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New zinnia picked as a top plant

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Old-fashioned zinnias are among the easiest and most reliable annuals to grow from seed. And they bloom their heads off all summer, making them a must-have for any cutting garden. In fact, the more you cut, the more they bloom.

This year, a new zinnia known as 'Zahara Starlight Rose' will make its debut in cutting gardens. It has won top honors from the All-America Selections committee, which has been picking the best new plants for home gardeners for more than 75 years.

Today's article spotlighting the 'Zahara Starlight Rose' completes our look at the four plants chosen by the AAS committee to be the best new plants for 2010. (Go to www.lohud.com/gardening to learn about the other winners: Gaillardia 'Mesa Yellow,' Snapdragon 'Twinny Peach' and Viola 'Endurio Sky Blue Martien'.)

'Zahara Starlight Rose' offers 2-inch-wide bicolor blooms in a stunning mix of rose and white. The plants stay fairly small — 12 to 14 inches tall and wide — making them ideal for patio urns or other containers.

Known botanically as *Zinnia marylandica* 'Zahara Starlight Rose,' this new zinnia likes full sun and average, well-drained garden soil.

It has proven particularly resistant to plant diseases such as leaf spot and mildew. It's also heat and drought tolerant, and deer should leave it alone.

Look for this gorgeous new zinnia at the better garden centers in spring or try growing it from seed from mail-order sources such as Harris Seeds, J.W. Jung Seed Co., Park Seed or Stokes Seeds Ltd.

For a look at other All-America Selections winners, visit www.all-americaelections.org. You'll surely find complementary flowers that will look good with your new zinnias.