden performance. So, as you contemplate what varieties to grow next year, take a few minutes to read about some of the top new varieties to come from this year’s Pack Trials.

Bracteantha ‘Mohave Grande Sunset’

Mohave Grande from Selecta First Class is a larger version of the Mohave series and contains four colors — Cream White, Red, Sunset and Yellow. They were the most vigorous bracteantha in the trials and are fairly uniform, although Cream White is less vigorous than the others. ‘Mohave Grande Sunset’ stands out because of its flower coloration. Flowers buds are golden yellow with red tips, and the flowers keep this coloration as they open and mature. Plants flowered continuously since the last week in April, and flowers remain on the plants for weeks. The flowers eventually become like dandelion puffs as they go to seed and do not require deadheading. ‘Mohave Grande Sunset’ requires very little maintenance and has performed well both in the garden and in mixed containers.



Bracteantha ‘Mohave Grande Sunset’

Cleome ‘Señorita Rosalita’

‘Señorita Rosalita’, marketed by Proven Winners, brings a Linde Armstrong look to a much larger plant. The abundant lavender-purple flowers on this plant are not as large as those in the Spirit series (see below) but provide an excellent show of color that can be seen from across the garden. This variety began flowering two weeks after planting, exhibited excellent lateral branching and filled a plot in three weeks. As ▶



Cleome ‘Señorita Rosalita’

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If you’re looking for more information about Pack Trials, check out our archived articles from last month’s coverage. At www.gpnmag.com, you’ll find information about some of the best new marketing programs, more varieties and an evaluation of new lavenders.

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Best of Trials — Spring 2006

Variety	Breeder/Supplying Company
Alternanthera 'Gail's Choice'	Proven Winners
Angelonia 'AngelMist Dark Pink'	Ball FloraPlant
Angelonia Serena series	PanAmerican Seed
Calibrachoa Cabaret series — Lavender, Hot Pink, Rose, White	Ball FloraPlant
'Celebration Rose'	Westhoff breeding, supplied by Superfresh Marketing
Cleome 'Spirit Appleblossom' and 'Spirit Frost'	Proven Winners
Coreopsis 'Sundancer'	GroLink
Euphorbia 'Diamond Frost'	Proven Winners
Ornamental Millet 'Purple Baron'	PanAmerican Seed
Petunia Jamboree series — Hot Pink, Lavender II, Light Blue	Fischer USA
Petunia 'Suncatcher Dark Lavender Vein'	Ball FloraPlant
Salvia 'Black and Blue'	GroLink, Superfresh Marketing
Salvia 'Mystic Spires'	Ball FloraPlant
Vinca Nirvana series	Fischer USA
Vinca 'Pacifica Pure White'	PanAmerican Seed

Figure 1. The varieties listed here are the top spring performers in the University of Florida trial gardens. Top summer performers will be selected in August.

of mid-June, plants were four feet tall and shading out coleus in an adjacent plot! One downside to this variety is it is not fond of the high winds that come with afternoon thunderstorms and tropical storms in Central Florida. It may, however, have better wind tolerance if not planted so close together. Beware when using this variety in mixed containers — it has a tendency to overgrow everything else in the container!

Cleome Spirit Series

Proven Winners' Spirit cleome series currently has three varieties — Frost, Appleblossom and Violeta — with more coming. This year, Appleblossom and Frost were in the trials. They began blooming two weeks after planting and continued to flower on the same inflorescence two months later. Seed pods develop on the lower portion of the inflorescence but are small enough not to detract from the open flowers. Some lateral branching occurs, and by the end of the spring trial secondary inflorescences were beginning to flower. These two varieties are not as vigorous as 'Señorita Rosalita' and work well in mixed containers when height is needed. In mid-June, after spring evaluations were completed and the weather had changed to typical Florida summer conditions (high night temperatures and humidity levels), a little bit of powdery mildew started on the lower leaves of both varieties.



Cleome 'Spirit Appleblossom'



Colocasia 'Royal Hilo'

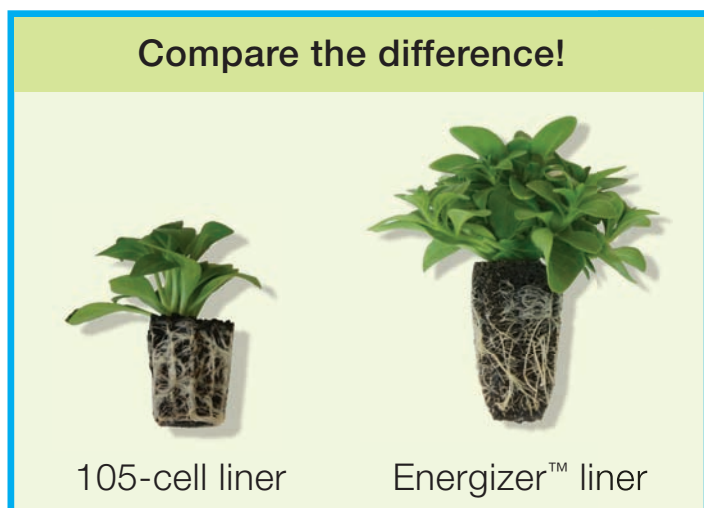
Colocasia 'Royal Hilo'

When the liners arrived from Agri-Starts I in February, they were three inches tall and had one fully expanded leaf. Three months later, the plants stood five feet tall with leaves up to two feet long and 18 inches wide. ♦

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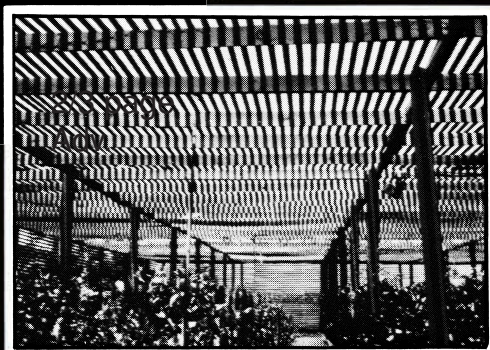
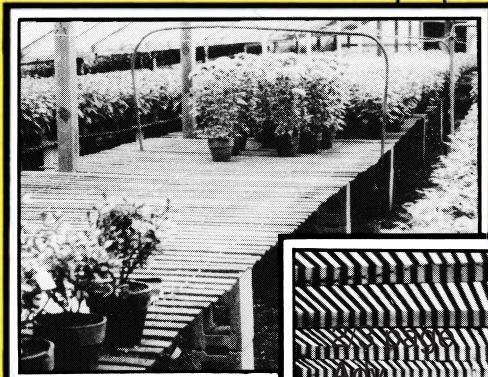
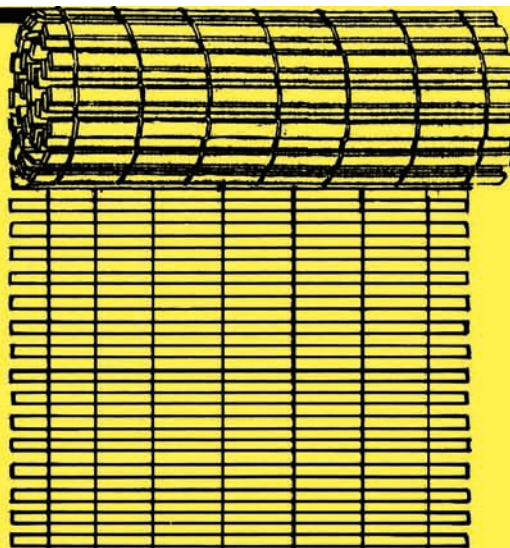
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'Royal Hilo', a black-stemmed colocasia, has leaves that are solid green on the top side and patterned with a dark veination on the underside. The plants begin to form secondary clumps at the base of the central stalk after a couple of months. This colocasia works as an accent plant in the landscape as well as in mixed containers. In the trial, it was planted in full sun and did not show any signs of leaf burn or sunscald.

Geranium 'Allure Tangerine'

Geraniums are not considered a summer crop in Florida. Since April is typically the end of the season and not a time to plant them in the ground, we did not have very high expectations for any of the geraniums in the trial. 'Allure Tangerine' from Ball FloraPlant surprised us, though. It filled the plot in six weeks and is providing good flower coverage well into June. The large flower heads are medium-orange in color and uniformly covered their plot. 'Allure Tangerine' will work well in the landscape and in monoculture pots. It will be interesting to see how long this variety will last into the heat and humidity of summer.



Geranium 'Allure Tangerine'

Lobelia 'Magadi Blue'

Lobelia and Florida heat performance are not usually uttered in the same sentence. However, Selecta First Class' lobelia 'Magadi Blue', with its brilliant deep blue flowers, may change that. After three weeks of greater-than-90-degree temperatures, most lobelia in the trial fell apart, leaving behind a wake of brown and dying plant. 'Magadi Blue', however, was the only lobelia still at peak performance in the trial at evaluation. It maintained its compact mounding habit, did not open up in the center and showed no sign of dieback. 'Magadi Blue' has flowered since April and not required any maintenance in the gardens.

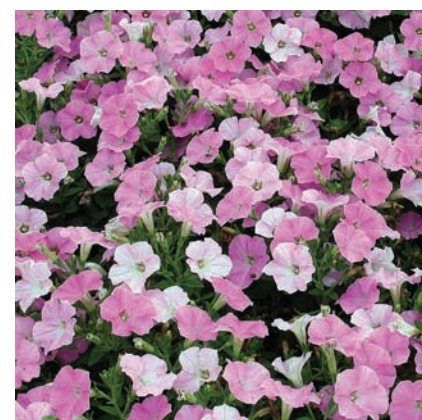


Lobelia 'Magadi Blue'

Petunias

It is difficult to give kudos to petunias since they do not withstand the hot and humid conditions of Florida's late spring and summer. However, this spring had absolutely perfect growing conditions, and almost every petunia looked good. By the end of May, however, low to mid 90s became a daily occurrence, and the petunias began to sort themselves out. The following petunias were chosen for their ability to put on an extended display of color and maintain a non-stretched look during the warm temperatures.

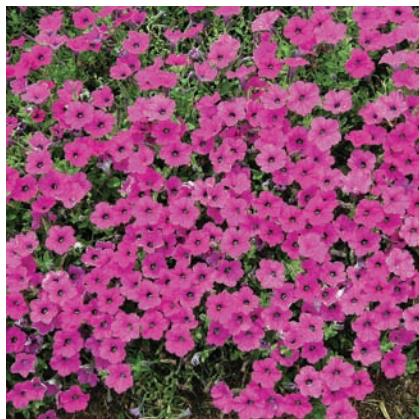
'Calimero Candy' and 'Calimero Purple'. As the other varieties in Westhoff's Calimero series (supplied to the trials by Superfresh Marketing) began to stretch in the heat, both 'Calimero Candy' and 'Calimero Purple' maintained their cool-weather plant form. Both varieties have a trailing growth habit, but 'Calimero Candy' features a multitude of bubblegum-colored flowers while 'Calimero Purple' has a brilliant display of hot purple flowers. Practically maintenance-free since planting, 'Calimero Candy'



Petunia 'Calimero Candy'

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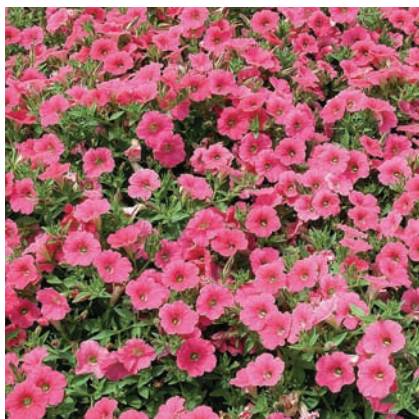
flowered for two solid months and was in peak form for six weeks. 'Calimero Candy' was also one of the few petunias to withstand our pounding afternoon summer thunderstorms. 'Calimero Purple' flowered profusely from the middle of April into the early part of June. It is a week later than 'Calimero Candy' to put on a good display of color but maintains peak color for more than six weeks. It also shows minimal flower damage after a thunderstorm and would benefit from a PGR application to help shorten the internodes, bring the flowers closer to the plant core and allow for a more intense color display.




Petunia 'Calimero Purple'

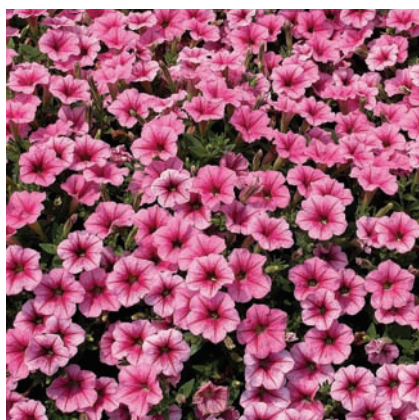
'Surfinia Baby Compact Coral'.

'Surfinia Baby Compact Coral' is one of eight new Surfinia petunias entered in the trials by Suntory. The name is slightly deceiving — the "baby compact" portion of the name describes the flower, not the growth habit. This mounding petunia has a slight identity crisis among the rest of the Surfinia varieties, which generally have trailing growth habits. However, when viewed as a single variety, it really stands out in the gardens. This small-flowering, coral-colored petunia has incredible flower power. The flowers are holding up in the afternoon rainstorms, and the plant thus far has maintained its mounding habit and not begun opening up in the center like other varieties. Compact Coral has the potential to perform well in hanging baskets. In a mixed container it needs to be paired with other vigorous varieties; otherwise, it has the potential to overtake a container.



Petunia 'Surfinia Baby Compact Coral'

'Surfinia Patio Coral Pink'. 'Surfinia Patio Coral Pink' is one of three Surfinia Patio varieties in the trials from Suntory. All three — Chiffon, Coral Pink and Hot Rose — have very different growth habits. Chiffon is extremely compact and mounding, Hot Rose is vigorous and trailing, and Coral Pink is compact and mounding. In the gardens, Coral Pink spread 12-15 inches in the two months after planting. It is a little later than the other Surfinias to come into full flower (peaked the beginning of May) but maintained excellent flower coverage for six weeks. This variety will work well in hanging baskets and monoculture containers. It may need a light PGR application for toning but not as much as typically required for petunias. 



Petunia 'Surfinia Patio Coral Pink'

Jennifer Boldt is trial coordinator, **Jessica Boldt** is a graduate student and **Jim Barrett** is professor of floriculture at the University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. Jennifer can be reached at jkboldt@ufl.edu.

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