

“Best of the Best” Trial Plants 2006-2023



--as tested by Master Gardeners--



At the Idea Garden, a volunteer display garden of the University of Illinois Champaign County Master Gardeners, we trial (“test out”) annuals each year. We have received about 50 different kinds of plants from 1-2 national companies. There are many more companies out there, and we feel fortunate to have received plants from the 2 companies. We get plants that will not be released for sale until the next year and also ones that are currently available. I’ve run the program since 2001. 😊

Detailed notes are made on them each month and submitted to the companies. This is extremely helpful to us as we learn which plants do well in the zone 5 area. They are evaluated for percentage of bloom, percent of pests or diseases, and an overall evaluation (a “5” means- “Oh, my gosh, I MUST try this out in my garden next year!” to a “1” which means, “This looks miserable”.) First is a list of the plants we trialed in 2023 (Gold, Silver, Bronze Medals) -then a summary of the **Best** of the Best Winners (mostly Gold Medal winners) over the years. Most are Proven Winner or Ball Horticultural Co. plants. Plants listed in **bold** are the ones to be first released in 2024.

2023-9-15 LIST OF TRIALS MEDAL WINNERS

PERFECT SCORE ALL SEASON!= Super Gold Medal Winners!: (NINE OF THEM= ALL TIME RECORD!!) (new being released in 2024 in bold)

Bidens Campfire Marshmallow, Petunia Supertunia Hoopla Vivid Orchid,
Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Hot Pink, Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Indigo,
Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Sweet Sangria, Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Scarlet,
Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Yellow, Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Violet Star,
Petunia Supertunia Vista Jazzberry.

GOLD MEDAL WINNERS: (A Petunia Palooza!) 14 Gold Medal Winners

Bidens Campfire Marshmallow, Ipomoea Sweet Caroline Sweetheart Mahogany,
Petunia Supertunia Hoopla Vivid Orchid, Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Hot Pink,
Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Indigo, Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Midnight,
Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Pink Star, **Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Sweet Sangria** (sadly, I have learned this will not be released in 2024 yet, not sure why, we loved it!),
Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Scarlet, Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Yellow,
Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista Violet Star, Petunia Supertunia Vista Jazzberry.

SILVER MEDAL WINNERS: (8 winners)

Calibrachoa Superbells Prism Pink Lemonade, **Calibrachoa Superbells Smitten Pink 2024,** Ipomoea Sweet Caroline Upside Black Coffee, Ipomoea Sweet Caroline Upside Key Lime,
Petunia Supertunia Saffron Finch, Petunia Supertunia Bermuda Beach 2024, Verbena Superbena Pink Cashmere, Verbena Superbena Sparkling Amethyst.

BRONZE MEDAL WINNERS: (5 winners)

Calibrachoa Superbells Double Redstone, Calibrachoa Superbells Double Vintage Coral, Calibrachoa Superbells Double Twilight, Ipomoea Sweet Caroline Red Hawk 2024, Verbena Superbena Cherryburst 2024

Top 2022 Trial Plants Gold Medal Winners: (ones in bold were new 2023)

Yellow highlighted= my personals favorites.

Begonia Surefire® Rose, and **Surefire White**

Begonia Double Up® White (chocolate leaves)

Cyperus Graceful Grasses®: Prince Tut

Gomphrena Truffula Pink

Ipomoea (sweet potato): **Illusion® Penny Lace™**, Sweet Caroline Medusa Green,

Petunias **Supertunia Mini Vista® Yellow**, Mini Vista Hot Pink, Mini Vista White

Petunia Supertunia® **Persimmon** (new), Vista Jazzberry.

Plectranthus (Coleus) ColorBlaze® Torchlight

Portulaca Mojave® Yellow 2023

ALL of the VERY Top Winners: over the years 2006- 2022 have been:

These include Proven Winner and Ball Horticultural

Co. plants,,, And here they are:

Note: the more recent introductions are at the end of each list & keep in mind, if it says "2019"- that means was INTRODUCED in spring of 2020:

Alternanthera: Alternantheras: 'Plum Dandy' and 'Purple Prince'(2017)

Angelonia: 'AngelMist Spreading Purple Improved', Angelonia 'Archangel Pink', 'Archangel Purple', 'Serena Purple', 'Serena Lavender Pink', 'Angelface Blue', 'Archangel Dark Rose' (top Angelina for 2014). **Angelonia 'Archangel Orchid Pink'**, Angelonia '**Archangel Blue Bicolor**'(this blooms ALL summer, at least in zone 5 Michigan!), Angelonia 'Angelface Super Pink'; **(Angelonia are deer/ rabbit resistant)**

Argyranthemum: 'Golden Butterfly' & 'Pure White Butterfly' (both 2017)

Basil 'Pesto Perpetua' (tied for top plant in 2007)- delicious, colorful variegated leaves and does not go to seed easily. **Basil 'Amazel'** (2018- DOWNY MILDEW RESISTANT)

Begonia 'Whopper Rose Green Foliage', 'Whopper Rose Bronze Foliage', 'Surefire Red' and 'Surefire Rose', 'Fireballs'. Begonia 'Double Up White' (2023 chocolate leaves, tidy plant), '**Surefire White**' (2023 big and beautiful, I cant live without this now!),

Bidens 'Campfire Flame, 2019

Calibrachoa: 'Mini-Famous Double White', 'Pomegranate Punch', 'Superbells Over Easy'. -- Keep in mind, ALL do better if in a container with REGULAR fertilizing, and can fade late summer (as an aside- if you are going to buy a "premium annual"- my opinion is you would do much better to spend your money on one of the 'Mini Vista' series of

petunias listed below, although "Calis" can be gorgeous in containers if fertilized often and not overwatered)

Canna: Canna Canova 'Mango', **Canna 'Toucan Scarlet'** (2017) (many in the Toucan & Canova did great- but these were the very top rated ones; the Canova series can be started from seed and bloom the first year- WOO!)

Cleome 'Senorita Rosalita' – **repeat** winner, (these get a bit of flea beetles, but are sterile & wont reseed all over, a full great all season bloomer, tall, majestic and FABULOUS), 'Senorita Blanca'. **Both bunny and deer RESISTANT! WAHOO!**

Coleus (Plectranthus):

'ColorBlaze' series: (ColorBlaze developed in Florida & are meant to withstand sun also!) 'ColorBlaze Dipt in Wine', ColorBlaze Royale Glissade', 'ColorBlaze Velvet Mocha', 'Colorblaze Lime Time', 'ColorBlaze Sedona' ('Sedona' is one of the all time favorites due to its infusion of rust, ochre, purple, plum and burgundy that make blending it with other plants a joy!!- now it's replaced by **Sedona Sunset**- 2018), 'ColorBlaze Alligator Tears', 'ColorBlaze Apple Brandy', 'ColorBlaze Velveteen', **ColorBlaze' Golden Dreams'** (2018), 'ColorBlaze Rediculous' (2018- replaces 'Marooned'), **ColorBlaze Torchlight** (2018 – it replaces 'Kingswood Torch'), Coleus 'Wicked Witch'- 2019, 'ColorBlaze El Brighto' (2021),

Other Coleus: 'Spumoni', 'Coleasaurus Kiwi', 'Burgundy Lace', 'Cocoa Mint', **'Wasabi'**, **Coleus 'French Quarter'**;

Coleus 'Kong Solomon Salmon Pink'; Coleus 'Campfire'

Coleus 'Kong Jr.' series: **'Kong Jr Rose'**, 'Kong Jr, Scarlet', 'Kong Jr. Lime Sprite'. (Kong Jr. series has same wonderful huge leaves on a plant that won't tower over others as much),

Colocasia: 'Heart of the Jungle', Colocasia 'Royal Hawaiian Aloha' (2017) **Deer/ rabbit resistant.**

Cuphea 'Vermillionaire'- millions of vermilion blooms that hummingbirds are suckers for!

Cyperus 'King Tut', 'Baby Tut', **Prince Tut** (2021) **Deer/ rabbit resistant.**

Dahlia: **Dahlia 'Mystic Illusion'** (one of the most resistant to powdery mildew), Dahlia **'Dahlightful Tupelo Honey'**(2017) Both have burgundy foliage & wonderful golden yellow flowers to contrast with that.

Euphorbia 'Diamond Frost' (**multi** year winner since beginning of trials), Euphorbia 'Diamond Delight', **Euphorbia "Diamond Snow"** 2019- TOP winner! --Fantastic plant! **Deer/ rabbit resistant.**

Gallardia 'Heat It Up Yellow'-2019

Gomphrena 'Truffula Pink' (2018, 2021 best gomphrena I have ever seen)

Helianthus 'Suncredible Yellow'- 2019- just keeps on blooming! **Helianthus 'Suncredible Saturn'** (2021)

Helenium 'Dakota Gold' (top winner in 2007- still love this, can reseed some delightfully in dry spots) **deer, bunny resistant**. This CONTINUES to be fabulous in my garden through 2023!

Heliotropium Augusta Lavender (2021) fragrant, bred to be planted in the ground, lovely, full, and long blooming. **Deer/ rabbit resistant**.

Impatiens: (interspecific hybrid that don't die from downy mildew): Impatiens 'Bounce White', 'Big Bounce White', 'Bounce Pink Flame', 'Bounce Violet', 'Big Bounce Lavender', 'Big Bounce Lilac', – all these were 2014 trial plants. Bounce impatiens are AMAZING!! I now cannot live without them!!!! (I have not trialed the 'Sunpatiens'- but they seem to do as well) 'Sunpatiens Compact' also great- but we did not officially trials these.

Incarvillea 'Cheron White'

Ipomoea= sweet potatoes: 'Sweet Caroline' series most do well but are prone to some Japanese beetle munching- one year the deep burgundy ones seem most attacked. Ipomoea (sweet potato): Illusion® Penny Lace™ (2023- gorgeous burgundy lacy foliage), Sweet Caroline Medusa Green (A bit chartreuse with lacy leaves- smash hit with any intense colors!- where has it been all my life??)

Lantana: 'Landmark Rose Sunrise Improved', 'Luscious Citrus Blend', 'Luscious Lemonade', 'Luscious Tropical Fruit', 'Luscious Pina Colada' Lantana 'Lucky Red'; Lantana "Luscious Royale Cosmo" (2017 & 2018, my favorite, the "Royale" series are more neatly rounded, tidy & compact- not as sprawling). 'Luscious Goldengate'- 2019. **Deer, bunny resistant**

Lobularia: (these are like alyssum on steroids!- sterile & don't quit blooming all season, rabbit, deer resistant); 'Snow Princess' (repeat perfect scores), 'Blushing Princess' (perfect score), 'Frosty Knight', 'Dark Knight' (2014 top winner), 'White Knight' (2021, bred to be more compact for things like containers) . SPECTACULAR plants- the 'Snow Princess' can grow 36" wide, all take light frosts but churn out a froth of fine blooms ALL season into October!

Marigold: Marigold 'Taishan Yellow Improved'- huge blooms!, Marigold 'Bonanza Orange' (2017)

Mecardonia 'Gold Dust'- a tiny hard working charmer with yellow blooms

Nierembergia 'Augusta Blue Skies'-delightful fine texture true sky blue.

Millet 'Jade Princess' (perfect score 2012) Love the chartreuse leaves with brown "fox tail" seed heads!, Ornamental Millet 'Copper Prince' (2017)

Ornamental Pepper: Ornamental pepper 'Midnight Fire' (2017) **sometimes Deer/ rabbit resistant**.

Pennisetum 'Graceful Grasses Vertigo' (top winner 2010- huge waterfall of burgundy wide ribbons of leaves! Stunning.), Pennisetum 'Fireworks'. **Deer/ rabbit resistant**.

Petunias:

--'Supertunia Vista' Series which includes: 'Supertunia Vista Fuchsia' (2008 top winner & it was improved on years after that), 'Supertunia Vista Silverberry', 'Supertunia Vista Bubblegum', (last two are MULTI repeat winners), 'Supertunia Vista Snowdrift'- 2019, 'Supertunia Vista Jazzberry' (2021)- an electric fuchsia STUNNER!

--"regular" Supertunias : 'Supertunia Raspberry Blast', 'Supertunia Lavender Skies' (top winner 2009), 'Supertunia Honey', 'Supertunia Royal Magenta Improved' (2017),
Petunia 'Supertunia Bordeaux' (2017), Petunia 'Supertunia Lovey Dovey'(2017),
'Supertunia Blue Skies' (2018 & 2019- fabulous!), 'Supertunias: 'Sharon' and 'Raspberry Rush' -(2019), 'Supertunia Royal Velvet Improved' (2021), 'Supertunia Sharon', Petunia
Supertunia® Persimmon (2023),

--'Supertunia Mini Vista' Series- the name was changed from the "Charm" series to 'Mini Vista' on most, and the 'Mini Vistas' are more vigorous: 'Supertunia Pink Charm', 'Supertunia Mini Vista Sangria Charm', 'Supertunia Rose Blast Charm', 'Supertunia Mini Vista Morning Glory'(2014 top winner-amazing REPEAT GOLD MEDAL WINNER!).
'Supertunia Mini Vista Pink Star', Supertunia Mini Vista Violet Star', 'Supertunia Orchid Charm', Petunia 'Supertunia Mini Vista Hot Pink' (2017-REPEAT winner & astounding flood of blooms), Petunia "Supertunia Mulberry Charm' (2017), Petunia 'Supertunia Mini Vista White' (perfect score 2018!) 'Supertunia Mini Vista Indigo' 2019,- beautiful purple/indigo hues, floods of flowers! Petunia Supertunia Mini Vista® Yellow (2023) I LOVE THESE Mini Vistas AND THE VISTA series!!

Other petunias:

--'Easy Wave Mystic Pink', 'Easy Wave Pink Dawn'

--'EZ Rider' series: 'EZ Rider Deep Pink', 'EZ Rider Rose', and 'EZ Rider White'(best white in my opinion), 'Easy Rider Blue'.

-- also Petunias: 'Pop Rocks White', 'Pretty Flora White', 'Pretty Grand Coral', 'Shock Wave Rose Improved'.

Portulaca 'Mojave Red Improved'- (2019), Portulaca Mojave® Yellow (2023) "not favored by deer and rabbits".

Rudbeckia: Rudbeckia 'Tiger Eye'- showy gorgeous HUGE blooms.

Salvia 'Vista Purple', 'Lighthouse', Salvia 'Rockin Playin' the Blues Improved'(stunning, tall & true blue!, repeat winner, EVER popular), Salvia 'Rockin' Deep Purple'(2017), Salvia 'Unplugged So Blue'- 2019. We didn't trial it, but Salvia 'Mysty' is an excellent & better replacement for "Victoria Blue" and I like it better than Salvia 'Unplugged So Blue', even, it has more blooms and is like a shorter 'Playin the Blues', but is NOT made by Proven Winners. *Salvia are deer/ rabbit resistant and hummingbirds LOVE the 'Rockin' series)*

Scaevola 'Whirlwind Pink' (2018), 'Whirlwind Blue Improved'- 2019

Sedum: Sedum 'Lemon Coral'. (annual in our area, fantastic bright chartreuse foliage to brighten any area- use with fuchsia or purple or blue plants!) **Deer/ rabbit resistant.**

Verbena: 'Superbena Royal Chambray' (probably called Superbena Imperial Blue now') , 'Superbena Violet Ice' (2013), Verbena 'EnduraScape Dark Purple' (2014 & top verbena that year) Verbena 'EnduraScape Pink Bicolor' (gorgeous & early/ long bloomer 2016) Verbena 'Superbena Stormburst' (2017), 'Superbena Whiteout' (2018) 'Superbena Sparkling Amethyst Improved'- 2019 .. Many verbenas "go on summer vacation" and have few blooms in the heat of July, August—the last 5 hang in there MUCH better than even some of the earlier verbenas we trialed years ago, but still may slow down a bit in blooming in August.

Vincas: 'Titan Icy Pink', 'Mediterranean XP Cherry Halo', 'Pacifica Orange', Vinca 'Titan Dark Red', 'Titan Apricot', 'Titan Burgundy', 'Titan Lilac', 'Titan Rose Halo'. The Titan series is vigorous, robust, and **disease resistant** and stellar even in high heat and humidity AND pest free! MUCH better than "generic" vinca. "Cora XDR" (for Extra Disease Resistance) was not officially tested but does well also. **Deer, bunny resistant.**

Zinnia Zahara Series: 'Zahara Fire', 'Zahara Double Fire', 'Zahara Scarlet', 'Zahara Sunburst' (perfect score 2013), Zinnia 'Zahara Cherry', Zinnia 'Double Zahara Raspberry Ripple' (2017- I'm NUTS over this) I truly think the whole 'Zahara' series (there are other colors) is better than the Profusion series! Bigger blooms, much less mildew, fuller healthier plants.

So NOW- you have some ideas for the best annuals to try and soon we will have the 2023 winners to add to this list- YAY!

-Ann Tice , Plant Trial "Tattler" for the University of Illinois Champaign County Master Gardeners Idea Garden since 2001 😊 . dermgood@gmail.com

To see OTHER annuals trial site results, and learn how annuals did in their trials to get a "jump" on the new arrivals each year- try Michigan State University: https://www.canr.msu.edu/hrt/our_gardens/Visit/Amien-and-Florence-Carter-Trial-Garden/

And Penn State University <https://agsci.psu.edu/flower-trials/index.cfm/fuseaction/plants.kwSearchPost>