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LSU AgCenter identifies plants most suitable for Louisiana

*For Release On Or After 07/30/10*By [Dan Gill](#)*LSU AgCenter Horticulturist*

The LSU AgCenter conducts greenhouse and landscape research on many new bedding plants each year. This helps to determine production practices to assist growers and evaluate performance in the landscape to provide garden centers, landscape professionals and home gardeners information on how these plants will perform under Louisiana's growing conditions. These trials are conducted at the Ornamental and Turfgrass Research and Extension Facility located at the Burden Center in Baton Rouge and the Hammond Research Station in Hammond.



This research is particularly valuable for Louisiana gardeners because the trials are done in the weather conditions we experience here. Plants that consistently do well in LSU AgCenter trials are good bets to be reliable performers in the home garden.

The Hammond Research Station is where most of the bedding plant trials are conducted. As you drive into the research station, the trial beds for sun-loving bedding plants and herbaceous perennials are in a large field on the left. This area is full of big landscape beds lavishly planted with an amazing variety of bedding plants in a kaleidoscope of colors. The plants in the beds are well-labeled with their names. The station also boasts a smaller, shade-loving-plant trial area.

Over the course of the summer, researchers evaluate a variety of characteristics, such as insect and disease resistance, height, uniformity, flower production and/or foliage quality. These all are taken into consideration when a landscape performance rating is assigned to plants.

The top summer bedding plant performers for 2009 include many great plants. Evaluations for 2010 are ongoing. Here are some of the 2009 results:

There are not a lot of euphorbia bedding plants, but a few years ago Diamond Frost came on the scene. With its delicate foliage and tiny, white floral bracts, it provides a wonderful fine, cloud-like effect in the garden – much like baby's breath – and looks great all summer. Two new varieties, Breathless White and Breathless Blush, are just as nice. Breathless Blush has reddish coloration in the foliage and pink flowers.

Early Bird Gold is a new selection of *Rudbeckia fulgida*. Found as an earlier blooming mutation of the extremely reliable Goldsturm rudbeckia, Early Bird Gold blooms a couple of weeks earlier. It's golden yellow, black-eyed Susan flowers are produced over a long period in early summer on plants that will

live and bloom for many years.

Mesa Yellow gaillardia is a new hybrid with a dense, mounding growth habit that reaches 18 to 20 inches tall. This plant is a perennial likely to come back and bloom for several years. Mesa Yellow is a drought-tolerant plant that produces 3-inch, bright yellow flowers over a long season if it's deadheaded.

Senorita Rosalita cleome has turned up as one of the most outstanding new plants from trial gardens across the county the past few years. It is an exceptional plant. Reaching heights of about 4 feet, it blooms lavender-pink flower clusters from mid-spring through the first killing frost. This variety is spineless and does not produce seed – so it stays in constant bloom.

There is a lot of interest in coleuses these days. Just look at the amazing variety of these plants available at area nurseries. One issue with coleus varieties is finding those that are less-inclined to bloom. Coleus is grown for its colorful foliage, and the flower spikes are not generally desirable. Two coleus varieties that have performed exceptionally well are Henna and Indian Summer. The foliage of Henna is highly fringed and sports shades of gold, chartreuse and reddish-purple on top and reddish-purple underneath. The foliage of Indian Summer varies from light red to light red blended with green and yellow. Both will reach about 2 feet tall.

Strong performance has also been seen in the Pacifica periwinkles, the Cora periwinkles and the Nirvana periwinkles. The Cora and Nirvana periwinkles have genetic resistance to the *Phytophthora* fungus that causes such problems with this outstanding bedding plant. The Pacifica, Cora and Nirvana periwinkle groups all come in a variety of bright colors.

Ornamental peppers are amazingly beautiful and resilient in the summer flower garden. And the colorful fruit they produce is edible – although generally fiery hot. Top ornamental pepper varieties include Chilly Chili – a rare, sweet ornamental pepper that's good for school gardens – Purple Flash, Sweet Pickle, Red Missile, Little Elf, Calico, Black Pearl and the Explosive series – Blast, Ignite and Amber.

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