

vaughn's view

BY VAUGHN FLETCHER

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COLORFUL, EXCITING & DISTINCTIVE *Perennials*

Perennial breeders continue to develop new introductions with outstanding characteristics and attributes. This is Part 1 of Vaughn's 2021 Summer Trials Report on perennials.



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The first perennial article I wrote for GPN in the fall of 2017 focused on the participation of perennial breeders in the summer trials program and the proliferation of new varieties for evaluation, promotion, and marketing.

Since then, I have followed up with numerous articles on many current and new perennial introductions and their outstanding characteristics and attributes. Methodical testing and trialing is a long process, and by

the time a new perennial is entered and evaluated in summer trials it has already undergone many years of testing in numerous private breeder trials.

So what are some of the perennial breeding advancements we are seeing in new perennials? The characteristics and attributes are numerous, and include day length neutrality, increased winter hardiness, new flower forms and colors, disease resistance, assorted sizes and textures, first year flowering, heat tolerance and increased floriferousness.

In growing and marketing perennials, all these traits must be considered; however, with the breeding focus on the annualization of perennials, all of the attributes I mentioned, as well as the applications of perennials in patio containers, beds and borders, has fostered a significant increase in wholesale and retail sales.

Consumers desire instant gratification and the axiom that color sells applies to perennials as well as annuals. The future in perennial breeding is dynamic and exciting with the potential of gene-editing and additional genomic technologies accelerating the rapid introduction of new varieties and series.

We have also seen the development of outstanding perennial supply chains and comprehensive breeder product and technical support and, last but not least, the increased interest in gardening for enjoyment, health, and wellness. The current and new perennials I have chosen to highlight in this article were in one or more of the following trial sites I visited last June, August and September: University of Georgia/Athens, Metrolina, Colorado State University, Penn State, Dallas Arboretum and Raker-Roberta's. They were chosen based on summer performance including heat tolerance, foliage quality, durability, disease resistance, flower stability and floriferousness. This is Part 1 on my Stellar Perennial choices. I will follow up with additional garden-worthy perennials in April.

1. ECHINACEA 'MOODZ COURAGE'

HilverdaFlorist

The breeding, selection, trialing and introduction of new echinacea varieties is fast and furious. The improvements in habit, colors, flower form, bud count,

flower position and disease resistance have produced varieties that create excitement at retail. The number of new echinacea cultivars in the summer trials is increasing every year; I have chosen to focus on five varieties in first- or second-year trials that manifested durability, a prolific flower count, mildew resistance, and vibrant and unique flower colors. The first variety is the Moodz Courage. It offers striking flowers with pink magenta petals and a large central disc. The bud and flower count was significant in the Colorado State trial in early August and mid September, as shown in the photograph. This series was introduced in 2016 and new varieties have been added every year. There are now 12 vibrant colors in the series; many of them have been in trials since their introduction. Plants are produced from tissue culture and liners are available from multiple suppliers.

2. ARTEMESIA 'SUNFERN ARCADIA'

Darwin Perennials

This unprecedented collection is one of the most unusual and fascinating perennial introductions for 2022. The two herbaceous perennial cultivars in the series are Arcadia and Olympia. Both



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varieties were in multiple trials in full sun beds, resembled evergreen shrubs from a distance, and demonstrated vigor, non-fading foliage and an upright habit. The series was recognized as one of the most drought-tolerant perennials in the Colorado State trial in 2021 and was outstanding in the Raker-Roberta's trial, as shown in the photograph, the first week of September.

3. COREOPSIS GRANDIFLORA 'SOLANNA BRIGHT TOUCH'

Danziger

This grandiflora series is comprised of eight single- and double-flowering varieties and is widely used in wholesale and retail programs. I consider this an annualized perennial series manifesting multiple attributes, including first-year flowering, no bulking or vernalization requirement, earliness, a narrow flowering window within the series, uniformity, and a mounded habit.

varieties feature fern-like soft foliage and texture and will provide consumers with a multi-purpose plant for landscape beds, borders, and as a companion plant in patio containers. The plants will mature at 14 to 18 inches and offer many attributes including drought tolerance, a non-invasive habit, unique foliage, low maintenance, Zone 4 hardiness, and, most significantly, adaptability in full sun or partial shade. Both

One of the hallmarks of the series is the prolific flowers rising above the foliage canopy, providing a showy and colorful presentation. The natural flowering period is mid-to-late April into early May. The series is hardy to Zone 4 and matures at 14 inches. Bright Touch was eye-catching in the Raker-Roberta's trial with brilliant golden yellow flowers with a red fleck, as shown in the photo.

4. ECHINACEA 'ARTISAN RED OMBRÉ'

PanAmerican Seed

The Artisan series, comprised of Red Ombre and Soft Orange, debuted in 2020, and is ubiquitous in perennial programs throughout the country. This award winning series is the first F1 echinacea hybrid from seed available in separate colors. Both varieties were in multiple trials last summer and what was conspicuous was the uniformity, upright architecture, flower size, and prolific flower canopy. I was impressed with the transitional coloration from red to softer hues of Red Ombre as I traveled to various trials in August and September. The photograph is from the Penn State trial in late August. This series offers flexibility and bench run application, is first-year flowering, and its winter hardiness is 4a. Look forward to the introduction of Artisan Yellow Ombre for 2022-23.

5. ECHINACEA 'GIDDY PINK'

Terra Nova

This standalone hybrid echinacea, introduced in 2020, definitely justifies its independence and free standing recognition. The magnificent large double pink flowers, with the dark central cone surrounded by tight disc double flowers and single petals, catch your eye as soon as you enter the perennial trial. The flower coverage is extensive, and the upward branching highlights the flower size and unusual flower form. The flower height of this variety is 22 inches, it is hardy to Zone 4 and has multiple applications in beds, borders, containers, and mass displays. The photograph is from the Metrolina trial in mid-August last year.



6. ECHINACEA 'SUNMAGIC VINTAGE PINK'

Bull Plant Genetics

This series, introduced by German breeder Hartwig Bull and represented in North America by Flamingo Holland, was outstanding in the Raker-Roberta's and Colorado State trials last summer. The series has six varieties for 2022: Fuchsia, Lavender, Pink, Red, Ruby and White. The trial varieties demonstrated superb upright branching, uniformity, floriferousness and vibrant colors. The Pink was indicative of the series with a daisy-shaped flower with a larger brown central cone, a deep pink halo, and light pink ray petals. The photo was taken at the Colorado State trial in mid-September. This series was new to the trial last year and received the newly created "first year flowering" excellence award. Multiple liner suppliers offer this series.



7. ECHINACEA 'LOVELY LOLLY'

Must Have Perennials

I saw this standalone variety at Costa in late April and again in the Penn State trial in late August, and in both trials Lovely Lolly exhibited large double dark pink pom pom flowers with recurved petals, deep purple upright stems, vigor, durability, minimal spent flowers, and — what was most impressive — a prodigious flower canopy. Sinclair Adam, Penn State trial manager, considers this variety a "Must Have Perennial." This variety matures at 20 to 24 inches. We have a multitude of outstanding echinacea varieties to choose from, and Lovely Lolly is definitely garden worthy, offering instant impact and having exceptional retail appeal. The photo is from the Penn State trial in late August.



8. HELIANTHUS 'SUNCATCHER'

Bull Plant Genetics

This hardy helianthus was trialed last summer in the Plantpeddler container trial and the Penn State perennial field trial. It is a hybrid derived from the native species decapetatus, and offers improvements in flower size, flower color, branching, and production programmability. The characteristics in the trial were dark green foliage, mildew resistance, layered branching, continual bud development, prolific flowers, and flowers positioned above the foliage. This variety has also undergone extensive trialing in 1-gallon production programs with outstanding results. The plants were uniform and no pinch was required. This variety is a



hardy late spring and summer perennial that will thrive in extreme summer conditions, flower until early fall and is an excellent pollinator perennial. The photograph was taken at Penn State in sun ground beds in late August. The stock is produced at InnovaPlants with unrooted availability, and liners are available from multiple perennial liner suppliers.

9. HIBISCUS 'SUMMERIFIC EVENING ROSE'

Walters Gardens

This genus was well represented in the 2021 summer trials at Metrolina, Dallas Arboretum, Colorado State University and Penn State. I visited these trial sites in August and September and, as you can imagine, many varieties were in the zenith of splendor. The breakthrough breeding, testing and introduction of new vegetative hibiscus varieties from Walters Gardens and other breeders is extraordinary. I remember selling Lord and Lady Baltimore in the 1970s and '80s, and now, with the development of standalone varieties and the Proven Winners Summerific Collection, we have well over 17 distinctive varieties offering different mature heights, habits, foliage color and single, bicolor, and multicolored flowers. These hibiscus selections provide the consumer with hardy perennials with a tropical flair, heat and drought tolerance, stately architecture, varying degrees of foliage color, and, most importantly, elegant and gorgeous flowers. As I reflect on the many varieties I saw in the trials last summer, Hibiscus 'Summerific Evening Glow' at the Penn State trial in late August was incredibly eye-catching, as seen in the photo. The hot pink flowers contrasting with the dark black foliage, the dense branching, and the rounded habit were imposing. This is one perennial I look forward to observing and enjoying in my own garden in early summer. The best opportunity to see the entire collection in its glory, including new varieties, is Summerific Week at Walters Gardens Aug. 2-8.

10. MONARDA 'BEEMINE PINK'

Darwin Perennials

Darwin Perennials has augmented and diversified its monarda program for 2021-22 with the introduction of the BeeMine series. The colors are Lavender, Pink and Red. They were entered in multiple summer trials and received excellent performance scores. This is an early flowering, medium-sized series maturing at 15 to 18 inches. The BeeMine complements the more compact Balmy series in the Darwin portfolio. Both series are first-year flowering, extremely uniform, long day obligate and hardy to Zone 4a. This series was developed and introduced from the same breeding program as the Balmy series. What impressed me was its uniformity, timing, branching and prolific flower canopy. Darwin now offers the Balmy, BeeMine and the Sugar Buzz series developed by Walters Gardens. The photo was taken at the Metrolina trial in late August. [gpn](#)