WILDFLOWERS FOR SOUTH FLORIDA

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Abstract. Wildflower seed companies often make amazing claims about what seeds will bloom and grow in Florida. The Mounts Botanical Garden in West Palm Beach, tested a number of native and exotic "wildflowers" to determine their success in Spring and Summer growing periods in 1995. Included are Dimorphotheca aurantiaca (African Daisy), Ammi majus (Bishop's Flower), Rudbeckia hirta (Black Eyed Susan), Silene armeria (Catchfly), Centaurea cyanus (Cornflower/Batchelor Button), Hesperis matronalis (Dame's Rocket), Coreopsis tinctoria (Dwarf Red Plains Coreopsis), Achillea filipendulina (Gold Yarrow), Viola cornuta (Johnny Jump-up), Ratidiba columnaris (Mexican Hat), Echinacea purpurea (Purple Coneflower), Ipomopsis rubra (Standing Cypress), and Achillea millefolium (Yarrow).

Introduction

The Mounts Botanical Garden in West Palm Beach, Florida provides visual demonstrations of plant material suitable to southeast Florida. The trials were initiated to answer concerns by commercial horticulture advisory committee members. Chief among the identified needs was the introduction of uncommon plant materials suited to this climate. Plants tested in this trial are grown in full sun, fertilized three times a year at the rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet of bed area with a controlled release fertilizer, irrigated on an as needed basis, and maintained weekly by volunteer Master Gardeners. Soil in this area was prepared by the addition of compost and is maintained by regular additions of mulch.

Discussion

All plants described in these trials were seeded in November for expected planting in the trial location in March. Plants were grown on site. This year was especially wet, with rains starting early in the year, and very hot temperatures. All plants were recommended by seed producers as being suitable for South Florida gardens.

Dimorphotheca aurantiaca (African Daisy)

Seedlings grew well in the nursery. Germination occurred in 10 days. Plants were placed in the trials March 14, 1995. Growth was not vigorous and was very uneven. With increasing rains of summer, plants became more susceptible to root rot. Although flowers were very appealing, few appeared, and plants were unattractive. Flowers are daisy-like in shades of white, yellow, and orange. Plants grew 8-10 inches. African daisy is native to South Africa. Plants were removed from trials May 30, 1995.

Ammi majus (Bishop’s Flower)

Germination took place in 10 days. Plants grew very well as seedlings. When placed in the ground, plants grew extremely vigorously. They rapidly grew to 3 foot and were erect, sturdy looking plants. The plant produces an abundance of large, rounded, five to six inch flower heads made up of small white florets, looking very similar to Queen Anne’s Lace. It is native to North Africa and Eurasia. Plants produced flowers in May. Blooming period is short, lasting only 3 weeks. Bishop’s flower was removed May 30, 1995.

Rudbeckia hirta (Black Eyed Susan)

Plants grew well from seed, germinating in 1 week. Seedlings were planted in trial border April 18, 1995. Seedlings remained vigorous and began blooming in June. The flower is a brown, domed center surrounded by bright yellow ray florets. Native to eastern United States, these plants have bloomed throughout the summer. Leaves show no damage from leaf spots, and growth is vigorous. Flower size is small, 2 inches, but flowers are abundant. Plants are 18-24 inches in height.

Silene armeria (Catchfly)

Plants grew well as seedlings with germination occurring in 14 days. Plants were placed in the trial area March 14, 1995. Growth was slow. Flowers appeared in Mid-May and continued through June. Rose-pink flowers are arranged in compact clusters radiating from a slender stem. It is native to Europe. Plants were 9-12 inches in height with very attractive but short-lived flowers. Plants became rapidly unattractive after flowering and were removed mid-July.

Centaurea cyanus (Cornflower/Batchelor Button)

Plants germinated in 1 week and were planted in trial border March 21, 1995. Plants grew single stemmed (18-24 inches in height) with few branches and produced pale flowers, four or five to a plant. Colors included pale blues, light pink, and white. It is native to Europe. This specie seemed to be adversely affected by summer temperatures. They bloomed in May but were removed in June.

Hesperis matronalis (Dame’s Rocket)

Plants germinated in 20 days and were planted in trial border March 21, 1995. They grew very well for several months. As summer grew wetter, more and more plants succumbed to root rots. By July, most had leaf spots and appeared unsightly. None produced flowers, and all had succumbed by September. Dame’s Rocket is native to Europe.

Coreopsis tinctoria (Dwarf Red Plains Coreopsis)

Plants germinated in 15 days and were planted in the trial border March 14, 1995. Plants were very vigorous. Flowers appeared from May through June and were abundant on plants 3-3.5 feet tall. Flowers were yellow, bronze, orange, and deep reds. Plants deteriorated rapidly after flowers faded. Plants were removed in July. They are native to U.S. plains.

Achillea filipendulina (Gold Yarrow)

Plants germinated poorly. Germination took 30 days. They were planted in trial border April 18, 1995. Growth was poor and plants succumbed to root rots and leaf spots very
rapidly. No flowers were produced. They are native to Europe.

*Viola cornuta* (Johnny Jump-up)

Plants germinated in 21 days and were moved to the trial border March 21, 1995. As heat and moisture increased, we lost more and more plants. Limited flowering occurred. They were removed from beds in June. Johnny Jump-ups are native to Spain and the Pyrenees Mountains.

*Ratidiba columnaris* (Mexican Hat)

Plants germinated in 20 days and grew rapidly. They were planted in the trial border March 7, 1995 and grew to 2-3 feet. They began flowering in Mid-May and continued through the summer months. Growth was robust. The characteristic black cone-shaped heads are surrounded by drooping, fire-red ray flowers with a splash of yellow accent. They are native to the mid-western United States.

*Echinacea purpurea* (Purple Coneflower)

Plants germinated in 15 days and were planted in trials March 21, 1994. They grew vigorously. Flowers are on individual sturdy stems. The soft lavender petals are surrounding a yellow coned center. Flowers began opening in late July, and plants bloomed throughout the summer continuing into September. They are native to the midwest and southeast United States.

*Ipomopsis rubra* (Standing Cypress)

Plants germinated in 15 days and were planted in trials March 14, 1995. Blooms began in May. Plants are tall and may not stand upright. The brilliant red, and peach colored tubular flowers are spaced along the flower stalk. Plants deteriorate rapidly after bloom, and plants were removed in late July. The foliage is very finely divided and gives a delicate lacy appearance. Plants are native to the southeastern United States.

*Achillea millefolium* (Yarrow)

Plants were very easily germinated from seed, but the very small plants, grew very slowly. Plants were placed in trials in March 21, 1995. Flowers are clusters forming a flat white top, attached to a single stem. Flowering occurred in May, June, and July. As rain and heat increased, losses to root rots increased. Yarrow is native to Europe.

**Results**

Among the thirteen plants tested only seven would be recommended for spring planting in southeast Florida. Those are: *Ammi majus* (Bishop’s Flower), *Rudbeckia hirta* (Black Eyed Susan), *Silene armeria* (Catchfly), *Coreopsis tintoria* (Dwarf Red Plains Coreopsis), *Ratidiba columnaris* (Mexican Hat), *Echinacea purpurea* (Purple Coneflower), and *Ipomopsis rubra* (Standing Cypress). Many of those produce short-lived blooms and can be expected to produce color only over a limited period of time. Those producing blooms over 3 months or more include *Rudbeckia hirta* (Black Eyed Susan), *Ratidiba columnaris* (Mexican Hat) and *Echinacea purpurea* (Purple Coneflower). Plants not doing well in these trials should be tested for fall or winter planting.

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**LAST YEAR’S GARDEN THIS YEAR**

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Additional index words. Self-seeding.

Abstract. The increasing use of annuals throughout Florida, together with a less formal style in many home gardens, is leading to many surprises as plants self-seed from season to season and year to year. The pitfalls and pleasures of encouraging this habit in the garden are examined, together with the implication for water-conscious gardening. Lists are presented of plants that can be expected to appear more than once from a single planting.

The strength of Florida’s gardens, particularly in the south of the state, has always been the wealth of broad-leaved evergreens. They made not only a backdrop but were a major part of the picture with their rich palette of size and form and texture, and even color. In the extreme south, and to a certain extent in central Florida, annuals were seen as being "difficult", and because our seasons were backward, this was reinforced by the difficulty of obtaining seed in good condition at the correct time for planting. The seed supplies were the forgotten packets in the garden stores, packed for sowing in “spring 19xx”, that we would hope had retained vitality through the hot humid summers as we planted them in the fall of 19xx or even the very early spring/winter of 19xx +1! The seed companies have learned now, and so have we, that many more annuals than anyone had realized can actually be persuaded to perform for most of our year. Seed and plants are readily available, and many gardeners have embraced the opportunity to go for changing colorful displays through much of the year. The beauty of the woody material