

2019 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 2019 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.

Whopper Begonia

The begonia Whopper (*Begonia x benariensis*) series from Benary has four varieties available: Red with Green Leaf, Red with Bronze Leaf Improved, Rose with Bronze Leaf Improved, and Rose with Green Leaf Improved. The leaves are waxy, shiny, and smooth. The bronze or green leaves contrast nicely with the flowers and surrounding plants. The large (3-inch), red and rose flower clusters mix well with other shade-loving plants like ferns, *Carex*, *Impatiens*, *Solenstemon*, *Torenia*, *Plectranthus*, and *Browallia*.

While begonias are typically thought of as shade plants, the Whopper series can handle a fair amount of sun and intense heat if adequate water is supplied. They tend to grow larger and fuller under higher light levels than those grown in the deep shade. They respond very well to applications of slow-release



Begonia 'Whopper Red with Bronze Leaf'. Image credit Ball Horticultural Company.

fertilizer that will feed the plants for several months. This will improve flowering and leaf health. Typically, if no fertilizer is applied, growth is sluggish, and performance is underwhelming.

The Whopper series also does extremely well in pots and looks attractive placed beside an entry to a home, on a patio, or even in a hanging basket. Begonias need to be watered regularly, especially if planted in the understory of trees. They can be deadheaded, but this is not necessary to promote reblooming. These begonias are not winter-hardy, but they could be moved inside to a sunny window to be enjoyed during the winter.

Collard Greens

Collard greens (*Brassica oleracea*) are multipurpose greens that can be used raw or cooked. For Mississippi gardens, they are best for fall, winter, and early-spring harvests. Collards do not tolerate heat. Because of their cold tolerance, collards' flavor is enhanced by frost and cold weather. Collards should be planted ¼-inch deep, 12–24 inches apart, in rows that are spaced 24–36 inches apart. Seeds germinate in about 10 days. Gardeners can expect to harvest greens in 50–75 days.

There are many varieties of collards available, including hybrid and open-pollinated types. 'Vates' is an open-pollinated, well-known variety. It produces compact plants with thick, dark green, broad leaves that grow to 1½–2 feet tall in about 75 days. If you prefer a hybrid, consider 'Top Bunch'. Producing tall, semi-erect plants in 71 days from sowing, the leaves regrow quickly after harvest.



'Tiger' collards. Image credit Ball Horticultural Company.

Blue My Mind Evolvulus

Blue My Mind *evolvulus* (*Evolvulus* hybrid 'USEVO1201') is a fantastic improvement of Blue Daze *evolvulus*, one of the very first Mississippi Medallion plants selected in 1996. The individual flowers are funnel-shaped and always form near the shoot tips. Blue My Mind is a prolific bloomer. The foliage has a downy appearance, and the 1-inch, funnel-shaped flowers are sky blue. The flowers open only for one day; in the morning, they are brilliant, but by afternoon will be looking quite spent, especially if the planting bed faces west and receives quite a high heat load each afternoon. A location with a little afternoon shade would be welcome, but too much shade will reduce total flowering. Blue My Mind needs to be planted in well-drained soil that is consistently moist.



Evolvulus 'Blue My Mind'. Image credit Gary R. Bachman.



Nyssa sylvatica with red and orange fall color. Image credit Wikimedia Commons.

Tupelo

Tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*), also commonly called blackgum, has the potential to be an extremely effective shade or specimen tree for difficult, poorly drained sites. This native deciduous tree is well suited to growing across Mississippi, being hardy in USDA hardiness zones 3–9.

Tupelo is easily grown in medium to wet soils. It will tolerate poorly drained soils, which are common in urban and suburban landscapes. It will even tolerate standing water. Once established, it will tolerate some drought. It does prefer acidic soils.

The foliage is shiny and dark green in the summer and has outstanding red and orange fall color. Landscape growth is expected to be 30–50 feet tall and 20–30 feet wide. There are numerous cultivars available with different growth habits and sizes.

Tupelo was named 2008 Tree of the Year by the Society of Municipal Arborists because of its adaptability and landscape versatility. It is on the preferred street tree lists of many large cities across the eastern U.S., largely because of its huge native range and suitability to tough urban sites.



Nyssa sylvatica foliage. Image credit Wikimedia Commons.

'Sweetie Pie' Blackberry

'Sweetie Pie' blackberry (*Rubus* subgenus *Rubus*) is a thornless plant with large, very sweet fruit. It is a vigorous plant and can produce prodigious amounts of fruit. Peak fruit production will start to occur in year 3. 'Sweetie Pie' was bred in Mississippi, so it tolerates heat very well. Blackberries are self-fertile, so there is no need to plant multiple cultivars unless desired.

Its fruit is best when consumed immediately or frozen because it is somewhat soft and will not store for long periods of time. The ripening season for 'Sweetie Pie' is considered mid to late in the blackberry growing period, which is mid- to late June for most of Mississippi. Aside from excellent quality fruit, it is resistant to rosette (double blossom), a problematic fungus of some other blackberry cultivars.

Blackberry plants should be set in the ground 3–5 feet apart in an area that receives full sunlight. Most blackberry plants have perennial root systems but biennial canes,



'Sweetie Pie' blackberry. Image credit Steve Stringer, USDA-ARS.

meaning they fruit only on the second year's growth. Canes will die after fruiting, so they can be removed after harvest or in the fall/winter timeframe. Bees are the primary pollinator, so encourage their activity as much as possible.

Fortunately, blackberries are one of the easier fruiting plants to grow. They have few significant pests, although stink bugs, spotted wing drosophila, cane borers, and anthracnose can be occasional problems. Supplying fertilizer and irrigation will substantially enhance the amount and quality of fruit. Good management will also reduce overall plant stress and keep the plants productive. Although they can be fairly long-lived in certain situations—10 years or more—most blackberry plants will begin to decline after 5–7 years.

'Sweetie Pie' is an excellent choice for homeowners who wish to grow their own fruit and also for you-pick operations and farmers' markets.



'Sweetie Pie' blackberry fruit. Image credit Steve Stringer, USDA-ARS.

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