



All America Selection Winners for 2022

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

As I leisurely make my way through a stack of seed catalogs, sipping on tea and savoring the warmth of the fireplace, I mostly jot down, in my well-worn notebook, tried and true vegetable and flower varieties that need to be ordered. The lure of new and improved plants, rediscovered heirlooms, and exciting cultivars or species untried by me, is just too great, however, and inevitably, my list grows longer. Among the handful of new plants that gets whittled down into a more realistic order is at least one All America Selections (AAS) Winner. What is an AAS winner and how does it get chosen?

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. Presently there are about 80 trial gardens throughout North America. Professional horticulturists volunteer their time to evaluate plant performance.

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. Last year a Gold Medal Award was given to an outstanding zinnia. This year two flowers received Gold Medal Awards, quite unusual and attesting to their outstanding characteristics. More common is the AAS Award which recognizes a flower or vegetable exhibiting superior characteristics compared to similar varieties available on the market. Both national and regional awards can be made. Only new, previously unsold varieties are used in the seed trials.

Begonia lovers will swoon over Gold Medal winner, 'Viking Explorer Rose on Green'. A crescendo of rosy pink, 2 ½ inch flowers is framed by glossy green foliage. Plants have a unique spreading and trailing habit reaching about 16 inches in height and width, perfect for filling a hanging basket or container. This Viking cultivar is a sturdy, stalwart plant tolerant of heat, rain, disease, insects, and pollution.

'Bee's Knees' is the first petunia to win a Gold Medal award since 1950. Vibrant yellow 2 to 2 ½ inch blossoms just keep coming from summer through frost. Reaching 8 to 10 inches in height and with a mounded, cascading habit, 'Bee's Knees' would be marvelous in window boxes or as an attractive edging plant or groundcover. Dead-heading is not necessary. This tough petunia stood up well to rain, heat and cold.



Petunia 'Bee's Knees' from www.allamericaselections.org

Sunflower 'Concert Bell' was selected for a national award. Unlike many sunflowers, 'Concert Bell' produces multiple clusters of 10 to 12 blossoms on an erect, columnar stem. Plants reach up to 6 feet in height. The 5 to 6-inch diameter golden flowers are pollenless, making for good cut flowers. Multiple direct sowings are suggested for continual summer to fall blooms.

Five vegetables were selected as AAS National winners. Eggplant 'Icicle' looks as good as it tastes. Cylindrical pure white fruit are ready for picking at about 7 inches in length. Plants are very productive with fewer spines than most eggplants. They stand about 4 feet high and can be grown in the garden as well as containers.

'Bauer' is a beautiful, dark green oakleaf lettuce. Its thick and crunchy leaves are particularly flavorful. Compact plants can be harvested as baby lettuce leaves or left to mature into a tight, rounded head 58 days from seed. Plants can be spaced tightly at 8 inches for a bountiful harvest in a small space.

Those attracted to unique looking but flavorful tomatoes might like to sample 'Purple Zebra'. Said to have a rich, complex flavor, the dark red fruits bear dark green stripes. Up to two hundred 3 to 4-ounce fruits are produced on tall plants that require staking. 'Purple Zebra' showed strong resistance or tolerance to many common tomato diseases.

A sweet and hot pepper also became 2022 AAS national winners. 'Dragonfly' produces gorgeous purple peppers with thick, juicy walls. The 4-lobed fruits are almost 4 inches in size and plants are super productive yielding up to 40 peppers per plant. Upright plants reach about 3 feet in height. Peppers can be picked when still green or even left to mature to a deep red.

Hot pepper, 'Buffy' produces 250 or more green to red good-sized fruits on 28-inch plants. Fruits are about 1 ½ inches long and slightly triangular. They make flavorful sport peppers but keep in mind they are hot – 500,000 Scoville units. That will make some chili sauce to keep you warm next winter!

When deciding what to grow in your garden next year, be sure to check out present or past AAS winners. They are sure to be stars of your garden as well. For gardening questions, call the UConn Home & Garden Education Center (toll-free) at (877) 486-6271, visit www.ladybug.uconn.edu, or get in touch with your local Cooperative Extension Center.