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Green Fuse Botanicals — ALL STAR SUMMER PERFORMERS

Entered into numerous trials across the country in 2018, these annuals and perennials stood out with impressive color and performance.



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.

Green Fuse Botanicals has made significant wide ranging annual and perennial vegetative introductions since its formation in 2009. The partnership with independent breeders has given them the opportunity to promote and market a diverse annual and perennial product line and a wide range of day-neutral perennials in the First Light perennial program. The focus of this program is first-year flowering perennials, which require no vernalization and are easily programmable for spring sales.

Green Fuse understands the importance of public and private trials for evaluating plant performance and enters many annuals and perennials each year. The company is committed to participating in regional trials and utilizing trial results for marketing and promotion to the industry. I will describe many current and new annuals and perennials I saw and evaluated in trials last summer.

I will begin with the First Light perennials in last year's trials, and then I will describe annuals in the Optimum program.

1. BUDDLEJA DAVIDI LEAH SERIES

The evolution of buddleja cultivars has been remarkable since davidi seeds were delivered to Kew Gardens from China in 1774. We now have more than 100 species of davidi available. In earlier articles I wrote about many outstanding buddleja introductions from multiple breeders over the past few years. We now have a multitude of series and standalone varieties with assorted colors and sizes.

The new Leah series, consisting of Violet, White and Blue, was introduced for 2018 and was in southern and northern trials last year. This is a compact, well-branched, dense series with large racemes that provided an excellent flower canopy last summer. Based on what I saw in the trials, this series will have excellent application in gallon programs. More color additions will be introduced in the next few years. The series matures at 18 to 24 inches and is hardy to Zone 5.



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2. DELOSPERMA DELMARA SERIES

The development and introduction of new delosperma varieties has been prolific the last few years. It is an important genus in the industry for its attributes including heat and drought tolerance, hardiness, flower profusion and multiple production applications. I described the Delmara series in my Spring Premier article last July.

Introduced in 2018, it is part of the First Light perennial program and was trialed throughout the country. Comprised of four varieties, they are characterized by large vibrant eye-catching flowers with a mounded, dense habit maturing at 4 to 6 inches. This series was ever blooming from early spring in the south through autumn in the north. Application this spring is in large packs, quarts and as an integral component of mixed succulent bowls.



3. DIANTHUS 'CONSTANT PROMISE STRAWBERRY'

There are three series of hardy dianthus in the First Light perennial program: Cadence, comprised of seven varieties, Constant Beauty, comprised of six varieties, and the new Constant Promise series. This chinensis x barbados interspecific series consists of Strawberry, Raspberry and White.

The varieties were in multiple trials, and I was particularly impressed by Strawberry with its unique vibrant color, hybrid vigor, large double flowers, reblooming power and impressive heat tolerance. It manifested continuous flowering throughout the summer in southern and northern trials. This variety is hardy to Zone 4 and had a tight, pot-like appearance with an excellent flower presentation above the foliage. We have hundreds of varieties to choose from, and this series demands consideration in spring programs for its performance in a wide range of summer conditions.



4. GAILLARDIA 'LUNAR HONEYMOON'

I have written about many outstanding gaillardia in previous articles, and I would be remiss if I did not describe 'Lunar Honeymoon'. With its bright yellow ray flowers with a deep yellow cone on a strong, mounding and tight habit, this was a top performer throughout the summer. In regional trials from south to north, and from May to early September, it demonstrated excellent heat tolerance, and most importantly for gaillardia, no evidence of splitting and an abundance of terminal flowers.

This variety is hardy to Zone 5 and matured at 12 to 15 inches. It is also used in the Green Fuse perennial Compatible mixes along with 'Lunar Red Moon'. The series will expand with the introduction of 'Harvest Moon' for 2019-20. There are so many varieties to choose from, and this variety was one of the best season performers last year.



5. LEUCANTHEMUM 'DARLING DAISY'

The leucanthemum assortment includes singles, doubles and recurved flower varieties. 'Darling Daisy' was in regional trials last summer and was in continuous bloom from late spring until frost. This variety is not new, but it is a top performer and an outstanding early bloomer with pure



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white ray flowers and a striking yellow center. It is low growing, maturing at 6 to 8 inches with a strong upright compact habit.

Excellent in quart and gallon production, it can be used as an annual in northern regions because of continuous flowering potential. The photo shown here was taken in the container trial at Mast Greenhouses in late August. This variety has overwintered in the St. Louis area and is listed as hardy to Zone 6.

6. SCABIOSA 'GIGA SILVER'

We have seen significant advances in scabiosa breeding since the introduction of 'Butterfly Blue' in the 1960s. As a broker sales representative, I sold 'Butterfly Blue' for many years beginning in the mid 70s, and at that time it was the only variety commercially available. There are more than 80 species of scabiosa, but very few have made it to the market.

The Giga series consists of four varieties: Blue, Purple, Pink and the new Silver, which was part of the First Look Program for 2018. I have seen this series in trials and production the past few years, and I have been impressed with its large flower heads, earliness and programmability for wholesale and retail sales. I saw Silver multiple times throughout the spring and summer, and what was striking was the tight branching, enduring flowering period and the floriferousness. The series matures at 16 to 20 inches and is hardy to Zone 4. This variety is part of the First Light program and is a first-year flowering perennial.

I will now describe some of Green Fuse's annuals in last summer's trials that were top performers. This list includes current and new varieties that were available this spring.

7. CALIBRACHOA CRUZE CONTROL SERIES

When I wrote about Raker's calibrachoa trial two years ago there were more than 260 varieties competing for best of show, and the list continues to expand every year with new and unique colors, day-length neutrality and increased flower sizes. The Cruze Control series, comprised of 16 colors, manifests many of the qualities we look for in calibrachoa today including earliness, heat tolerance, short internodes, uniformity, large flowers and varied color palette. This series includes three new colors: White, Lemon and Giant Rose. The series was in regional trials with excellent flower stability and retention from spring through autumn. The Compatible recipe mixes are comprised of many Cruze Control varieties and 'Cruze Control Piñata' was one of my top ten selections from the Metrolina trial in late August last year.

8. RUDBECKIA 'RISING SUN CHESTNUT GOLD'

This annual variety was introduced in 2017, and has been in trials for two years as well as in annual spring production programs throughout the country. When I am asked about some of the most dramatic and stunning plants in the trials in the past 10 years, this rudbeckia is on that list.

The large bicolor ray flowers in multiple shades are vibrant and, most importantly, are prodigious and long lasting. Last year, it was blooming profusely in Florida in early spring, and in Colorado and Michigan in September. It has been first in its class in many trials since its introduction. This variety will bloom under short days without supplemental lighting and is applicable for year around production. The habit is durable and compact, and it is hardy to Zone 7.



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9. SALVIA FARINACEA CATHEDRAL SERIES

We have many outstanding farinaceas in the market, and this series is comparable in all respects. It has been one of my favorite series for many years because of the vibrant colors, multiple flower stems and strong upright habit. The series is comprised of seven colors including the new blue bicolor. In trials or in spring production it flowers early, is compact, multi-branched, uniform, and adaptable in hot humid conditions. The inflorescence is 6 to 8 inches long with multiple terminal flower spikes. The plants mature at 12 to 16 inches. The series was impressive throughout the summer and early fall. It is utilized in quarts, gallons and mixed containers for spring sales and as a summer component in landscape beds and containers for its color and performance.

10. SALVIA SPLENDENS 'GRANDSTAND RED-PINK LIPSTICK'

We have witnessed significant improvements in the splendens class from multiple breeders, and the improvements include a larger color palette,

compactness, extended blooming period, garden performance, durability, day-length neutrality and floriferousness. This award-winning series of six colors was introduced in 2015 and has been recognized for outstanding performance in multiple trials sites and ultimately in wholesale and retail programs.

In spring quart programs, mixed containers and landscape beds, this series provides outstanding uniformity, a strong vertical habit and, most importantly, a vivid and intense inflorescence. This series matures at 12 to 18 inches.

One of the most striking varieties introduced in 2016 was Red-Pink Lipstick with a distinctive red calyx and pink/white corolla. The large, stunning bicolor flowers are eye catchers and have earned this variety many trial awards since its introduction, including Growers Choice award at the University of Georgia trial last summer. In my opinion, it was the most distinctive splendens variety in multiple trials last year. We have a myriad of series to choose from, and the Grandstands, specifically this variety, was impressive in last summer's trials and retail programs. *gpn*



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