



UTIA PLANT RESEARCH HELPS LOCAL GARDENS FLOURISH

If your garden typically looks less than ideal, UT Institute of Agriculture researchers say it may have nothing to do with the greenness of your thumb.

“Choosing the proper plants for your site is really the most important part,” says UT AgResearch Horticulturalist Jason Reeves. “Choosing plants that are not adapted to our environment is a big problem. Once you’ve chosen the proper plant, your odds of being successful have greatly increased.”

And that’s where researchers like Reeves come into play. Each summer, they test dozens of plant varieties at the UT Gardens located in Knoxville and at the West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center in Jackson. By evaluating plants for disease, heat and humidity tolerance,

Growing plants and greening thumbs

and quality of blooms and foliage, UT is eliminating the unknown. And by collecting data from two very different regions of the state, Tennessee gardeners benefit from a comprehensive study.

“Homeowners want to know what does well in their area and what varieties they should be choosing to grow when they go to the garden center,” says Reeves. “Same thing with industry breeders who want to know if they should market their plants in Tennessee.”

Most of the work at the gardens is done with annual flowering plants. However, there is considerable research on no-spray roses, as well as trees and shrubs. Researchers monitor these plants throughout the year, compiling detailed reports that provide growth rates, flower production, and heat tolerance as well as information about growing conditions.

“This ‘laboratory garden’ research aids the economic growth of Tennessee’s green industry and is essential to the success of in-state commercial growers and landscapers,” says West Tennessee REC Director Dr. Bob Hayes. “The gardens’ beautiful backdrops also serve as classrooms for gardeners who want to learn how to spend their money wisely when planning landscaping projects.”

Researchers recommend a visit to the gardens so you can see firsthand the plants growing. Surrounded by vivid colors and artful landscaping, you may forget you’re on a fact-finding mission, but when you leave, you’ll be better prepared to choose the right plants and be on your way to greening up your garden...and your thumb.

The UT Gardens in Knoxville and Jackson are official All-America Selections Test and Display Gardens and American Conifer Society Reference Gardens. They are open daily to visitors during daylight hours. You can visit <http://utgardens.tennessee.edu> for more information as well as trial results for each garden. —Ginger Trice

UT Gardens in Jackson and Knoxville assist home gardeners and the nursery industry alike. Inspecting plants in the Jackson gardens are UT Knoxville Gardens Interim Director Sue Hamilton, left, AgResearch Horticulturalist Jason Reeves, and professional grower Annie Davis of Willow Oaks Greenhouse in Brownsville.

