Just like the top auto manufacturers test their cars in extreme conditions to see how much heat they can take, so too do plant breeders. If you want to know how much sun a plant can stand, you have to head South. From the dry heat of Texas to the muggy dog days of Georgia, plant trials separate the stalwarts from the wilters.

Landscapers who want to know how annuals will withstand the heat should explore the trial sites below. If annuals can make it in the southern heat, they’re more likely to perform well this summer in your clients’ landscapes.

Georgia heat
The Trial Gardens at the University of Georgia has been putting cultivars to the test in Athens, GA, for 30 years. It trials plants that come from breeding companies around the world and from perennial plant nurseries, growers and gardeners. Each cultivar is evaluated semi-monthly for number of flowers; leaf color; uniformity of habit and flower; resistance to insects and diseases; and overall appearance. The regular evaluation is useful for tracking the plant through its lifecycle. The data is combined into a performance rating, based on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being exceptional and 1 being nearly dead, according to the Trial...
EASY INSTALLATION IS A LOK.

Who says there are no sure things in construction? Hardscapes built and designed with VERSA-LOK are a cinch to go up quickly and easily. Our pinned in place design makes perfect installation and structural stability a sure thing. When you use VERSA-LOK, once it’s built, it’s built to last.

To find out why landscape architects prefer VERSA-LOK, call (800) 770-4525 or visit www.versa-lok.com.
Texas Winners Circle awards showcase the trials’ top performers each year at flowers.tamu.edu.

**States of sunshine**
The University of Florida (UF) Fort Lauderdale Research & Education Center Trial Garden site works to provide unbiased evaluations of bedding plant cultivar performance in South Florida via monthly evaluations. The trial garden posts its data and images of each cultivar at http://goo.gl/WeyJx.

UF also has conducted trials in Gainesville, FL: one for the cool season from December to May and one for the warm season from April to August. However, due to budget cuts, trials have been discontinued there. You can still see 2008’s “Best of Trial” winners here: http://goo.gl/x9TgB.

Louisiana also trials color for landscape plantings. It’s known for putting caladiums and other sun garden varieties to the test at the Louisiana State University (LSU) Ag Center in Hammond, LA. (http://goo.gl/99Fbd). And every year, it names the best-performing plants to its Louisiana Super Plants marketing program.

Likewise, the Mississippi Nursery & Landscape Association names plants to its Mississippi Medallion Program every year. The plants are chosen for their ability to thrive in the state, but many of them have excellent heat tolerance characteristics that landscapers may want to investigate at http://goo.gl/ULNgv.

By doing a little bit of homework, you can make sure the plants you install for your clients look great all season long. Gooch is a freelance writer and editor based in Northeast Ohio.
Stop traffic
‘Brakelights Red Yucca’ is Monrovia’s semi-exclusive compact new color selection of Hesperaloe parviflora.
With vibrant red flowers and gray-green foliage, this compact grower reaches 2 ft. tall. It’s hardy in USDA Zones 6 through 10 and requires good drainage. Because it does not set seed, it offers a longer bloom period. Monrovia.com

Fun in the sun
Bred by Seeds By Design, the Ornamental Pepper ‘Black Olive’ plant is a 2012 All-America Selections winner. Judges said this entry was a standout, especially in southern gardens where heat was a major presence during the 2011 trials. All season long, this plant kept its upright habit with draping leaves and dark purple/black fruit, which appeared in small clusters along the stems. As summer progresses, the fruits mature to red, giving contrast against the dark purple foliage and bright purple flowers. It’s great as a 20-in. border plant or a color splash for containers. SeedsByDesign.com

Pleasure cruise
The repeat-flowering Rosa ‘The Endeavour’ (Ausdisco) from David Austin Roses features approximately 50 petals. With dark green leaves, the upper side of the petals is salmon-tinted, while the reverse is soft yellow. The growth remains compact even in the hotter areas — in fact, this is a variety best suited to the warmer U.S. regions (zones 5 through 9). It reaches 4 by 3.5 ft. as a garden bush or up to 8 ft. as a climber. The flower is named for the HMS Endeavour, commanded by Lt. James Cook. It carried the famous explorer on his first voyage to the Pacific Ocean, where he discovered and claimed New Zealand (1769), Australia (1770) and a multitude of Pacific islands for the British crown. DavidAustinRoses.com
Silver lining
Well-suited to cool-season containers and landscapes, Ball’s new ‘3D Silver’ osteospermum features blooms that stay open all day and night. The mounded African daisy plant grows between 10 and 14 in. tall and 18 to 24 in. wide. Other new varieties in the 3D line include ‘Berry White’ and ‘Coral Sand,’ joining the existing pink and purple colorways. BallHort.com

Easy-care evergreen
Giokumo Cryptomeria is a dwarf Cryptomeria japonica selection with year-round interest introduced by Garden Debut late last year. This compact, densely pyramidal Japanese cedar has a vigorous growth rate. Early growth in the first three to four years is moundding and spreading, but it matures at a height between 8 and 10 ft. and a width of about 6 to 8 ft. after 20 to 30 years. For added interest, Giokumo sports persistent, cinnamon-colored decorative female cones about 3/4-in. long. It has deep green coloration and 3/8-in.-long, spirally arranged, awl-shaped needles that curve inward with a thick, dense habit. Branchlets are eventually deciduous, typically lasting three to four years. GreenleafNursery.com

Dilly of a dahlia
Taking second place at the American Garden Awards in 2011, Fides Oro’s ‘Dahlinova Hypnotica Lavender’ flowers over and over, even in a partial sun environment, according to the company. Other colors in the Hypnotica series include red, orange, yellow, white, pink, light pink and coral; bi-colors in bronze, rose and purple; “Dark Night” and new “Cherish Pink.” Dahlinova.com