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## Paint the Rainbow: Standout Varieties from the Michigan Garden Plant Tour

*Flowers bloomed in every hue at the seven trial gardens around the state during the 2024 Michigan Garden Plant Tour.*

Every year Michigan State University and Michigan’s leading young plant producers host a free open house at their trial sites and display gardens to give growers, landscapers, and retail operators the opportunity to learn about a wide range of ornamental crops. Industry professionals can see for themselves which new varieties perform the best under various conditions, including in the ground and in containers. The tour lasts for two weeks and was held this year from July 29-August 9, 2024.



Photo 1. It’s always a good day to visit trial gardens! Photo: Heidi Lindberg

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This year, there were seven trial gardens at different locations throughout central lower Michigan: DGI Propagators, Four Star Greenhouses, Mast Young Plants, Michigan State University Trial Garden, Pell Greenhouses, Raker-Roberta’s Young Plants, and Walters Gardens. Every trial and display garden showcased new introductions and catalogue favorites. Flowers bloomed in every hue and [Michigan State University Extension](#) Educators, Heidi Lindberg and Caitlin Splawski, traveled to each site, picking favorites and snapping photos along the way. Of course, there were more favorites than could be covered in one article, but here are twenty standout plant varieties:

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## Celosia ‘Burning Embers’ - Sakata

Celosia ‘Burning Embers’ was stunning at the Michigan State University Trial Gardens with its fiery red flowers and crimson foliage. It has already been noticed in the trials as it has earned its place as a [2024 All American Selections Winner](#). It has a long bloom time, is quite compact (~12 inches tall), and withstands heat and humidity well. Celosia has been increasingly popular to feature in fall combinations alongside chrysanthemums for its flower power and fall hues.

## Strawflower GRANVIA ‘Crimson Sun’

- Suntory

Even on a 90+ degree day, *Bracteantha bracteatum* GRANVIA ‘Crimson Sun’ from Suntory was unphased. Not only was the strawflower eye-catching, but the plants also boasted nearly perfect foliage during a season where leaf spots, root rots and mildews have reigned supreme. Available from Raker Roberta’s Young Plants as a plug, GRANVIA ‘Crimson Sun’ would make a great addition to summer and fall offerings.

## Begonia Beaugonia ‘Poppy Peach’ and ‘Poppy Orange’ - Westhoff

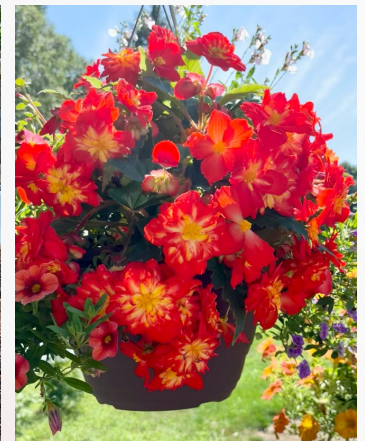
I always love a splash of color for the shade and really love tuberous begonias for their large flowers. Both begonia ‘Beaugonia Poppy Peach’ and ‘Beaugonia Poppy Orange’ had showstopping large multi-colored flowers at DGI Propagator’s trial gardens. The peach varieties have bright salmon, peach, and yellow flowers that cascaded over the side of the container in the shade garden. The orange variety was in combination with other plants, but stole the show with vibrant yellow, orange, and red flowers.



Photo 2. Celosia ‘Burning Embers’ exhibits fiery red flowers on crimson foliage at MSU trial gardens. Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 3. Cheery, red bracts of this supersized strawflower, GRANVIA ‘Crimson Sun’, welcome the day’s bright sunshine. Photo: Caitlin Splawski



Photos 4 & 5. Begonia Beaugonia ‘Poppy Peach’ (L) and ‘Poppy Orange’ (R) had phenomenal color for shade plants. Photos: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 5. Alstroemeria 'Summer Heat' features fiery red flowers with yellow throats. Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 6. Alstroemeria 'Summer Heat' would be great as a back of the border plant or a central focal point. Photo: Heidi Lindberg

## Alstroemeria 'Summer Heat' - Walters Gardens

Those who are familiar with cut flowers in the florist trade will be happy to see that Alstroemeria, or Peruvian lilies, made my list for 2024. Walters Gardens is releasing 3 new varieties in this genus for 2024-2025, all with beautiful flowers. 'Summer Heat' stands 3 to 3.5 feet tall and is a great back of the border variety that attracts pollinators. The flowers are bright red with yellow throats. It added vibrant color to this display bed. It has overwintered multiple seasons in Zone 6 in Zeeland, MI and it blooms mid-summer through frost. It is a great addition to the back of a border garden or an addition to a cut flower garden.



Photo 7. Anigozanthos Kanga 'Cherry' was particularly floriferous. Photo: Heidi Lindberg

## Anigozanthos Kanga 'Cherry' - Greenfuse

Anigozanthos, commonly known as [kangaroo paw](#) or [Australian sword lily](#), was a unique plant genus to this trial garden compared with other trial sites. Native to western Australia, it is grown as a unique container annual or a houseplant throughout the northern US (Zone 10 & 11). The Pell Greenhouse's trial gardens showcased multiple colors of this plant in the Kanga series. It mainly caught my eye for its sword-like leaves and interesting texture. 'Cherry' was particularly full of flowers compared with other colors in the series.



Photo 8. *Eucomis* 'Purple Reign' has purple spikes of flowers on bronze strappy foliage. Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 9. Dozens of flowers on the raspberry Angelonia Archangel 'Dark Rose'. Photo: Heidi Lindberg

### Angelonia Archangel 'Dark Rose' - Ball FloraPlant

Angelonia Archangel 'Dark Rose' is a raspberry-colored annual that would also provide height in a combination planter. The color was as rich as the juicy fruit and was so floriferous when compared with other varieties of Angelonia. It would be great planted in contrast with light-colored 'spillers' in containers.

### Eucomis 'Purple Reign' - Walters Gardens

Eucomis, also known as Pineapple lily, is a genus of plants native to South Africa and has a tropical looking bronze foliage. On top of the dark foliage are showy, tall inflorescences that resemble a pineapple, hence the common name. Being from the midwest, I am always drawn to plants that look so different than those native to Michigan. Don't be fooled by its tropical looks though, this plant is hardy to zone 6.

### Argyranthemum Grandaisy® 'Pink Halo Improved' - Suntory

I was drawn to this cute pink variety of *Argyranthemum*, 'Pink Halo Improved' at the MSU trial gardens. The yellow-centered pink flowers were very attractive, and the plant created a nice carpet within the plot. I was surprised at the excellent garden performance of the Grandaisy® series, which was so floriferous and showy, especially during August considering they serve as an early season crop often offered in the spring alongside *Osteospermums*.

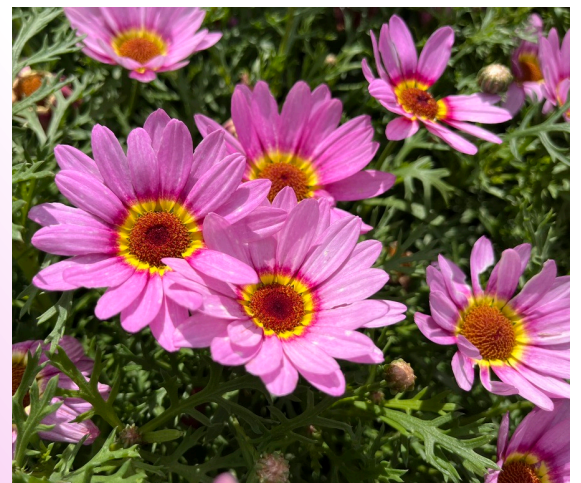


Photo 10. Delicate pink and yellow flowers of *Argyranthemum Grandaisy*® 'Pink Halo Improved.' Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 11. Argyanthemum Grandaisy® 'Pink Halo Improved' created a pink carpet. Photo: Heidi Lindberg

### Petunia Supertunia 'Tiara Pink' - Proven Winners

This year there's another Supertunia to put on your radar, Supertunia Tiara® Pink Petunia. Before I even got out of my car, this one caught my eye. This vigorous petunia reaches up to 12" in height and up to 2' wide. The flower touts a luminescent glow emanating from the center, a tiara atop the princess pink flowers.

### Hibiscus Summerific® 'Candy Crush' - Walters Gardens

It wouldn't be a Michigan Garden Plant Tour without choosing a Summerific® hardy hibiscus as a favorite! Walters Gardens has all their varieties of hardy hibiscus planted in a large bed and some in a stunning large border bed across the garden. 'Candy Crush' is not the newest introduction in the series but had showy pink flowers with deep throats in a tidy 5-foot ball-like habit. The sturdy stems held the large flowers upright without flopping over.



Photo 12. Supertunia 'Tiara Pink' petunia catches my eye from the parking lot. Photo: Caitlin Splawski



Photo 13. Supertunia 'Tiara Pink' is a vigorous princess pink petunia with a luminescent glow emanating from the center. Photo: Caitlin Splawski



Photo 14. Hibiscus Summerific® 'Candy Crush' features huge 8" flowers on a tidy, but large foliage. Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 15. Mojave® Tangerine Portulaca Improved has showy orange flowers with a yellow center. Photo: Caitlin Splawski

### Purslane Mojave® Tangerine Improved - Proven Winners

Mojave® Tangerine *Portulaca umbraticola* showed incredible garden performance. Not only was the size of the blooms impressive, the richness of the orange against the deep green color of the foliage makes it a great addition to any garden border.

### Zinnia Profusion 'Red Yellow Bicolor' - Sakata

Zinnia Profusion 'Red Yellow Bicolor' was the [2021 AAS trial winner](#) and has previously won the Fleuroselect Gold Medal award for performance in European flower trials. While not brand new, 'Red Yellow Bicolor' was a strong contender with its excellent mounding habit and cheery red and yellow flowers at the 2024 trial garden.



Photo 16. Mojave® Tangerine Portulaca Improved pops amongst the sea of Truffula® Pink Gomphrena behind its flashy border. Photo: Caitlin Splawski



Photo 17. Bright bicolor flowers of zinnia Profusion 'Red Yellow Bicolor.' Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 18. Zinnia Profusion 'Red Yellow Bicolor' atop a healthy mounded habit. Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 19. Large double, yellow flowers of Sunfinity® ‘Double Yellow’. Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 20. Prolific habit of Sunfinity® ‘Double Yellow.’ Photo: Heidi Lindberg

## Sunflower Sunfinity® ‘Double Yellow’ - Syngenta Flowers

While plant combinations provide texture and interest, sometimes there is no need for multiple species when a plant is as spectacular as sunflower Sunfinity® ‘Double Yellow.’ This sunflower was very floriferous and seemed to overflow from its container with showy double flowers. New from Syngenta Flowers, it has an increased resistance to powdery mildew, is a pollinator magnet, and would work well in the landscape or in large containers.

## Dahlia ‘Mystic Spirit’ – Kientzler

The bees and I are also fans of single dahlias that retain their pollen-filled centers. Though they often are less showy than their multi-petaled counterparts, Dahlia ‘Mystic Spirit’ from Kientzler gives them a run for their money. The large flowers displaying an eye-catching hue of peachy goodness with a just a touch of rosiness sit atop robust mahogany to black foliage. The blooms are vivid against the dark backdrop of foliage. This variety is a must have for a middle of the border planting or a fashionable container.



Photo 21. The peach blossoms atop Dahlia Mystic ‘Spirit.’ Photo: Caitlin Splawski



Photo 22. The contrast of the peach blossom of Dahlia Mystic ‘Spirit’ with the deep mahogany foliage, makes it appear even darker in color. Photo: Caitlin Splawski

## Osteospermum ‘Blue Eyed Beauty’ - Ball FloraPlant

For a second year in a row (and not even knowing it), I chose Osteospermum ‘Blue Eyed Beauty’ as one of my favorites at the Mast Young Plants trial gardens. I am drawn to the sunny yellow flowers with the purple center and white halo. It is an unusual color combination in flowers and was a standout to me in the gardens. Similar to Argyranthemums, they primarily target early spring sales window and are drought tolerant and deer resistant.

## Salvia Cathedral® ‘Blue Bicolor’ - Greenfuse

Salvia Cathedral® ‘Blue Bicolor’ from Greenfuse is a more compact line of salvias that are quicker to finish for growers. It is not the newest color in the series, but the white and light purple was showy and impressive at the Pell Greenhouse’s trial gardens. This plant was truly a pollinator magnet humming with bumblebees!

## Heliotrope Aromagica™ Purple - Proven Winners

Another pollinator favorite at the Four Star display gardens that I also admired for its top performance was Aromagica™ Purple *Heliotropium arborescens*. In addition to being a pollinator magnet, the large, deep purple inflorescences are fragrant and well-branched. Even as some blossoms were passing, new ones were developing right ovetop giving the plant a very clean appearance with little to no maintenance.



Photo 23. Osteospermum ‘Blue Eyed Beauty’ has a showy, unusual lavender, white and yellow flower. Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 24. Salvia Cathedral® ‘Blue Bicolor’ with white and purple flowers was a pollinator magnet. Photo: Heidi Lindberg



Photo 25. Aromagica™ Purple Heliotropium featured a well-branched habit and tidy appearance. Photo: Caitlin Splawski





Photo 26. The deep burgundy coloration of *Alternanthera* 'Purple Prince' creates a tidy border in front of the colorful flowers behind. Photo: Caitlin Splawski



Photo 27. Unplugged® White Salvia covered in bees. Photo: Caitlin Splawski

## *Alternanthera* 'Purple Prince' - PanAmerican Seed

Grown from seed, *Alternanthera brasiliana* 'Purple Prince' from PanAmerican Seed is the first compact *Alternanthera* that offers an easy-to-grow alternative to varieties propagated through vegetative cuttings. The durable carpet of foliage it makes is a great addition to gardens as a rich border planting or as a nice color accent in containers. Plants grow to be roughly 12" high by 18" wide and do best in partial to full sun.

## Mealycup Sage Unplugged® White - Proven Winners

It's not often that white flowers steal the show, but the new Unplugged® White Salvia was a standout, a favorite of mine and the pollinators. In the display beds it was featured with best sellers Truffula® Pink Gomphrena, Graceful Grasses® Purple Fountain Grass, and ColorBlaze® Newly Noir™ Coleus.



Photo 28. Unplugged® White Salvia alongside best sellers Truffula® Pink Gomphrena, Graceful Grasses® Purple Fountain Grass, and ColorBlaze® Newly Noir™ Coleus. Photo: Caitlin Splawski

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