



Every visit to Dr. Allan Armitage's trial garden is a wonderful plant lover's adventure. There are so many plants competing for a spot of ground to show their abilities to perform and "wow" the viewer. Annuals, perennials, the odd and unusual – they are all there trying to shine. It was a pleasure to spend time getting to know some of the new ones that may find their way to our area within the next few years. And it is good to see some of the tried and true favorites holding their own with the new kids. New annual plant material emerging on the market is, as always, looking at improving overall habit, form, longevity, and color to help us enjoy our very short growing season. Leaf color, whether it is a single color or a multi-color variegation, is showing new selections and varieties in everything from soft pastels to vibrantly intense tones. Bloom color, texture, size, and flower longevity are reaching new heights. Let's talk about a few of the annual plants that are favorites or just making their way to the general market.

Zinnias are a long time favorite that look happy in the garden and do very well as a cut flower. They love the sun and the heat and can be found in every size from petite to monster. 'Uproar Rose' looked excellent both in leaf and flower. There was little to no insect or disease damage on the leaves (nice medium green color) or flowers, which were about 5" – 6" across and a luscious rosy pink on very full heads. 'Zowie Yellow Flame' has an interesting petal distribution in multiple tones of yellows, reds and oranges - quite similar in color to traditional Gaillardias. The very tight heads of 'O.P. Red & Yellow' with their creamy yellow tipping on red centers has, in the early stages of flowering, a look of Scabiosa (pink cushion flower) about them.

Coleus – can there ever be enough to keep us all happy? Probably not, so there is always more emerging on the market. The choices in color, habit, and texture are mind boggling in diversity. They are an easy plant to grow, requiring little more than consistent moisture and a bit of fertilizer to keep happy. While most of us think shade, shade, and shade for Coleus – all of the Coleus in the Athens trial garden are growing in the full hot Georgia sun, and love it! One of the newer ones on the market – and

yes, it can be found in the Midwest – is 'Kong Mosaic'. If you haven't seen this one, you are in for a treat when you do! The leaves are variegated in shades of red, green, purple and creamy white, and are almost prehistorically huge. While they will grow in the full sun, you may observe a bit of sunscald and the color will be less intense. But, you will notice increased levels of the beautifully crinkled leaf texture. Another newer development in color choices for Coleus is copper colored foliage. One of the nicer copper tones can be found in the 'Stained Glassworks Copper'. While there have been some copper choices previously available, this one has less of a sharp yellow overtone making it a bit easier to blend into other color palettes. I love it with some of the purples. If you need lighter tones to add light to an area, 'Glennis' has a lovely creamy base with paler tones of greens and pinks on pretty lobed leaves. Tall and firmly upright, 'Emerald and Snow', shows off beautiful greens and whites at a height of about 3'. In the darker ranges, 'Molten Lava' is an excellent dark purple with hints of burgundy-red. If you are looking for a knock-your-socks-off pink – watch for 'Patated Pink'. It looks like it will have a lower profile but definitely shades of pink, pink, and pinker.

Begonias have been staples for shade color and as traditional garden and container flowers. New in the line-up of choices are 'Bonita Shea' – a lovely foliage plant with smaller, crinkled leaves in shades of green and red. The rather small, whitish flowers are definitely an afterthought. It grows beautifully in the sun or shade, with sun exposure encouraging increased leaf texture. 'Art Hodes' is another fun begonia. It has large (8" – 10"), textured leaves in shades of a lighter, luminescent green with a slight red edging. I did not observe flowers at this point in development. 'Anna Feile' begonia has wing-like, sharply lobed edges on the dark green leaves. At 6" across and 10" long, the leaves really make a bold statement.

Who's wearing white this season? The Verbenas, Ageratums, and Euphorbias. There are outstanding whites available in these sun lovers - in forms ranging from very upright, Verbena 'Temari Patio White', to somewhat

creeping, Verbena 'Donalena White Hail'. Ageratum 'High Tide White' has a nice, taller form with a clear white flower color. Another white flowering plant that has performed very well over the past two years, in intense heat, is Euphorbia 'Diamond Frost'. This is a lower growing plant with smallish, medium green leaves - the very small white flowers float over the leaves, bouncing with the breeze.

For those who are looking for new plants, the Acalyphas will be one group to watch. These plants have an upright profile with leaves ranging from somewhat smooth and elongated in purples, reds and greens to the green and white crinkled leaf variegation in 'Ceylon Lime'. Alternantheras have certainly been showing their beautiful purples in the currently available 'Purple Knight'. 'Gail's Choice' also has a very nice full, lateral branching habit. A new one that will hit the markets soon is Alternanthera 'Summer Sensation'. This lower growing Alternanthera has a lovely deep purple hue to the older leaves, with new growth emerging in vibrant pink variegation. Our cooler evening temperatures should result in more intense pink coloring.

Why look at new plants, now, that will not be coming on the market for a while yet? First and foremost, new plants are fun. Second, we are all looking for plants that will perform to the best extent possible given our dollar investment. There are wonderful places, nearby, to check out many of the new and exciting trial plants. Boerner Botanic Garden in the Milwaukee area, Madison's Olbrich Botanic Garden, Green Bay Botanic Garden, and the Chicago Botanic Garden. They all have lovely trial garden areas and are worth a trip to see what's new. It's not too early to start planning for next year – or the year after.