

2017 Mississippi Medallion Plants



The Mississippi Medallion program was established in 1996 by the Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA) to increase awareness of plant materials and to promote sales and production of ornamental plants in Mississippi. Compared to national campaigns such as All-American Selections and Perennial Plant of the Year, the Mississippi Medallion program focuses on plants adapted to the environment in Mississippi to benefit both consumers and the green industry.

This publication gives an introduction to the 2017 Mississippi Medallion Plants and is part of a series of publications that promote awareness of these plants. Look for these and other Mississippi Medallion plants at your favorite local nursery and garden center.

Flowering Annual/Perennial

Vermillionaire cuphea is one plant that has definitely earned its spot in landscapes. This is a heat-loving plant that flowers from spring to frost in the fall. Last year, Vermillionaire was flowering all the way into November in coastal Mississippi gardens. Abundant, fiery yellow, red, and orange tubular flowers are produced up and down the stems and all over the entire plant. This plant produces a mound of flowers and is quite a sight all summer long. The flowers are butterfly and hummingbird magnets. Vermillionaire is a nice-sized plant, reaching about 3 feet tall and almost as wide by the end of summer. It is a very nice container plant for the patio. Plant in full sun for the best flowering and tighter growth; it will really put on a show with consistently moist soil and regular feeding. Vermillionaire cuphea is perennial in zones 8a and warmer, but you won't be disappointed growing it as a great flowering annual.



Vermillionaire cuphea. Image by Dr. Gary Bachman, MSU Coastal Research and Extension Center.

Flowering Landscape Shrub

Conversation Piece azalea is a great alternate-season blooming azalea that displays gorgeous flowers in mid-spring and then again in the fall. The flowers are amazing and typically almost 4 inches across. But what's most unique about Conversation Piece is that different-colored flowers appear on the same plant. Flowers are displayed in a range from dark pink to nearly white; others are pink and splashed (variegated) with white; and still others are white and splashed with dark center blotches. Truly a conversation piece! This azalea is perfect for a smaller landscape space and typically will mature at about 3 to 5 feet tall and wide. Be sure to plant in landscape beds with good drainage but even, consistent soil moisture. Always add a layer of mulch; for azaleas pine straw works well.



Conversation Piece azalea. Image courtesy LSU AgCenter.

Vegetable

For gardeners with little space, Patio Snacker will produce an abundant harvest of cucumbers within only 2 to 3 feet! Suitable for 3- to 5-gallon containers, Patio Snacker produces a short (3- to 5-foot) vine that works well for trellising. The vigorous plants bear fruit that are perfect for snacking when picked at under 1.5 inch wide and 6 inches long. Patio Snacker is parthenocarpic, which means the fruit are produced without insect pollination, making it perfect for an urban home garden. If consistently picked, these crunchy cucumbers can be harvested all summer long. These cucumbers have a non-bitter skin that makes them perfect for eating fresh off the vine.

Fruit Tree

Japanese persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*) is also known as oriental persimmon or kaki. Some can look like a squat, flattened, orange tomato, but flesh and skin color can vary by variety. This is generally a small, deciduous tree, but it can reach up to 60 feet and is long-lived. Space trees at least 15 feet apart to allow for adequate growth. Many varieties will be self-fertile, but some have problems with pollination. Bees are the primary pollinators, so having bees available through natural populations or maintained bee colonies will improve overall pollination. Trees begin to bear fruit 3 to 6 years after planting, depending on variety. Heavy crops can result in tree stress that can lead to premature fruit drop and alternate bearing. Harvest generally occurs in the fall. Japanese persimmons evolved in Asia, and there are two kinds: astringent and non-astringent. The most popular types, such as Fuyu or Jiro, are those that produce sweet, juicy, non-stringent fruit. The taste is quite unlike the native persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), which can be exceedingly astringent. These trees are easy to grow and require minimal maintenance because they have few pests. The most common disease is persimmon wilt, and common insect pests are scale and twig girdlers. Japanese persimmons are cold-hardy to about 20°F. The fall foliage can range from red to orange, and, when the fruit are ripening in the fall, they look like little pumpkins hanging on the tree.



Patio Snacker. Image courtesy Ball Horticultural Company.



Japanese persimmon. Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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