

1994 BEDDING PLANT EVALUATIONS

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It was a dark and rainy night when the Minnesota Commercial Flower Growers braved the elements to evaluate the trial gardens on the St. Paul campus of the university. While it sounds like the start to a mystery novel, it is a fact. The growers at the September growers meeting were asked to give their opinions on how the plants on trial were doing. The results of these evaluations and the official university evaluations are in. As growers you may be interested to see what performed well in the trial gardens, and what you may want to consider carrying.

Over 40 cultivars made it on the growers "top ten list". This variety of favorites came from 12 evaluations that were turned in. Five plants showed up on five lists. These were:

'Primetime Rose' Petunia	9.3
'Queen Mix' Cleome	9.0
'Full Mixture' Gomphrena	8.3
'Tropical Rose' Canna	8.2
'Marine' Heliotrope	8.2

Another three plants were on four lists:

'Treasure Red' Pepper	8.375
'Blue Horizon' Ageratum	7.75
'Silver Cup' Lavatera	7.125

Making three lists were:

'Wonderland White' Alyssum	9.667
'Belle Mix' Hibiscus	9.5
'Party Fun' Begonia	9.5
'Rhea Blue' Salvia	9.167
'Blue Danube' Ageratum	8.33
'Talent Mix' Gazania	8.33

As you can see there was a wide variety of favorite plant material in the trial garden. Many of the materials that were on the lists are received good ratings in the official evaluation. The top six plant materials in the official evaluation were:

'Blue Horizon' Ageratum	9.5
'Full Mixture' Gomphrena	9.5
'Wonderland White' Alyssum	8.75
'Impulse Carmine' Impatiens	8.75
'Ice Castles' Celosia	8.75
'Victoria' Salvia	8.5

The ratings were based on evaluations on two dates, July 27 and September 21, 1994. Ratings consisted of a plant rating and a flower rating on each date. A 0-10 rating scale was used, with 0 being very poor performance and 10 being outstanding performance.

The St. Paul trial garden is considered the disease test for plant materials. This is the most urban setting for the trial gardens, and even with this we are susceptible to the diseases that are often present in the agronomic crops being grown near by.

The trial gardens are repeated, with some variation, at the university experiment stations at Morris and Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

The top performers at Morris were:

'Wonderland White' Alyssum	8.75
'Argent White' Salvia	8.5
'Tempo Burgundy' Impatiens	8.5
'Accent Violet' Impatiens	8.5
'Accent Deep Pink' Impatiens	8.5
'Summer Pastels' Achillea	8.5
'Primetime Blue' Petunia	8.5



We consider Morris to be our heat and drought tolerant site. The trial plots are on the top of a hill, and do receive some wind. The impatiens and begonias performed well, they are grown in the shade of a pine windbreak.

The top performers at Grand Rapids were:

'Pigeon Red' Kale	9.0
'Beauty Pink' Kale	8.67
'Tokyo White' Cabbage	8.67
'Pigeon White' Kale	8.3
'Wonderland White' Alyssum	8.25
'Wonderland Purple' Alyssum	8.0
'Purple Wave' Petunia	8.0
'Kamone White' Kale	8.0

Grand Rapids is our test of cold weather, and often plants can't be planted until late in the season. They can also receive fall rains, as they did in 1994, that can cause botrytis to set in. This botrytis on the petunia flowers was the reason that 'Purple Wave' petunia didn't have a higher rating. In general it was outstanding. It is not surprising to find that the ornamental cabbages and kales did well at this site, the weather was perfect for plant growth and coloring.

An overall summation of the top plants in the state is always nice and it follows. In order to be listed, the plant had to be trialed at all three sites.

'Wonderland White' Alyssum	8.58
'Blue Horizon' Ageratum	8.33
'Victoria' Salvia	7.67
'Primetime Blue' Petunia	7.5
'Summer Pastels' Achillea	7.42
'Wonderland Purple' Alyssum	7.0

By evaluating the sites throughout the state, a grower can get a good idea of how many plants will perform. For the 1995 season many new plant materials will be trialed, along with some of the top performers from the past years. Take the opportunity to see for yourself, and evaluate for yourself, how approximately 200 cultivars of bedding plants do in various sites.

If you are interested in looking at the complete evaluation of all three trial gardens, including weather data and plant size, the 1995 edition of Cultivar Trials of Bedding Plants, including the 1994 data, will be available in the upcoming months. Contact the Minnesota Extension Service to obtain a copy of this helpful publication.

