

2016 trial garden winners at the Mississippi Truck Crops Branch Experiment Station[©]

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Abstract

During 2016, 109 new bedding plants were trialed for performance in Crystal Springs, Mississippi, under low-maintenance landscape conditions. The top performers among sun-loving flowering plants, sun-loving foliage plants, and shade-loving flowering plants were identified. Results from the plant trials serve as a resource for horticultural professionals, educators, and home gardeners in Mississippi.

INTRODUCTION

Plant performance varies throughout the USA because it is highly influenced by environmental factors. Therefore, it is important that new varieties are evaluated for regional performance. We trial new bedding plant material for performance in Crystal Springs, Mississippi (USDA hardiness zone 8b). This trial serves as a resource for horticultural professionals, educators, and home gardeners in Mississippi. It helps growers select new material that will likely perform well and it helps create a demand from consumers for new plant material that is adapted to this region.

This year, 109 plant entries were trialed in the garden from Ball Horticultural Company, Proven Winners, and Sakata. Four entries were trialed both in the shade and in full sun, and 27 entries were trialed in 30-cm hanging baskets. All entries were grown from seed, unrooted cuttings, or rooted plugs. Planting into raised beds began on April 15, 2015 and semimonthly ratings (1 to 5, where 5 is a perfect score) were taken from mid-April to late August based on uniform growth, flowering, leaf health, and landscape impact. Plants were fertilized, weeded, and sprayed as necessary, but deadheading was not done so as to mimic low-maintenance landscape performance. Water was supplied through drip irrigation as needed. Trial data was uploaded to a trial garden website: blogs.msucare.com/ornamentals.

SUN-LOVING FLOWERING PLANT WINNERS

Most of the entries performed very well through late June. As the summer temperatures rose, plant performance waned for some entries. Ten top-performing varieties were identified. Ornamental pepper 'Sedona Sun' (PanAmerican Seed; rated 4.46) was the year's top performing plant. Several impatiens performed very well and included SunPatiens[®] Compact Coral Pink, SunPatiens[®] Compact White Improved, SunPatiens[®] Compact Tropical Rose, and SunPatiens[®] Compact Red (Sakata; ratings above 4.2). Others in the top ten list included vinca 'Titan Pure White' (PanAmerican Seed), cleome 'Señorita Blanca' (Proven Winners), *Gomphrena* 'Ping Pong Lavender' (Sakata), and Petunia Supertunia[®] and Vista Silverberry (Proven Winners).

FOLIAGE PLANT WINNERS

Many of the foliage plant entries performed extremely well this year. The top performer was *Alternanthera* 'Purple Prince' (PanAmerican Seed; rated 4.83), followed by several new cultivars belonging to the *Ipomoea* Sweet Caroline series: Raven, Sweetheart Jet Black[™], Bewitched After Midnight[™], Bewitched Green with Envy[™], Sweetheart Lime, and Light Green (Proven Winners). Two coleus cultivars also made the top ten list: 'Inferno' and

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'Ruby Slipper' (Proven Winners). *Artemisia stelleriana* Quicksilver™ also made the list, but had problems with heavy August rains and suffered from root rot caused by fusarium.

SHADE-LOVING FLOWERING PLANT WINNERS

Eight shade cultivars were recommended this year. Impatiens Big Bounce™ Pink and Bounce™ Bight Coral topped the list for top performers in the shade (Selecta; rated above 4.45). All cultivars from the Whopper® series of begonias (bred by Benary) made the list: 'Rose with Bronze Leaf,' 'Rose with Green Leaf,' 'Pink with Green Leaf,' 'Red with Bronze Leaf,' 'Red with Green Leaf,' and 'Pink with Bronze Leaf'. They performed well in spite of hot summer temperatures.