

2018 Mississippi Medallion Plants



The Mississippi Medallion program was established in 1996 by the Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA). The program is intended 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 2018 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.

Distylium Vintage Jade

Distylium is a great, low-maintenance evergreen alternative for boxwood, cherry laurel, holly, and juniper. It works in foundation plantings, borders, walkways, or as ground cover on banks. It thrives in full sun or part shade and tolerates drought, heat, and wet soil. It also has excellent disease and insect resistance. 'Vintage Jade' is perfect for a smaller landscape space, typically only growing 3 feet tall and 4 feet wide (Figure 1). This is the smallest variety of Distylium, with a compact, mounding growth habit. It maintains a dark, glossy green throughout all four seasons. As a witch hazel relative, it produces small, red flowers along its stem in late winter, which grow into pretty red berries. This is a healthy, adaptable, and versatile plant.



Figure 1. Distylium 'Vintage Jade'. Image courtesy of Bailey Nurseries.

Lemongrass

Lemongrass is a tropical herb with a strong citrus flavor. It forms tall, grassy clumps ranging in height from 3 to 5 feet (Figure 2). This is an adaptable replacement for traditional ornamental grasses and a great addition to the edible landscape. Lemongrass usually survives winter temperatures in zones 8 and 9 in Mississippi. It can be planted as an annual or in containers in northern Mississippi. Lemongrass needs full sun and fertile, well-drained soil (it does not perform well in clay or other heavy soils). Raised beds are perfect planting locations. Lemongrass can be fairly large, so for massing in the landscape, separate plants by 24 inches. Plant in large containers for patio use. Lemongrass is low maintenance and has few pests. It may actually repel mosquitos because citronella oil is naturally found in lemongrass. Tight clumps can be divided with a sharp spade to provide divisions for other areas of the garden or to share with friends. The edible portion of lemongrass is near the base of the stalk. The tender base is sliced, bruised, or pounded into a paste and is often used in Asian cuisine and herbal teas.



Figure 2. Lemongrass. Image by Dr. Gary Bachman, MSU Coastal Research and Extension Center.

Lemon Sedum

For full-sun areas in the landscape, lemon sedum (*Sedum mexicanum*—or *S. rupestre* and *S. reflexum*) is ideal. Lemon sedums are part of the diverse group called sedum, and lemon sedums, such as Lemon Coral, have small, chartreuse, needle-like leaves, which help brighten up landscapes (Figure 3). Lemon sedum is only a few inches tall, so it works very well at the front of landscape beds; unlike many ground covers, it is noninvasive. Each plant is capable of spreading 10–14 inches, but they can be planted even closer together to fill in an area more quickly. One of its most striking features are the star-shaped flowers. They produce hundreds of neon-yellow flowers that seem to glow in the landscape in the early spring, typically around March. Lemon sedums are rated for USDA winter hardiness from zones 7 to 11. While it is a perennial, most lemon sedum stems that flower will typically die out. Spent flowers should be removed after they have flowered; during the spring and summer, the clump will fill back in. It is easy to propagate, so any gaps in the clump can be filled in with cuttings from more vigorous sections. These plants contrast nicely with dark-colored foliage or plants with blue or purple flowers.



Figure 3. Lemon sedum. Image by Dr. Gary Bachman, MSU Coastal Research and Extension Center.

Fancy Leaf Kale

The fancy leaf kales are bred for a vibrant display of dazzling colors that range from snowy whites to reds, pinks, and purples (Figure 4). They have ruffled, textured leaves and feathered leaf edges. As the temperatures get cooler, the colors will develop, so don't be turned off if selections in the garden center look green. Peacock, Nagoya, Redbor, and Chidori are well-performing varieties in Mississippi. Good soil drainage is a must, so raised beds are great for in-ground, ornamental kale. Many home gardeners don't think about drought conditions in the winter months, but cold fronts can be relatively dry, and the soil moisture can be rapidly depleted. Kale likes consistent soil moisture, so use mulch. Consistently fertilizing the plants is also important because these plants are fairly heavy feeders. Add a tablespoon of a good, slow-release fertilizer into each planting hole to get the plants off to a great start. Then, on a monthly schedule, use water-soluble fertilizer; this will keep the plants healthy and strong.



Figure 4. Kale 'Coral Queen'. Image by Dr. Gary Bachman, MSU Coastal Research and Extension Center.

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