



David Robson: More of the best plants of 2010

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This year, the All America Selection committee chose nine seed-grown plants to receive recognition. These plants showed superior qualities at the vast majority of test gardens across the United States.

Last week, we looked at six of these. We finish up this week with three additional flowers — including one that was more of a shocker than it placed.

Twinny Peach snapdragon is a bedding plant winner, meaning it's a shorter plant characteristic of mass plantings to make an effect. You could tuck a plant here and there in a container, but if you really want to make a statement, stick at least four to six together.

Snapdragons are fickle, thriving in the cool night temperatures and warm days of spring and autumn. During the summer, the old cultivars tended to peter out, especially the large cutting types that most people remember.

Twinny Peach is a double-flowered form, hence the "twinny" name, which means it's next to impossible to grab the flower and squeeze open the petals like a snapping mouth like the single types. That's too bad if you have little kids. On the other hand, you have a denser flower that gives more depth to the flower garden.

This winner is also a smaller version, topping out at 12 inches. The pinkish flowers with various hints of yellow and orange, giving it a peach color, also tolerate summer's heat, which means you should get three good season's worth of growth.

Gaillardia Mesa Yellow is an annual, though some folks can keep gaillardia or blanket flowers around year after year. Most green-thumbers realize the plants usually won't make it through the winter and plant them annually.

Most gaillardias are a mixture of orange, red and yellow. Mesa Yellow is a pure yellow flower grown from seed, topping out at 18-20 inches. The downside is that the plant may take four months to bloom. In other words, start the seeds early if you want plants throughout the summer.

Compare the 120 days to flowering with the 70 days for snapdragons. There's a big difference.

Plants also are more compact instead of the legginess that is common with most gaillardias. You still may have to pinch the plant to keep it from flopping during strong wind and rains.

Mesa Yellow gaillardia also work well in containers, either in the center supported by other plants or at the edges where you could get some cascade or spiller effect.

Saving the surprise for last, AAS recognizes the first Echinacea or coneflower from seed.

Most coneflowers are perennial, while most AAS winners are annuals. With the Perennial Plant Association recognizing perennial plants, it's a surprise to see the AAS do it.

Coneflowers are native flowers, well adapted to unpredictable Midwest weather. They tolerate drought, floods, freezing temperatures and summer scorchers. Year after year, they produce purplish-pink flowers that attract bees when in full bloom and birds that go after the seeds.

Pow Wow Wild Berry has a deep purple flower, darker than the traditional coneflowers, but with the same orange center. Flowers are 3-4 inches across, slightly smaller than a typical coneflower.

Remember that in containers, you'll need to heel them in the ground for the winter so they don't freeze out.

Plants branch at the base, which not all coneflowers do. The branching makes for more flowering stems and a shorter, compact plant that reaches two feet in height, with a spread of 12 inches.

The literature states the continuous flowering means you don't have to deadhead or cut out the old flowers. Still, for the sake of flower production and garden beauty, take the clippers to the faded blooms and remove them back to another bud. Deadhead until the first of September.

Pow Wow Wild Berry, like most coneflowers, is no tomato or marigold when it comes to germinating or flowering. It may take four to five months to get a plant to the blooming stage. In other words, if you want flowers this summer, start the plants indoors as soon as possible.

Otherwise, you can grow the plants out for a full bloom in 2011.

All the AAS winners are available through the Internet or many seed catalogs. More than likely, many garden centers and nurseries will carry some of these plants in the spring.

David Robson is a horticulture educator for the University of Illinois Extension. For more gardening information or for your local extension unit office, go to www.extension.uiuc.edu/mg.

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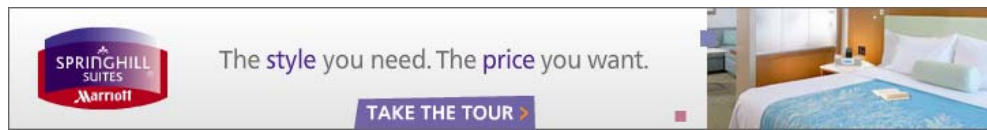
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