

COLEUS

One of the nicest plants you can grow in your garden is Coleus. Coleus, classified as an herbaceous perennial, needs very little attention. Just keep it well-watered and it will look good. The only downside is that it is cold sensitive. Some of the larger growing Coleus may need staking but it is worth the effort for the

long months of color. Coleus can be grown in sun or partial shade and come in all colors and sizes. Most Coleus bloom as the plant matures. The small blue flowers

are carried on a stalk that can sometimes reach ten inches long. Leu Gardens has found Coleus to be a welcome addition to the annual garden, as an accent plant to brighten a dark corner, as a grouping to add color to an otherwise green border and also as a container plant. Many nurseries, garden centers, and mail order nurseries offer Coleus. There are literally dozens of named varieties, and some catalogs offer more than sixty different choices.

Coleus are relatively inexpensive and once purchased can be propagated by cuttings in the fall. These can be wintered over in a warm greenhouse or well-lit area of a shed or other such

building where they will not be subjected to extreme cold. To take a cutting, just cut a piece about four to five inches long, remove any blossoms and the bottom row of leaves, leaving about a 2 or 2½" section of stem. Stick the cutting in a four-inch pot filled with sterilized potting soil. Water well and place in a warm area. Misting the leaves a few times each day will help the cutting take root faster. In about ten days to two weeks new roots

should be coming out of the area where the last row of leaves used to be.

Coleus cuttings root quickly and grow large and rapidly. You may have to put the plants in a

larger container or pinch the cuttings to keep the plants of manageable size until warmer weather arrives. Once all danger of frost is over, Coleus can be planted in the garden.

Coleus have few pests, but are not drought tolerant. If the plants become stressed by lack of water they tend to fall prey to mealy bugs and/or aphids.



GRACE ANN – A “fun” coleus speckled green, white and red. A slightly smaller plant (to 18”) that can be used in a tiny space or container.

Some varieties seem more prone to pests, and experimenting with different ones may be necessary to find plants that are more resistant.

Since last summer, Leu Gardens has been engaged in Coleus trials to find out which Coleus grow best in Central Florida. Seventy-seven named varieties were planted in a trial bed on July 31, 2000. On September 21, 2000, forty-seven more varieties were added to the group. The Coleus were all planted in full sun with automatic irrigation. No effort was made to stake them. We



STUNNING – A mid-sized plant to 2' tall and wide, deep burgundy leaves with deeply serrated edges.



GAY'S DELIGHT – A medium-sized Coleus with golden yellow leaves with bronze venation. A good sturdy plant for full sun.



THE BOSS – Perhaps the largest of coleus in our trials. A shrub-like plant to three feet tall and wide. Deep bronze-yellow on the upper leaf surface and deep purple on the underside. The leaves are “puckered” on the leaf margins giving this plant a unique texture. Wow!



CHARLIE MC CARTHY – A charming little coleus to 12" with tiny, tiny bright green leaves and a deep maroon blotch. The perfectly round habit is formed without shearing!

monitored for growth, color, pests and whether the plant broke or split as the stems got longer. Sometimes as the plants broke and fell to the ground, they set out roots from the leaf apices; this made the plant look fuller but also reduced the height. In November, we took cuttings of all of the plants, planted them in pots and put the pots of Coleus in the greenhouse during the winter. (The original group of one hundred and twenty-four plants in the trial bed was killed in the first freeze that occurred in December.) Some of the Coleus cuttings did not root well but we ended up planting one hundred and thirteen on March 13,

2001. Seventy more plants are expected to arrive this spring for testing in our trial area. With the new arrivals, we will have close to two hundred Coleus. This number will represent not all but most of the Coleus varieties worth growing.

As we get into the growing season we will be evaluating the Coleus we planted in March and adding the new ones as they arrive. This year will provide us with more data on the qualities, growth habits and pest problems and we will compile a report at the end of summer. We wish to extend an open invitation to see our trials anytime.

Helen BeVier
Horticulture Manager



LIME FRILLS – A very pretty, delicate plant to 15". The leaves are deeply serrated and colored lime green with a lemon yellow splash down the center.



KIWI FERN – Elongated brownish-red leaves, deeply lobed and edged in gold. A real showstopper, which grows to only 12".

Some of the Coleus varieties worthy of mention are:

Trailing varieties:

- 'Inky Fingers' – Amber & olive with central blood red & purple fingering.
- 'Tell Tale Heart' – Small green leaves with heart shaped burgundy center.
- 'Trailing Queen' – Traditional tricolor.
- 'Swiss Sunshine' – Bright yellow leaves, scalloped ochre edges, with pink & violet central flames.

Short varieties:

- 'Charlie McCarthy' – Cute about 12" high with tiny mint green leaves.
- 'India Frills' – Tiny ochre leaves with pink and purple, delicate effect.
- 'Purple Duckfoot' – Tiny purple webfoot shaped leaves.
- 'Butter Cutter' – Bright yellow & ochre leaves that are frilly.

Medium varieties (to 2¹/₂ feet)

- 'Rustic Orange' – Rustic orange with lime overtones & green edges.
- 'Glory of Luxembourg' – Cayenne colored rust leaves.
- 'The Boss' – Large leaves of antique copper veined pink & lime green
- 'Dipt in Wine' – Wide leaves of ochre and crimson

Tall varieties (over 3')

- 'Plum Frost' – Black purple leaf with Nile green center.
- 'Schizophrenia' – Violet, carmine, & caramel on widely branching plant.
- 'Tobasco' – Red-pink and cranberry rose with purple & maroon.
- 'Dada Daddy' – Lime with flecks of lemon, carmine & violet.

Novelty

- 'Tilt A Whirl' – Furled circular leaves of heather with rust & lime edges.

