

Some Plants Take the Heat



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: *Euphorbia cotinifolia* 'Burgundy Wine' is one of the heat-tolerant plants you can see in the demonstration garden at the Leon County Extension Center.

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“It is all over by July”, say the gardening pundits. “Spring and fall are the only times that count.” Well, if it were ever true, t’aint so anymore. To see what I mean, visit the demonstration garden at the Leon County Extension Center, 615 Paul Russell Road in Tallahassee. There tropicals bloom in mass profusion, annuals defy the recent 100 degree weather and perennials keep to their schedule.

There are a few stars: big, bright yellow flowers of yellowbells (*Tecoma stans*), orange *Bauhinia galpicii*, and red spicy jatropha stand out in spite of rain and heat, all beauties from south Florida that survived last winter’s freezing cold here. A few common plants such as annual coleus have a new look, having spawned so many new colors, leaf design and textures, they have become much in demand and fit into most color schemes. Especially interesting is a ruffled chartreuse and bronze combo.

Caladiums, too, are adding new cultivars with red splotches in various designs playing a big part. A pink and green caladium paired with pink petunias works very nicely. The caladiums also love shade and are a foil for a lot of green. Pink and yellow allamandas are still small but flowering and should be strong plants by late summer. Even if some of these tropicals don’t survive the winter, they are enjoyable as annuals for months at a time, lasting well into the fall. With luck, and some protection, they might come back after winter.

A particularly captivating combination is in a bed inside the fenced-in car park at the back of the building. To get there, walk through the front door and angle your way left around to the Master Gardener Office. While there you can pick up a plant list, ask questions and generally find out what we, Master Gardeners, do. Someone there will

point you to the back door to the car park where you can see a big, dark red *Euphorbia cotinifolia* 'Burgundy Wine' against taller lime-green gingers with touches of yellow rudbeckias and a spark of a red coleus nearby. Stunning! The euphorbia was dug up last fall, placed in a huge pot in a temporary greenhouse and replanted in the spring. Well worth the effort as you will see. An under-used pavonia is there too, cream with a dark red center. Very useful because, with little effort, it fills a big space.

In a section of the garden out by Paul Russell Road, there is a splash of brilliant color with Knockout roses and vinca taking center stage. In this echo of an English border, dianthus is still hanging in there along with neon pink supertunias ('Vista Bubblegum'), still sporting brilliant blooms long past their sell-by date. Knockout roses have given new life to summer gardens. With almost constant color, they take little care and bloom from spring until fall...and then some.

Look for *Siphonochilus decora*, (sorry, it has no common name) a tropical, low growing, leafy plant with clear yellow flowers, and very decora, i.e. beautiful. It likes the shade, good news in leafy Tallahassee. It is in the bed on the south side of the building.

In the fenced-in area off to the far south of the building you will find tropical plants that are very useful in our summer gardens. Planted originally for summer show many survived the first winter and are slowly adapting to our warmer winters. It surprised us to see how many come back each year. All plant labels have their planting date on them indicating survival rates.

In that area, *Indigofera gerardiana* is beginning to bloom again. Its fine grey leaves are covered with pink flowers in April and will start to show off again this month. Not a tropical, it has survived winters with ease and is another beauty that needs a lot of room. Nearby, the bright yellow flowers of *Tecoma stans* are gorgeous, too, with a wow factor that defies description.

There is much to see. A pink hibiscus with a red center has a huge flower, fully ten inches across, a tall lycium that looks like rosemary but climbs and spreads in a strange way, and cordylines with spiky dark leaves that point up various set-pieces. An upright lavender cuphea is more reliable, a better bet than true lavender which can be iffy here. Sonset lantana gets a bit big, but is perfect in an empty area in the back. Its pink and yellow flowers liven the car park even on a rainy day.

Along with all the big eye-catchers there are the dependable zinnias, pentas and various cupheas. All blooming and colorfully disproving the myth. If you can take the heat, August is a winner.

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