

Top picks: Hard-working flowers earn AAS honors

By Laura Christman

Posted September 12, 2009 at midnight



Mesa Yellow (gaillardia)
Mesa Yellow has 3-inch, bright daisy-type flowers that turn into attractive globe-shaped seed heads. This gaillardia (blanket flower) blooms throughout the summer and attracts butterflies. Plants get 20 to 22 inches high. Their contained, mounded form makes them a good choice for small spaces and pots.



Endurio Sky Blue Martien (viola) looks delicate, but it isn't bothered by wind, rain or even a bit of snow. The bluish blooms can brighten garden beds or containers. In mild climates, this viola will flower through the winter. In other places it offers two-season color, flowering in the fall and then again

There's more to great flowers than frills and thrills. How about resistance to chills? Tolerance of cold and heat, the ability to withstand diseases and willingness to keep on blooming are traits that can make a flower a real winner.

All-America Selections recently announced four such flowers as its top choices for the 2010 growing season. The honors went to a gaillardia, viola, snapdragon and zinnia. They will be available at nurseries and from mail-order businesses in the spring.

Normally AAS, a nonprofit program that puts plants to the test to find the best new varieties for gardeners, includes vegetables in the winner's circle. Nona Wolfram Koivula, AAS executive director, said there were some remarkable vegetables growing in AAS test gardens, but the growers of those plants didn't have enough time to produce sufficient quantities of seed to have the vegetable plants put on the market with the AAS label.

"There are vegetables in the pipeline ready to be introduced," Wolfram Koivula said in a telephone interview from her office in Downers Grove, Ill. Look for an announcement about them at this time next year.

Meanwhile, enjoy the flowers. "We have a very interesting selection this year," Wolfram Koivula said.



Twinny Peach (snapdragon) is a snapdragon that doesn't snap because its double flowers are so fluffy they don't have the joints of traditional snapdragons. The flowers are colored in shades of peach, yellow and orange. The plant produces lots of flower spikes, which make great cut flowers. Twinny Peach is easy to grow and tolerant of heat.



Zahara Starlight Rose (zinnia) is a sunloving, undemanding plant that produces white-and-rose flowers all summer. It's tolerant of heat, demands little water and is resistant to leaf spot and mildew. The plant grows 12 to 14 inches tall and wide. It works well in garden beds

For example, she said one of this year's honorees, Zahara Starlight Rose, is a striking bicolor zinnia that's resistant to leaf spot and mildew.

"A lot of people like zinnias because they can take it hot and dry. These also have disease resistance," she said.

The goal of the independent AAS program, which has test gardens throughout the country, is to find plants that have exceptional form, color or other characteristics.

They must also be easy to grow in a variety of climates and resistant to bugs and diseases. Plants that earn AAS distinctions can be marketed with the AAS label.

"If you are in doubt whether a variety will perform, always chose an AAS winner," Wolfram Koivula said.

Here's a look at this year's winners. For more information about AAS and to get details on previous winners, go to www.aaswinners.com.

Reporter Laura Christman can be reached at 225-8222 or lchristman@redding.com

Click [here](#) to view the online version.