

WINNER'S CIRCLE

This year's award-winning varieties feature plants praised for their blooms, bloodlines and fragrance.

By Jen Hubert

Most of the time, consumers can see a plant's appeal. They can appreciate the cheddar-pink flowers that cover dianthus 'Firewitch' or the golden plumes of celosia 'Fresh Look Gold'. But award-winning plants can also offer customers the value of things they cannot see, like proven hardiness and durability.

The plants in *Lawn & Garden Retailer's* annual Winner's Circle showcase are bred to look great and perform well. After scrutinizing trial and evaluation results, handfuls of judges have found them worthy of their associations' awards. You can use this information as a marketing tool: Tell customers that these plants stood up in trials and came out winners, a tactic that may even bring higher selling prices for you.

All-American Daylilies

The All-American Daylily Selection Council gave its first award in 1994 and has been testing plants that perform in at least five

USDA Hardiness Zones across the country since then.

'Buttered Popcorn' (Benzinger). 'Buttered Popcorn' is named for its buttery-gold flowers that are bred to bloom 97 days per year on average. Foliage measures 20 inches tall and 30 inches wide and hosts flowers that bloom from mid-season until frost. This heat-resistant plant can be planted in full sun.

'Persian Market' (R.W. Munson Jr.). 'Persian Market', bred for large, ornate flowers, should bloom an average of 90 days per year. Its salmon-pink flowers have a rose halo and sit on 25- to 30-inch scapes that float about 6 inches above the foliage. 'Persian Market' is commonly used in ground cover, borders or containers.

All-America Selections

All-America Selections relies on judges that have a minimum history of 2-3 years conducting side-by-side comparison trials. The trial sites they judge on must also have a record of environmentally safe testing. The plants are judged on their vigor, productivity and ability to thrive across North America.

'Fresh Look Gold' (Ernst Benary of America). *Celosia plumosa* 'Fresh Look Gold' grows to about 1 ft. tall and wide and features golden-yellow plumes that rise above bright-green foliage. Because of the plant's low maintenance, it could be a good candidate for corporate or municipal plantings. 'Fresh Look Gold' can also be used as a fall pot plant because of its endurance indoors. It grows best in full sun to partial shade with well-drained media.

'Opera Supreme Pink Morn' (American Takii). 'Opera Supreme Pink Morn' is an F1 petunia named for its iridescent, pink blooms. The 2½-inch flowers are white in the center with a yellow throat. The plants should spread 3 ft. in sunny locations. Pruning or deadheading should not be necessary for this variety. It is commonly used for landscaping, hanging baskets and window boxes.

'Pacifica Burgundy Halo' (PanAmerican Seed Co.). The early flowering vinca 'Pacifica Burgundy Halo' is named for the burgundy ring around its white center. It is bred to measure 1 ft. tall and wide

and resist heat and drought. This hardy plant is typically used in mass and landscape plantings. Blooms of contrasting colors should make this plant stand out.

All-America Rose Selections

All-America Rose Selections' trial program, which began in 1938, requires its winners to embody traits consumers want in a garden plant. The plants should be fragrant and disease resistant and have good vigor and flower production.

'Wild Blue Yonder' (Weeks Roses). Grandiflora rose 'Wild Blue Yonder' has reddish-purple flowers that should grow ruffled and wavy. These landscape plants, which were bred to have good disease resistance, develop stems that are medium to long. The flower buds commonly are pointed and full with a petal count between 25 and 30. Colors should deepen with cooler temperatures.

'Julia Child' (Weeks Roses). Julia Child picked this floribunda rose to bear her name. Its butter-gold petals blend in well with light-colored landscapes. These free-



Daylily 'Buttered Popcorn'



Daylily 'Persian Market'



Celosia 'Fresh Look Gold'



Petunia 'Opera Supreme Pink Morn'



Vinca 'Pacifica Burgundy Halo'

flowering plants have flowers with about 35 petals that reach 3½ inches in diameter; buds are pointy and full. 'Julia Child' was bred to resist black spot and grow compact, rounded and bushy.

'Rainbow Sorbet' (Bailey Nurseries). 'Rainbow Sorbet', a multicolor floribunda, is a descendant of 'Playboy'. 'Rainbow Sorbet' has an upright growth habit and stems that can grow 5 ft. in length. Its foliage is dark green and glossy, and its flowers are mixed shades of red, orange and yellow. In full bloom, cuplike flowers finish yellow

and pink. Flowers grow from a pointed bud and reach a length of about 3-3½ inches in diameter with a petal count between 15 and 18. 'Rainbow Sorbet' should show good resistance to black spot. It is a hardy plant and not averse to growing during the winter months.

'Tahitian Sunset' (Jackson & Perkins). Hybrid tea rose 'Tahitian Sunset' has high-centered, apricot buds that turn increasingly pink as they unfurl. Flowers, which commonly grow to 5 inches and have approximately 30 petals, feature a yellow base on dark-green foliage. The stems

should grow up to 14-16 inches long, with the entire plant reaching up to 5 ft. tall. 'Tahitian Sunset' can also add an anise scent to the garden.

American Hosta Growers Association

Since 1996, the American Hosta Growers Association has tried to select hostas that are widely available and retail for about \$15 in the selection year. As hosta cultivars increase, the association strives to help growers find the hostas they consider to be the best.

'Stained Glass' (Shady Oaks Nursery). 'Stained Glass' reflects the

bloodlines of the 2002 Hosta of the year, 'Guacamole'. This year's winner is bred to grow up to 20 inches high and 45 inches across, mimicking the growing habit of 'Guacamole'. 'Stained Glass' develops lavender, fragrant flowers in late summer. It does well in bright light with consistent watering. High light accentuates the color difference in the plant's green-bordered, yellow leaves.

American Ivy Society

American Ivy Society began the "Ivy of the Year" program in 2001. Since then, the society has looked ▶



Grandiflora rose 'Wild Blue Yonder'



Floribunda rose 'Julia Child'



Floribunda rose 'Rainbow Sorbet'



Hybrid tea rose 'Tahitian Sunset'



Hosta 'Stained Glass'

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for durability and vibrancy in its award winners. The society classifies plants based on the Pierot System of Classification, which divides ivy varieties into eight categories based on leaf shape.

'Shamrock'. *Hedera helix* 'Shamrock', a miniature bird's foot ivy, features equal-sized leaves of three rounded lobes. Because of its self-branching habit, 'Shamrock' makes mounds of dark-green growth with light veins. The ivy can work as a house plant in a container or topiary. Its winter-hardy qualities should also allow it to grow well as an outdoor ivy. When full sunlight is not available, this plant should tolerate dark corners.

Fleuroselect

Fleuroselect focuses on innovators — plants that push the limits in breeding. Trials in Israel, Europe and South Africa test plants for pot perfor-

mance, indoor pack performance and annual garden performance.

'Infiniti Scarlet' (Floranova Ltd.). This geranium gets its name — 'Infiniti Scarlet' — from its scarlet flowers, which bloom between spring and end of summer. The plant is bred to flower early, with prolonged flowering for an extended season. Its flowers should grow 3-4 inches in diameter and highlight the plant's upright form and round leaf shape. When mature, 'Infiniti Scarlet' should reach roughly 12 inches high and 10 inches wide.

'Aztec Sunset' (Thompson & Morgan UK Ltd.). This annual two-toned zinnia displays double flowers that can reach 2 inches in diameter and bloom from June to first frost. The plants, which can be almost completely covered by flowers, should grow to roughly 6 inches high and 10 inches wide. 'Aztec

Sunset' does well in moderate climates and is bred to have a compact habit and good resistance to mildew.

'Prairie Splendor' (S&G Flowers). *Echinacea purpurea* 'Prairie Splendor' is a first-year flowering perennial with 4- to 6-inch blooms that start in late June. These 39-inch-high plants have lanceolate leaves and an upright form and develop best in full sunlight. According to the breeder, they are the first perennial echinacea to flower 100 percent in the first year.

'Noverna Clown' (Kieft Seeds Holland). With blooms that change from color to color, this *Dianthus barbatus* was given the name 'Noverna Clown'. Its flowers open to white, but they change to pink, salmon or violet. Flowering starts in the spring and lasts into the fall. Bushy and branched with deep-green lanceolate leaves, this plant should reach roughly 16 inches

wide. It is commonly used in pots and grown in standard light.

'Sydney Blue Picotee' (Kieft Seeds Holland). *Delphinium consolida* 'Sydney Blue Picotee' adds blue flowers with a sky-blue edge to the Sydney series. Like the other varieties in the series, it is bred to grow early and uniformly. Double flowers develop from May to October and reach about 1 inch in diameter. It has an erect plant form with vertical branching and should reach about 47 inches high.

'Presto' (Clause Tezier). *Coreopsis grandiflora* 'Presto' was bred for its flowers and naturally short habit. The plant forms a ball shape about 8 inches in diameter. It produces double flowers from June to August, with mature flowers reaching approximately 2 inches in diameter.

'Blue Glitter' (Ernst Benary of America). *Eryngium planum* 'Blue Glitter' offers a deep-blue color



Ivy 'Shamrock'



Geranium 'Infiniti Scarlet'



Zinnia 'Aztec Sunset'



Echinacea 'Prairie Splendor'



Dianthus 'Noverna Clown'

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during its July-August flowering period, with flowers reaching about one-half inch in diameter. Plants are bred to grow about 32 inches tall and 8 inches wide. Because of the plants' long life as a cut flower, it should be well suited for vase arrangements.

'Avant-garde Blue', 'Avant-garde Pink' (Thompson & Morgan UK Ltd.). Each of these laurentia brings a different color to the hybrid F1 series. 'Avant-garde Blue' and 'Avant-garde Pink' are bred to have vigorous growth habits,

long flowering periods and good basal branching. At maturity, plants should reach about 10-12 inches high and 12-14 inches wide. Star-shaped flowers, which cover the whole plant, usually grow to about 1½ inches in diameter.

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Floristar

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'Global Red' (Oglevee, Ltd).

Ivy geranium 'Global Red' has dark-green foliage and was bred to provide a large number of flowers. It grows well in a 4½-inch format using



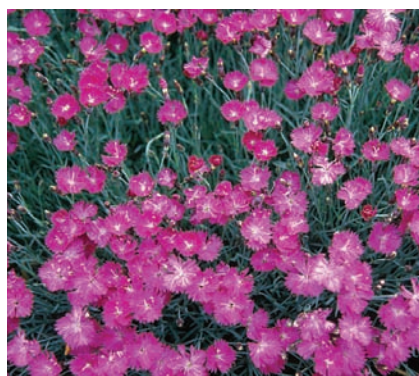
Geranium 'Global Red'



Geranium 'Royal Light Pink'



Osteospermum 'Kenai Grande Pineapple'



Dianthus 'Firewitch'

one plant per pot. Cooler temperatures should encourage compact growth, a better branching habit and earlier flowering.

'Royal Light Pink' (Selecta First Class). Ivy geranium 'Royal Light Pink' is bred to branch well and

have several flowers open simultaneously. It should tolerate heat well, have a medium vigor and flower early. Flowering can increase during high light periods.

'Kenai Grande Pineapple' (Selecta First Class). Osteospermum

'Kenai Grande Pineapple' can be drought resistant and prefers high light levels. The plants have an upright to mounding habit and flower early. Their large, cream-yellow flowers should remain in bloom all summer long. ▶

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Perennial Plant Association

Each year, the Perennial Plant of the Year Committee selects four finalists from a list of varieties nominated by Perennial Plant Association (PPA) members. Then, the members pick one winner.

Since 1990, the PPA has been awarding plants based on their low maintenance and suitability for a broad range of climates. Easily propagated plants are also a plus.

'Firewitch'. *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* 'Firewitch' grows best in full sun and well-drained soils in Zones 3-9.

Mature plants should have foliage from 3-4 inches tall and 6-12 inches wide and flowers that reach 6-8 inches high. Cheddar-pink flowers, which give off a clove-like scent, make the plants suitable for border edges, rock gardens or wall crevices. Cut back flowers in late spring to promote reblooming later. ✂



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Editor's note: *Dianthus 'Firewitch'* photo courtesy of Steven Shill; *hosta 'Stained Glass'* photo courtesy of H. Hansen; *Hedera helix 'Shamrock'* photo courtesy of Rachel Cobb.

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