

# VAUGHN'S MIDWEST Sampler Container Trial

*This month, I evaluate container performance of new annual introductions right here in my Missouri garden.*

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Since 2017 I have focused on the performance of new annual and perennial introductions in regional trials. This month, I will highlight specific plants from the new variety sampler programs that international flower breeders provide to broker sales representatives and garden writers throughout the United States.

This is a valuable marketing tool for the breeder, as well as a powerful selling tool for sales

representatives who grow the new plant varieties, evaluate plant performance, and then dispense the information gleaned from the growing process to their customers during the booking season.

As a former sales representative, and now garden writer, I have participated in this sampler program for many years. I have been a container gardener for well over 25 years and currently plant 40 18-inch containers in full sun and grow them through summer and fall in Missouri. This gives me the opportunity to test each variety for environmental extremes including heat, humidity and moisture. I incorporate a slow-release fertilizer at planting and supplement monthly with 15-30-15. I started container planting on April 25 and took these photos the week of June 22.

Even though we experienced temperatures in the upper 80s and low 90s in late May and June, it would be

premature to give an objective final assessment of summer performance after about 60 days in containers. The varieties I have selected were blooming profusely in late June even though they were at different stages of development. My photos will give you a glimpse of mature flowers, and I will share my perspective on growth habit, flower color, flower stability and consumer application for each of the new varieties I am highlighting for 2021.

## 1. CATHARANTHUS 'SOIRÉE KAWAII CORAL REEF'

*Suntory Flowers*

Three new colors have been added to the Soirée Kawaii series for 2021: Blueberry Kiss, Red Shades and Coral Reef. This series develops slowly, but with rising temperatures it forms a heavily branched and mounded habit with small flowers and a prolific flower count. I focused on Coral Reef because of its high impact color and compact habit. The Soirées make an

outstanding filler component that stands the test of time in containers and will continue to manifest color through the fall season.

## 2. CALIBRACHOA 'TIKTOK ROSE' Dümnen Orange

I focused on this vibrant calibrachoa in my earlier article on the Southern plant trials. TikTok is a new series for 2021 comprising Rose, Grape and White. Rose was distinctive in the Southern trials and manifested similar attributes in my container trial including earliness, large flowers, color retention, vigor, and eye-catching bright rose flowers with yellow star-shaped centers. Consumer application includes basket and mixed containers.

## 3. CALIBRACHOA 'COLIBRI MELLOW YELLOW'

*Danziger*

This compact, daylength-neutral series was introduced in 2017, and new varieties



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have been added every year. The series now consists of 10 colors, including Malibu Pink and Mellow Yellow for 2021. The series is characterized by tight internodes, earliness, compactness and excellent flower coverage. Mellow Yellow in my trial demonstrated large flowers, earliness and attention-grabbing color.

**4. DAHLIA 'MEGABOOM BERRY BLAST'**

*Dümmen Orange*

This new standalone bicolor introduction for 2021, with large XXL-sized flowers, has a more compact habit than the XXL series. In the Costa Farms trials in Florida in March, Berry Blast produced dazzling bicolor flowers with excellent presentation above the foliage canopy. The plant in my trials is consistent with performance in the Southern trial. It produced remarkable white and rose flowers with yellow center on short peduncles positioned above the canopy through June in my trial.

Additional novelty colors will be introduced for 2022. This will be a stunning dahlia in 6-inch and larger containers for spring sales.



**5. GERANIUM 'ROSALIE ANTIQUE SALMON'**

*Syngenta Flowers*

It was only a matter of time before a variety was introduced with similar flower form as the Pandora (or Rosebud) geranium, which I sold for many years in the 1980s and 1990s. Geranium 'Rosalie Antique Salmon' is one of the most unique novelty geraniums to enter the market in many years. It is a standalone variety with large umbels and rosebud-shaped petals with a light salmon/pink ruffled center and white margin. The habit is upright with excellent branching, outstanding bud development, and prolific flowering. This will be a dramatic and striking plant at retail.

**6. GERANIUM 'MOJO ORANGE'**

*Syngenta Flowers*

Geranium 'Mojo Dark Red' was introduced for the 2020 spring season and the series has expanded for 2021 with four new colors: Orange, Salmon, White and Cranberry Splash. I received the Orange in my sample shipment this year, and it started blooming in early June with bright orange petals. It has continued to flower

continuously with excellent color saturation and brightness. The inflorescence is medium-sized with multiple umbels, and the foliage has light zonation. I noted the outstanding performance of Cranberry Splash in the Costa trial in my June article, and Orange is a standout as well. This will be a versatile series for quarts, combinations and hanging baskets.

**7. LANTANA 'LUSCIOUS ROYALE RED ZONE'**

*Proven Winners*

Proven Winners has added to the Luscious series with their first true red, 'Luscious Royale Red Zone'. The tubular flowers transition from orange, yellow and red to a solid red, bright flower cluster. The plants in my containers were vigorous and possessed tight internodes with multiple flower clusters. This variety is certified sterile by the University of Florida. The Luscious series comprises 11 diverse colors and has won many regional trial awards since its introduction. Royale Red Zone is an outstanding addition to the series and will garner much attention in summer trials. This variety matures at 12 to 16 inches

and has multiple applications in quarts, mixed containers and hanging baskets.

**8. PETUNIA 'RAY SUNFLOWER IMPROVED'**

*Danziger*

Three improved varieties have been added to the Ray series for 2021: Red, Fuchsia and Sunflower. I received Sunflower in my trial assortment, and it is as outstanding as I expected. The plant has been improved with a better habit and flower coverage, and it demonstrated those attributes in my trial. They were nicely mounded, early to bloom and highly floriferous. The pinwheel blossoms of black and light yellow were vivid with striking contrast. The flowers exhibited no sign of flecking and the color separation was well defined. The entire Ray series is characterized by a compact mounded habit, earliness and uniform timing.

**9. PETUNIA 'EASY WAVE ROSE FUSION'**

*PanAmerican Seed*

Rose Fusion was one of the most floriferous introductions in my trial through June. This timing is

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consistent with the cultural description of Rose Fusion. This daylength-neutral variety is the earliest flowering in the Easy Wave series. The large flowers with rose gradations have strong color retention with continuous flowering. There are now 18 varieties and eight Easy Wave mixes available for 2021. This new introduction has multiple applications in premium packs, quarts, combinations and baskets.

**10. PETUNIA 'BEE'S KNEES'**

*Ball FloraPlant*

This new vegetative standalone variety was impressive in the Florida trials in January and March, and it has demonstrated many of the same attributes in my trial. It has excellent vigor, medium-sized flowers, tight internodes and, most importantly, has maintained a striking and vibrant two-tone yellow flower with minimal fading. I was impressed with the consistent flower production and flower presentation. Compared to many of the seed and vegetative yellow petunias on the market, 'Bee's Knees' will offer a bright and distinctive improvement to many current varieties. This versatile petunia will be utilized in quarts, combos and basket production.

**11. PHLOX 'GISELE RED'**

*Selecta One*

The underutilized interspecific Gisele phlox series currently has five colors, and four new colors have been added for 2021: Red, Light Pink, Purple and Scarlet. The flower clusters are positioned above the foliage canopy, and the colors are vibrant and stable. I love the way it spreads in a container to provide a great filler component. The flowers are nonfading, and chromaticity of Gisele Red is unique among spring annuals. This is an outstanding series for spring production in quarts, with consumer application in mixed containers and flower beds. This is one of the most heat tolerant annual phlox series in the industry, and it has demonstrated outstanding performance throughout the summer in regional trials.

**12. SCAEVOLA 'WHIRLWIND STARLIGHT'**

*Proven Winners*

Since the introduction of the Whirlwind series, Proven Winners



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has made significant improvements to the original varieties, specifically White and Blue. Whirlwind Starlight is the new introduction for 2021, and it offers a unique bicolor flower unlike any scaevola in the industry.

This variety spreads but also grows upright with stacked fan flowers on the terminals. It has weaved its way through my containers with a plethora of flowers. This scaevola will have outstanding application in baskets and mixed containers with its upright and vigorous growth habit, and it will continue flowering through the summer.

**13. VERBENA 'VANESSA BICOLOR INDIGO'**

*Danziger*

Three new varieties have been added to the vigorous Vanessa series for 2021: Dark Pink, Red and Bicolor Indigo, which brings the total to nine. I have written about the superior performance of this series in earlier articles. The Vanessas have many attributes including vigor, floriferousness, minimal flower cycling, excellent color retention and mildew resistance. I received the new Bicolor Indigo in my sampler shipment. The canopy, with multiple flower heads in different stages of development, was impressive, and the plants flowered profusely with shades of lavender, purple and white. This series has application in quarts, mixed containers and baskets.



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**14. BEGONIA 'DOUBLE UP RED'**

*Proven Winners*

This vegetative begonia series for 2021 is available in three colors: White (with green foliage), Pink and Red (both with bronze foliage). I received all three colors, and they developed uniformly in my containers with similar flower timing. The plants are compact and upright with dense foliage. I have them planted in partial shade, and they are beginning to flower profusely. They appear to be self cleaning and produce flower clusters on top of the canopy which creates a colorful presentation. This will be an outstanding series for 4-inch production, and consumers will utilize the series as fillers in containers or in landscape beds.

**15. PETUNIA 'ITSY MAGENTA'**

*Syngenta Flowers*

This standalone vegetative petunia is as good as advertised. The color saturation and richness of the magenta flowers is eye catching, and the foliage and flower coverage in the container is outstanding. The exceptional branching and controlled habit will allow this petunia to function as a filler and trailer, maturing at 8 inches. It manifested exceptional performance in 2019 summer trials. Based on its growth habit, vibrant flower color and floriferousness, this will be an essential component in many mixed combinations in 2021.

**16. DAHLIA 'XXL CANCUN'**

*Dümmen Orange*

The XXL series was introduced in 2011 and now consists of 14 varieties, including Cancun. This bold and vibrant red introduction is an outstanding and necessary addition to the series. This is a standout variety in my container trial. The architecture of this plant is impressive, with large caliper stems, dark foliage and flowers maturing above the foliage canopy. This is an eye-catching variety that has incredible retail appeal. This spring it was sold exclusively through Mast Young Plants, but it will be widely available for 2021 from various sources. It was one of the most outstanding dahlias in the Mast container trial in 2019. The XXL series has been a top-performing dahlia series in regional trials for many years, and Cancun enhances the value of this series. *gpn*

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