

# GARDENING

## Zoo puts annuals to test annually

By Beth Burwinkel

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If you're looking for some great tried-and-true annuals, consider some of the winners in the annual trials at the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden.

Every year, the zoo evaluates many annuals to see how they perform.

The 2009 winners include flow-

ers and foliage plants for sunny and shady locations. For lists of previous winners, as well as suggestions for other great plants, visit the zoo's website, [www.cincinnati-zoo.org/plants/annuals/default.html](http://www.cincinnati-zoo.org/plants/annuals/default.html)

As director of horticulture at the zoo, Steve Foltz sees the best annuals every day. One of his favorites is Petunia Supertunia 'Vista Bubblegum,' a spreading, yet compact plant. He says it is proba-

bly the showiest petunia he's grown at the zoo.

"It's really a bright bubblegum pink," he says. "It's really a hot color. ... You hardly see any green in the bed."

Another winning petunia, Petunia Supertunia "Vista Silverberry," has flowers that are silver with a touch of purple, he says.

The best annuals for 2009 include:

- Princess Purple Fountain

Grass (Pennisetum purpureum 'Princess')

- Nicodemus Cuban Oregano (Plectranthus 'Nicodemus')

- Impatiens Rockapulco Series - Double Impatiens

- Pineapple Coleus (Solenostemon scutellarioides 'Pineapple')

- Redhead Coleus (Solenostemon scutellarioides 'Redhead')

- Baby Tut Umbrella Grass (Cyperus involucratus Graceful)



Provided / Cincinnati Zoo

**A good bet** for survival is redhead coleus, which was tested by the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden.

## Planting advice

Before heading to the nursery or garden center, measure the size of your garden beds and know the sun and shade patterns so that you buy the right plants for the conditions, says Kris Stone, director of the Boone County Arboretum and owner of Tri State Horticultural Consulting.

Mass plantings are more effective than a few plants of many types.

Gardeners can also use foliage plants to provide contrast, Stone says.

Sweet potato vines can give gardeners a mass effect with fewer plants, Stone said.

Be careful with color combination, Stone says. Too much contrast can be shocking and too much of one color can look monotone. At the garden center, take time to compare the colors.

Repeat colors and forms throughout the landscape. Mix textures.

If planting a container, don't use potting soil that was planted in previously. He suggests incorporating a slow-release fertilizer like Osmocote when planting in containers.



## Grasses Baby Tut)

- Petunia Supertunia 'Vista Silverberry' and 'Vista Bubblegum'

- Dahlia 'Mystic Illusion' – Mystic Illusion Dahlia (Dahlia 'Mystic Illusion')

- Fusion Peach Frost Exotic Impatiens

- Persian Shield (Strobilanthes dyerianus)

This year, 150-200 varieties of annuals will be tested. The plants will include tropical plants that homeowners could plant near a pool or patio or mix in with other annuals.

The trials are held at the zoo, in collaboration with the Cincinnati Flower Grower's Association and Ohio State Extension in Hamilton Coun-

ty. The Cincinnati Flower Grower's website, [www.cincinnatiflowergrowers.org/site/](http://www.cincinnatiflowergrowers.org/site/), offers planting and gardening information.

The winning annuals are generally available for purchase in nurseries and garden centers.

In October, after annuals are done growing, the zoo plants tulip bulbs in its high-impact beds.

The zoo uses a grower's mix with pine fines and compost or peat moss to amend the beds.

"The more organic matter you can get in the soil, the better it will be," Foltz says.

Though May is planting season, heat-tolerant plants

such as lantana, vinca and sweet potato vines can be planted in June, Foltz says.

They're generally available in nurseries and garden centers at that time because they are easier to maintain in a nursery than some other annuals.

"We like to get ours in by Memorial Day," Foltz says. "The backup plan is using the more heat tolerant (annuals) in June."

## More plants

For more great tried and true flowers, perennials and vegetables, consider the All-America Selections. The 2010 winners include:

- Purple coneflower 'Wow Wild Berry'

- Gaillardia F1 'Mesa Yellow'

- Marigold F1 hybrid African 'Moonsong Deep Orange'

- Snapdragon F1 'Twinny Peach'

- Viola F1 "Endurio Sky Blue Martien'

- Zinnia 'Double Zahara Cherry'

- Zinnia 'Double Zahara Fire'

- Zinnia 'Zahara Starlight Rose'

- Pepper 'Cajun Belle'

- Watermelon F1 hybrid 'Shiny Boy'



Provided / Cincinnati Zoo

**Get instant impact** from Petunia Supertunia "Vista Bubblegum."