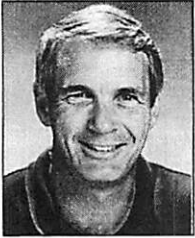


VERBENAS

OR

How Do You Choose Your Dance Partner When All The Partners Are So Beautiful?

by Allan Armitage, The University of Georgia



The lowly verbena has certainly been on a roll!. When I was a young wipper snapper at Michigan State University, I used to study the trials there, and most of the Verbenas were beautiful, but rather weak-kneed, often succumbing to disease and pests by late summer. Some were better than others, and I remember everyone getting so excited when germination of the Romance series topped

60%. The seed strains are still beautiful, and pack sales of Amor, Romance, Imagination, Quartz, Springtime and Sandy series are, for the most part, doing just fine.

However, it is the vegetatively propagated verbenas that have stolen the spotlight these days, perhaps the result of the astounding success of introductions such as 'Homestead Purple', 'Taylortown Red' and 'Silver Anne'. Of course, if a plant finds success, look out for imitators. Amazingly, plants have been sold as 'Homestead Pink', (really 'Silver Anne') and 'Homestead Red' ('Big Red').

Many older vegetative verbenas continue to be sold, some of which are quite similar, and most bear fine old names like 'Kremeton', or 'Evelyn Scott'. However, breeders have a decidedly difficult time with independent named cultivars, but how they love to produce a series. I have tried to explain this term to students; how a series is similar in habit, flowering time, and size but differs only

in flower color, but looking at a series does not always verify that definition. Regardless, vegetative Verbena Series, like the World Series, will be with us for many years so we might as well get used to it.

We received a good many of the veggie verbenas this past winter and put them in the greenhouse. They all grew well, with few obvious performance differences among them. They were placed into the trial gardens on May 1. Plants were all mildew free upon planting, something that can be a major limitation to Verbena (see sidebar 2), and were planted in mixed containers. The fact is, the breeders have done a terrific job, and every entry looked good at times, some looked good the entire summer. Summer in Athens was long, hot and dry, but we were able to irrigate as needed. Once plants were established, we took data every two weeks, on a scale of 1 to 5; 5 being the best. We averaged the data over 16 weeks (21 June-16 Sept) and to arrive at a reasonable assessment of performance. A rating of 3.0 -3.4 is mediocre, 3.5-3.9 is good, 4.0-4.4 is very good and 4.5 and above is excellent. We looked carefully for powdery mildew, but found little, perhaps because of the lack of rainfall (or perhaps exceptional breeding techniques).

Numerous other fine series have been produced, and one conspicuous by its absence is the Tapien Series. We did not receive any Tapiens this year, but they have fared well in the past, and likely would have been among the leaders this year as well.

Verbena by Cultivar

<u>Aztec Series</u>	Average rating	<u>Babylon Series</u>	Average rating
Bright Lavender	4.4	Light Blue	3.9
Bright Purple	3.6	Lilac	3.7
Dark Purple	3.1	Neon Rose	3.5
Lavender	4.7	Pink	4.6
Pink Magic	3.9	Silver	3.9
Rose Pink	3.6		

Comments: 'Aztec Lavender' was the best of the series, earning top ratings of five out of five for six continuous weeks. The color was close to that of 'Twilight Mauve Shades'

Comments: 'Babylon Pink' was probably the best pink we trialed. The flowers were darker than 'Neon Rose'. We also really liked the color of 'Silver'

Check out www.uga.edu/ugatrial/verbena.htm for a column written for Greenhouse Grower on the performance and names of 33 cultivars of vegetatively propagated verbenas. Written in 1996, it contains taxa that were the beginning of the verbena ground swell.

Verbena by Cultivar - continued

Temari Series Average rating 3.9

Bright Pink	3.7
Burgundy	4.2
Cherry Blossom	3.7
Patio Hot Pink	4.1
Patio Rose	3.7

Comments: I have always liked the Temaris and this year the colors of 'Patio Hot Pink' and 'Patio Rose' were eye-catching. 'Temari Burgundy' performed well early on then was crowded out later in the season.

Tortuga Series Average rating 3.8

Double Purple	3.3
Hot Pink	3.6
Light Pink	4.0
Peach	4.2
Red	3.9
White	3.5

Comments: The Tortugas produced some of the biggest flowers of all the verbenas, but their performance in the heat of this years summer was not quite as good as we would have liked. However, without a doubt, 'Tortuga Peach' has a great future with a flower color that can be combined with almost anything and good heat and humidity performance. 'Tortuga Double Purple was disappointing.

Twilight Series Average rating 3.8

Mauve Shades	4.3
Pink	3.2
Pink Bouquet	3.9

Comments: 'Twilight Mauve Shades' is the best performed in the series, simply being a more vigorous grower and flowering later than the others. 'Pink' is a little weak under our conditions.

Wildfire Series Average rating 4.7

Blush	4.7
Purple	4.7

Comments: Although only two colors were trialed, they both were the hit of the verbenas. Meg green, my trial manager, simply blushed with glee when she showed off "Wildfire Blush" in our containers. 'Wildfire Purple' and 'Aztec Lavender' are excellent choices for a lavender to purple verbenas.

Many thanks to the companies supporting this research work, including Ball Seed Co, EuroAmerican Propagators, Bear Creek, Proven Winners, Novartis, The Paul Ecke Ranch and Goldsmith Seed Co

I like to hang around with people smarter than me, people who can simplify complex questions into simple common sense answers. Such is my good friend, Nathan King, the Ball Seed Co. representative in this area. Nathan has seen plants come and go, trends elevate and descend and companies appear and disappear. He is a common visitor to the trials and brings clients and friends alike to see the new material in the real world. Looking at all the colors, forms, performance data and advertising hype from all the breeders, I asked him: "Nathan, which verbenas do you think will sell the most". His answer, "whichever one has the least mildew." Simple, isn't it?

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