

BEDDING PLANTS THAT TAKE THE HEAT

The University of Georgia Horticultural Gardens Gold Medal Winners, 1994

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The staff who toil in the trial gardens at The University of Georgia get to have all the fun. They learn the delicate practice of deadheading thousands of geranium and marigold flowers, they become scholars about pigweed, nutgrass and chickweed, they are always outside in the cleansing heat and humidity of a Georgia summer and get to answer my questions as to why the plants are not looking as good as I expect them to. Who could ask for more?

A number of years ago, for some reason that I couldn't understand, they asked to be involved in choosing plants which they felt, on a week to week basis, outperformed all others. Thus, we started choosing the UGA Gold Medal Winners in 1985 and have been pointing out the gems of the summer landscape ever since. This year, as with other years, the winners are very special. Their garden performance was exemplary and their need for maintenance minimal. Not only were they best in their color class, they were the best plants in the entire trial.

Ratings were based on foliar and flower quality, uniformity, and tolerance of heat, humidity and torrential rain. Garden ratings are based on a perfect score of 5.0. Congratulations to the breeders and to the companies who have enhanced floriculture with their skill and foresight.

Winners, UGA Gold Medals, 1994

Impatiens 'Blitz 2000 Pink' S&G Seed Trial Rating 4.75

To me, a surprise winner. Blitz has always been an excellent series, but for our conditions, plants generally were too robust and tall. The improvements in the series (Blitz 2000) was obvious in all colors as shown by its ability to withstand the torrential summer rains and abusive conditions. Blitz 2000 Pink was somewhat taller than many of the impatiens but it stood proud and became one of our "55-mph plants." After planting, Blitz 2000 Pink took off and bloomed profusely until the first frost. This cultivar was undaunted by the plague of thrips which took its toll on almost every other cultivar. Blitz 2000 Pink far outshone the other impatiens all summer.

Petunia 'Primetime Lavender' Goldsmith Seed - Trial Rating 4.87

Another surprise winner in my eyes. Petunias have won gold medal awards in the past, in fact, Primetime Rose was so honored in 1992. However, with the advent of vegetative petunias and new germplasm (*P. integrifolia*) into the new cultivars, a traditional seed strain was not likely to compete. However, Primetime Lavender was an eye-catcher all summer long. Its pleasant, unique color made it a welcome addition to the petunia color spectrum. From

early May until the petunias were tilled under in November, this cultivar was consistently in full bloom. We cut back all the petunias in July for our annual "rejuvenation-thon" and Primetime Lavender was in full bloom again more rapidly than most other entries. Good color, good form, great performance.

Salvia 'Scarlet King' Royal Sluis Trial rating 4.62

This rain and the cloudy weather were to the liking of many Salvia cultivars, but the bright scarlet flowers and deep green foliage of Scarlet King were particularly memorable. From early in the summer, it bloomed profusely and brilliantly. The difference in foliage color between this cultivar and most others in the trail was obvious as the season progressed. The flowers rapidly returned after deadheading so seldom were the plants ever out of flower. This cultivar remained undaunted by the adverse conditions in which it grew this summer and was a deserving winner.

Vinca 'Pacifica Red' Waller Seed Co. Trial rating 4.66

Vinca are in potential serious trouble in southern landscapes because they are prone to overwatering, and wet summers can greatly reduce their effectiveness. This year, we, along with much of the southeast, had torrential rains in July and August. Regardless, Pacifica Red was always thriving. The plants were well branched and loaded with handsome true red blooms which stood out like beacons against the dark foliage. When I first saw these plants greenhouse grown in pack trials, I was not convinced that the red color would not fade during the heat of our summer. However, I don't think the Royal Horticulture Color Chart would have picked up any fading, we certainly did not. Its nearly flawless performance attracted the attention of visitors all summer. This vinca was a stunning attraction of the trial garden this year and hopefully will enhance the use of these plants in the landscape.



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