

STUNNING BEGONIAS in Southern Trials

Begonia breeding has come a long way, with improved flower structure and exciting colors. These standouts proved to be top performers in basket trials this year.



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I attended the southern trials in early June. One of the most impressive and comprehensive performance displays I saw was the hanging basket begonia trial at Metrolina Greenhouses in North Carolina, comprised of current varieties in the market and new introductions for 2019.

Begonia breeding advancements have been explosive in recent years. Begonias have a long and storied history. They were named after French botanist, Michel Bégon, in 1690. Benary introduced the world's first F1 hybrid fibrous begonia, 'Primadonna' in 1909 and followed up in 1972 with the introduction of Nonstop begonias. We now have an abundance of outstanding seed and vegetative varieties from multiple breeders. The major classes include semperflorens, tuberosa, boliviensis, hiemalis, masoniana, rhizomatous, rex and hybrids.

There were 68 different varieties in the basket trial. They were planted week 10 in 11.5 Dixie baskets, three plants per basket, and grown in 40 percent shade. I will describe some of the top performing baskets based on vigor, habit, foliage quality, floriferousness and color stability. The baskets I have selected are a mix of interspecific, hybrids, boliviensis and hiemalis varieties.



1. 'BOSSA NOVA YELLOW'

Floranova

This boliviensis seed series was introduced in 2014, and we now have nine colors and a formula mix. This series is characterized by excellent branching, short internodes, bell-shaped flowers and a cascading habit as the plant matures. It has multiple applications in quarts, baskets and mixed containers. It is extremely heat tolerant and is utilized in full sun or partial shade. Yellow was especially vibrant, demonstrating vigor, floriferousness and a tight mounded canopy.

2. 'FRIVOLA PINK'

Beekenkamp

The Beekenkamp vegetative begonia program is called Dreams and is comprised of four different categories including; Garden, Waterfall, Perfume and Indoor.

'Frivola Pink' is part of the Dreams Garden collection that includes 'Carmen', 'Chloe', 'Evi Bright Pink', 'Vermillion Red', 'Glory Pink' and 'White'. The attributes of these varieties include double flowers, highly saturated colors, compact habit, and exceptional sun and heat tolerance. 'Frivola Pink', with



a dark ruffled center and lighter pink outer petals, was eye popping. The entire collection has distinctive and bright flowers that set it apart, and garden performance has been outstanding.

3. 'I'CONIA PORTOFINO SUNRISE'

Dümmen Orange

The Dümmen Orange begonia portfolio encompasses five categories, including Miss, Unbelievable, Unstoppable, Portofino and Spring Fling. The Portofino series, which is new for 2019, includes six colors: Hot Coral, Champagne, Hot Orange, Salmon, Sunrise and Yellow. Sunrise was a standout in the trial with



large, vibrant, prodigious double flowers. The series is characterized by double flowers, rich color saturation, excellent branching, dark foliage, heat tolerance and uniformity, and it attracted a great deal of attention and interest at the California Spring Trials.

4. 'UNSTOPPABLE FIRE UPRIGHT'

Dümmen Orange

This boliviensis variety is part of the Unstoppable series which includes Upright Salmon and Upright White. This has been one of top sellers and performers the last few seasons. The foliage and flower presentation are significant with an upright mounded



habit, dark green foliage transitioning to a deep bronze, light green veins, and abundant striking large single flowers. This series has multiple applications in quarts, mixed containers and baskets.

5. 'ENCANTO ORANGE IMPROVED'

Beekenkamp

This variety is part of the Waterfall Dreams series consisting of Orange Improved, Pink and Red. This is a more vigorous boliviensis series for part sun to shade. The attributes include early flowering, tight cascading habit, glossy green foliage and large single bell-shaped flowers. I have seen this series in full sun in Michigan and



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shade in the south, and it continued to bloom prodigiously all summer. Best application is mixed containers and baskets.

6. 'FUNKY PINK'

Benary

This stand-alone interspecific cross was introduced two years ago, and it combines large bright flowers with excellent heat tolerance. It has single and double flowers transitioning from pink to deep rose. It has a tight cascading habit with flowers layered nicely above the foliage creating a colorful canopy. This is best utilized in morning sun and afternoon shade. 'Funky Pink' is a seed variety, and combined with 'Santa Cruz', 'Santa Barbara' and 'San Francisco' gives the grower and retailer a diverse range of growth habits and flower colors. A new variety, 'Funky White', has been introduced for 2019.

7. SOLENIA SERIES

Beekenkamp

The Solenia series has been an integral part of production programs for many years for good reason. The series is uniform with tight branching, negligible deadheading, exceptional heat tolerance and minimal breakage, making it an outstanding series for basket production. The 3-inch double flowers available in nine colors are adaptable in full sun to semi-shade in northern regions and shade in the south. This is a multipurpose begonia program for quarts, mixed containers and baskets. I have included images of Improved Yellow and Scarlet, which were distinctive and exceptional for color intensity. The Improved Yellow is one of the most vivid and luminous colors I have seen in the trials.

8. 'VERMILLION RED'

Beekenkamp

This variety is part of the Garden Dreams collection and is a sun-tolerant variety. It was introduced in 2013 and still sets the standard for the richest, deepest red in the market. I have seen this variety in production for many years as well as in multiple trials sites throughout the country, and it remains one

of the most eye-catching red vegetative begonias. The double rose-type double blooms are profuse on a vigorous upright habit, with short internodes and dark foliage. It is extremely heat tolerant and its garden performance is exceptional.

9. RISE UP FLAMINGO'S DREAM AND BULLS EYE

Westhoff

Westhoff began begonia breeding in 2010 and introduced Rise Up and Shine Bright series in 2017. The Rise Up series is comprised of 10 colors of singles

and doubles with excellent stacked branching and medium-sized, upward-facing flowers above the foliage. The varieties I selected possessed vivid, dramatic and vibrant flowers. Flamingo's Dream has a very unusual double flower structure

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with a ruffled yellow blush center and unique coral-pink flowers. Bulls Eye was very similar in habit and floriferousness, with stunning red-orange flowers with a yellow blush center. Both varieties were the most distinctive in the entire trial. This series has a wide range of colors and

flower forms and many must be considered in production programs for 2019. Application includes quarts and baskets.

10. 'SHINE BRIGHT WHITE'

Westhoff

This boliviensis series is comprised of White, Red and Amore Red. White and Red have a dense canopy and excellent branching. Versatile in sun or shade, they thrive in hot humid weather. They are extremely floriferous with large single flowers positioned well above the canopy. Both colors will have application in baskets and mixed combinations. Amore Red has a more upright habit and will be better suited to container production.

11. 'BEEL'

Beekenkamp

This new variety for 2019 will not be in the 2018-19 catalog, but will be on the Beekenkamp availability list for trialing. It will be in the Garden Dreams category and Beekenkamp Collection with the other elatior begonias including 'Frivola Pink', 'Evi Bright Pink' and the Glory series. The single two-tone rose-pink flowers were eye catching, and the flower canopy was profuse. The leaves were dark green with short internodes creating a well branched and mounded habit. These qualities create eye popping sales appeal and will distinguish it from the begonia assortment in the market.

12. 'NONSTOP ROSE IMPROVED'

Benary

This article would not be complete without mentioning the classic Nonstop begonias. This series has been in the market for 30 years and maintains significant market share. The class is comprised of the Nonstop, Nonstop Mocha and Joy series. Rose Improved was new for 2018 with a deeper rose color and a better habit. This variety manifested the attributes we expect from this series including uniformity, mounded habit, large double highly saturated flowers, and excellent branching. They have multiple applications in quarts, mixed containers and baskets. We have seen many improvements in this series and more colors are in the pipeline.

Begonia breeding has overcome many of the earlier drawbacks including premature flower drop, small and downward facing flowers, production challenges and shipping issues. The new seed and vegetative introductions are distinctive and audacious with improved habits, durability, unique flowers forms and exciting colors. [gpn](#)

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