

# DARWIN PERENNIALS' TRIAL PERFORMANCE: 2019 Introductions

*With an increased focus of perennial breeding, these new varieties stood out in trials north and south this summer.*



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**P**erennial breeders have recognized the value of the summer trials for testing plant performance, exposure to the industry, and using the information for marketing and promotion of current and new introductions.

Darwin Perennials has increased its commitment to and participation in summer trials throughout the country. They have made significant strides in research and development since the Ball acquisition in 2007. At that time, Darwin possessed a minimal number of proprietary varieties but continued to add third party genetics to expand their portfolio. The acquisitions of Kieft and PanAmerican Seed augmented the development of perennial seed breeding. In 2009, Darwin Perennials allocated additional breeding resources to developing, trialing and selecting new vegetative introductions. To expand the perennial list, they added the Aris perennial farm and distribution program in 2014 and Star Roses and Plants in 2015.

In this article, I describe the performance of new vegetative introductions for 2019 in the summer trials throughout the country including Florida, Georgia, Ohio, North Carolina, Illinois, Colorado and Michigan. It is important to remember that every perennial may have different production applications and cultural requirements predicated on regions of the country. Darwin offers specific schedules and cultural practices for each variety in the portfolio.

## 1. COREOPSIS 'ELECTRIC SUNSHINE'

This variety is considered a tender perennial in the south and an annual in the north. It is listed as Zone 8a with a mature height and width of 18 to 24 inches. This was the most floriferous coreopsis in the trials this summer. The prodigious masses of large bright yellow flowers with the red center were eye catchers in every trial. It flowers early in the season and continues until fall. Application includes quarts, gallons and combinations at retail and, most importantly, landscape sites where it can manifest its flowering potential.

## 2. COREOPSIS 'GOLDEN STARDUST'

This introduction is hardy to Zone 5a, begins flowering in March and continues through fall. I was impressed with the upright growth habit, durability and the intense, richly saturated yellow

flowers with deep red centers. It exhibited outstanding heat tolerance and uniformity, maturing at 12 to 18 inches.

## 3. COREOPSIS 'SUPER STAR'

I highlighted this new introduction in an earlier article this summer. At that time, I focused on the incomparable flower size, upright habit, and exceptional vibrant bicolor flowers. This variety





was in multiple trials this summer, and the color retention and habit were consistent and similar to the Uptick series. The variety matures at 14 to 16 inches, has a mounded habit and is hardy to Zone 5a. The plants were heat tolerant with minimal deadheading. This is a standalone variety that will deliver outstanding eye catching flower size and color in retail programs. I saw no symptoms of mildew throughout the summer and early fall.

#### 4. ECHINACEA 'SOMBRERO TRES AMIGOS'

This is the single introduction for 2019, and it was outstanding in the trials. It possesses the durability, uniformity and matched timing of the entire Sombrero series. What distinguish this variety are the transitional flowers. The single flowers are a combination of Peach Coral, Rose and Burgundy. This was strikingly evident in the Metrolina trial in mid August. The trial was comprised of more than 80 echinacea varieties, and the colors, vibrancy, branching and timing of Tres Amigos matched additional Sombrero varieties in the trial. This series is hardy to Zone 4b, flowers June through August and, with 11 varieties available, offers an excellent retail assortment.

#### 5. HELENIUM SALUD SERIES

We are familiar with the native common autumnale Sneezeweed. The genus comprises over 40 species in North and South America. Pan American Seed introduced the seed variety 'Dakota Gold' in 2005, which set the standard for uniformity and floriferousness. We currently have two outstanding vegetative varieties and series in the marketplace including 'Moerheim Beauty', a RHS Garden of Merit winner, and the Mariachi series from AB Cultivars. Both series were in the summer trials in Michigan and Colorado. Darwin has seen the value of this genus for summer and fall sales and has introduced the Helenium Salud, a vegetative series for 2019. It is

available in three colors for next year including Ember, Golden and Yellow. The flower colors were intense and vibrant, and the plants were compact and well branched. This heat- and drought-tolerant series was equally floriferous in containers and ground beds. The series is hardy to Zone 4a, matures at 14 to 16 inches and blooms from early summer through fall.

#### 6. PENSTEMON 'QUARTZ RED'

The Quartz series came out of the Star Roses and Plants breeding program and became part of the Darwin perennial assortment. This upright, basal branching series is comprised of Amethyst, Rose and the new Red for summer 2019. This series was grown in the southern trials last year with an excellent performance rating all summer. 'Quartz Red' was in the Metrolina trial, which I saw on two visits in June and later in mid August. This new robust variety manifested the attributes of the series including large bell-shaped flowers, heat and drought tolerance, and most importantly the ability to rebloom all season. The series matures at



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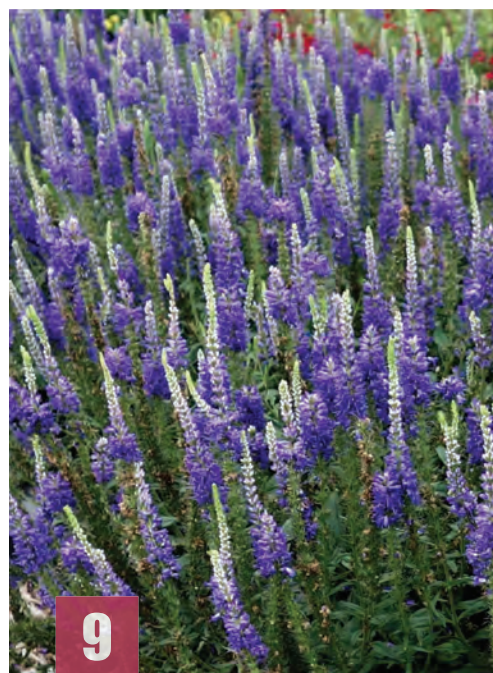
20-24 inches and is hardy to Zone 6a. I was impressed by the minimal deadheading required and the abundance of flowers throughout the summer. Application of this series for landscapers and consumers includes perennial beds, borders and rock gardens.

### 7. PHLOX PANICULATA KA-POW SERIES

This compact paniculata series is new for 2019. It consists of four vibrant colors including Lavender, Pink, Purple and Bicolor. It was trialed in multiple trial sites this summer from south and north. I saw no evidence of mildew in mid to late summer. The plants are characterized by compactness, maturing at 16 to 18 inches. They are well branched and uniform. Based on durability, timing, vivid colors and upright architecture, this series will have excellent retail appeal. It is hardy to Zone 4b. There are many excellent *Phlox paniculata* series in the market, and this is another outstanding selection for your consideration.

### 8. SALVIA NEMOROSA 'BLUE BY YOU'

Darwin offers two nemorosa series: Marvels and Lyricals. This new hybrid introduction is a cross between nemorosa and pratensis. It is standalone variety that offers earliness as manifested in the south in March of this year and continued to flower heavily in multiple trials later in the spring through late summer. The sterile flowers produced long, light blue inflorescences with heavy flowering maturing at 18



to 24 inches. It is hardy to Zone 4b. This variety will have outstanding application in retail programs with its earliness, prodigious flower spikes and tight habit.

### 9. VERONICA 'FOREVER BLUE'

The extensive breeding and introduction of new veronicas from multiple breeders is significant and impressive. We have innumerable new series and colors from breeders and suppliers. I wrote about the Moody Blues series last year because of its compactness and uniformity, and now Darwin has introduced a standalone veronica with the upright habit and flowering potential of the Moody Blues, but with more vigor, larger flower spikes, and maturing at 16 to 18 inches. 'Forever Blue' was in multiple trials, and its attributes included a deep blue inflorescence, extended blooming cycle, excellent branching, no seed set and mildew resistance. I saw this variety in the Raker trial the last week of August with no mildew symptoms and a prodigious flower canopy.

### 10. VIOLA CORNUTA HALO SERIES

This series is comprised of five colors including the new Golden Halo for 2019. We utilize many different seed violas for spring sales. This new vegetative addition to the Halo series was impressive as it continued to bloom prolifically with solid golden Yellow flowers in multiple trials from early spring until mid summer. The series includes four current two-toned varieties, Lemon Frost, Lilac, Sky Blue and Violet. The extended flower cycle, large flowers, vigor and floriferousness distinguish this vegetative series from other series. Hardiness is listed as 5a with a mature size of 8 to 10 inches. This is the most heat-tolerant vegetative viola series I have seen in many years of trial evaluations. *gpn*



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