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**Disease-Resistant Vinca Among 500 Bedding Plant Varieties Featured at Upcoming Field Day**

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OVERTON – On June 26, nursery growers, greenhouse managers and gardening enthusiasts can view field tests of flowering bedding plant varieties at the annual Overton Horticultural Field Day.

"We have close to 500 varieties this year, and that includes 70 varieties in the container trials," said Dr. Brent Pemberton, horticulturist with Texas AgriLife Research.

This year, there will be an emphasis on vinca, including two new series that are resistant to aerial phytophthora, a serious landscape problem with this crop all across the South, Pemberton said.

"The disease-resistant vinca are quite revolutionary for the industry," Pemberton said.

The new vinca are the Cora and Nirvana series. A large selection of colors from both series will be on display.

The field day will begin at 8:30 a.m. at the Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center's North Farm site. The tour will continue at the site until about 10:30, then move to the Overton Center's headquarters building, where a demonstration garden is located. Lunch will be served at about 11:30 a.m.

After lunch, the program will move inside with a presentation by Pemberton and Jimmy Turner of the Dallas Arboretum on the 2008 California Spring Showcase, also known as Pack Trials. Dr. Terri Starman, department of horticultural sciences, College Station, will give a presentation on container gardening, including results from the container trials done in cooperation with Pemberton since 2006. The program will conclude by 3 p.m.

Pemberton began trials of bedding plants at the Overton center to serve the commercial greenhouse and bedding plant industry. In recent years, the industry has had a \$500 million annual economic impact on the region, according to Pemberton.

Before Pemberton began his trials, there were few if any tests under East Texas conditions of the many new varieties released by seed companies each year, he said.

Since the first field day with less than 100 varieties, the event has grown to include vinca, ornamental peppers, trailing petunias, verbenas, begonias, portulaca, zinnias, geraniums and ageratum.

"There's also a good selection this year of geranium and lantana," he said.

"We also coordinate trial results with the Dallas Arboretum," Pemberton said. "Over five million consumers in the northeast Texas region now have the opportunity to see how promising new plants from all over the world perform in our climate."

There also will be an award program in cooperation with the Dallas Arboretum called the "North Texas Winner's Circle." Each year the best performing plants at both locations are chosen by Pemberton and Turner for promotion as award winners. Many of these award-winning plants will be on display at the field day.

Plants in the running for designation as Texas Superstar™ also will be on trial, as well as many of the past plants receiving that designation. This statewide program is promotes plants that perform well in trials across Texas. The plants being promoted for spring and summer 2008 are Firecracker Shrub and Pride-of-Barbados, both flowering shrubs.

Though begun primarily to serve the bedding plant industry, the trial's thousands of square feet of plots planted purple, pink, red and white flowers have become popular with regional gardeners.

Preparation for the trial has also become a way for local Master Gardeners to fulfill their requirement for community service. Moreover, with the ever-increasing number of entries by seed companies, the trials could not have grown to be so all-inclusive without the volunteers, Pemberton said.

"The Smith and Rusk County Master Gardeners Associations are an integral part of these trials," he said. "They provide hundreds of hours of labor every year. A lot of hard work goes into planting the trials and the Master Gardeners provide the labor and enthusiasm that gets this job done."

Registration is free and includes lunch. The Overton center is located 1 mile north of downtown Overton on State Highway 3053.

Coming from south of Overton, take State Highway 135 into town. At Overton's single red stop light, take a left, go across the railroad tracks and turn right immediately after the Brookshire's Supermarket. Look for the large white sign on the right side of the road identifying the Overton center.

The North Farm site is about 4 miles north of the center on Hwy. 3053. For an online map, go to <http://overton.tamu.edu/flowers/fieldday.htm> .