

So, What's New?

Funny thing, don't you think, that we are forever curious to know what might be a new food, new idea, new world's record, new celebrity, new fashion. We need the energy that the magic quality of newness brings to our daily routine. Nowhere does 'new' generate more excitement than in new seeds, new plants. The most amazing thing- as you leaf through the stack of colorful 'new' catalogs, the word 'new' leaps off nearly every page!

"All – America" selections emerge each year promoted by the horticultural industry itself as they search for the qualities needed for a plant to have lasting value. There are not many winners for 2010 as the criteria remain high. Perennials are especially important to home gardeners wishing to make lasting improvements in their landscaping.

One of the winning perennials is Gaillardia 'Mesa Yellow' bred for compact growth and heavy flowering. We are familiar with the annual and perennial versions of this plant with its perky red and yellow petals but this is the first hybrid to flower from seed the first season. The usual gaillardias are a mix of red and yellow, such as 'Arizona Sun', brick red with yellow edges and the fantastic 'Fanfare' with trumpet petals with fluted edges in rust, red, and yellow. 'Mesa Yellow' has both clear yellow petals and a golden yellow cone, sure to sing in a sunny spot.

Another All-America selection winner is the Zahara Zinnia 'Starlight Rose', said to be resistant to both mildew and leaf spot. This winner grows 12 to 18 inches both high and wide and the white petals are marked with a splash of rose at the base, a really pretty flower. A winner in a favorite category is the new snapdragon, 'Twinny Peach'. These fat butterfly blooms are double, or twins, which explains the odd name. And it is a combination of peach, yellow, and light orange, sure to catch your eye. This is a smart plant for our hot summers. You can save some of the seeds for fall planting as they often survive winter to herald spring. I do not know about this current winter, however.

You knew this was inevitable, that there would be a yellow 'Knock Out' rose! It has arrived, 'Sunny Knock Out' with three-inch blooms that open a bright yellow and age to buttercream. It has the tough, shiny foliage of the family and is three to four feet tall and wide. For those of use who never get sufficiently organized for the endless spraying program prima donna roses require are eternally grateful to William Radler for developing the Knock Out roses. We are not even going to quibble about the missing fragrance. With our trust in the perfectibility of such endeavors, we are waiting for a fragrant rose as easily cared for as this batch!

Those vegetable plants that were selected as winners in past years do not lose their importance just because the date has changed. A plant that has won selection is always a good choice for your own plot. Older All-America winners include 'Big Beef' and 'Celebrity' hybrid tomatoes, 'Derby Green' bush bean, 'Bell Boy' hybrid green p epper, 'Honey Select' sweet corn, 'Aristocrat' zucchini, 'Sunshine' kobocho-type winter

squash, 'Fanfare' cucumber, 'Stonehead' cabbage, 'Bonbon' buttercup squash and, most interesting, a watermelon that turns golden yellow when it is ripe! This curiosity has small black seeds and red flesh. Its name is 'Yellow Crown' and it was a winner in 1991 and you might have thought more people would have planted it. Watermelons are supposed to be green we think but it is also a shame when we harvest them too soon, tasteless, and too late, mealy.

When it comes to winning vegetables, local success has to be your best guide. The seasons vary from year to year of course, changing the outcome to a degree, but as a general rule, what is known here as a successful choice, will be a safe bet. What works in the Piedmont may not be a success here. One new eggplant that has received raves further north as prolific may also be great here. It is 'Rosa Bianca' and it has small fruits streaked lilac and white and cooks easily with a melting texture. You might like to try seeds of a mokum carrot, cigar shaped with a sweet taste and a great crunch. You don't find a lot of unusual carrots in grocery stores because those selected for mass production have to last long and ship well. It is fun to try the odd sorts that merely have to travel from back yard to kitchen.