

2017 Summer Trials All Stars

PART 2

This is a continuation of last month's article on new and current annuals that were top performers in multiple trials throughout the country last summer.



Vaughn Fletcher is president of Fletcher Consulting. He has been in the horticulture industry since 1971, working in many areas including landscaping, garden center and greenhouse production, greenhouse and nursery sales and sales management. He can be reached at vfletcher9@gmail.com.

These all-star selections demonstrated outstanding attributes including vigor, heat tolerance, consistency, uniformity, durability and floriferousness and were eye catchers in each and every trial in which they were entered. As I have mentioned in earlier articles, my focus is on plants that are season extenders and provide value for the consumer.

AGERATUM 'BUMBLE BLUE'

Westhoff

This vegetative series, comprised of four colors, was introduced in spring 2017 and entered in multiple trials. The series is exceptionally heat and drought tolerant with intense flower power, especially 'Bumble Blue', which was well branched with a mounded habit and minimal deadheading required throughout the summer. It was trialed in containers and beds in sun to demonstrate its applicability. This series will be used as a filler in containers and as a border edging plant in landscape settings. It was most impressive in mass plantings. There are many vegetative and seed choices in the market, and this series rivals them all for resilience and continuous flowering.

GERBERA 'GARVINEA SWEET GLOW'

Florist Holland

As I traveled from trial to trial throughout the summer, this tissue culture garden gerbera series continued to impress with its floriferousness, vigor, heat tolerance and overall durability. This series is characterized by large, 2- to 3-inch flowers, strong uniformity, non-stretching stems, and a profusion of color above the canopy. This is a three-season series; I have seen it in bloom in landscape beds in Dallas in May, summer containers throughout the country, and northern trials in late August and September. The Sweets are comprised of 11 vibrant

Gerbera 'Garvinea Sweet Glow'

and unique colors. Sweet Glow was the most eye catching of all colors last year. Commercial application include gallons and 7-inch containers, as a thriller in large containers, in perennial borders in Zone 7, and as cut flowers.

ISOTOMA 'FIZZ 'N POP GLOWING VIOLET'

Plant Haven

This new variety of laurentia from Australia was extremely floriferous in summer trials last year. The large iridescent violet purple flowers with yellow eye are larger and more prolific than the straight species, and the heat tolerance was impressive. The plant matures at 12 to 15 inches with a compact rounded habit. Trialed in full sun, it appears to have outstanding drought tolerance. This is a long season variety with color until autumn. The unique flower structure will set it apart at retail, and is comparable to laurentia 'Blue Star' in habit, culture and flower structure. There are five colors in the series, but this was the outstanding variety in multiple trials and provided superb garden performance.

PETUNIA 'BIG DEAL FLAMENCO DANCER'

Westhoff

I have written about many outstanding petunias from last year's trials, and with hundreds of varieties in the market my focus in this article is on a few that are in production programs and a new 2017 all American introduction. These current varieties continue to impress with distinctive color, performance, flower stability and a prodigious flower canopy throughout the summer.

The Big Deal series is a durable landscape petunia with five varieties. The vivacious bicolor flowers are day length neutral, prolific, and provide excellent cover in landscape trial beds and large containers. Very few landscape series offer the stunning colors of these five varieties. Based on summer and fall

performance, Flamenco Dancer, with a frilly margin and grandiflora type raspberry-white flowers was the most impressive. This has excellent application in landscape beds and in large containers and baskets.

PETUNIA 'EVENING SCENTSATION'

American Takii

This new seed multiflora type petunia is a 2017 All-America Selections award winner, and its unique flowers and performance justify this distinction. The clear shades of indigo rival vegetative varieties in the market, and the fragrance — which is subtle during the day — is incomparable in the evening. It has a low, spreading habit with an extremely high flower count. I saw it in early trials in June and followed up again in late August. Garden performance was excellent, translating into stable polychromatic color. This variety adds value as a substitute for comparable vegetative varieties. The fragrance is icing on the cake.

PETUNIA 'SURPRISE BLUE SKY'

Dümmen Orange

This top-performing vigorous variety has been in trials and spring programs for the last few years, and for good reason. It has a unique, vibrant, royal blue trumpet-shaped flower producing a dense canopy. There are very few petunias in the industry with this unique blue color and flower stability. A day length neutral variety with excellent vigor and durability through the summer, it has been recognized in many trials the past few years as a top performer.

The Surprise series consists of 23 varieties with a diverse color palette. The series has multiple applications and is used in many Confetti combos. Blue Sky is used in Confetti Shocking Blue, which is one of the top sellers. I am impressed with this variety every year, and I believe it is indispensable in spring programs.



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Petunia 'Surprise Blue Sky'



Salvia 'Mystic Spires Improved'



Verbena 'Endurascape Blue Improved'



Verbena 'Lascar Mango Orange'



Zinnia 'Double Zahara Raspberry Ripple'

RUDBECKIA 'RISING SUN CHESTNUT GOLD'

Green Fuse Botanicals

I was impressed with this *Rudbeckia hirta* variety in every trial last summer. It is part of the Green Fuse First Look program for 2018. It is the first rudbeckia in an active breeding program that will include hardy cultivars. This is an annual, single flower, day length neutral cultivar that matures at 18 to 24 inches. The rigid flowers are 4 to 5 inches with excellent positioning above the foliage. This variety is vegetative and will be available in URC and liner form for late 2018/2019. Another point for

consideration is that this is the first *Rudbeckia hirta* for flexible scheduling, which eliminates specific lighting requirements. Based on trial performance last summer, this will be an excellent variety for summer and fall programs.

SALVIA 'MYSTIC SPIRES IMPROVED'

Ball FloraPlant

This variety, which has been improved for better summer performance, flower persistence and a deeper color, was a top performer last year in almost every trial in which it was entered. This sturdy, dark leaf variety is well branched, free flowering and bloomed from

early summer until frost. In every trial I visited, the flower canopy was extremely colorful and prodigious with minimal deadheading. The plant matures at 24 to 30 inches in the ground and is excellent for a background plant or thriller in large containers. It is heat and drought tolerant and competes extremely well with comparable varieties.

VERBENA 'ENDURASCAPE BLUE IMPROVED'

Ball FloraPlant

This series was introduced in 2015 as a season extending landscape verbena. It



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tolerates high temperatures in the summer and cool weather in the fall. It is a drought-, frost- and heat-tolerant series and is considered an herbaceous perennial in the southern regions.

There are 10 varieties in the series, well matched in habit and timing. In multiple trials last year 'Endurascape Blue Improved' did not cycle out of bloom and was as floriferous as any verbena in the trials throughout the summer and fall. This color has been upgraded with an improved center and more upright habit to match the series. At several trials later in August this variety was the most floriferous and eye catching of all verbena selections. Throughout the summer and fall I did not see any powdery mildew on this variety. Based on performance, this is an outstanding season extender.

VERBENA 'LASCAR MANGO ORANGE'

Selecta

Selecta offers four series of verbena, and the Lascar series was trialed in multiple sites last year. This series has an excellent color range with a medium habit, so it is versatile in quarts, mixed containers and is an important component of Trixi combos. The color range is impressive with 14 vibrant colors that have a full center, mounded habit, and bloom early in production. One color in particular is unlike any verbena color in the industry, and that is Mango Orange. It has large umbels of coral with an orange eye and is a stunning two tone flower. It was the most eye-catching verbena color in many trials. With the reduction of orange petunias in the market, this variety takes on added value for its color. This variety is unique and deserves consideration in spring programs.

ZINNIA 'DOUBLE ZAHARA RASPBERRY RIPPLE'

PanAmerican Seed

This variety is new for 2018 and it is a sizzling and special

polychromatic zinnia. It is listed as powder puff pink with a raspberry stripe down the center, but the coloring will vary under different environmental conditions. Cooler temperatures will accentuate the rose tone. As the flowers age and

temperatures increase the whitish pink becomes more prevalent. We have heard the term consistently inconsistent and that is true of this Zahara color. Even though the colors changed throughout the summer, the color separation was well defined

and it was durable and heat tolerant. It matures at 16 to 20 inches and has application in landscapes and mixed containers. [gpn](#)



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