

Southern Trials Plant Tour

Impressive introductions for 2018 were on display at this year's southern trial locations.

I have toured the southern trials for the past four years, and every year I eagerly anticipate seeing how the new introductions I saw at California Spring Trials compare in summer trials in Alabama, South Carolina and North Carolina. This year, I attended Young's Plant Farm in Alabama, Sakata in South Carolina – Clemson University, and Metrolina in North Carolina.

These trials were implemented to test and evaluate established varieties and new introductions that perform best in the South and Southeast and to incorporate the best performers into future programs that provide the highest level of potential success for the consumer. The trials consist of mixed containers, raised beds and hanging baskets simulating how the consumer will utilize these plants in a residential or commercial setting.

The new eye-catching annuals I have chosen were represented in at least two of the trials. What are we looking for as we walk for hours to observe these new introductions? Breeding companies, retailers, growers and brokers evaluate each plant for various attributes including floriferousness, foliage quality, uniformity, vibrancy, color saturation and vigor. Based on these criteria, decisions are made by growers for application in next year's production program.

The trials have become an integral part of the selling and decision-making process, and the trial site hosts add more varieties each year and expand and improve the facilities to attract more visitors. The trial hosts deserve our appreciation and thanks for the organization and execution of the trials.

There were many contenders for consideration in this article, but I have picked 10 new varieties that were impressive in the southern trials and I will describe them briefly.

ALTERNANTHERA 'CHOCO CHILI' (WESTHOFF)

In my previous article, I discussed the new seed alternanthera 'Purple Prince' from PanAmerican Seed, and we now have a new vegetative variety from Westhoff. This variety has a mounded compact habit with black-purple foliage on top and a bright ruby color on the underside giving a unique bicolor appearance. It was nonfading in multiple trials and extremely heat tolerant in full sun conditions. This is a short day plant requiring 12 hours of day length to maintain a vegetative condition. It will be an excellent accent and component plant in mixed containers and baskets.



Alternanthera 'Choco Chili'



Calibrachoa 'Superbells Double Ruby'

CALIBRACHOA 'SUPERBELLS DOUBLE RUBY' (PROVEN WINNERS)

Proven Winners introduced two double calibrachoa Superbells for 2018, Double Orchid and Double Ruby. Both varieties were trialed in beds and containers at Young's and Metrolina, and their performance was impressive. The flowers were fully double and abundant. The cascading, but mounding, habit and branching were excellent. I was particularly impressed by Double Ruby. The flower color is a vibrant nonfading deep red, definitely one of the most highly saturated colors in the trial. This will make an outstanding addition to mixed baskets, containers and quarts. I predict sell through of this variety in 2018 will be exceptional.

COLEUS 'STAINED GLASSWORKS ROYALTY' (DÜMMEN ORANGE)

The classic Coleus Glassworks collection is diverse with 13 upright and two trailing types. Dümmen Orange has introduced four varieties for 2018 including Crown Jewel, Golden Gate,



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Coleus 'Stained Glassworks Royalty'



Coleus a 'Great Falls Yosemite'

Presidio and Royalty. The most interesting was Royalty because of the vibrant deep rose bicolor leaves. This will be an outstanding component plant in mixed containers in addition to quart programs.

COLEUS GREAT FALLS SERIES (DÜMMEN ORANGE)

This new trailing series consists of four multicolored varieties: Angel, Iguazu, Niagara and Yosemite. They were trialed early in Florida and in the Young's and Metrolina trials. The series was planted in full sun beds, mixed baskets and containers. All four were nonfading, and spreading with a controlled habit with smaller leaves than traditional coleus varieties. Based on these trials, plants could be utilized in sun or shade beds,

planters and mixed containers. Dümmen Orange has also introduced these into the Confetti lineup as the first non-flowering component.

HELIANTHUS 'SUNFINITY' (SYNGENTA)

This plant was a significant focus at California Spring Trials and rightly so. Ten years of breeding development has brought to the market a new branded sunflower that offers nonstop blooming, multiple branching and season-long color. This vigorous sunflower will grow to 36 to 48 inches in the garden with a spread of 24 to 30 inches.

I saw it at the January trial at Costa and at Young's and Metrolina in June, and it was performing as advertised. Scores of blooms covered the plants and they were truly spectacular. Deadheading and pruning are not

required. In regard to application it will be ideal in a large garden setting, raised beds or large patio containers. The plant is being marketed this summer in gallon and 8-inch containers at a premium price.

Syngenta is offering a premium Sunfinity tag to promote this revolutionary introduction and Summit Plastic offers branded 2.5-quart and 1.5-gallon containers. Based on early performance in the south, this may be the most significant introduction of the year.

LANTANA BLOOMIFY SERIES (BALL FLORAPLANT)

These were in the spring trials at Costa Farms and Young's and at Metrolina in June. There are two colors in the series — Red and Rose. They

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are being marketed as the first certified sterile lantana on the market, and this feature will provide excellent flowering through the summer. The plants in these trials were vigorous, with a strong upright architecture. I understand they are two weeks later to flower than the Lucky series. The flower heads were full and vibrant forming an excellent canopy. Based on these early trials this series will have excellent application in landscape beds and large containers. The series will offer the industry a specimen lantana.

PHLOX PHLOXSTAR SERIES (DANZIGER)

Introduced at the California Spring Trials, this was trialed in containers and raised beds at Young's and Metrolina in full sun. The series is available in three colors: Red, Salmon and White. The colors were uniform and mounding with an excellent flower canopy. Red was one of the most intense and vibrant colors in the entire trial. We currently have two excellent series in this class in the marketplace, Intensia from Proven Winners and the Foxy Lady series from Dümmen Orange. This provides additional series for spring production.

PORTULACA PAZZAZ NANO SERIES (DANZIGER)

We are all familiar with the excellent Pazzaz series. It has been in the marketplace for more than five years and now Danziger has introduced a compact series called Nano. It is available in four colors: Fuchsia, pink, orange and yellow. It was trialed at Young's and Metrolina and it was consistently compact, exhibiting large vibrant flowers and a full center. A few growers who trialed the series early this season informed me the flowers opened extremely early and remained open later in the day. This timing, however, may vary by region and growing conditions.

Dümmen Orange also introduced a new upright Cupcake portulaca series for 2018. This series is available in five colors including Lavender, Lemon Zest, Orange Zest, Raspberry and Yellow Chrome. I did not see these in multiple trials, but I expect to assess them later in the summer and compare them to the current and new series in the market. Growers now have excellent choices with these new series.

SALVIA 'ROCKIN DEEP PURPLE' (PROVEN WINNERS)

This improved variety for 2018 was outstanding at Young's and Metrolina. The plant has an upright habit with a floriferous canopy. This gives the plant tremendous application in landscapes and as a thriller in large containers. The violet-blue flower spikes are long, and the purple calyxes give an added intensity to the



Helianthus 'Sunfinity'



Lantana 'Bloomify Red'



Phlox 'Phloxstar Red'



Portulaca 'Pazzaz Nano Fuchsia'



Salvia 'Rockin Deep Purple'



Zinnia 'Profusion Red'

plant even when the flowers are spent. The plant matures at 24 to 48 inches, and I cannot reiterate enough the beauty of the bicolor flower and the interest this creates.

ZINNIA 'PROFUSION RED' (SAKATA)

'Profusion Red' was selected as a 2017 All-America Selections winner for superior garden performance in the ornamental seed trial. The variety was in early spring trials at Costa and

at Young's and in Metrolina in June. This is an outstanding addition to the series, the first true red zinnia in its class with excellent flower retention as the season progresses. The color fits the series with uniformity, heat and drought tolerance, and disease resistance. The flower color intensity and saturation in the June trials was unsurpassed. Because of the dark red flower, the retail presentation will be outstanding. This variety should be in everyone's program for 2018. [gpn](http://gpn.com)