



2021 All America Selection Winners

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Besides my tried and true varieties of flowers and vegetables, I really enjoy growing a few new ones. How to decide? With so many seed and plant catalogs offering so many enticing choices, I usually start with a recent All America Selections (AAS) Winner. What is the AAS and who decides which plants are promoted as winners?

The AAS is an organization that evaluates new garden varieties and was founded in 1932 by W. Ray Hastings who was the president of the Southern Seedsmen's Association of Atlanta, Georgia. He was looking for a way for home gardeners and consumer garden magazines to find out about new and improved plants. To do so, he encouraged seed companies to establish trial grounds where new varieties could be grown and evaluated. The trial gardens should be located throughout varying North American climates and the plants should be evaluated by impartial, knowledgeable judges. The purpose of All America Selections would be "To promote new garden seed varieties with superior garden performance judged in impartial trials in North America."

In 1933 the first AAS winners were announced and AAS winners have been introduced to the public every year after. Two types of awards are given. About once each decade, a plant is given a Gold Medal Award, which signifies a breeding breakthrough. This year a Gold Medal Award winner was chosen, zinnia 'Profusion Red Yellow Bicolor.' More common are the National and Regional AAS Awards which recognize a flower or vegetable exhibiting superior characteristics compared to other like varieties readily available on the market. Only new, previously unsold varieties are used in the seed trials.

Many gardeners are familiar with the Profusion series of zinnias. Several have been previous AAS winners and they are noted for their huge color selection, outstanding performance and heat and humidity tolerance. Self-branching plants reach about 14 inches high and wide. Flower production starts approximately 9 weeks from seeding. Bright gold blossoms sport vibrant red centers. Plants can be dead-headed or if left on plants, "aging flowers morph into soft, beautiful

shades of apricot, salmon, and dusty rose to bring a plethora of color to the garden, all from one variety.”

Like all zinnias, ‘Profusion Red Yellow Bicolor’ basks in full sun and moderately fertile soil. The 2 ½ inch flowers are continuously produced until stopped by frost. Use these plants to edge walkways, fill containers, add a touch of color to vegetable gardens or just as cheery bedding plants. Plants are highly disease resistant, a boon to us gardeners used to battling powdery mildew.



The only National AAS winner this year is acorn squash ‘Goldilocks F1’. Sweet, nutty flesh is packed into 4 by 4-inch, one-pound fruits. High yielding plants set 10 or more squash on every plant. ‘Goldilocks F1’ is a bushy, compact acorn squash taking up just about 16 square feet per hill with plants reaching 30 inches in height. Fruits are bright orange and can serve as fall decorations until it’s time for the dinner table. Robust plants produce early (85 days from seed) and are tolerant to powdery mildew.



A Regional vegetable winner that I may even try is ‘Pot-a-peno F1’ jalapeno pepper. Plants are compact enough to grow in containers and produce a multitude of 3 to 4-inch green fruits with that traditional spicy zip. Left to ripen to red, the flavor becomes sweeter, a perfect addition to my flavorful but not too hot salsa.

Seeds should be started 6 to 7 weeks before transplant date, which is typically mid to late May in Connecticut, depending on the weather. The 12 to 15-inch high plants can be set in the garden or into pots. A unique trait that ‘Pot-a-peno F1’ offers is hanging, rather than upright fruit, making the picking easier.

Until reviewing the 2021 AAS winners, I never knew what an echalion was. Apparently, it is a cross between a shallot and an onion. Often called banana shallots, echalions look like plumper, elongated shallots. AAS Regional winner, echalion ‘Crème Brulee F1’ is no more difficult to grow from seed than onions. The sweet, tender bulbs can be eaten raw but caramelizing them brings out their sumptuous flavor. Coppery pink skins are easily peeled, and the oblong fruit grows to 4 to 5 inches in length when mature.

Regional winner, Shasta daisy ‘Sweet Daisy Birdy’ is a white flowering perennial hardy to zone 3. Five inch blossoms arrive early and feature reflexed petals and a cheery yellow center. Use them to attract pollinators as well as for bouquets. Plants enjoy full sun, average moisture and a soil amended with organic matter. Deadhead for a longer bloom time.

Celosias are workhorses in the flower garden. Medium to bright colors are produced on long lasting spikes or combs. If you have not been growing them, please give Regional AAS winner, celosia ‘Kelos Candela Pink’ a try this year. One of the judges called it the ‘Energizer Bunny’ for

its long-lasting, showy plumes of hot pink. Upright plants top out at about 2 ½ feet with almost half that as flower blossoms. It's a wonderful cut flower and I have not noticed any insect and disease problems on any of the celosias I have grown through the years. These plants are also tolerant of high heat and humidity and deer resistant.

Check out this year's or previous All America Selection winners. They are bound to score in your garden too.

If you have any houseplant or gardening questions, feel free to contact us at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.