

Hoosier Gardener: Coleus, other trial plants withstand summer heat well

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Bombshell blue fescue sprouts hair for a strawberry pot of a succulent called Chalky Fingers. / Photo provided by Jo Ellen Meyers Sharp

This summer has been a baptism by fire for many of the new annuals under evaluation. Most of the trial plants are in containers, so they have been watered and fertilized regularly.

Here are some winners:

Coleus (Solenostemon) -- It wasn't until I went to Dallas in September 2010 that I gained a richer appreciation for coleus, especially the newer varieties that do so well in full sun. Even in late summer, the Dallas coleus looked fresh, clean and colorful, and they do in Indiana, too.

Proven Winners' ColorBlaze Marooned basked in sun all day, grew to 30 inches tall and dwarfed companion plants in the containers. Next year, these coleuses are going to get their own pots.

Hort Couture's Under the Sea series of coleus spent the summer in the shade with filtered sun and did wonderfully. I think the colors would have been richer if they were in more sun, but I'm not complaining.

Simply Beautiful's Serena Lavender Pink Angelonia did exactly what we expect from this long-blooming, sun-loving annual -- perform. Plant angelonia in the ground, as a centerpiece in containers or a backdrop in a window box. You won't be disappointed.

Hort Couture's 'Chalky Fingers' (Senecio) have beckoned me to the world of succulents, and now I'm trying to figure out how I can winter them over. They are in a strawberry pot in full sun.

Lantana can take as much heat and sun as nature provides. Lantanas are upright, trailing or mounded, so there's a form for every application. Proven Winners' Banana Pink did great, attracting butterflies and the occasional hummingbird.

Seabrook's Lavender Verbena has been a charming trailing plant that has resisted spider mites, one of its pests. Although not winter-hardy in Indiana, this Blooms of Bressingham introduction has about a 20-inch spread its first year in a sunny spot in the ground or spilling from a window box.