

2005 All-America Selections Winners

Established in 1932, the All-America Selections (AAS) makes awards on a yearly basis for the new vegetable and flower varieties that it feels exhibit qualities that are superior to contemporary varieties. The awards are based on the votes of a council of professional judges, who have studied the new varieties at more than 50 trial sites scattered across the United States and Canada.

Although the All-American Selection varieties are not perfectly adapted to all gardens, your chances of success are greater when you select an award winning variety. Here are the 2005 winners. Give them a try.



Gaillardia aristata 'Arizona Sun' Flower Award Winner

This gaillardia is red and yellow. Each 3 inch single flower is mahogany red with bright yellow petal edges. The bright colors are similar to the desert sun in Arizona. Like many annuals, these plants produce flowers continuously. Even the spent blooms are



attractive as tufts of seed. When grown in a full sun garden, 'Arizona Sun' is a compact plant reaching only 8 to 10 inches tall, spreading 10 to 12 inches. Blanket

flower is native to the Great Plains and usually considered a perennial. 'Arizona Sun' performed as an exceptional plant the first year grown from seed. This AAS winner may overwinter, depending upon the severity of winter. 'Arizona Sun' flowers can be cut and used for summer bouquets. They may attract butterflies to the garden in search of nectar.



Vinca 'First Kiss Blueberry' Flower Award Winner

The first blue-flowered Vinca is an AAS winner named 'First Kiss Blueberry.' The large 2 inch single blooms have a darker eye which accentuates the violet blue color. For decades breeders have been diligently working towards a blue Vinca. Now 'First Kiss Blueberry' fills the color void. Gardeners will look for 'First Kiss Blueberry' plants to add to their collection. Proven to be heat and drought tolerant,

mature plants will be about 11 inches tall and spread 16 inches, given adequate growing conditions. Easy to grow, this Vinca can be grown in patio containers or combination planters.



Zinnia 'Magellan Coral' Flower Award Winner

'Magellan Coral' blooms are radiant. They illuminate the garden. The fully double, dahlia flowered 5 to 6 inch blooms gleam with brilliant coral petals. The flower quality and color are superior to other zinnias. In addition to the color, 'Magellan Coral' plants are brimming with luminous blooms. Consistent flower production is an improved quality. Earliness to bloom is another exceptional trait. From sowing seed to first bloom requires only 6 to 9 weeks. Mature zinnia plants will reach about 15 to 17 inches tall and spread 15 to 19 inches, depending upon growing conditions. Like all zinnias, 'Magellan Coral' will perform best in a full sun growing location. This AAS winner is adaptable to container gardening.

Eggplant 'Fairy Tale' Vegetable Award Winner

'Fairy Tale' is a petite plant with decorative miniature



eggplants. The fruit appearance is as luscious as the taste. 'Fairy Tale' eggplants are white with violet stripes. The fruit are sweet, not bitter, with a tender skin and few seeds. The elongated oval eggplants can be picked when quite small at 1 to 2 ounces or they can be left on the plant until double the weight, and the flavor and tenderness remain. 'Fairy Tale' eggplants are recommended for marinating and grilling whole. The harvest can begin in just 49 to 51 days from transplanting. The petite plant reaches less than 3 feet tall and wide, perfect for container gardening. An eggplant has not won an AAS award since 1939, so 'Fairy Tale' is truly an exceptional new variety.



Winter Squash 'Bonbon' Vegetable Award Winner


'Bonbon' is a squash with three improved traits. They are restricted habit, earliness and superior eating qualities. 'Bonbon' has an upright, semi-bush habit needing less garden

space. Mature vines spread about 8 feet. When 'Bonbon' plants are transplanted into a full-sun garden, look for ripe fruit within 81 days; a full week earlier than other varieties. 'Bonbon' squash has thick orange flesh and when cooked delivers sweet flavor and creamy texture loaded with vitamin A. The dark green squash is painted with silver stripes and weighs about four pounds. Easy to grow, 'Bonbon' is not highly susceptible to diseases and is adaptable to any location where squash is grown.



Tomato 'Sugary' Vegetable Award Winner

The name says it all. Judges raved about the sweet tomato flavor. The half-ounce dark pink fruit has a sugar content of 9.5 percent, higher than most others. The fruit is produced in clusters like grapes and can be eaten like them. 'Sugary' tomatoes have a distinct shape; they are oval with a pointed blossom end. In addition to the flavor, 'Sugary' plants produced a high yield with a noticeable lack of cracked fruit. Look for ripe fruit on the strong semi-indeterminate vines within 60 days from transplanting into warm, prepared garden soil or large containers. Plants are vigorous and may need pruning to contain growth. 'Sugary' should set a new standard for 'cherry' size tomatoes with sweet flavor. (MJF)



Garden Guide

Things to do this month

- Rake the lawn to remove leaves and twigs.
- Some annuals, such as verbenas, snapdragons and petunias, take 70 to 90 days to bloom. They should be started indoors in early spring.
- Buy some new perennials for your flower border. Spring is a good time to renew and add variety to your landscape.
- Complete the pruning of shrubs, ornamental trees before growth starts, except for spring flowering shrubs. Prune those which bloom in spring as soon as they finish flowering.
- Start transplants indoors of tomatoes, peppers and eggplant.
- Do not plow your garden when the soil is wet. It will form clods which are difficult to break up and interfere with cultivation during the summer.
- Plan your vegetable garden on a sheet of paper to utilize the space most efficiently. Remember to rotate the vegetables in the garden to reduce insect and disease problems.
- Buy a notebook and use it to keep all your gardening information. List what you plant in the garden. Include the name of seed companies, plant name, variety, planting date and harvest date. During the growing season keep notes on how well the plant does. If the variety is susceptible to disease, record what was used to treat any problems. All this information will be helpful in planning future gardens.
- Pick a permanent spot for herbs in the garden.
- If you have not done it already, check stored tools and outdoor furniture for signs of rust. Remove any surface rust with steel wool and paint with rust-inhibitive paint.
- Turn the compost pile.
- Place birdhouses built this winter outdoors this month. Birds will begin looking for nesting sites soon. (MJF)

Caring for Easter Lilies

We can thank Louis Houghton, a World War I soldier, for the popularity of the Bermuda lily, better known as the Easter lily, in this country. In 1919, he brought a suitcase full of hybrid lily bulbs to the southern coast of Oregon and gave them to family and friends to plant. The climate there was ideal for growing this lily, a native of the Ryukyu Islands of Japan, and by 1945, 1,200 west coast growers were producing bulbs for the commercial market. Up until that time, first Bermuda, and then Japan, dominated the U.S. export market.

Today, ten growers, most located along the California-Oregon border, in an area known as the "Easter Lily Capital of the World," produce 95 percent of all bulbs grown in the world for the potted Easter lily market. They produce almost 12 million bulbs, shipping them to commercial greenhouses in the U.S. and Canada. Despite a sales window of only two weeks,

Easter lilies are the fourth largest crop in wholesale value in the U.S. potted plant market, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Poinsettias, mums and azaleas, rank first, second and third.

The cultivar most commonly grown for U.S. markets is the "Nellie White." It is named for a lily grower's wife and has large, white, fragrant trumpet-shaped flowers. When buying a lily, look for a plant with flowers in various stages of bloom from buds to open or partially opened flowers. Foliage should be dense, rich green in color, and extend all the way down to the soil line. This is a good indication of a healthy root system. Look for a well-proportioned plant, one about two times as high as the pot. You also should check the flowers, foliage and buds for signs of insects and disease.

At home, keep your lily away from drafts and drying heat sources such as appliances or heating ducts. Bright, indirect light is best with

daytime temperatures of 65 to 75° F. Water the plant only when the soil feels dry to the touch, but do not overwater. To prolong the life of the blossoms, remove the yellow anthers (pollen-bearing pods) found in the center of each flower.

Do not throw away your Easter lily after it is done blooming. You can save the bulb and plant it outdoors. Easter lilies can be replanted outside after the blooms are gone. Plant the Easter lily outdoors as soon as the ground can be worked. Select a sunny site with well-drained soil. Set the top of the bulb six-inches below the soil surface. Cut off the old flowers, but leave the stem and leaves. Do not cut back the stem until it dies down in the fall, then cut it off at the soil surface. After the soil surface freezes in late fall, mulch the soil and do not remove the mulch until new growth begins in the spring. (MJF)