

2001 Georgia Gold Medal Winners

Georgia Gold Medal Winner



Ornamental Sweet Potato
(*Ipomoea batatas*)

Who would have imagined sweet potatoes, a tropical root crop, would suddenly become a prized landscape plant? Few vegetable plants can boast such a dramatic crossover from the vegetable garden to the landscape, where shoots, not roots, are the focus of plant breeders and the envy of Southern gardeners.

Blackie Sweet Potato, with its purple, almost black foliage was the first overnight sensation. Its vigorous, trailing growth habit, heat tolerance and ability to cover large areas in a short time are a landscaper's delight. The dark foliage provides a dramatic contrast to vivid colors, like those of pink and purple wave petunias.

Margarita Sweet Potato, with its striking chartreuse foliage, sets the summer landscape aglow. It makes a dramatic statement when planted with Blackie. Another selection is Tricolor, which has shades of pink, magenta and green all in the same leaf.

In addition to landscape planting, ornamental sweet potatoes are great plants for trailing over the sides of raised planters or large hanging baskets. Make certain baskets are at least 18 inches in diameter to provide enough rooting area and moisture to support the vigorous top growth.

Many people ask if the roots of ornamental sweet potatoes are edible. The answer is yes, but they are not very palatable. Plant edible types if sweet potato pie is in your future.

PLANT CHARACTERISTICS

Plant Type: Summer annual with trailing vine-like growth.
Plant Size: 12 inches high and spreading 10 to 15 feet.

CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade.
Soils: Moist, well-drained.
Planting: Plant in late spring after soil has warmed.
Fertility: Broadcast a complete, balanced fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, at planting and two to three times during the growing season.
Propagation: Cuttings taken from established plants are easy to root. Roots may be dug and overwintered for spring planting.

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Autumn Fern
(*Dryopteris erythrosora*)

To achieve a lush, rain-forest-like ambiance in shady, moist sites, consider Autumn Fern, *Dryopteris erythrosora*. Unlike many of our native wood ferns that die back and disappear in winter, Autumn Fern is evergreen, providing year-round interest in the landscape.

"It's one of the toughest wood ferns on the market," says Dottie Myers, Atlanta landscape architect. It's a great plant for naturalizing in pine woodlands or for erosion control in shady drainage easements.

Another outstanding merit of Autumn Fern is the color of the new fronds. They unfold a bright, coppery red, then gradually fade to olive green. Although freezing temperatures, ice and snow sometimes burn the foliage, the plant is reliably evergreen in most parts of the state.

Like other woodland ferns, Autumn Fern prefers filtered shade and moist, well-drained, acidic soils high in organic matter. Given these conditions, the plant will flourish.

PLANT CHARACTERISTICS

Plant Type: Herbaceous perennial.
Plant Size: 18 inches high, spreading.
Foliage: Arching, fine-textured fronds. New growth is coppery-red.

CULTURAL REQUIREMENT

Exposure: Partial shade.
Soils: Moist, well-drained, high in organic matter.
Fertility: Light application of granular fertilizer, such as 16-4-8, in early spring.
Pruning: Remove old fronds damaged by winter freezes.

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Inkberry
(*Ilex glabra*)

Moist sites are challenging to landscape because only a limited palette of plants will tolerate poorly drained soil conditions. Inkberry is one such plant. It's a native Georgia shrub, found in the wild along stream banks and flood plains.

Inkberry played an important role in Georgia's rich heritage. Bee keepers have long valued the plant as an excellent honey source. Early settlers dried and roasted the leaves to make an herbal tea.

Today there are more than 20 improved selections of Inkberry in the nursery trade. Many have compact growth habits and uniform shapes that are easy to maintain. Shamrock, Nigra, Georgia Wine, Compacta and UGA are a few of the cultivars you'll see on the market.

Inkberry is a great evergreen plant for perennial borders, hedges or simply for naturalizing in low-maintenance areas. It looks particularly nice when planted in groups of three or more plants.

Classified as a rhizomous shrub, Inkberry spreads gradually from the parent plant by forming suckers along the root. Eventually, the plant takes on a clump-like appearance.

PLANT CHARACTERISTICS

Plant Type:	Evergreen shrub.
Plant Size:	6 to 8 feet tall and 6 to 8 feet wide.
Leaves:	Lustrous green leaves, one to two inches long.
Plant Form:	Rounded, oval.
Fruit:	Black, berry-like drupes in November persist until spring.

CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS

Exposure:	Full sun to partial shade.
Soils:	Moist, acid.
Pruning:	Can be sheared for a more compact growth habit. Old, thinning plants can be rejuvenated by pruning them back close to ground level in February.

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Chastetree
(*Vitex agnus-castus*)

If you like crape myrtle, you'll love Chastetree, *Vitex agnus-castus*. It's tough as nails, heat tolerant and cold hardy with good pest resistance and excellent drought tolerance. It flowers consistently in May and June with a minimum of care. Who could ask for anything more in a small flowering tree?

Also known as summer lilac, Chastetree flowers on new terminal growth. Individual blooms are tiny, about 1/4 inch, but they are borne in masses on large, multi-branched panicles, much like crape myrtle or butterfly bush. Flowers may be blue, lavender, pink or white, depending on cultivar.

Like crape myrtle, Chastetree can be encouraged to repeat bloom in late summer by removing the terminal seed clusters soon after the first bloom finishes. Pruning before mid-July will result in a second floral display in October.

Some call Chastetree a large shrub. Others call it a small tree. It grows 15 to 20 feet tall with an equal spread. Train it as a single-trunk tree or a multi-trunk specimen for use as an accent plant in the landscape.

Chastetree is native to southern Europe but has been a part of the American landscape for more than 400 years.

PLANT CHARACTERISTICS

Plant Type:	Deciduous small tree.
Plant Size:	15 to 20 feet high with an equal spread.
Flowers:	Blue, lavender, pink or white panicles on terminal growth.

CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS

Exposure:	Full sun to partial shade.
Soils:	Very adaptable - moist to dry.
Fertility:	Granular fertilizer, such as 16-4-8, in early spring as new growth emerges.
Pruning:	Prune in late winter to shape and to encourage branching. Optional pruning after the first bloom will force new growth and repeat bloom in fall.

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