



Amazing Annuals

proven winners to make your garden pop!

Calibrachoa Superbells® Peach

Photo courtesy www.provenwinners.com

by kerry ann mendez

Snap! Crackle! Pop! Sensationalize your garden and containers with annuals that are proven winners. Thankfully, Proven Winners has eliminated the guesswork for you. Any annual that wears the coveted PW label has passed Proven Winners' unforgiving muck boot camp.

Proven Winners was launched in 1992 by three top plant propagators. Their goal is to grow unique, superior flowering, disease resistant plants that pass long rigorous control tests conducted at trial stations across the United States, Canada, Europe, South Africa and Japan. Finalists that complete the grueling two- to three-year tests are then awarded the prized PW crown and shipped to garden centers around the country.

Closely associated with Proven Winners are Proven Selections. Over 400 plants are tagged as Proven Selections; some are new introductions and others have been around a while. Proven Selections plants are awarded this honorable title based on their superior regional performance whereas Proven Winners perform well nationwide. Either group will make you proud. Allow me to introduce you to a few of my favorites.

You'll hit the jackpot every time with Proven Winners' line of Calibrachoa, aptly nicknamed Superbells®. These miniature petunia look-alikes bloom tirelessly from May until frost and require no deadheading. Superbells® come in over a dozen fashionable colors and are available in mounded or trailing forms. Superbells® typically grow to between 6"-8" tall and all demand full sun. Although they are commonly used in containers, I prefer them in my perennial gardens. They provide season-long, colorful anchors and effectively link gardens together. I especially like the trailing varieties spilling over onto pathways, cascading over retaining walls, and filling in empty gaps left where spring blooming bulbs have gone dormant. One thing to

avoid with Superbells® is soggy soil. To minimize this stressful condition in containers, steer clear of glazed containers that hold moisture longer. Go for terra cotta that breathes better. Superbells® are usually sold in 4" pots.

Browallia receives the MVP award in my gardens, not only for its exceptional performance but also for its ability to trick folks into believing it's a perennial. This Energizer Bunny blooms in sun or shade from May through the first heavy frost. Like Superbells®, it requires no deadheading to make it shine. Browallia can reach 10"-14" but I like to pinch them back by half their height at planting for more compact, blossom-covered plants. Browallia is quite drought tolerant so it's a great substitute for thirsty Impatiens in dry shade. You can usually buy these in 4" pots.

Coleus has made a grand comeback. In the 1800s Coleus was in high demand but then fell in popularity during the early 1900s. Striking foliage colors, leaf shapes, forms and textures have propelled it back into the spotlight. Some of my favorites include Freckles (chartreuse and orange, 24"-30"), Pink Chacos (brilliant pink, white and green, 6"-12"), Sedona (burnished bronze, 18"-24"), Gay's Delight (screaming yellow with rich red veins, 24"-30"), Saturn (chocolate-maroon with splashes of chartreuse, 12"-18"), Strawberry Drop (red, chartreuse, burgundy and green petite leaves, 8"-12"), and Fishnet Stockings (if I can't wear them, at least my gardens can). Most Coleus prefer part sun to shade but new sun tolerant varieties are hitting the market. Coleus are great mixed with other annuals in containers but can make an eye-catching statement by themselves. They also jazz up shaded perennial beds that can become monopolized by hostas. Be sure to pinch off emerging flowers. This is one time when flowers play second fiddle. Being a tightwad, I like to save my favorite Coleus from Old Man Winter's

down the garden path

death blow. Simply pinch them back to within 4"-5", plant them in showy containers, spray their leaves with insecticidal soap, and set them in a brightly lit room. Proven Winner Coleus is usually only available in 4" pots but sometimes you can find assorted mixes in six packs.

Last summer I tried Lantana for the first time. Shazam! Luscious™ Citrus Blend™ knocked me over with its screaming red, orange, and yellow flowers and record-breaking growth rate. I planted it with rich blue Salvia farinacea and the effect was mesmerizing. Lantana sneers at drought and heat, plus it also never needs deadheading. Like many of us as we age, Lantana tends to spread wider than taller. Many cultivars can quickly scramble to three feet across. Plant heights vary from the petite series (under 12" tall) to 24" to 36". There is even a new collection with trailing stems that perform fantastically cascading down containers in brutally hot locations. Lantanas are sold in 4" pots.

I was dumbfounded, by Mandalay™ Mandarin Begonia, a new begonia I tried. It was a huge head-turner and received the most "What's that?" comments in my gardens. Mandalay™ Mandarin reaches 12" and is covered with dangling, bell-shaped, single-petaled, orange flowers spring through fall. Once again, no deadheading required. Mandalay™ Mandarin also receives high marks for its ability to tolerate inconsistent watering. Tucked in an area of the garden that did not reliably get hit by my sprinkler, they still performed marvelously. If orange isn't your color, there is also Mandalay™ Flamingo (pink) and Mandalay™ Pearl (white). I've also seen the Mandalays™ used in hanging baskets, window boxes and taller containers and they're stunning. You'll find the Mandalay™ series available in 4" pots.

I thought Supertunia® Vista Bubblegum Petunia was going

to follow me into the house!

I planted one little plug on each side of my front porch steps and they grew faster than any other petunia I've ever grown. They morphed into a soft pink, blossom-covered mound that was easily two feet wide and 18" tall. Noticeably different than other petunias was Vista Bubblegum's even distribution of flowers over the entire mound. It did not have a leggy look like some. Like most petunias in the Supertunia® series, no deadheading was needed. These are available in 4" pots.

Although I have mentioned only a handful of annuals in the Proven Winners line, there are plenty of winners to choose from. Check out their Web site at www.provenwinners.com. Save your gambling for the New York Lottery. Proven Winners will have you winning the jackpot every time! @

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Mandalay™ Mandarin begonia
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