

Lessons Learned from the Demonstration Garden



Photo by David Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Variegated shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet* 'Variegata') provides a colorful accent in a partially shaded area of the demonstration garden.

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If you've been gardening long, you know that not everything you plant grows equally well. And not everything you read about in magazines, newspapers, or plant catalogs grows well here either. So, before investing money in new plants, it's always nice to be able to see how they grow for someone else first.

This Saturday, October 30, 2004 at 10:00 a.m. , you will have that opportunity. There will be an open house and tours of the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension demonstration garden at 615 Paul Russell Road in Tallahassee . The garden contains a variety of colorful annuals and perennials, groundcovers, ornamental grasses, shrubs, and trees. Activities start promptly at 10:00 and should conclude at noon with door prize drawings. Be there early to register.

This summer was particularly hard on plants. Summer's heat and humidity is always a limiting factor for plants in north Florida . But, in addition, this year we had several tropical storms to contend with. So plants that have held up in the demonstration garden, despite all the stresses, are to be noted.

The variegated shell ginger, *Alpinia zerumbet* 'Variegata', is one such plant. We have had some of these beautiful variegated gingers in a partially shaded area of the garden for several years. The ones that have been in the garden the longest are now approximately four feet tall and three feet wide, full and lush, with large lime-green and yellow variegated leaves. They really brighten up a shaded spot in the garden. This ginger dies back in the winter, then rapidly resumes growth each spring.

We have also been very impressed with the performance of the *Torenia* 'Summer Wave' series this year. This low-growing flowering annual forms a thick groundcover of blooms in blue or light purple. We grow it in partial shade where it receives full sun only a few hours a day. It has performed better for us than the 'Clown' series of *torenia*. It has been flowering well since spring, performing beautifully through the worst of summer.

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When I was growing up, coleus was a plant used just in the shade. In recent years, however, there have been great advances in the breeding of coleus so that there are many cultivars that hold up well in full sun and that don't form flower heads so readily. Coleus are grown for their colorful foliage. When they flower, you should pinch the flower heads out to keep the plant growing well. So it is an advantage to have types of coleus that don't flower so readily. We have many colors and patterns of coleus growing in the demonstration garden, in both sun and shade. All have held up well through the summer heat and rains. The only problem we had was when the winds of the tropical storms blew over some of the large coleus plants. Even then, we just stood the plants back up, tucked the roots back in the soil, and cut the tops of the plants back so as to reduce some of the weight until the roots took hold again. The plants are coming back very well. So if you want easy color from spring through fall, plant some coleus plants next season. For ideas on how to use them in the landscape, come see ours.

Other plants with colorful foliage that have provided easy color for us in the garden are acahypha (copperleaf), crotons, *Alternanthera* 'Purple Knight', and ornamental sweet potatoes.

To see all these plants and many more, and how to grow them, make plans to come out Saturday morning at 10:00 a.m. And bring your camera and note pad. You're guaranteed to get some ideas from the garden. The Leon County Agriculture Center is about ¼ mile east of the fairgrounds on Paul Russell Road .

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