

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



December 30, 2023

Ornamental Award Winners for the Garden

The movies, Broadway, and music associations all have award programs. Why not awards for plants? In fact, many plant-based associations name Plants of the Year or other special plant award winners with outstanding performance across the United States for home gardens. Perennial Plant of the Year[®], Hosta of the Year, Stout Silver Medal Award for daylilies, and Peony of the Year are popular plant honors.

The Perennial Plant Association annually names an award winner. The 2024 Perennial Plant of the Year[®] is *Phlox paniculata* 'Jeana'. This upright tall phlox reaches 5 feet tall and 4 feet wide. The flowers appear in midsummer to fall on sturdy stems. The fragrant tubular flowers are lavender-pink in color and about half of an inch wide produced on numerous pyramidal panicles. The beautiful blossoms attract butterflies, hummingbirds, and pollinators for their nectar. Deadheading promotes more blossoms.

The leaves of 'Jeana' are green, long, and narrow. Tall phlox is known for problems with the disease powdery mildew on their foliage. However, the leaves of 'Jeana' remain green through the summer and fall because the plant is resistant to powdery mildew.

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In the landscape, 'Jeana' could serve as a background to shorter perennials. Remember to plant it in a suitable growing location where you can watch the butterflies, such as the eastern tiger swallowtail, and other pollinators visit the flowers for nectar.

'Jeana' prefers to grow in full sun but would benefit from shade in the afternoon in hot areas. It grows best in well-drained soil that does not go dry.

The American Hosta Growers Association chose 'Mini Skirt' (*Hosta* 'Mini Skirt') as the 2024 Hosta of the Year. This very small mounding and compact plant originated as a sport from the hosta 'Mighty Mouse'. The thick blue-green leaves have creamy yellow margins in the spring that change to a creamy white by summer. The center of the leaves changes to more of a green color. Wavy leaf margins add to the plant's character. It reaches about 7 inches tall and spreads to about 14 inches.

The flowers of 'Mini Skirt' are described as pale lavender jammed together on short scapes. They are produced in mid-summer.

Hostas grow best in moist, well-drained soil. Also, they prefer to grow in shade but would tolerate morning sun, to keep the leaves from scorching and looking bad in the summer. 'Mini Skirt' would be suitable to edge a shady border. Because of its size, it would fill a container, or add interest to a variety of plants in a container. Plants are propagated by division.

The 2024 daylily awards are named after the growing season in late summer to fall. The most recent Stout Silver Medal Award winner named by the American Daylily Society for 2023 is 'Tim Herrington'. This highest award is given to the daylily that performs the best over a wide geographic area.

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The flower color of ‘Tim Herrington’ is described by the American Daylily Society as a copper red with noticeable midribs that are yellow. The flower form is double with petals coming out of the middle of the flower. The blooms are 3.5 inches across. It blooms in midseason and is reported to rebloom. Even though a flower is only open for one day, the plant is covered by 26 to 30 blossoms opening over time. The flower scape reaches 20 inches in height.

Daylilies prefer full sun. They can grow in partial shade but will produce fewer flowers. They are desirable perennials for their beautiful blossoms, low maintenance, green foliage, and tolerance to both poor soil and drought conditions. Plants are propagated by division.

The American Peony Society selected ‘Gay Paree’ (*Paeonia*) as the 2023 Gold Medal Award winner. The society describes the flower as Japanese or anemone form with guard petals that are cerise pink surrounding a center of cream petaloids. The center petaloids have a hint of color like the guard petals. The flowers are fragrant. The plant is reported to produce over 50 flowers during the season. Side buds develop and bloom as well. Due to the long-lasting flowers, and strong stems, ‘Gay Paree’ makes a nice cut flower for fresh arrangements. Flowers are held above deep green foliage. The plant stems are strong and able to support the blossoms. The bloom time is considered midseason from May to early June.

The plant of ‘Gay Paree’ reaches 33 inches tall. It is easy to grow and disease resistant. It can serve as a background for other perennials. Peonies should be planted in full sun and well-drained soil but will grow in a variety of soil conditions. They are propagated by division mostly to share with family.

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For more information about plant honorees, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's tip:

The Kentucky Theodore Klien Plant Award program promotes outstanding ornamental woody and herbaceous perennial plants for Kentucky landscapes. The award is named after the late Theodore Klein who owned Yew Dell Nursery. Today his home and gardens are open to the public at Yew Dell Botanical Gardens, Crestwood, KY. These plant winners can be found through the University of Kentucky, Marting-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment at <https://nursery-crop-extension.ca.uky.edu/ukrec-nursery-crops/theodore-klein-plant-awards>. The Yew Dell Garden website separated the winners into different categories including evergreens, perennials for shade and sun, trees, and KY natives found at <https://www.yewdellgardens.org/theodore-klein-plant-awards/>.

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