

"Consumer Talk" appears in each issue of *Lawn & Garden Retailer* to examine the issues facing today's garden center customers. Our panel of consumers will provide you with insight into their gardening and retail experiences to help you better understand today's customers' needs.

Plant to Win

Every year, *Lawn & Garden Retailer* covers award-winning varieties chosen by horticultural experts and judges across the country. But do garden center shoppers really care about a little blue ribbon? We asked our panelists.

Jeanette, 54
Berwyn, Ill.



Award winners are intriguing, and I do check them out. Zone hardiness is one of my top priorities and will guide me on whether or not to purchase a winner. As a Master Gardener, I have the opportunity to visit the MG website and other websites that inform us of award-winning plants. When plant shopping, I will choose the award winners first if they are plants that I am interested in or want to try out. I guess it's like reading a cooking magazine. I am interested in them and read up on the them, but there's still only a 50/50 chance that I will purchase them. However, I will recommend award winners to family and friends because I know that they have been tested and will be a good choice for novice gardeners.

Linda, 51
Bluffton, S.C.



I absolutely appreciate recommendations and expert advice from well-established organizations. When they bestow "award-winning" status on featured plants, I pay attention. I am particularly interested in learning about perennials. The Perennial Plant Association has a great website that lists their winning selections for the last 20 years. When you click on the annual winner, the website connects you to a new page with photos and lots of useful information. I am definitely going to try planting their 2009 Perennial Plant of the Year — the graceful *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola'. I am also going to plant nepeta 'Walker's Low', the association's 2007 Perennial Plant of the Year, around my birdbath. Both of these plants are noted to be deer resistant, which is important in my area. I wish I knew more organizations that featured "Plant of the Year" awards. It is a fun way to learn about plants.

Marie, 58
Mission Hills, Kan.



I confess that I do not regularly monitor different gardening associations or follow their award-winning plants. Occasionally, when reading a gardening magazine, I will note a story about an award winner, and I may put it on my shopping list for my next visit to the garden center. More often than not, I rely more on the recommendations of friends or the experts at my local garden centers. Sometimes these recommendations coincide with award-winning plants. In shopping for plants, I'm more likely to rely on certain growers or brands. For example, I've never been disappointed with Proven Winners plants. I buy their plants, especially their annuals, and I'm always satisfied. I am a big fan of annuals, and I like lots of color in my patio pots. The plants are strong, the colors are clear, and they perform as advertised on the information sticks in every pot.

Juliet, 36
Santa Rosa, Calif.



A plant's award-winning status definitely makes me take notice, but it isn't the main thing I look for. I want to see what is growing well where I live, so I depend on local nursery recommendations and selection to inform me. It's great to see what nurseries have growing in their own pots to see what is doing well in our climate. I just came home with a big blueberry bush after seeing how well it did for a nursery near my house and reading a handout they had prepared on how to care for it. It was a big purchase considering I was just going in for a few herbs! Overall, I would like to know if a plant being offered has won awards for particular attributes — being pest free or long-flowering, for example. These pluses would sway me toward a certain variety if I knew about them.