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# Variety Central



## Classic City Awards For Perennials

A glance at the best performers in the Trial Gardens at UGA.

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We recently discussed, argued and finally voted on the top 12 perennials in the Trial Gardens at UGA. These plants exemplified the highest performance for the longest period of time in our challenging environment in Athens, Ga.

We used our own eyeballs but also asked visitors to flag the plants they liked best. On perennials, we collected data on length of flowering (or length of beauty if no flowers), disease and insect problems, and their ability to perform well even in difficult conditions of heat and humidity. The plants that make this list are truly the best of the best.

These are the Oscars, the Emmys, the Tonys and the Obies all tied in one. If a plant wins a Classic City award, take it to the bank.

### And The Winners Are ...

***Athyrium nipponica* 'Wildwood Twist.'** This fern performed extraordinarily well during 2009. While it has been a UGA Trial Garden resident for a few years, we placed it in a much more desirable site during the winter earlier in the year. The better soil moisture combined with denser shade gave this fern a reason to shine. We are proud to present this plant to our visitors. Its frond color pattern is eye catching and can serve as a fantastic focal point, border, accent plant or container component.

***Coreopsis* 'Route 66.'** With flashes of red and yellow in the daisy flowers, the old highway has been resurrected in a compact, spunky form of tickseed. Performing in brilliant form all summer into the early autumn, this coreopsis from ItSaul Plants has an attractive mound form and is floriferous without need for deadheading.



**Echinacea 'Tiki Torch.'** I am a particularly harsh skeptic of many of the new echinaceas, and I had to be talked into this one. However, everyone was more than a little pleased 'Tiki Torch' did so well. The orange flower color is vivid and maintains its color over a long period of time. A plant that can hold its own with no need for staking is desirable, and 'Tiki Torch' from Terra Nova is just that.

Although 2009 was its first year, we expect to see this echinacea reappear next year with even more gusto and even more blooms. This year's sneak peek has definitely given us reason to believe it will.

**Erysimum 'Jenny Brook.'** She wowed us from January until June this year with her delightful color palette of apricot and lavender. 'Jenny Brook' from Blooms of Bressingham cascades well down a slope or overhanging a bank. A plant worth getting to know, this erysimum is the best wall flower we have ever trialed, bar none. Lots of flower power, no maintenance. It showed no sign of stress whatsoever, proving to withstand the climate associated with the southeastern piedmont. She is green and healthy in the fall and looking forward to next spring.



**Gaillardia 'Georgia Yellow.'** Not to toot our own horn, but we haven't witnessed a finer gaillardia in a very long time. 'Georgia Yellow,' an Athens Select debut, exhibits a floriferous blooming habit and no sign of legginess that is often seen with other gaillardias. From May to October, plants were never out of bloom, quite different than many of the other gaillardias on trial. Deadheading was not necessary as the rounded fruit

added another ornamental dimension to the plant. 'Georgia Yellow' asks for little fuss, provides a lot and given room to grow, can liven up any garden space.

**Heliopsis 'Tuscan Sun.'** We planted 'Tuscan Sun' in a cement container, not knowing exactly how tall it would grow. To our amazement, this compact Proven Winners plant never grew more than 9 inches tall. This is the first year for the plant, so we expect more height next year, but a dwarf heliopsis – well, we are excited. It formed a tight mound that was consistently covered in bright yellow blossoms from June until frost. 'Tuscan Sun' tolerated our heat and our humidity without waning.



**Heuchera villosa 'Brownies.'** This autumn coral bells is, in many ways, the essence of the season. Warmth in the tone of the brown and tan foliage and the softness of the cream puffs of floral decoration both echo the spirit of fall. 'Brownies' is outstanding in its ability to withstand intense heat, humidity and drought and still come out looking like a 10.

**Heuchera villosa 'Caramel.'** Golden apricot-hued leaves adorned with sprays of white blossoms make this heuchera stand out from the rest. We probably trial two dozen different heucheras, but to me this is the best. Its potential to hold up in our sometimes less-than-tolerable-summer adds even more charm to 'Caramel.' We hold this plant in the very highest regard of all the heucheras we are trialing. Plants have been in the gardens for many years and never fail to please.



**Phlox 'Peacock White.'** We have been very impressed with the Syngenta series of compact summer phlox. While all the colors within the series are impressive, none provided the same oomph 'Peacock White' did. The color is a vivid fresh bright white, and the blooms seem to have a noticeable longevity, exhibiting less of a need for deadheading. The pristine white color, together with the robust growing habit of a

plant that never was taller than 15 inches, makes this phlox a plant worth admiration.

Lavandula x intermedia 'Dutch.'

'Dutch' is by far the most vigorous and hardy lavender at the trial garden. A faithful resident for many years, we have been continually impressed with its bountiful florets and calming rich scent. In an effort to not take this great specimen for granted, we felt it absolutely necessary to include 'Dutch' in our 2009 Classic City Awards for being reliably beautiful year after year.



**Rosa 'Sunny Knockout.'** One of the best roses we have trialed, 'Sunny Knockout' will almost knock you out, not only with its sunny disposition, but also with its beautiful fragrance. This is its first year in the garden and it has been a pleasure to watch this rose grow and blossom. It has proven to be a real showstopper, and we look forward to watching her turn heads next year.



**Rudbeckia 'Henry Eilers.'** Terra Nova's 'Henry Eilers' is a handsome and spirited lad, indeed. We were very much entertained by the scoop-petaled, yellow-orange flowers. This rudbeckia adds a whimsical focal point wherever planted. Flowering time was midsummer, and 'Henry Eilers' was still flowering November 1. Another attribute of this plant is the foliage remained healthy and unscathed by any disease or insect pillage throughout the season.

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#### **About the author:**

*Allan Armitage is a professor, Department of Horticulture, University of Georgia, Athens, Ga. You can e-mail him at [allan@greenhousegrower.com](mailto:allan@greenhousegrower.com). Allan would like to thank perennial manager Shanna Tomlinson for her skill and tenacity working with the hundreds of perennials in the garden.*

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