

Deciding what to plant in your garden

February 20, 2011

Cabin fever has begun and the garden catalogues have arrived with the promise that someday it will be spring. With all of the plant choices out there, how do you know which ones are the cream of the crop? With a little help, you can pick the very best vegetables and annuals for your garden this year.

All-America Selections are there to help you make the tough decisions of what to put in your garden a little easier. What exactly are All-America Selections? All-America Selections (AAS) was founded in 1932 as a way to promote and distribute new and improved cultivars of flowers, bedding plants and vegetables. It is the oldest independent plant testing organization in North America.

They evaluate the plants through a network of almost 200 display gardens across the United States and Canada, with two in Nebraska. The plants are grown and evaluated for several years in the display gardens before they make the cut.

The plants selected as AAS Award winners are the cream of the crop and the best of the best. Some of the previous winners are actually the tried-and-true plants we have come to love, like the Wave petunia, Straight-8 cucumbers, Celebrity tomatoes, and Sensation cosmos.

With the new year comes the new 2011 AAS Award winners. They include one flower, three annual bedding plants, and three vegetables to add to your garden. They are: Gaillardia "Arizona Apricot," Ornamental Kale "Glamour Red," Salvia "Summer Jewel Red," Viola "Shangri-La Marina," Pumpkin "Hijinks," Tomato "Lizzano" and Tomato "Terrenzo."

Gaillardia "Arizona Apricot" is a compact plant reaching 12 inches in height. The blooms have a unique apricot center with yellow edges. This long flowering perennial keeps a tidy uniform habit.

Kale "Glamour Red" is the first winning kale in 78 years. It has shiny, not waxy, leaves which results in more vivid colors on its 10 to 12 inch flower head.

Salvia "Summer Jewel Red" has an early and prolific flower production. The plants remain about 20 inches tall. The bright red flowers are great for attracting hummingbirds.

Viola "Shangri-La Marina" is an early-flowering viola that has a low growing mounding habit. The blooms have light blue petals with a dark blue "face."

Pumpkin "Hijinks" produces small pumpkins, 6 to 7 pounds, with uniform size and shape. They have smooth, deep-orange skin with distinctive grooves. Gardeners can expect high yields with this pumpkin.

Tomato "Lizzano" is the first late blight-tolerant tomato. The tomatoes are cherry sized and plentiful. This cultivar will work well in patio containers or hanging baskets.

Tomato "Terrenzo" is a "tumbler" type cherry tomato. The tomatoes have a high sugar content for sweet eating tomatoes. This cultivar will also work well in patio containers or hanging baskets.

For more complete information about the winners or to view pictures, or to just find out more about All-America Selections visit www.all-americanselections.org.