

TROPHY CASE

VARIETIES



Looking for a legitimate way to set your customers up for success? An All-America Selections Display Garden can prove to be a great starting point.

By Pete Mihalek

How confident are you that you've chosen the right mix of annuals and vegetables for your customers? What proof do you have that the plants you've ordered will actually perform for the home gardener and have them returning for more?

You can recommend the All-America Selections (AAS) Winners with confidence because every single one has been trialed by experts in trial grounds across the country, but you can take that recommendation one step further — show your customers the winning varieties as they thrive in an AAS Display Garden at your garden center.

In the following interview with Diane Blazek, executive director of All-America Selections, we discuss the importance of AAS Display Gardens to you and your customers.

Out of the 180 AAS Display Gardens, only four are located at independent garden centers. Why is it important to get that number up?

Diane Blazek: It is only recently that adding independent garden centers as AAS Display Gardens has become part of our strategic direction. Traditionally, public gardens have made up the majority of our Display Gardens, with the thinking that AAS Winners will receive publicity by being grown at a location with a lot of visitors. That still holds true today; but we'd like to take that visibility one step further and actually have them at garden centers (that have room for a display of AAS Winners) to help tell the AAS story and have the product right there, available for sale.

Telling the AAS story and how an entry goes through the process of becoming a winner helps sell that product and, in the end, helps ensure success for the home gardener.

Simply put, why does it make sense to display winning varieties at places that also sell them?

Blazek: Call it impulse buying. If you see a beautiful dahlia at a public garden, how often will the average home gardener actually write down the variety then seek it out at their local garden center? On the other hand, if you see that same beautiful dahlia on display at a garden center, labeled by variety name, with the AAS logo (and hopefully some signage explaining what it takes for a variety to

The People's Pick



The 2012 American Garden Award, now in its fourth year, featured six new flower varieties chosen by their breeders for their excellent garden performance.

Once these new varieties were planted and put on display at more than 28 highly respected public gardens across the United States, the public was invited to vote on their favorite using one of several voting methods. The votes have been tallied and the three winners are:



Grand Prize Winner: Begonia boliviensis 'Santa Cruz Sunset' by Ernst Benary of America



Second Place: Gazania 'Big Kiss White Flame' F1 by Syngenta Flower



Third Place: Petunia 'Surfinia Deep Red' by Suntory Flowers

Understanding AAS Garden Types



Preview Gardens: These are select garden writers who are able to start from seed, then plant the AAS Winners in their own gardens in order to get first-hand experience on how the AAS winners do in their home garden.



Display Gardens: These sites are public spaces, planted and maintained by horticulturists or Master Gardeners, with the purpose of planting and putting on display the AAS Winners from the past five years.



Trial Grounds: These sites are not necessarily open to the public but instead are where the actual AAS Trials occur, are planted, observed and scored by horticulture professionals who judge the AAS entries against the chosen comparisons.

become an AAS Winner), then it's much easier for that consumer to find and purchase that exact variety for their own garden.

Does selling and displaying AAS varieties add some credibility to an IGC? Can it help with customer confidence?

Blazek: Absolutely! Our tagline says it all: *Tested Nationally & Proven Locally*. It's a difficult decision for a retailer to decide which of the thousands of new varieties they will carry. AAS helps that decision process by honing in on the ones that have gone through our trialing process and weeding out the ones that did not perform to our standards.

If the garden center personnel takes the time to read our literature and understand the rigorous testing these winners undergo all over North America, they will understand the story behind the story, which helps them sell confidence to their

customers. We also create downloadable signage (found here: www.aaswinners.com/signs_brochures/index.cfm) to help identify the AAS Winners; and all the tag and label companies generously support the AAS program by providing tags with the AAS logo on the appropriate varieties. All totaled, it gives the consumer confidence that if this variety has been trialed and judged by professional horticulturists, then it's a proven performer.

For those interested, how can an IGC get started on creating an AAS Display Garden?

Blazek: Retailers can contact our office to request an application (contact Macie Zorn at mzorn@aas-ngb.org). After that, our Board of Directors approves the application; then it's just a matter of growing and planting the AAS Winners just as a retailer would do for other plants they put on display in order to promote them.

AAS Display Gardens get the seed for the AAS

Winners from the past five years. They can choose to be just a flower display garden, just a vegetable display garden or both. For 2013, we will send 11 or more vegetable winners and 18 or more flower/bedding plant winners. We do alert the Display Gardens in October/November as to the exact varieties they'll receive so they can plan ahead.

There is a fee for the signage, but that's the only up front cost. We have a listing of all AAS Display Gardens on the AAS website, so after approval, we'll add the garden center to this list (along with the Google Maps location feature we have there). **LGR**

All-America Selections is an independent, non-profit organization that tests new varieties then introduces only the best garden performers as AAS Winners. For more information on the All-America Selections judging process, visit www.all-americaelections.org.

There are AAS winners from years ago, such as Butter Crunch Lettuce and Champion Radish, that are home garden favorites today. It's an opportunity for consumers to see that if it has an AAS award it can be expected to perform in their garden. Visitors to our nursery enjoy walking through our AAS Display Garden and often share their impression of these winners. We value this feedback on a new variety. The flower selections add to the beauty of our garden and I can confidently say (to customers) these are varieties that are easy to grow and will perform.

-Rose Marie Nichols McGee, Nichols Garden Nursery, Albany, Ore.



Helen Hillman Photography