

## Hot plants for a new season

BY STEVE WHYSALL, VANCOUVER SUN JANUARY 14, 2010



The DIANTHUS Scent First Passion.

**Photograph by:** Vancouver Sun, Files

A beautiful sky-blue pansy, a bright, sun-yellow gaillardia and a candyfloss-pink dianthus.

These are just three of more than a dozen terrific new plants that will be available to gardeners this spring.

The pansy and gaillardia are two of four special plants that have been singled out and awarded the honour of being called All-America Selections winners for 2010.

These plants were all vigorously tested in trial gardens across North America before being chosen and recognized for the exceptional beauty of their flowers as well as their "superior garden performance."

The gaillardia, also known as blanket flower, is a new variety of *G. grandiflora* called 'Mesa Yellow'.

Its unique qualities are that it does not get "tall and loose and floppy", as it grows only 16 to 18 inches high, and it produces spectacular sun-yellow daisy-like flowers that measure three inches across. These blooms not only make great cut flowers, they also have the ability to attract butterflies.

The blue pansy, 'Endurio Sky Blue Martien', is a new cultivar of *Viola cornuta*. It grows only six inches high and produces a gentle mound about 12 inches across.

It is rated as a great filler plant for containers as well as a low-growing summer ground cover.

The other two All-America Selections winners are a highly disease resistant bicolor zinnia called 'Starlight Rose' that has white petals with deep red star-shaped markings, and a snapdragon called 'Twinny Peach' that produces flowers containing a fruity blend of yellow, light orange and peach tones.

Zinnia 'Starlight Rose' grows 12 to 14 inches high and is being promoted as the "perfect plant" for novice gardeners because it is so undemanding and resistant to leaf spot and mildew.

The 'Twinny Peach' snapdragons may not interest purists of the genus who tend to think a snapdragon isn't a snapdragon until it has jaws that snap when you pinch the flower.

'Twinny Peach' is one of those snapdragons with the snap removed - it doesn't have the typical jaw-action of a classic snapdragon.

Nevertheless, it is being touted as a great plant, especially for a window box since it grows about 12 inches high and is impressively drought tolerant.

Skagit Gardens, a nursery located just over the border in Washington state, also has several wonderful new or less well-known plants for this year, including the candyfloss-pink dianthus mentioned earlier.

This is part of the Scent First series consisting of three new cultivars of carnations that have extra large blooms and a slight spicy perfume. They are named 'Candy Floss' (pink), 'Passion' (red) and 'Tickled Pink' (lavender-pink).

Each one grows five to 10 inches high and blooms non-stop from May to October. Skagit says these carnations have evergreen foliage that "forms handsome, tidy tussocks."

Skagit is also drawing fresh attention this spring to the reliable 'Big Bang' series of coreopsis produced by American plant breeder Darrell Probst.

There are four cultivars in the series: 'Cosmic Eye', 'Full Moon', 'Galaxy' and 'Redshift'. Each is reputed to bloom all summer long.

'Cosmic Eye' has yellow flowers with a burgundy flare in the centre. 'Full Moon' and 'Galaxy' are two strong yellows and 'Redshift' has flowers that start out butter-yellow with a crimson centre and slowly "shifts" to become ruby red.

Already on the shelves of many garden centres is Skagit's new top line of hellebores, notably 'Green Corsican', 'Jacob', 'Josep Lemper' and 'Pink Frost'.

"Beautiful and refined, this collection brings new life to winter and early spring-blooming hellebores," the nursery says.

'Green Corsican' has creamy white flowers and grows 18 to 14 inches high; 'Jacob' grows nine to 12 inches high and has long-lasting white flowers from November to January; 'Josef Lemper' grows 15 to 18 inches high and produces white flowers from December to February; and 'Pink Frost' grows 12 to 15 inches and has burgundy and white buds that open to light pink from January to March.

Skagit is also excited about two new euphorbias in its inventory - 'Ruby Glow' that has burgundy foliage and ruby-red new growth, and 'Ascot Rainbow' that has foliage containing a blend of sage green, lime green and rose tips in cool weather.

For lovers of ornamental grasses, Chasmanthium 'River Mist' offers something a little different with its

loose tufts of green and white striped blades and billows of sparkling white seedheads in late summer.  
'River Mist' grows 60 to 90 cm high.

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