

Extension > Gardening Information

Yard and Garden News

Extension > **Yard and Garden News** > University of Minnesota 2009 Annual Flower Trials Archive

University of Minnesota 2009 Annual Flower Trials

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Karen Jeannette, Horticulture Research Fellow & Yard and Garden News Editor



Photo 1: Ornamental Pepper 'Black Pearl' was a top 10 performer in St. Paul, but grew less profusely in Morris and Grand Rapids, MN locations.

Karen Jeannette.

Each year researchers and scientists from the University of Minnesota, Department of Horticultural Science grow, display, and trial hundreds of annual flowers at several Minnesota locations, then report how well these annual varieties perform for that season.

For Minnesota gardeners and industry professionals, the yearly University of Minnesota Annual Flower Trial sheds some light on how certain annual flower varieties will perform under different Minnesota conditions, and which ones are top selections for Minnesota overall. St. Paul, Morris, and Grand Rapids, Minnesota were home to the 2009 display and trial gardens, as in past years. These locations differ in their hardiness zones, heat zones, and growing days (see the section Top 10 Performing Annuals for 2009 by Site for details). 2009 Annual Flower Trial winners had to perform well despite cooler than average conditions through much of the summer growing season (Grand Rapids reported growing degree days for June through August were 16% below the 30-year average), followed by warmer than average September conditions. Thus, making for a somewhat challenging year for many annuals, especially those that perform best under warmer summer conditions.

Criteria for evaluating the 2009 annual flower trial cultivars include whether they were diseased (no/yes), average flower size, plant uniformity (1=poor, 5=excellent), and plant and flower ratings (1=poor, 5=excellent).

With differences in growing conditions across the state, having a top ten list for each annual flower trial location can prove helpful for gardeners trying to select varieties that perform well in similar growing conditions. Here are the 2009 top performing annuals by site:

Top 10 Performing Annuals for 2009 by Site

St. Paul, MN (USDA Winter Hardiness Z4; Heat Z5; 169 growing days)

Neil Anderson, Floriculture Breeding, Associate Professor, Department of Horticulture Science

<http://horticulture.cfans.umn.edu/>

1. Colocasia 'Heart of the Jungle'
2. Millet 'Jade Princess'
3. Petunia 'Debonair Lime Green'
4. Petunia 'Pretty Much Picasso'
5. Petunia 'Sophistica Antique Shades'
6. Ornamental Pepper 'Black Pearl'*
7. Osteospermum 'Asti White'*
8. Gaillardia 'Mesa Yellow'*
9. Dianthus 'Bouquet Rose'
10. Carex 'Graceful Grasses Toffee Twist'

*=All American Selections cultivar

Morris, MN (USDA Winter Hardiness Z3/4; Heat Z4; 144 growing days)

Steve Poppe, Horticulture Scientist, West Central Research and Outreach Center

<http://wcroc.cfans.umn.edu/Horticulture.html>

1. Petunia 'Ray Purple Vein'
2. Lobelia 'Techno Heat Upright Blue'
3. Petunia 'Suncatcher Red'
4. Geranium 'Calliope Scarlet Fire'
5. Petunia 'Supertunia Vista Bubblegum'
6. Diascia 'Flirtation Orange'
7. Coleus 'Trusty Rusty'
8. Begonia 'Braveheart Rose Bicolor'
9. Viola 'Skippy XL Red-Gold'
10. Verbena 'Superbena Coral Red Improved'

Grand Rapids (USDA Winter Hardiness Z3; Heat Z3; 109 growing days)

Shengrui Yao, Research Fellow, Grand Rapids, MN

<http://ncroc.cfans.umn.edu/Horticulture.html>

1. Petunia 'Pretty Much Picasso'



Photo 2: Les Bolstad Golf Course, St. Paul 2009. Annual Flower Trial report.



Photo 3: Coleus 'Trusty Rusty'. 2009 Annual Flower Trial report



2. Petunia 'Supertunia Vista Bubblegum'
3. Ipomoea 'Illusion Midnight Lace'
4. Delphinium 'Diamonds Blue'
5. Lobularia 'Snow Princess'
6. Cyperus 'Graceful Grasses King Tut'
7. Verbena 'Lanai Royal Purple'
8. Colocasia 'Heart of the Jungle'
9. Cleome 'Senorita Rosalita'
10. Rudbeckia 'Denver Daisy'

All American Selections

All three Minnesota flower trial locations involved in the 2009 Annual Flower Trial are also All America Selections Display Gardens, (AAS) since 1990, and grow the AAS winners from the past five years. The AAS Award recognizes a flower or vegetable variety proven to be superior to all others on the market. In 2009, St. Paul was the only Minnesota location with All American Selection cultivars in its Top 10 Performing Annuals list. There were, however, four AAS cultivars highlighted as performing good or excellent at two or three Minnesota trial locations under 2009 conditions. These highlighted AAS cultivars include:

Celosia 'Fresh Look Gold'
 Nicotiana 'Perfume Deep Purple'
 Petunia 'Opera Supreme Pink Morn'
 Salvia 'Evolution'

The Full 2009 Annual Flower Trial Report

So which other annual flowers performed best across Minnesota locations? Evaluation data for hundreds of annual flower cultivars can be found in the full 2009 Annual Flower Trial report. Highlighted in grey are cultivars rated as good to excellent under 2009 conditions for at least two or three locations. See page one under **Flower Cultivar Evaluation Data** to gain further insight as to how these highlighted cultivars are evaluated for the 2009 Annual Flower Trials. The report can be read here:

[FlowerTrial 2009-1.pdf](#)

The 2009 University of Minnesota Annual Flower Trials certainly give us an idea of which annual flowers performed the best under 2009 growing conditions. Now it's up to Minnesota gardeners and nurseries to continue evaluating these new flower cultivars in 2010 under a new year's growing conditions, in new sites, and with different caretakers. May the best varieties win!

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[Flowers](#)

Categories

[Calendar \(5\)](#)

[Diseases \(18\)](#)

[Flowers \(25\)](#)

[Fruit \(7\)](#)

[General Gardening \(3\)](#)

[Houseplants \(8\)](#)

[Information Technology \(2\)](#)

[Insects \(36\)](#)

[Landscaping \(13\)](#)

[Lawns \(18\)](#)

[Soils & Composting \(1\)](#)

[Trees & Shrubs \(26\)](#)

[Vegetables \(11\)](#)

[Weeds \(3\)](#)

[Wildlife](#)

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[March 2010 \(7\)](#)
[February 2010 \(5\)](#)
[January 2010 \(5\)](#)
[December 2009 \(5\)](#)
[November 2009 \(4\)](#)
[October 2009 \(7\)](#)
[September 2009 \(10\)](#)
[August 2009 \(14\)](#)
[July 2009 \(20\)](#)
[June 2009 \(20\)](#)
[May 2009 \(19\)](#)
[April 2009 \(9\)](#)
[March 2009 \(7\)](#)
[February 2009 \(9\)](#)
[January 2009 \(10\)](#)

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