

Exciting Yet Tough New Flowers Available to Gardeners

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Thursday, May 23, 2002

In this day of water restrictions, long work hours, and busy families, we tend to expect more of our landscape plants. And growers are very busy trying to provide what we expect. "New Crops and New Ideas for the South" was the theme of the recent Floriculture Field Days I attended in Gainesville, Florida. Flower growers, landscape and nursery professionals, and others associated with the floriculture industry met in Gainesville, May 7-9, 2002, for the field days sponsored by University of Florida, San Felasco Nursery, and Ornamental Outlook trade magazine.

Some plants were totally new to the industry. But most are just vast improvements of old favorites. Coleus plants, for example, have been around for years. Your grandmother probably planted them in the shade for the beautiful foliage color. But in recent years, many coleus cultivars have been released which will provide color under Florida conditions in the full sun. There's even a group of coleus now called the Florida City Series. I particularly liked 'Chuluota', 'Micanopy', 'Raiford', and 'Yalaha', but there are even cultivars named for Sopchoppy and Two Egg. I was also drawn to the brilliant chartreuse of 'Solar Shade' and the rich red of 'Red Ruffle', two other modern-day coleus cultivars. But there are many cultivars of these new sun-tolerant coleus available. Visit your local nursery and experiment with some this summer.

Another new summer annual in nurseries in recent years is angelonia, hailed as the "summer snapdragon". If you've tried any of the angelonias already on the market, you may have been relatively pleased. But some of the newest angelonias, such as Ball Seed's 'AngelMist', are being promoted as having "fuller, lusher plants that flower earlier than ever".

Cleome is another tough-as-nails summer annual from your grandmother's day. But most of the cleomes get rather tall and lanky. This year there's a 'Linde Armstrong' cleome that's attracting a lot of attention because of its compact growth habit and lavender flowers. If your local nursery doesn't have it yet, you may ask if they can get it. Some growers are already starting to produce it, though the supply may be limited.

Vinca, or Madagascar periwinkle as some people call it, has long been a summer favorite. It's very drought tolerant and is the kind of plant that can sprout in a crack in the sidewalk and thrive. Unfortunately, during rainy seasons, it often succumbs to a fungus disease and dies. Being released this year is the new 'Diva' series of vincas. 'Diva' is supposed to be like a vinca on steroids. It's bigger and supposedly tougher. It will be fun to try it once it reaches the local garden centers, though that may not be until next year.

Another exciting possibility that probably won't reach us until next year is *Duranta repens* 'Sapphire Showers'. *Duranta*, known to many as golden dewdrop, is a shrub grown for its blue flowers followed by golden yellow berries. The new 'Sapphire Showers' has flowers totally unlike those of its parent. The flowers are a much more intense violet-blue, edged

with a ruffle of white.

'Sapphire Flowers' drew lots of attention at the field days. There were plenty of new cultivars of other warm-season annuals at the field days. There were torenias, calibrachos, verbenas, petunias, and plectranthus or Cuban oregano. There were presentations on perennials such as salvias and gingers. Gardeners can rest assured that every year there will be plenty of new plants in the nurseries and that gardening will remain America's number one outdoor pastime.

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[\[Back\]](#)