

Classic City Awards 2011 Annuals

Dear All,

We take great pride in the Trials at the University of Georgia. We don't trial for the sake of trialing or to make us look good or to give us something to do – we trial in the steadfast belief that what we do makes a difference. When we provide real data under real world conditions, we do so in the belief that someone, breeders, growers, retailers and consumers, will pay attention. Quality is not limited to fertility standards and spacing, quality is also what consumers, from landscapers to buyers, see when they have a little money to spend.

So, in the steadfast belief that what we do does make a difference, here are the Classic City* Award winners for 2011, the very best plants in the trial gardens, based on year round performance and/or eye-clutching beauty. Of the over 2000 plants in the garden, being a Classic City Award winner is equivalent to the Oscar and Tony rolled up as one.

Happy Gardening,

Dr. Allan Armitage

Group 1: Short, relatively compact plants, suitable for fillers in containers or ground covers in landscape beds:

Alternanthera 'Little Ruby': Jacob's Coat, from Grolink

I talked about this plant last month and both description and video is available at greenhousegrower.com. One of the finest new alternantheras in many years and one that every broker should be pushing.



Angelonia 'Carita Purple': from Syngenta

Of the two-dozen or so angelonias, this one was flagged (we give all visitors flags to mark their favorite plants) more than any other, all the time. From spring to fall, it never showed heat delay.



Angelonia 'Serena White': from BallHort

Man cannot live by purple alone – and 'Serena White' was also constantly flagged. A little slower to show off than 'Carita Purple', but a plant easy to recommend. With excellent white flowers.



Heliotropium 'Scentopia Dark Blue': from Syngenta

Oh my, what a nice surprise this was! Heliotropes can be like birthday parties, all dressed up one moment but fading away almost the next day. 'Scentopia' looked wonderful from May to November, with deep blue flowers, excellent foliage and no maintenance.



Ipomoea 'Sweet Caroline Bewitched': from Proven Winners

We are well known for our sweet potato trials, and this year was no different. In fact, we constructed a sweet potato wall with about 10 cultivars; and 'Bewitched' was one of the least aggressive. This in fact is a good thing, a sweet potato with fabulous lustrous purple leaves and a well-behaved countenance. I love it.



Scaevola 'Surdiva Light Blue': from Suntory

With the great many fan flowers available, it is more difficult than ever to find one that stands above the others. The Surdiva series has been excellent over the years; all colors are good. However, 'Light Blue' has shone all season. And has been a particularly good container plant.



Group 2: Upright plants, suitable for thrillers in the container or eye candy in the landscape bed.

Argyranthemum 'Flutterby Yellow': from Ecke Ranch

The South African daisies have been getting better every year but it is still difficult to recommend argyranthemums for hot, humid climates. However, I have been looking at this introduction for a couple of years and have been impressed for at least that length of time. The only argyranthemum that flowered from beginning to end, and one I can always count on to be in flower.



Begonia 'Whopper Red': from BallHort

Wax-type begonias are also difficult to distinguish from each other, but the large leaf, large flower forms have been popular this year. The Whoppers grew well in the trials and flowered in deep shade all season. Easy to recommend, an excellent choice for something a little different in wax begonias.



Celosia 'New Look': from Benary

There is nothing new about 'New Look' but there is nothing new about chocolates either, and people still can't get enough. This is simply a great plant, bright and flamboyant and easy to grow and maintain. We planted it beside 'Scentopia Dark Blue' and what an extraordinary combination that was.



Clerodendrum 'Starshine': from Grolink

This was highlighted at Greenhousegrower.com a few weeks ago, in print and in video. There is no one who saw the plant in flower that did not flag it, and everyone asked "What is it, where do I get it?" Without doubt, the most pleasant surprise in the Gardens this year.



SunPatiens 'Compact Deep Rose': from Sakata

Why people would not be planting this by the acre is beyond me, assuming bright sun is available. It doesn't really matter when one views them, they are always incredibly eye-catching. Many fine colors and heights are available, but we were struck by the compact habit and the last flowers of this selection.



Group 3: Basket and container material:

Calibrachoa 'Callie White 11': from Syngenta

So many new calibrachoa, so hard to tell one from another, but when we look at them all for 6 months, a few stand out. I have written about some of my favorites in the past, and it is nice to be able to talk about this one. The Callie series consists of many colors but few whites really shine. This has been an excellent plant and I can breathe a sigh of relief that I have something else to talk about in this large plant group.



Caladium 'Pink Splash': from Classic Caladiums

This was our first year of trialing caladiums, we did not do many because I never felt they could compete with other faster growing, more colorful annuals in the garden. I am not sure if they can compete financially, but oh my, did people ever love these plants, especially this one. I believe visitors flagged this more than any other plant in the garden.



Geranium 'Caliente Orange'; from Syngenta

I guess the rest of the breeders should fire me because I keep coming back to this cultivar when I am recommending basket geraniums. This vibrant hybrid is visible across the garden and has been an all star for the last two years, outperforming the other ivy-type geraniums. There are many fine other ivies in the garden as well, but no one has yet come up with something better.



Hibiscus 'Haight Ashbury': UGA

We have looked at a couple of fantastic foliage-type hibiscus, but this multi-colored form made people stop and stare and stop again. It is a wonderful hippy-type plant, kaleidoscopic and psychedelic in color. An excellent thriller for mixed containers.



Mimulus 'Buttercup': from Grolink

For mixed containers, one of the finest plants we trialed was this brilliant yellow mimulus. Mimulus??? I never had mimulus to live for more than 6 weeks - so when first planted, I was highly skeptical and kept waiting for it to pass away quietly. However, it flowered all season, never fading and never attacked by disease or insects. Few of you know this plant - I recommend you try it before everyone else does.



Petunia 'Purple Ray Vein': from Danziger

We had at least 50 cultivars of petunias, from papaya to black, from bicolor to yellow, from mini to maxi size. There was no shortage of excellent petunias, but this one kept everyone, including myself, coming back to admire it. The ray series has always been a good one - 'Yellow Ray' has long been the best yellow, but 'Purple Ray Vein' was stunning in all mixed containers.



Group 4: Vines. People love them, landscapers need them and growers hate them.

Jack in the Beanstalk vine:

All you have to do is ask any shopper about the boy taking his cow to market, and disappointing his mother when all he brought home were big colored beans. If you ask the question in front of containers of Jack's beanstalk, and have a photo of the huge fruit filled with red beans, they would fly off the bench. What great fun, what a way to get kids excited, what are we doing ignoring these weird and wonderful plants?



Rex begonia vine: Cissus discolor

We do dozens of vines and invariably, consumers want to know where to get them. My reply is usually "on line", because no one really grows them in numbers. This is one of the very few vines that tolerate shade, all the more reason for us to start growing more unusual plants and a few less geraniums.



Sky flower vine – Thunbergia grandiflora

We all know black-eyed Susan vine, *T. alata*, but its cousin is far more spectacular than Susan, to be sure. The dark green leaves are indestructible but the gorgeous large blue flowers are favorites for all who come across them. They flower on and off in late summer but far more heavily in the fall. Takes your breath away.

