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PERPETUAL *Perennial Performers* — 2018 TRIALS —

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



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The quantity of perennials in summer trials has increased substantially. This is the culmination of years of breeding and selection, with significant advances in breeding techniques and a focus on interspecific hybrids. Many of the varieties I selected have been in trials for two to three years and are currently in production and a few are new for 2019. These varieties consistently exhibited the following attributes: durability, robust architecture, heat tolerance, stable flower color, disease resistance, long flowering window and floriferousness.

We envision perennial color as short lived and transitory, but these perennials demonstrated a protracted flower cycle. Future breeding goals include improved habit, day length neutrality, minimal vernalization requirements, first year flowering, new and improved flower color, textures and leaf patterns, and maybe, most importantly, extended blooming periods.

As I have mentioned in previous articles, the entry and trialing of seed and vegetative perennials in nationwide trials is proliferating every year, and the varieties I am highlighting in this article were perpetual performers in last year's summer trials from early summer through September.

1. AGASTACHE 'MORELLO'

Terra Nova Nurseries

I described the beauty of this herbaceous perennial in an earlier article. It was entered in multiple trials again last year and did not disappoint. This agastache has been one of the most floriferous and eye-catching varieties in the trials the past two years. The prodigious and colorful burgundy rose inflorescences rise impressively above the foliage canopy.

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There are only a few agastache varieties that can match its flower power. 'Morello' began blooming in early summer and continued until early fall. It is extremely heat and humidity tolerant and an excellent pollinator, growing 28 to 36 inches and hardy to Zone 5. 'Morello' has been an award winner in multiple trials the past two seasons.

2. ALLIUM 'MILLENIUM'

Mark McDonough

This was named Perennial Plant of the Year for 2018 by the Perennial Plant Association, and the recognition is well deserved. Many articles have been written about the attributes of this herbaceous perennial. There are more than 700 species



of allium, and this hybrid ornamental onion with its glossy, upright foliage clump and remarkable spherical umbels of rose-pink florets is outrageously unique, distinctive and stunning. This variety has an unusually long flower period from July through August. It requires full sun, well-drained soil, and is hardy to Zone 5. The plant matures at 18 to 20 inches and was in multiple trials last year. It was uniform, consistent and flowered prolifically with a multitude of umbels. This is a perennial that creates interest and attention due to its unique inflorescence. Based on what I have seen the past two seasons, this allium is a must for perennial production.

3. COREOPSIS 'DOUBLE THE SUN'

Kieft Seed

This 2019 introduction is part of the PanAmerican/Kieft first-year flowering perennial program. 'Double the Sun' is an excellent sub for the discontinued 'Sun Up'. It flowers two to three weeks earlier than 'Early Sunrise', and the flower size is comparable to 'Sun Kiss' and larger than 'Sun Fire'. This variety was uniform and consistent all summer with a tidy, mounded habit, clear yellow double flowers, and a prolific canopy. It has a 13-hour critical day length requirement and will flower over a 10-week period. It is a Fleuroselect winner, matures at 12 to 14 inches, and is hardy to Zone 4a.

4. ECHINACEA 'MOODZ COURAGE'

HilverdaKooij

HilverdaKooij has been active in breeding and propagation for over 40 years and has production sites in the Netherlands, China, Columbia, Italy and Kenya. They have made significant investments in breeding technology, and the results have been impressive. They have introduced many series introductions including dahlias, alstroemeria, dianthus and helleborus. They introduced this echinacea series in trials in 2016 and 2017 and followed up with a larger selection of varieties in 2018 trials. There were nine colors with five experimentals displayed at the 2018 California Spring Trials. The entries the past two years have demonstrated outstanding summer performance with high bud and flower count. Whether utilized in containers or in beds, the flower power was impressive with large central cones, reflexed florets



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and outstanding upright growth habit. The varieties were compact and durable, and manifested a colorful flower canopy from July through September. Courage was one of my favorites with its large central disc, magenta recurved flowers and upright architecture. This series is propagated from tissue culture and is available from various liner suppliers for 2019-20. The series matures at 20 to 24 inches and is hardy to Zone 5. Based on habit and performance, this will be an excellent series for wholesale and retail production.

5. HELIOPSIS 'BLEEDING HEARTS'

Jelitto Perennial Seeds

This form of the native sunflower was one of my favorite eye-catching perennials in the trials last summer. The first in the Jelitto perennial breeding program was 'Burning Hearts' in 2016, followed by 'Bleeding Hearts' in 2018. What sets this variety apart from other heliopsis is the lack of yellow coloration in the flower. The deep purplish stems and leaves contrasted beautifully with transitional flowers of



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scarlet-red changing to orange-red and maturing to bronze at the end of the season. It began blooming in June in the south and July in the northern trials and matured at 24 to 30 inches with a clump forming habit. This is a first-year flowering perennial, hardy to Zone 3. It is excellent as a cut flower and a pollinator.

6. ECHINACEA 'SOMBRERO GRANADA GOLD'

Darwin Perennials

Since the launch of the Sombrero series in 2011 with Hot Coral, Sandy Yellow and Salsa Red (which is still the No. 1 seller in the series), the introductions and variety improvements have continued every year. Granada Gold was introduced in 2018 and was in wholesale and retail production this spring. This variety was in multiple trials last summer and demonstrated the attributes we have come to expect in the Sombrero series. These attributes include compactness, durability, heat tolerance, vibrancy



and nonfading colors. Granada Gold began blooming late spring in the south and continued blooming in the north through September. The flowers were a rich golden yellow and, most importantly, floriferous with an outstanding canopy. This is one of the premier echinacea series in the industry, and two new varieties have been added for 2020: Summer Solstice and Tango Tangerine. The series now comprises 12 varieties all hardy to Zone 4b.

7. GAILLARDIA 'SPINTOP RED'

Dümmen Orange

The breeding advances in gaillardia have been impressive since the limited selection of varieties available over 30 years ago. We now have outstanding seed and vegetative series with significant improvements in habit, uniformity, flower stability, season-long color and day length neutrality. The SpinTop series was introduced in 2017 and is comprised of four varieties including Red Starburst, Orange Halo, Yellow Touch and

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Red. What set Red apart from all varieties last summer in containers and beds was the compact habit, durability, and most significant, uniformly saturated deep red ray flowers that maintained their intensity through the summer season. This series is day length neutral and is hardy to Zone 4.

8. LEUCANTHEMUM 'SWEET DAISY BIRDY'

Dümmen Orange

The Sweet Daisy series is comprised of four varieties including Sofia, Jane, Christine and Birdy for 2019. The flower forms are different and Birdy was impressive with medium, frilly white petals and a conspicuous yellow center. It began flowering in June in the southern trials and this continued in Michigan and Colorado into late August and early September. The series is first-year flowering and has a uniform growth habit with dark foliage and eye-catching flowers. I was impressed by Birdy's heat tolerance and prolific flower canopy throughout the summer. It was one of the top-performing perennials in the Georgia trial. This compact variety matures at 12 inches and is hardy to Zone 5.



10. LEUCANTHEMUM 'COCONUT'

Terra Nova Nurseries

Over the years, Terra Nova has introduced numerous outstanding and unique leucanthemum, and 'Coconut' demonstrated in

multiple trials last summer why it should be in every perennial program. The vivacious fringed double daisy flowers have yellow petals which gradually fade to white from the center. The compact habit and prodigious

stems and flowers produced a canopy that was stunning. This variety will have multiple flowers the first year based on the field and container trials. 'Coconut' is hardy to Zone 5 and matures to 18-24 inches. [gpn](#)

9. RUDBECKIA 'AMERICAN GOLD RUSH'

Intrinsic Perennial Gardens

This rudbeckia was introduced in 2018 and is offered by many perennial suppliers for 2019. It was in southern and northern trials and undoubtedly was the most floriferous and impactful Black Eyed Susan I observed all summer. This new hybrid produces a compact, dome-like habit with a flower canopy unrivaled in rudbeckia varieties last summer. Most importantly, this hybrid is resistant to Septoria Leaf Spot and manifested disease free foliage. The abundance of recurved yellow flowers with black cones was striking with minimal spent flowers visible. This variety has outstanding application in mass plantings or large containers. The plant matures to 24 to 30 inches and is hardy to Zone 3.



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