

Best Plants Report 2008

**University of Tennessee
West Tennessee Research and Education Center Gardens
Jackson, TN
Jason Reeves and Matthew Morrow**

Best in Show For 2008

Petunia 'Vista Fuschia' Proven Winners

Best New 2008 Variety

Zinnia 'Zahara Yellow' PanAmerican Seed

Best Old Variety

Ornamental pepper 'Black Pearl' PanAmerican Seed

Top 10 Performers

Begonia 'Big Red with Green Leaf' Benary

Ornamental Pepper 'Purple Flash' PanAmerican Seed

Vinca 'Mediterranean Red XP' PanAmerican Seed Great new color for the ground hugging Mediterranean series.

Vinca 'Mediterranean White XP' PanAmerican Seed Great new color for the ground hugging Mediterranean series.

Vinca 'First Kiss Blueberry' AAS Winner

Petunia 'Opera Supreme Pink Morn' AAS Winner

Euphorbia 'Diamond Frost' Proven Winners

Lantana 'Luscious Grape' Proven Winners

Petunia Supertunia 'Vista Bubblegum' Proven Winners

Osteospermum 'Asti White' AAS Winner

Best Herbs

Lavender 'Sancho Panza' K. Sahin

Basil 'Boxwood' Ball Seed Co.

Perennials

Sedum rupestre 'Angelina'

Muhlenbergia capillaris Pink Muhly Grass

Panicum virgatum 'Northwind' Very strong steamed

Pulmonaria longifolia 'Diana Claire'

Agave parryi subs. *huachucensis* good drainage is a must

Agave macroculmis good drainage is a must

Best vines:

Jasminum officinalis 'Fiona Sunrise' also known as 'Frojas'

Fallopia baldschuanica 'Lemon Lace' synonym Fallopia aubertii Gold Lace Vine

Tropicals

Asclepias physocarpa Swan Butterfly Milkweed

Calitropis gigantea Giant Milkweed

Musa acuminata 'Siam Ruby'

Zea mays 'Winning Streak'TM Tropical Perennial Corn

Woody Plants

Cupressus arizonica var. *glabra* 'Limelight' Arizona Cypress

Spirea thunbergii 'Ogon' also goes by the trademark name Mellow YellowTM

Indigofera amblyantha

Physocarpus opulifolius Summer Wine® 'Seward' Ninebark

Juniperus chinensis 'Gold Lace'

Juniperus horizontalis Lime GlowTM

It was a busy season for Ornamental Horticulture this year. We put together one of our most successful Summer Celebrations to date, drawing around 3,400 attendees. Since research is our main focus here at WTREC, we worked hard to trial many new seed grown and vegetative plant varieties for the benefit of the gardening community as a whole.

Some of the notable varieties in our **Top 10 Performers** list include 'Big Red with Green Leaf' begonia from Benary Seed, as well as an ornamental pepper called 'Purple Flash' that we believe will prove stunning to gardeners for years to come. Another **Top 10 Performer** is *Osteospermum* 'Asti White', a 2008 AAS winner. It outperformed all of the vegetative types trialed in our hot, humid area, and looked good until frost.

Our **Best New Variety for 2008**, 'Zahara Yellow' zinnia, has a yellow coloration rarely seen in a flower and required little care and zero dead heading, but still managed to look superb all season. For the **Best Old Variety**, we chose an ornamental pepper called 'Black Pearl'. This pepper really stood out in the gardens and was one of our most asked about plants.

A lavender cultivar called 'Sancho Panza' has impressed us by remaining vibrant and upright all season, which is no mean feat for a lavender in west Tennessee. Out of several fine perennials, we are able to recommend a lungwort, *Pulmonaria longifolia*. This is exciting because many lungworts fizzle out in our hot and humid climate. Our trial shows that plants with *longifolia* parentage can stand up to our conditions and thrive. *P. longifolia* 'Diana Claire' has been performing well for several years with little care under droughty conditions.

Recent buzz over the use of *Panicum* (switch grass) as a bio-fuel has increased awareness of its usefulness as an ornamental. *Panicum virgatum* 'North Wind' has proven itself to be very strong stemmed and the only cultivar that does not flop over.

Two tropical plants stood out. One is a non- seed bearing ornamental corn, *Zea mays* 'Winning Streak'. It is highly variegated and perennial in warmer zones. 'Winning Streak' reaches 2 feet tall and makes a fine tropical specimen. The second is *Calitropis gigantea*, commonly called Giant Milkweed. Nearly every passerby commented on its beauty. Interestingly, though stunning to see, its flower carries no scent.

We've planted many new conifers for the collection of woody ornamentals, including two fine golden forms of Juniper. *Juniperis chinensis* 'Gold Lace' and *J. horizontalis* 'Lime Glow' will brighten any landscape. This past fall we added many new trees and shrubs to the gardens and arboretum.

In late summer we were busy assisting in the trial of 22 cultivars of jack-o-lantern pumpkin varieties for resistance to powdery mildew. We grew and harvested over 80 varieties of pumpkins, gourds and winter squash. These were used to create a fun and unique seasonal display, which was designed around a house made of pumpkins and corn stalks. Hundreds of visitors made it out to enjoy this work of "Curcubit Architecture" in person, and many more found out about it through the extensive news coverage it received around the country. The display opened up the eyes of many to the great potential in using agricultural products for decorative purposes.

The pumpkin trial results can be found by clicking on the link below.
<http://westtennessee.tennessee.edu/events/PumpkinTrialResults.pdf>