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# greenhouse GROWER

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American Color

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# Annual Surprises & Perennial Favorites

**T**HE Trial Gardens at the University of Georgia host two open houses each year – one for the commercial industry and another for the gardening public. In my last column, I shared the overall annual favorites of the commercial industry and the gardening public. In this column, I share the annuals the industry and public surprisingly preferred, as well as the perennial favorites of both parties.

The industry doesn't get it yet, as it was not chosen. Hopefully, the industry will come around in time.

**Dahlia 'Dark Angel Dracula.'** This was another breakthrough here in the South, where dahlias struggle with the heat. This GroLink dahlia was in the top 10 in industry voting, and it was also flagged by the public.

**Bulbine 'Compact Yellow.'** This GroLink variety was quite an eye catcher and ranked sixth overall by the public.

ity. In fact, I believe people simply couldn't make up their minds. In our minds, the breeding by Selecta First Class and Fides is ahead of the pack.

**Begonias.** As expected, none of the wax begonias caught the eyes of either group, although the Big series from Benary looks very good to us. However, free-range cultivars like 'Edinburgh' and 'Anna Fiele' garnered significant flags. The popularity of these old mainstays bodes well for be-



Terra Nova's 'Henry Eilers' rudbeckia



Fides calibrachoa

## The Surprises

Plants that are not necessarily big sellers caught the public eye at the trial gardens this year and, in some cases, the industry's eye as well. Here are some of the lesser-known varieties, but ones that often finished as top 10 vote getters when flagged by the industry or the public.

**Mimulus 'Curious Orange.'** This Proven Winners variety was the biggest surprise for me, as mimulus historically has done poorly in the South. It broke the public top 10, sporting dozens of flags.

**Pentas 'Stars and Stripes.'** 'Stars and Stripes,' from Athens Select, was the talk of the pentas. Its variegated foliage and deep red flowers attracted the most flags by far.

**Gomphrena 'Audray Purple Red.'** This American Takii gomphrena was one of many excellent globe amaranths in the garden. Tough and dependable, this should be a mainstream plant.

**Calibrachoa.** The biggest surprise is that none was chosen by either group. This is a reflection of numbers – we have more than 75 cultivars – rather than qual-

gonias like PanAmerican Seed's 'Gryphon.'

**The others.** Hemigraphis (waffle plant), *Manihot esculenta* 'Variegata' (variegated tapioca) and a few other oddball plants also garnered significant votes from both groups. Propagation issues dog the latter, but I'm not sure why we don't see more of the former.

## Perennial Favorites

In the summer, the annuals make the biggest splash but they are surrounded by perennials of every ilk in the trial gardens. I don't think the industry folks paid much



attention, but the public certainly did. Only a handful received significant flags, but with perennials, timing is everything.

The overall vote getter with the public was hydrangea 'Limelight.' It was in its full glory, and if this is not a wakeup call to be growing a few select woody plants as part of your mix, you have your head in the sand. Other perennial standouts were:

**Rudbeckia 'Henry Eilers.'** This is a relatively new cultivar from Terra Nova Nurseries that looks spectacular here in July and August. It shines later the further north you go. 'Early Bird Gold' from Dupont, which did well in the voting, is one of our favorites. Darwin's 'Pot of Gold' was a favorite, too, but both were distant seconds to Henry.



PanAmerican's 'Gryphon' begonia

**Echinacea.** We have more than 20 cultivars here, but the one in full flower when people were in the garden was Terra Nova's 'Firebird,' one of our favorites, and Darwin's 'Pure Green Jewel,' which I predict will quickly become a major player in the coneflower business. Order these now.

**Phlox.** Lots of phlox were on display but Syngenta Flowers' 'Peacock White' and Darwin's 'Peppermint Twist' were the big winners by the public. Nothing else came close. Neither was in flower when the industry was there.

**Roses.** The David Austin roses garnered many public votes. This is our first year with the Austins, so we are not yet ready to make any recommendations. However, the public absolutely loved 'Lady Emma Hamilton.' 'Charlotte' came in a close second.

**Belamcanda 'Hello Yellow.'** This Brent & Becky's Bulbs blackberry lily has bright yellow flowers and, when in bloom, always catches the eye. It certainly did for the people in the garden.

**Crinum 'Bradley.'** This was hidden behind some larger plants but the public found it anyway. 'Bradley' has handsome pink flowers, is an easy grower and a variety gardeners will eat up.

Many more plants received flags, and if the events were held at a different time, I am sure different plants would have received more (or fewer) votes. There were very few "dogs" in the trials, but there is no doubt some plants are simply better than others in the heat and humidity of the UGA Trial Gardens. These are real data from real people under real landscape conditions. I hope they prove useful to you real growers and retailers.

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