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Bogren, Richard C.

contributors

- Gill, Daniel J.
- Owings, Allen D.

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Coleus are great plants for the summer landscape

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By LSU AgCenter Horticulturists [Dan Gill](#) and [Allen Owings](#)

Coleus are one of our summer favorites for Louisiana landscapes. Coleus come in old varieties and new varieties. Some do well in shade and others do well in sun. There are coleus propagated from seed and coleus that are only propagated by stem cuttings.

We grow coleus for the brilliant foliage they provide. And they do best planted anytime from mid-spring until early summer.

Older coleus varieties are normally better suited for shade areas. These are usually propagated from seed and include the shorter, smaller-growing Rainbow and Wizard series. The Kong series has big foliage and looks like a sun coleus, but it's a shade coleus. A new coleus for shade is the seed-propagated Versa series.

New varieties labeled "sun" coleus may be sold at garden centers. Most of these are propagated asexually – by stem cuttings – and include varieties such as the Solar series. Other popular varieties include New Orleans Red, which is a former Louisiana Select plant, and the Mississippi Medallion coleus called Mississippi Summer Sun.

Texas A&M University started the coleus revolution about 10 years ago with the promotion of Plum Parfait and Burgundy Sun. The Solar series of coleus, especially those with dark red foliage, and the Florida Sun series have been doing well in LSU AgCenter trials.

The LSU AgCenter has been evaluating coleus from Proven Winners the last couple years. The best landscape performers include Life Lime, Big Red Judy, Coco Loco, Dappled Apple, Fishnet Stockings, Glennis, Pistachio Nightmare, Merlot, and Twist and Twirl. Hybrid coleus from Proven Winners that have been performing well in south Louisiana landscapes the past few years include Royal Glissade, Zen Moment and Quarterback.

New, great-performing coleus for full sun have been developed and released by Ball Horticulture the past couple years. They include Henna, Mint Mocha, Indian Summer, Trusty Rusty and Redhead.

Coleus provide the landscape with brightly colored foliage. Flowers are not the desired feature. For this reason, you don't allow coleus to flower in your landscape. When buds begin to appear, pinch them off, and a more bushy plant develops. Even if a particular variety you have is slow to flower, which is true for some of the new varieties, keep the terminal growth pinched back across the top of the plant. These terminal cuttings can be propagated easily.

Coleus do not tolerate wet feet, so make extra sure the soil where they're planted has good drainage and that watering is strictly monitored. Too much water will reduce vigor and make the plants more susceptible to diseases and root rot.

Fertilize established plants once or twice during the growing season with a slow-release fertilizer at the rate of 1-2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of bed area.

Try coleus in containers and patio plantings. In the landscape, though, it's best to plant them by the flat – not one here and one there. Mass them for impact.

Visit LaHouse in Baton Rouge to see sustainable landscape practices in action. The home and landscape resource center is near the intersection of Burbank Drive and Nicholson Drive (Louisiana Highway 30) in Baton Rouge, across the street from the LSU baseball stadium. For more information, go to www.louisianahouse.org and www.lsuagcenter.com/lyn.

[Rick Bogren](#)

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