



Everything New Orleans

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GARDEN DREAM TEAM

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Like the presents we received during the holiday season, new plants make the scene every year to delight gardeners. Almost everyone is intrigued by seeing something new, and the impulse to try a novel variation of a familiar plant or one that's altogether new is often irresistible.

Especially anticipated each year is the new crop of All-America Selections Winners.

All-America Selections is a non-profit organization that tests newly developed seed-grown cultivars of bedding plants and vegetables in garden plots all across the country.

Duplicating conditions in the average home garden, the testing program is independent and unbiased. AAS was founded in 1932, and the first AAS winners were announced a year later, after the results were tabulated for the first trial. AAS winners have been introduced each year since 1933, and AAS continues as the oldest, most established international testing organization in North America.

As always, the 2010 AAS Winners were judged in side-by-side comparison tests with standard cultivars and were selected based on the plants' performance.

Only those few cultivars that demonstrated unique new characteristics, exceptional productivity and superior garden performance make the All-American Selections list.

So, when it comes to bedding plants and vegetables, All-America Selection Winners are generally considered good choices.

That's not to say that every winner is going to be an outstanding choice for Louisiana, and we may use them differently from gardeners in other parts of the country.

For 2010, four winners have been named. Here's what the AAS says about them.

Flower award winner

The flower award winner is Gaillardia F1 'Mesa Yellow'

'Mesa Yellow' is the first hybrid blanket flower with a controlled plant habit and prolific flowering. Its performance was impressive at the Hammond Research Station in 2009.

The 3-inch, daisy-like flowers and globe-shaped seed heads offer a superior presentation of color that continues throughout the summer. The bright yellow flowers are rich in nectar and will attract butterflies.

Especially notable is the improved plant habit of 'Mesa Yellow' -- they do not get tall, loose and floppy. The neat, mounded plants reach about 16 inches tall and about 20 inches wide in a full-sun garden location and are adaptable to smaller gardens or any type of containers. When planted near the inside edge of a container, they will cascade down the sides.

They are relatively maintenance-free, drought-tolerant and not prone to insect pests. 'Mesa Yellow' plants recover quickly from severe weather. 'Mesa Yellow' is best grown as a summer bedding plant.

Bedding plant award winners

Two bedding-plant winners were named, Snapdragon F1 'Twinny Peach' and Zinnia 'Zahara Starlight Rose'.

Kids and adults alike enjoy pinching snapdragon flowers from the sides to make the dragonhead-shaped flowers "snap." 'Twinny Peach' however, is a snapdragon without the snap. Why? Because it is a double flower form that does not have the jaws or joints to snap.

Another unique quality is the blend of peach-tone colors. The soft shades of peach, yellow and light orange are distinct, and no other snapdragon offers this range of colors. Match 'Twinny Peach' with blue tones of *Salvia farinacea* or purple-flowered pansies and your garden will be a knockout.

Plants are compact and don't need staking, growing about 12 inches tall and 8 inches wide.

In the full-sun garden, 'Twinny Peach' will produce abundant flower spikes, plenty to cut and place in vases for fresh indoor bouquets. Plants will continue to flower all season with little garden care. Best planted in fall or late winter, 'Twinny Peach' will bloom over a long season.

Zinnia 'Zahara Starlight Rose' is the result of hybridizing *Zinnia elegans*, the garden zinnia, with *Zinnia angustifolia*, the narrow-leaf zinnia. The combination yields a compact plant with prolific flowers and excellent disease resistance. Zahara zinnias come in a variety of colors, and their rose and white bicolor flowers make 'Zahara Starlight Rose' an excellent addition.

Grown in full sun with good air circulation, they have proven resistances to leaf spot and mildew, which can devastate healthy plants and cause early deaths.

The unique flowers are white with a prominent star-shaped eye of rose (although the rose star may fade some in intense heat). These superior qualities resulted in long-lasting zinnia plants that provide generous color from late spring to late summer.

'Zahara Starlight Rose' is heat and drought tolerant, and easy to grow. The mature plants are mid-sized, about 12 to 14 inches tall and wide, large enough to make a bold statement in beds, containers or patio planters.

Cool season award winner

Viola F1 'Endurio Sky Blue Martien' takes the honors among cool season plants.

The color blue is uncommon in flowers. That's why plants that produce blue flowers are so treasured, and 'Endurio Sky Blue Martien' is a welcome addition.

This unique spreading/mounding viola may look delicate, but it delivers tough-as-nails performance in the garden. It will flower throughout the cool season, from late October through April, when planted in fall. It can also be planted in early spring, covering planters and landscapes with sky-blue blooms until early May.

Like all violas, the flowers are relatively small, at just under an inch, but you will be amazed how they cover plants in beautiful sky blue. Spreading/mounding plants grow to 6 inches tall and 10-12 inches wide. Use it along with other cool-season bedding plants in window boxes and hanging gardens, as well as balcony and patio planters.

INFOBOX:

tips for

gardeners

STILL MOWING: Regularly mow lawns overseeded with ryegrass at a height of 1 1/2 inches to keep them looking attractive.

PLANT NOW: Vegetables to plant in January include beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onions, radishes, shallots, snow peas, spinach, Swiss chard and turnips. Plant seeds of tomatoes, peppers and eggplants in greenhouses or under lights indoors in late January to produce transplants to be put out in March.

EASY ON THE CHEMICALS: Use garden pesticides only when your pest problem has been properly identified and chemicals are absolutely necessary. There is no need to spray an insecticide, for instance, every time you see a bug or minor damage. When a pesticide is recommended, always buy the least toxic product that will do the job.

MATCHED SET: It's important to design a landscape that requires only as much maintenance time and effort as you have to give. Remember: Lawn areas and flowerbeds are high maintenance.

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