

Features

10/30/2026

It's So Hard to Choose!

Compiled by Jennifer Polanz



Chris Beytes, Editor-in-Chief

For me, this year's "Stuff We Love" started out more like "Stuff We Want to Love, but Can't Quite Because it Won't Flower!"

It was a tropical hibiscus, purchased from a box store this spring, with beautiful pink flowers and a deep rose throat. We put it in a pot in a prominent spot in our Orlando garden. Then in June it stopped blooming. Oh, the buds would form alright, color up and get just to the point of unfurling ... then they'd fall off. Weird.

HibisQs Longi-Tropic Pink has finally started to bloom again.

Big pink flowers on HibisQs Adonicus Dark.

Vibrant orange flowers on HibisQs Sibylle.

Hollywood Rico Suave is what you think of when you think big tropical hibiscus.

I guessed it was thrips or something. But to find out, I decided to ask the readers of my newsletter, Acres Online, using Paul Pilon's "What's Happening Here?" formula.

The answer came from the supplier of the plant, Costa Farms, via their R&D director (among other titles), Justin Hancock. Justin wrote:

"Good news and bad news on your tropical hibiscus inquiry in the last Acres Online.

"The good news: Technically, there's nothing wrong with your plant. The bad news: That variety—HibisQs Longi-Tropic Pink—has issues holding its buds in high summer temperatures. (Like me, perhaps of its Danish roots, it's not at its best when temperatures soar.)

"Because it's a genetic issue, you're, unfortunately, going to see this continue through the summer (unless you haul it inside to the air conditioning overnight every night or something crazy like that). If you want, though, I'm happy to ship up one of the HibisQs varieties for our summer program—a variety that is able to hold its buds throughout the summer. (We only offer Longi-Tropic Pink in our early spring program.)"

Mystery solved!

And as he promised, Justin had not one, but four hibiscus shipped to me to trial: Apollo Double (a yellow/orange bicolor), Kamira (yellow), Adonicus Dark (pink) and Sibylle (orange). We've put them all in terracotta pots on the barn porch to study and admire.

Meanwhile, seeing perhaps an opportunity for a little competitive comparison, the folks at Spring Meadow Nursery in Michigan sent me three big Rico Suave Hollywood Hibiscus from their Proven Winners ColorChoice Line. We found them a home in a bed around a sabal palm.

And surprise! After being treated like a salad bar by a deer and enduring the sweltering summer, our original Longi-Tropic Pink looks great and is starting to flower once again!

With temperatures in Florida finally reaching tolerable levels for humans and plants alike, we're expecting a winter and spring filled with hibiscus blooms, thanks to the generosity of the hibiscus community.



Bill Calkins, Senior Editor/Digital Editor

I was really grateful to receive A LOT of sample plants this year and am proud to say I planted every single one of them and dutifully watered, fed and paid attention to them throughout the season. It's hard to narrow my favorites down because most performed well—at least up to the claims we heard about at CAST.

In no real order, here are my favorites from this summer.

Rudbeckia F1 Claire Orange from Takii. I had a feeling these would be awesome when I thought about the massive display at CAST, so I planted them in two pots front and center by the walkway to our front porch. They did not disappoint, blooming from spring until mid summer when the temps shot up for an extended period of time and I didn't stay on the water like I should have. The flower coverage was fantastic and they just kept sending up more and more blooms.

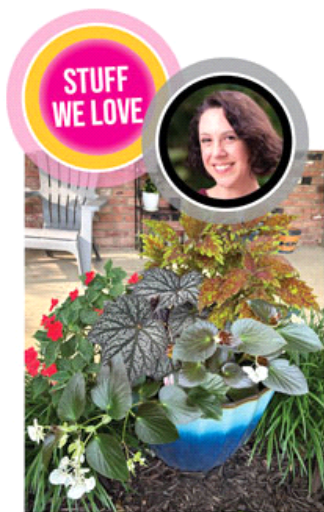
SuperCal from Sakata. I haven't planted SuperCals in probably five years and seeing how well my samples performed all summer made me regret this fact and vow to ALWAYS plant petchoa for the rest of my life. I

used SuperCals in the big pots on my back patio, which get full sun for most of the day. They kept vivid color for months and held their own against Danziger's Sol Luna interspecific impatiens and Benary's Street Art Pentas in combos.

Tradescantia Pistachio from Green Fuse. I had a purple tradescantia last year in a shade pot by my front door and it did well so I was happy to put the new white one in the same spot as a trailing element with a coleus and dark-leaf

begonia. It's now October and Pistachio still looks good. Tradescantia is underrated and Pistachio's unique color really stands out.

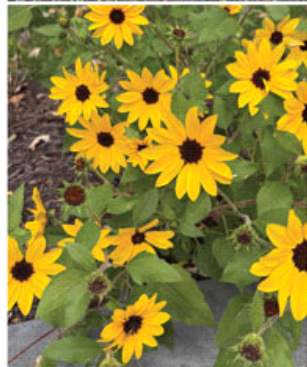
Verbena bonariensis Flair from Benary. This might have been my favorite plant of the year. It's a tall, wild plant with bloom clusters that hummingbirds and bees were on all summer next to the fireplace chimney on our patio. I love the structure and how it just kept blooming and getting taller, but not flopping over. I need about a dozen of these next year (wink, wink to anyone from Benary who's reading this ...)



Jennifer Polanz, Managing Editor

Color me impressed with a lot of what we got in sample boxes from breeders this year. It was really hard to choose a few, but I did my best, along with an honorable-mentions list of those that just barely missed the cut. Let's start with a beautiful begonia from Plants Nouveau: Lunar Lights Neon Moon. From the beginning this plant made a statement with its huge textured leaves. In the fall it sends up beautiful pink flowers, but the foliage is the star of this show. It's joined by the equally awesome Lunar Lights Little Moon, and another begonia they sent, Summer Storm, was pretty amazing, as well. You can't go wrong with any of these.

This is one of my favorite containers of this summer, with PanAmerican Seed's Begonia DragonWing White Bronze Leaf and Proven Winners' Coleus ColorBlaze Pepper Flakes (both honorable mentions).



If you look at the new breeding like a horse race, the newest addition to the Sunfinity lineup from Syngenta Flowers turned the corner strong and picked up steam down the straightaway to the finish. I took this picture of Sunfinity Single Yellow at the beginning of October, when everything else was either waning or gone. It was a strong performer and added a happy burst of blooms to the landscape. I opted to put this in the ground, but its well-behaved habit would lend itself to a large container, too. This addition makes five to the Sunfinity series.



I can't decide what I loved more about Suntory Flowers' Heavenly Peach Horizon: the long-lasting blooms all summer or the antique-y color they evolved into. Regardless, this was a great performer with little fuss, aside from water and some random fertilization (I'm getting better at it, but still not consistent). The semi-trailing habit definitely came out in this, as it spilled over a mixed container beautifully.

Honorable Mentions

Like I said, too many great performers, so I wanted to give a shout-out to the following for just barely missing the cut:

- Danziger's OMBRE Tyler Glam Calibrachoa (colors evolved over the season)
- Syngenta Flowers' Itsy Blue Petunia (it's SO cute!)
- PanAmerican Seeds' DragonWing White Bronze Leaf Begonia and the Basil Monteverde Genovese (long-lasting and delicious)
- Proven Winners' Coleus ColorBlaze Pepper Flakes and Outshine Orchid Salvia (the hummingbirds loved it)

Ellen Wells, Senior Editor At-Large

I'd spotted Gourmet Gardener's Spirals Multi-Stem Plant Supports at Cultivate'25 and deployed one in my garden this spring. I situated it over my peony—it's from my grandmother's garden so it's special and, honestly, it's taken a few years to get established in my garden. I wanted something that could hold up its stems and give the plant a chance to stand proudly.

How does this spiral work? You attach the accompanying stake onto the spiral and insert the whole thing in the ground in the middle of a plant that tends to collapse. Then place a few stems inside the circle and spin the spiral in place. The spinning will slot the stems into the spiral.



The great thing for you is that the Spirals Multi-Stem Plant Supports are packed flat, three to a case. Easy to stock! Obviously, be sure to have one on display and maybe even include a sign with a QR code showing a video of how it works.

I've only begun appreciating the combination of beauty and workhorse resilience of geraniums in my midlife. They're pretty much indestructible—if you get good ones. And for the last few years the geraniums I've received in Dümme Orange's spring sample packs have been really great geraniums.

Besides being resilient to weather and the occasional mistreatment from my little dog, this year's geranium sample variety—Sarita Wild Salmon—left me wishing the entire sample box had been filled with this one gorgeous variety. This color always caught my eye as I walked across my porch. I'll say it didn't produce many blooms during the worst of the summer heat, but in mid-October it's still pumping out flower heads. It'll be hard to beat this color!

Jennifer Zurko, Editor

I don't normally get excited about vinca, but the new Tattoo Boysenberry from PanAmerican Seed has a really interesting color pattern and seems like it can handle pretty harsh conditions. Because my front porch faces south, it just cooks out there during the day, so not everything in my experimental combo looked good all summer, but Tattoo did. Besides growing bigger, it pretty much looked the same the whole time, with shiny foliage and lots of blooms.

If you want a pretty low-maintenance plant that grows nice and full, PanAmerican Seeds' SolarScape XL Red Glow is for you. One plant filled out a 10-in. container with no problem and kept blooming and blooming through the spring and summer. As I'm writing this at the end of September, it's STILL blooming. One of the benefits of SolarScape that PanAmerican touts is its ability to bounce back after drying out and I can attest that it's 100% correct. There have been times when I was late giving it water and it looked like all the life was sucked out of it. But after I gave it a good drink, it pepped up literally within minutes.

Dümmen's I'conia series of hybrid begonias is a favorite of mine. This one is Portofino Valencia Pink, and besides regular watering, I haven't had to do anything else and it's been growing and blooming all season long. It's on my balcony and has withstood everything from wind to torrential downpours to high humidity. And it's also withstood serving as a forbidden snack for my cat, who likes to sneak bites of the flowers before getting yelled at and kicked back inside.

Something else that I've loved this year are small planters that come in different shapes and fun designs. Pope's Plant Farm always has fun containers that make you stop and say, "That's so cute!" The squirrel and vintage trucks I saw in their booth at Cultivate are new for this year. And because I myself have a self-assured orange kitty, I love their planters of cats with demure facial expressions that come in different colors. **GP**

