

# Summer Trials: Top-Performing Seed Annuals — Part 2

*Here is a continuation of last month's evaluation of top seed performers from summer trials.*

Last month, I began highlighting seed introductions that have been trialed the past few years from many of the different breeding companies. This month, I will continue my evaluations of seed varieties. These plants were eye catchers in multiple trial sites last summer with excellent performance, including vigor, uniformity, floriferousness, flower vibrancy, foliage quality and heat tolerance.

Many of you have included these varieties in spring production and are using them in different applications. I hope your evaluations of these varieties at the end of the season will reinforce my observations, which are based on performance in many geographical areas.

## **ALTERNANTHERA 'PURPLE PRINCE' (PANAMERICAN SEED)**

This is the first compact seed alternanthera, a definite alternative to vegetative varieties. It was trialed in containers and beds in multiple trials and manifested outstanding non-fading purple foliage, short internodes and a trailing habit. It is excellent as a border plant in landscape sites and an accent plant in large containers. I saw it in landscape sites in Dallas and containers in Michigan throughout the summer and fall. It maintained its color and tight growth habit. This has great potential and will become an important accent plant in 2018 and beyond. There was a seed shortage for 2017, but the official launch will occur for 2018.

## **BEGONIA SPRINT PLUS SERIES (BENARY)**

This is a very competitive field with old standards as well as new series introductions in the past few years, which makes it difficult for a new series to gain sales traction and a market position in the industry. However, the Sprint Plus green leaf series deserves your attention. It has been entered in multiple trials for the past few years and continues to impress with earliness, uniformity, compactness, narrow flowering window and floriferousness. I have seen the series in full sun and partial shade in the South and the North with the same performance levels. The series consists of seven colors and a mix, and it partners very well with the bronze leaf Nightlife



Alternanthera 'Purple Prince'



Begonia Sprint Plus Series

series, which has also performed well in summer trials the past few seasons.

## **BEGONIA BOLIVIENSIS BOSSA NOVA SERIES (FLORANOVA)**

The Bossa Nova series was introduced a few years ago, and Floranova continues to add colors to make this a complete series. Eight colors and a mix are available now, and most colors were entered into multiple trials sites last year. It is



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*Begonia boliviensis* 'Bossa Nova Red Shades'



Dianthus 'Supra Purple'

impressive that all eight colors in a seed series can be so uniform, heat tolerant and adaptable in sun or shade. The plants performed well in the basket trial at Metrolina in North Carolina in June and in full sun at the Raker trial in Michigan in late August. We continue to see the introduction of many outstanding interspecific and boliviensis types into the marketplace, and this trend will continue as more colors and leaf types enter the market. Let us not minimize the importance of vegetative varieties that are outstanding performers. There are many choices today compatible with your production program.

**DIANTHUS SUPRA SERIES (HEM GENETICS)**

This interspecific series has been on the market for more than 10 years, and 'Supra Purple' was an All-America Selections (AAS) winner in 2006. What sets this series apart is the unusual single flowers with fringed petals unlike any dianthus in the industry. The series has been entered in multiple trials for many years and has continued to demonstrate vigor, excellent branching, continual flowering and surprising heat tolerance late in the season. 'Supra Pink' is an AAS winner for 2017 and was in full bloom in Alabama in early June. We have a multitude of dianthus varieties



**Snapdragon 'Snaptastic Magenta'**



**Vinca 'Mega Bloom Pink Halo'**



**Gerbera 'Majorette Sunset Orange'**

available today, but because of Supra's unique flowers it stands apart.

**SNAPDRAGON SNAPTASTIC SERIES (SYNGENTA FLOWERS)**

Syngenta introduced this series at California Spring Trials (CAST) last spring, but I was fortunate to see the series in the Costa trial last January in Florida and later in April before its official introduction at CAST. What is so special about this series? It is promoted by Syngenta as having a very strong root system resulting in exceptional heat tolerance, large

vibrant flowers, excellent basal branching and upright growth habit. These attributes were demonstrated in multiple trials in the South and in Michigan. The series is available in five colors and a mix; based on my observations last summer the strongest colors were Magenta, Red and Pink. This will be an excellent series in quarts, 6-inch pots and mixed containers.

**VINCA MEGA BLOOM SERIES (AMERISEED)**

This international flower breeding company from Thailand was introduced to

the industry at CAST in 2015. Their breeding focus is heat and humidity tolerance and they have entered many varieties in the summer trials including marigolds, petunias and vincas. I want to focus on the vinca Mega Bloom series, which has demonstrated the largest flowers of any vinca series in the industry. Comprised of 13 colors, it was bred to withstand hot humid summers with an excellent, well-branched growth habit. Orchid Halo and Pink Halo are 2017 AAS flower winners for one significant reason — extra large bright purple and pink flowers with a large white eye. We have many choices in vinca today, and breeders must focus on introductions that are unique and different to gain market share. I must say, based on container and field trials in the South and Michigan this summer, this new Mega Bloom series has achieved that goal.

**GERBERA MAJORETTE SERIES (SAKATA)**

This new series was introduced by Sakata at CAST in 2016. It was promoted as the most uniform gerbera in the industry with earliness, large vibrant flowers and excellent branching. It is available in seven colors and a mix. I saw the series at Costa in late January and followed up with a visit and evaluation two months later prior to the spring trials. It demonstrated these attributes in the early trials and later in August in the northern trials. I was also impressed with the tight flower canopy, vigor and non-stretching flower stem. This appears to be a very programmable bench run series for quarts and larger containers. It will be in many spring programs, and I look forward to grower feedback on performance. *gpn*