

December 24, 2022

AAS Winners Make Great Gifts for Gardeners

The night before Christmas and all through the house, seed catalogs were strewn about, even on the couch. The garden plans were drawn on paper with care, in hopes for a growing season soon to be there. The gardeners were resting, all snuggle and warm, with visions of AAS winners dancing in their heads. And seed companies with new plants and AAS testing results, the winners were announced for gardeners’ pleasure. These plants truly are gifts with their improved qualities and performance in the garden for everyone to grow and enjoy.

The non-profit organization, All-American Selections® in North America tests and introduces significantly improved ornamentals (bedding plants) and edibles grown from seed or by cuttings. Seed and online catalogs use the three letters, AAS, in a circle with a red banner that says “Winner” to mark these flowers, vegetables, and fruits.

The ornamentals and edibles are grown in trial gardens across the United States. The trials have been conducted every year since 1932. The award-winning plants are selected by judges from across the US and Canada. The recent AAS winners are available to see at different Display Gardens. The Western Kentucky Botanical Garden and The Arboretum, State Botanical Garden of Kentucky, on the campus of the University of Kentucky serve as display gardens. For 2023, there are six national winners.

Coleus Premium Sun Coral Candy (*Solenostemon scutellariodes*) is a National AAS Ornamental Seed Winner. Sun Coral Candy is the first seed coleus to win this award. A noteworthy characteristic is its ability to be grown in full sun. The leaf color holds well even in full sun under humid conditions. The narrow leaves are multicolored coral-pink blending into green with serrated edges. The plant forms an elegant mound 10 to 16 inches in height. It fits into small spaces and containers. A few flowers bloom late in the season. This is a desirable trait if removing flower spikes is not a favorite chore. Sun Coral Candy tolerates heavy rain, wind, and heat. Keep the plant watered but provide soil that drains well. Can be grown in the shade as well.

Snapdragon Double ShotTM Orange Bicolor F1 (*Antirrhinum majus*) is a National AAS Ornamental Seed Winner. This annual has 1- to 2- inch flowers with shades of orange to orange-red that are double and open-faced. The flowers fade to a dusty pink as they age. Flowering begins in spring. The plant height is 18 to 20 inches tall with the flower stalks. It is pollinator friendly and can be used as a cut flower. Provide well-drained soil in containers or in the ground and grow it in full sun or partial shade. It tolerates frost and resists light freeze, so combine this plant with pansies to extend the color in the garden.

Colocasia Royal HawaiianR Wikiki (*Colocasia esculenta*) is a National AAS Ornamental Non-seed Winner. This taro or elephant ear is used as an annual in a container or in the ground in full to partial sun. The leaves are described as containing vivid pink veins with a creamy white center, and glossy green edges. The stems are deep burgundy. The plant holds up to wind and rain. The clumping plant habit reaches 36 inches in height. This colocasia tolerates heat.

Salvia Blue by You (*Salvia hybrida*) is a National AAS Perennial Winner. This perennial salvia or meadow sage has what is described as bright blue blossoms covering upright 10- to 12- inch spikes. This plant blooms two weeks earlier compared to others of this type. The flowering period is late spring to late summer. By removing spent blossoms, it will bloom throughout the summer. The plant reaches 20 to 22 inches tall and wide. The required growing conditions include full sun and well-drained soil whether grown in containers or in the ground. Bonus characteristics include heat tolerance, winter hardiness, and attracting pollinators including hummingbirds and butterflies. However, deer and rabbits do not prefer this plant.

Pepper Jalapeno San Joaquin F1 (*Capsicum annuum*) is a National AAS Edible -Vegetable Winner. Since the plant sets most of the fruit at one time, about 50, thick-walled peppers per plant will be ready for canning, pickling, or combining in other dishes. The fruits are about 4 inches long. If not all of them are needed at the same time, the fruit holds firmness and flavor until they are harvested. Fruits left on the plant turn a pretty red color and hold their flavor. San Joaquin is great for growing in 5-gallon food grade buckets or containers. The plant height is 30 inches and spreads 30 inches. It prefers to grow in full sun after the threat of frost.

Squash Kabocha Sweet Jade F1, (*Cucurbita maxima*) is a National AAS Edible – Vegetable Winner. This personal sized squash weighs 1 to 2 pounds and is 4 to 5 inches in size. In addition, it is flat-round, jade green outside, and deep orange flesh inside. The flesh is described as dry but sweet and full of flavor. Serve the flesh roasted, baked, or pureed. This warm season vegetable produces fruit 100 days after planting. This vining plant reaches 24 inches tall and spreads 6 to 8 feet. Plant in full sun.

For more information about AAS Winners, contact the Daviess County Cooperative

Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

**Annette’s Tip:**

To find AAS Winners, look for the All-America Selections® Winners logo in catalogs, at the local garden centers and nurseries on the plant tag, and through websites. Have fun growing these plants!

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