

# HighLights

Trial Gardens and HortResearch at the South Mississippi Branch Experiment Station

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Numerous plant varieties in the Trial Gardens continue to provide a colorful flower display on warm summer days. Some also serve an important function in the landscape as a food source for pollinators and keep the Trial Gardens buzzing with activity.



*Ruellia simplex* 'Mayan Purple' (above, left), 'Mayan Pink' (above, right), and 'Mayan White' with a visiting pollinator (below, left).



Three new, patented, and non-seed-producing varieties of Mexican petunia [*Ruellia simplex* (formerly known as *Ruellia brittoniana*)], developed at the University of Florida, are included in our Trials Gardens this year.

'Mayan Purple' and 'Mayan White', both taller, upright-growing varieties, are apparent favorites among the larger, pollinating bees that dive into the large corollas. Bees also visit the smaller-flowered and more compact-growing 'Mayan Pink' to obtain a quick snack while sitting on the lip of the corolla. Unlike older varieties of Mexican petunia, unwanted spread of seedlings is avoided due to the sterility of these three varieties. We have also noted that old flowers of 'Mayan White' drop from the plants as the flowers age, unlike the older, non-sterile 'Snow White' that tended to retain old, dried, brown flowers. Mexican petunia is not a true petunia, but is named for the floral similarity to garden petunias. Visit our Trial Gardens to follow these heat-loving varieties through the summer.



Pentas 'Northern Lights Lavender', an Egyptian star flower or star cluster from Benary, attracts a variety of pollinators. Pentas varieties are currently in full bloom in the Trial Gardens.



Gomphrena 'Las Vegas Pink' and 'Las Vegas Purple' (above) from Benary attract many of the smaller (and very camera shy) pollinators. These two mounding varieties of globe amaranth have exhibited prolific flowering and very good heat tolerance.

Agastache 'Golden Jubilee' (right), a 2003 All-America Selections (AAS) winner, is regularly included in our AAS Display Garden. Pollinator activity on this variety can be relied upon, even after peak bloom is over and only a few flowers remain. The golden-green foliage is notably aromatic, releasing essential oil when brushed or crushed.

