

# YOUR "YEAR OF" EASY IDEAS

National marketing campaigns can help make your job easier.

By Diane Blazek

**W**ith spring already here, you may be looking for some easy, last-minute merchandising, display or seminar ideas to help sell more product in the coming weeks. Luckily, there are several "Year of the" programs that you can take advantage of. You can use the information provided by the respective sponsoring organizations for a quick injection of interesting sales ideas.

The National Garden Bureau (NGB) has three "Year of the" programs that any retailer can leverage at no charge.

Each year, NGB's board of directors chooses one annual, one perennial and one edible class to highlight in the "Year of the" program.

Since 1981, NGB has been highlighting plant families that are popular in today's gardens, are easy to grow and have a wide diversity of species within that class.

NGB then hires writers to create fact sheets that outline the history of that plant class, describe the various forms and uses of that flower or vegetable and give an overview of some specific varieties. These fact sheets are used on the website along with an extensive photo collection of varieties from NGB members.

Those fact sheets become stories for website and social media platforms, content for a bimonthly e-newsletter series and tidbits for other forms of communication throughout the year.

The great news for retailers is that this content is provided at no charge to anyone who wishes to repurpose it for their own usage, as long as proper credit is given. Simply include the phrase "Content [or photos] courtesy of National Garden Bureau."

The following are a few ideas on how you can use NGB's "Year of the" program for your own business:

1. Duplicate the fact sheet information into your own e-newsletter(s) urging customers to try a few of the new varieties within that class.
2. Use that same information, in whole or excerpted, as articles for newspapers or magazines that serve your local market.
3. Use some of the many photos available from the NGB photo library in signage and advertisements promoting that class of annual, perennial or vegetable.
4. Print an abbreviated version of the fact sheet as a tri-fold brochure and use it as a handout when giving weekend gardening seminars.
5. Download and print the signage available at [www.ngb.org](http://www.ngb.org) as a way to bring attention to a class of plants.
6. Use that same signage as point-of-purchase (POP) when creating an eye-catching temporary display for annuals, perennials or edibles.
7. Access the NGB Pinterest boards featuring the "Year of the" crops and use those on your own Pinterest boards for customer inspiration.
8. Follow NGB's Facebook and Twitter pages and share the many photos and tips about each "Year of the" crop that pops up on those sites.

## Annuals: Year of the Coleus

Coleus is one plant taking the stage in 2015. Coleus is an extremely popular annual that has gained a lot of momentum over the past 10 years. New breeding work has resulted in numerous leaf forms and many interesting colorations in addition to coleus that are more suited for sunny areas.



The National Garden Bureau has selected coleus (top left and right) as its annual, gaillardia (bottom left) as its perennial and the sweet pepper (bottom right) as its vegetable varieties for its 2015 "Year of the" programs.

# MARKETING

What's not to love about coleus? There's even a Facebook page devoted to it.

## Perennials: Year of the Gaillardia

Gaillardia is one of those perennials that blooms heavily in summer and fall, making them an excellent choice for long-season color.

Many gaillardia are perennials native to North America, but the class also boasts a few annuals and biennials.

Commonly called blanket flower, the colorations of some gaillardia are similar to their cousin, the sunflower.

## Vegetables: Year of the Sweet Pepper

Sweet peppers bring a rainbow of colors and a plethora of shapes to the table.

It is easy to value them for looks and flavor alone, but the sweet pepper is a nutritional powerhouse as well.

Home gardeners can find many varieties of sweet pepper plants available at their local nursery or seed retailer.

## Perennials: *Geranium x cantabrigiense* 'Biokovo'

To promote a specific variety of plant, the

Perennial Plant Association (PPA) has the Perennial Plant of the Year (PPOY) program.

The PPOY program began in 1990 to showcase a perennial that is a standout among its competitors. Perennials chosen are suitable for a wide range of growing climates, require low maintenance, have multiple-season interest and are relatively pest/disease-free.

The selection process is quite simple — PPA members vote for the PPOY each summer. At that time, in addition to the vote, each member may also nominate up to two plants for future consideration. The PPOY committee reviews the nominated perennials and selects three or four perennials to be placed on the ballot.

Nominations generally need to satisfy the following criteria:

- Suitability for a wide range of climatic conditions
- Low-maintenance requirements
- Relative pest- and disease-resistance
- Readily available in the year of promotion
- Multiple seasons of ornamental interest

The 2015 Perennial Plant of the Year is *Geranium x cantabrigiense* 'Biokovo'.

This excellent groundcover type perennial that only reaches 6 to 10 inches high is a naturally

occurring hybrid of *Geranium dalmaticum* and *Geranium macrorrhizum* found in the Biokovo Mountains of the Dalmatia region of present-day Croatia.

## Herb: Savory

To promote a specific herb, the International Herb Association (IHA) has the Herb of the Year program.

In 1991 the International Herb Association established National Herb Week to develop and coordinate attention on the use of herbs and herb businesses.

Shortly thereafter, the IHA began choosing an Herb of the Year based on it being outstanding in at least two of three major categories: medicinal, culinary or decorative. They have chosen Savory for 2015.

Any or all of these programs can be put to use by garden retailers as a way to educate your customers and highlight specific plants for added sales. **LGR**

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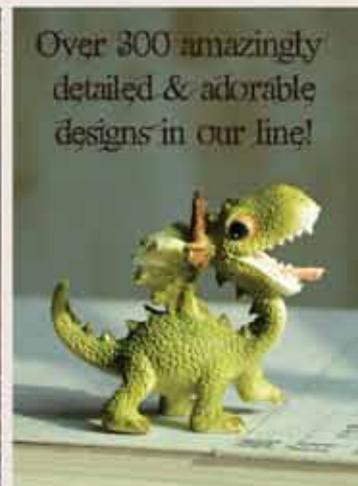
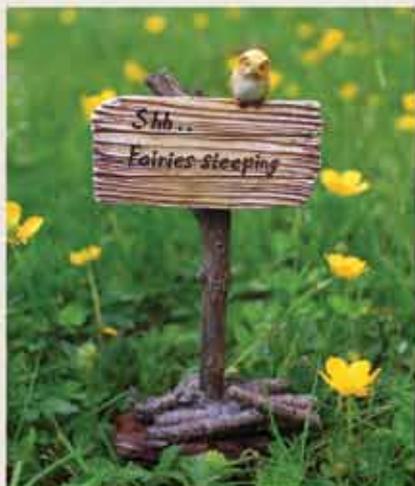
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