

Stunning Annuals from Westflowers

These unique and eye-catching varieties have generated excitement and consistently exhibited excellent summer performance.

Westhoff, selling under the branding name Westflowers, is a global player in the breeding and introduction of vegetative annuals. The company has been a finished grower and supplier in the European market for many years, which gives them a great understanding of what the retailer and consumer are looking for. In 1994, Westhoff entered the North American market with the petunia *Sylvana* series and continued to add series culminating with portulaca *ColorBlast* and calibrachoa *Calitastic* for 2017. The company has made significant introductions in many categories including lobelia, portulaca, petunia, calibrachoa and bracteantha. Numerous off shore farms and domestic liner suppliers have added the complete or partial annual portfolio to their list.

Many of the 2017 Westflowers introductions I discuss in this article were finished and sold this spring at retail locations throughout the United States and Canada, and I trust my view and observations coincide with your results.

I began my 2016 summer tour at Costa Farms in Florida in April and finished in Michigan at Raker the last week of August. These specific varieties demonstrated excellent summer performance consistently in all trial sites. What attributes are we looking for in summer hardiness? As I stated in my first article this winter, the criteria includes vigor, uniformity, durability, floriferousness, color vibrancy and heat and drought tolerance.

BRACTEANTHA COTTAGE SERIES

This series demonstrated exceptional heat tolerance and durability in the southern trials in June and in later trials across the country. There were seven well-matched colors this season and two mixes. The colors were perfectly matched in mixed containers, the flower canopy presentation was well above the foliage, and the flower colors were vibrant. There are competitors in the marketplace, but this series deserves your attention. I have seen dual application in spring retail programs and autumn landscape programs with excellent temperature adaptation.

CALIBRACHOA CALITASTIC AND CALIBASKET SERIES

There were three competitive series of genetically compact calibrachoa introduced in 2017, including *Calitastic*. This series



Bracteantha 'Cottage Bronze'

was trialed at Young's Plant Farm in Alabama, Metrolina in North Carolina, Ohio State, Colorado State and Welby Gardens also in Colorado. The series is characterized by a compact, upright, uniform habit and large flowers, and is available in 11 colors. It is also very early to flower, with application in quarts, mixed containers and hanging baskets. The most outstanding colors were Mango, Pumpkin Spice and Plumberry Punch. If I were to choose the top performer, I would select Plumberry Punch. It was excellent in containers at Metrolina and Welby and in the field trial at Young's. New for 2018 is Papaya, a new rich orange/amber bicolor.

Calibasket, the partner to the *Calitastic* series, is slightly more vigorous but maintained a mounded uniform habit with minimal stretch in the northern trials. It is early blooming at eleven hours and available in seven colors. The three eye-catchers were Pink Doll, Radiant Orange and Sunny Side. Corona, a rich deep coral, is the new introduction for 2018.

CALIBRACHOA CHAMELEON SERIES


This series created buzz last year when it was introduced — and for good reason. An industry first for calibrachoa breeding, the intense multicolored varieties change color throughout the season predicated on temperature and light levels. The plants



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Calibrachoa 'Calitastic Plumberry Punch'



Calibrachoa 'Candy Shop Candy Bouquet'



Lobelia Hot Series

were characterized by a blend of colors in the ground or in containers. This is a vigorous series with application in monoculture or mixed baskets and containers. The series was trialed in multiple locations last summer, and all varieties maintained the flower pattern with slight variations from early summer through fall with a consistent growth habit. A few varieties stood out with vibrant multicolored flowers and excellent floriferousness. The top performer was Sunshine Berry, with a very distinct color pattern in the ground or containers followed by Blueberry Scone and Cherry Banana.

CALIBRACHOA 'CANDY SHOP CANDY BOUQUET'

Although this variety was in limited trials last season, it was dramatic for its unique bicolor pattern with magenta and yellow starbursts. The plant is vigorous with a semi-trailing habit. It makes a great component in mixed containers and baskets. Introductions for 2018 include Candy Crush and Sweet Tart. Both varieties match Candy Bouquet for vigor, habit and striking bloom patterns.

LOBELIA HOT SERIES

Westhoff has entered this series in multiple trials for many years. It was first introduced in 2004. Many new colors have been added every year and now the series consists of 15 Hot colors. The series has demonstrated exceptional heat tolerance, uniformity and floriferousness in every trial, and 'Hot Waterblue' is one of the top sellers in the industry because of its compact habit, color and flower canopy. As many of you know from experience, there are many excellent series in the industry. The genetic improvements for habit, floriferousness and heat tolerance have been significant, benefiting growers and ultimately the consumer.

PETUNIA CRAZYTUNIA SERIES

This series entered the marketplace in 2013 and the petunia world has never been the same. Many breeding companies have aggressively brought to the market their own collections or series of petunias to compete with these unusual colors and patterns. There are many adjectives to describe the Crazytunias: bold, exciting, explosive and



Petunia 'Crazytunia Good Night'



Petunia 'Hells Flamin' Rose'



Petunia 'Big Deal Pinkadilly Circus'



Portulaca 'ColorBlast Double Magenta'

novel. With 35 colors in the series, there is something for everyone. I promoted and sold these when they were introduced, and growers used them in many production programs including quarts, mixed and monoculture containers, and baskets. Some of the most popular varieties include Black Mamba, one of the best black petunias in the industry with no fading or striping; Red/Blues, a vibrant red with dark center and exceptional uniformity; and Cherry Cheesecake, an excellent red/white striping and non fading color. As I mentioned earlier this is a collection of colors with different growth rates. The standouts in last summer's trials included Good Night, Citrus Twist, Lucky Lilac and Moonstruck. Coincidentally, at the Welby container trial in August consisting of more than 900 containers, the breeders, growers and

retailers selected Good Night and Moonstruck in the top 10. We will see five new colors for 2018 including Blackberry Mojito, Blue Ice, French Kiss, KaBloom and Ultra Violet.

PETUNIA HELLS SERIES

There are very few petunia series that offer the vibrant neon colors that this series demonstrates. Westhoff introduced 'Hells Glow' and 'Hells Bells' a few years ago and followed with 'Hells Fruit Punch' last year and 'Hells Flamin' Rose' for 2017. All four colors are vibrant with a mounded semi-trailing habit as they mature. Flamin' Rose is unique to the series because of the bright salmon color with a soft yellow throat. I saw the series at multiple trial locations in North Carolina, Texas and Colorado last summer, and the performance all season

was excellent. The 'Hells Fury' mix, consisting of Glow and Fruit Punch, was bright and electric.

PETUNIA BIG DEAL SERIES

This is a vigorous, large-flowering, day-length neutral series. This is a landscape series with application in large containers or baskets. It is available in five colors: Flamenco Dancer, Freaky Fuchsia, Salmon Shimmer, Pinkadilly Circus and Roaring Raspberry. They were trialed in containers and beds in Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, Texas and Colorado last summer, and in the winter trial at Costa Farms this January. They demonstrated consistent timing and unique flower colors. Salmon Shimmer and Pinkadilly Circus were undoubtedly the top performers in the series in all trials.

PORTULACA COLORBLAST SERIES

When the series of double, single and striped portulaca was introduced last spring at the California Spring Trials, many questioned the potential of the double series. There was no question the singles and stripes were unique, specifically Mango Mojito, Watermelon Punch and Grenadine, which attracted many grower and consumer votes in summer trials. There are four colors in the single series and three in the striped series. The performance of the double series last summer took many people by surprise. The blast of color, flowers that never closed due to flower size, floriferousness, vigor, uniformity, and heat and drought tolerance in beds or containers were outstanding. From the southern trials north to Michigan, they continued to bloom prolifically until early fall. We have many excellent series in the marketplace, but what sets this series apart are the unique bicolors and doubles.

Westhoff continues their aggressive breeding program with many new introductions for 2018, including new colors in existing collections. New series include alternanthera Choco Chili, cuphea FloriGlory, ageratum Bumble, petunia Constellation, and begonia RiseUp and Shine Bright series. [gpn](#)

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