

PHENOMENAL Perennials

It's an exciting time in the perennial world, and demand at the consumer level continues to grow. These hardy standouts provided flowering throughout the summer at various trials in 2017.



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Perennial breeders have supported the university and public trials for many years and continue to add more varieties to the trials every year. The perennial breeders understand the importance of these trials for exposure, evaluation and promotion. It is an exciting time in the perennial world with the acceleration of new introductions and the increased demand at the wholesale and retail level.

This month, I will detail my observations of current and new perennial introductions and their performance in 2017 summer trials. I will describe varieties I saw in multiple trials that manifested the most important attribute — color.

We currently see the annualization of perennials and the breeding focus on all-season color. Color sells, and perennial breeders understand the importance of this as well as qualities such as hardiness, disease resistance, durability and summer performance. A term I use is summer hardiness, which encompasses all of these attributes. Trial sites are accommodating this breeding explosion with increased space devoted to perennial containers and ground plantings.

The perennials I have selected provided unsurpassed flowering throughout the summer in different regions of the country. Perennials must be more conservative on the use of carbohydrates, using the bulk of energy to build strong roots

and stems for overwintering, and yet these hardy varieties manifested excellent flowering throughout the summer and fall.

AGASTACHE 'MORELLO'

Terra Nova Nurseries

Terra Nova Nurseries has introduced many significant agastaches over the years, including the Kudos series, 'Blue Boa' and 'Violet Vision'. 'Morello' has a deep burgundy rose dense inflorescence that rises beautifully above the foliage. It is a unique flower color for agastache with a strong, dense upright architecture creating eye-catching impact. It bloomed prolifically in southern and northern trials. It matures at 24-30 inches, is a Zone 5 variety, and showed mildew tolerance throughout the summer and fall.

COREOPSIS 'UPTICK GOLD AND BRONZE'

Darwin Perennials

This vegetative series comprised of four colors was introduced last year and was a top performer at university and public trials. It was a Plant of Distinction at the University of Georgia and the Medal of Excellence Industry Choice award winner. Why did the series earn this recognition? This Zone 5 series is unsurpassed for prolific blooming. It has bold large flowers with a uniform mounded habit requiring no dead heading and matures at 15-18 inches. Vernalization is not required, the series exhibits minimal cycling, and they are



Agastache 'Morello'



Coreopsis 'Uptick Gold and Bronze'



Dianthus 'Rockin' Red'



Coreopsis 'Sunkiss'



Echinacea Kismet Series

day length neutral. Gold and Bronze has been the most striking color in the series with a large deep bronze eye framed with gold. In my opinion, perennial programs are incomplete without this uniform and floriferous series.

DIANTHUS 'ROCKIN' RED'

PanAmerican Seed

Do we need another dianthus in addition to innumerable outstanding seed and vegetative varieties currently in the marketplace? When it comes to dianthus 'Rockin' Red', the answer is emphatically yes!

This new interspecific first-year flowering seed variety was in many regional trials this spring and summer. It was in full color in Florida trials in late January through late spring. The durability and flower performance continued in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Colorado in late

August and September. It is a day length neutral, multi-season performer with strong apical dominance and fragrant, lacy vivid red flowers creating an excellent presentation. Based on the outstanding flower canopy, this will be a winner in retail displays. This dianthus is hardy to Zone 5 with production application in quarts and gallons.

COREOPSIS 'SUNKISS'

PanAmerican Seed

This first-year flowering coreopsis may be the largest, brightest yellow/burgundy blotch in the market. It is a Fleuroselect Novelty award winner. In multiple trials, the plant was upright and floriferous with outstanding heat tolerance. In comparison trials with other grandiflora cultivars, this plant demonstrated earliness, uniformity and an unsurpassed flower canopy. It is hardy to Zone 4, and grows 12-14 inches with a naturally



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compact habit. The superior branching and floriferousness make this variety indispensable.

ECHINACEA KISMET SERIES

Terra Nova Nurseries

These two colors have been in regional trials for the past few years and for good reason. This is an interspecific series with outstanding performance year after year. Its attributes are many, including high crown count, upright mounded habit, and a colorful canopy from early summer through fall. The plants mature at 18-24 inches and are hardy to Zone 4. The two new colors for 2017 are Red and Yellow. This series has impressive flower power, excellent uniformity and is dynamic in the landscape. This is a first-year flowering perennial with an extended blooming period and excellent overwintering performance.

ECHINACEA 'SOMBRERO SANGRITA'

Darwin Perennials

There may not be enough superlatives to describe this series. It is available in 10 colors, and Granada Gold and Sangrita are new for 2018. This is an exceptionally well-matched, uniform series that produces a strong upright plant with vibrant flowers. I was impressed with the performance of Sangrita in all the trials. The scarlet-red flowers with burgundy-red stems create a wonderful floriferous presentation. The series is hardy to Zone 4B, matures at 18-24 inches, and blooms from late spring through fall. Sangrita won the People's Choice Award at the University of Georgia trial garden in 2017.

ECHINACEA PRIMADONNA WHITE AND DEEP ROSE

Benary

Benary introduced White and Deep Rose this year and entered both colors in various trials. Both seed varieties bloomed continuously from June through early fall. The varieties were impressive with strong upright branching and large single flowers positioned uniformly above the

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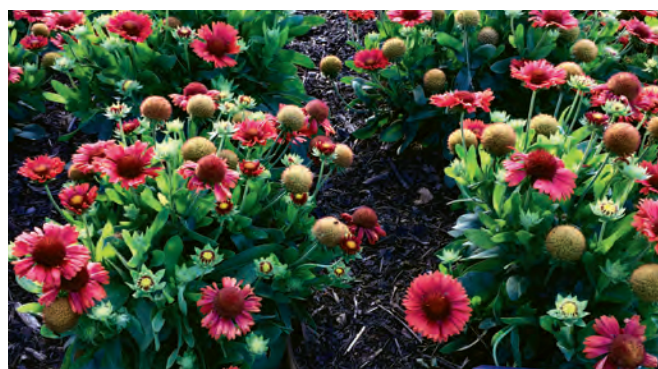


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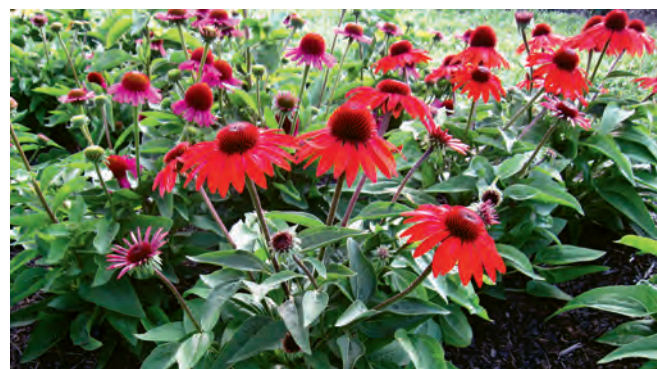




Echinacea 'Primadonna White'



Gaillardia 'Spintop Red'



Echinacea 'Sombrero Sangrita'



Leucanthemum 'White Magic'



Salvia 'Spring King'



Perovskia 'Crazy Blue'



Veronica 'Moody Blues Sky Blue'

canopy. The white and deep rose ray flowers surrounded an orange-brown center cone. These varieties are hardy to Zone 3 and mature to 30-36 inches.

LEUCANTHEMUM 'WHITE MAGIC'

Darwin Perennials

We have a plethora of seed and vegetative Leucanthemum available today, and this 2018 introduction was a distinctive variety in trials last summer. Infinite tones of white exist in nature, and this variety manifested extremely clean, large, white semi double flowers with a uniform canopy. This is a long blooming perennial, blooming in early June through September in the north. It exhibited flower reduction in the southern trials but continued to show some color even under extreme heat. It is hardy to Zone 5b and matures to 20-24 inches. We have many choices but based on the flower presentation, flower purity, habit and floriferousness this variety needs serious consideration.

GAILLARDIA SPINTOP SERIES

Dümmen Orange

We have many outstanding seed and vegetative options when it comes to gaillardia. The Spintop series provides another choice for a well-timed, uniform and vibrant series. The varieties have been in numerous trials throughout the country the past few years and in production programs nationwide. The current and new introductions were on display last summer. Yellow Touch, Red and Orange Halo were introduced in 2015, and Red Starburst and Yellow Halo in 2017. This is a compact, uniform and extremely early flowering series with flower power and vibrancy throughout the summer. The series has demonstrated excellent heat tolerance in all regions and matures at 10-12 inches. This is a Zone 4 series.

SALVIA 'SPRING KING'

Dümmen Orange

This breeder offers additional Salvia nemorosa varieties including Caramia and the Salute series. This may be the earliest blooming Salvia variety in the industry. It began flowering in southern trials in early spring and continued blooming through September in northern trials. What makes this variety so impressive is the habit and flower presentation. The upright architecture and large purple violet panicles set this plant apart from the competition. This Zone 4 variety is first year flowering and no vernalization is required. It does benefit from

deadheading for continuous flowering into fall. The plant matures at 18-24 inches and is hardy to Zone 4.

PEROVSKIA 'CRAZY BLUE'

Darwin Perennials

We have come a long way in the perovskia breeding world since the mid 1800s when the genus was first named. Russian Sage was Perennial Plant of the Year in 1995, and Benary introduced the seed variety 'Filigran' in 2003. Since that time, we have had over 14 cultivar introductions of various sizes and flower color.

'Crazy Blue' was introduced in 2015 and was entered in multiple trials again last year. It has received recognition as a top performer from Penn State and Colorado State trials in 2015 and 2016. Why enter it in consecutive years into the various trial locations? Unquestionably it is because the profuse, large blue panicles create one of the most colorful perovskia in the industry. The plant structure is upright with strong interlacing foliage. The plant matures at 18-24 inches, creating an airy cloud of color and maintaining its intense deep blue flowers from summer into October. The choices are many, and this variety is in the mix for the best of the best.

VERONICA MOODY BLUES SERIES

Star Roses and Plants

This genus has exploded with many outstanding introductions over the years from a multitude of breeders. We have eight different species comprising well over 40 cultivars. The differences are significant and the choices for production must be carefully selected. The Moody Blues series was introduced in 2014 and offers one of the best compact and uniform series in the industry. I saw this series in the Raker trial two years ago and again in several trials last year. The uniformity and flower canopy was impressive. It demonstrated superior uniformity and timing across the five colors. It began blooming in June and continued through October and matured at 12-14 inches. Dark Blue was the richest color in the trials, and there is an excellent color selection with Mauve, Pink, Sky Blue and White. This is a first-year flowering series, hardy to Zone 4A and no vernalization is required. Versatility is the quintessence of this series with application in quarts, gallons, mixed containers and in borders in landscape beds.

The commitment by the world's perennial breeders to participation in summer trials is impressive and exciting, and I look forward to seeing and writing about these new introductions in the 2018 trials. [gpn](#)