What is an All-American Selection?

In 1932 W. Ray Hastings, who was president of the Southern Seedsmen's Association of Atlanta, Ga proposed the idea of an All-American Selection. This was a way of helping home gardeners know which new varieties are truly improved and assist garden consumer editors with a way of getting reliable information. In the 1920s the information was misleading from time to time.

Thanks to W. Ray Hastings there is a national network of trial grounds throughout North American climates. The seed trials accept only unsold varieties. Since 1933, there have been AAS winners introduced each year. The AAS is the oldest, most established international testing organization in North America. There are many other breeders from Japan and Europe that also flood the market with new varieties each year. But North America can rely on unsold tested varieties from various test gardens in North America.

Each year a panel of judges awards two awards. The first award is the AAS Gold Medal Award for a breeding breakthrough, given about once or twice a decade. The other is for a flower or vegetable with the achievement of being superior to all others on the market.

Since the AAS does not advertise the new winners, their public relations department informs gardeners each September about winners. The AAS depends on Extension agents as well as magazines to introduce the winners to the general public.

For 2012 the following are AAS winners:

—Ornamental Pepper. "Black Olive" has an attractive purple foliage which endured the heat in the southern trial gardens.

—Salvia. “Summer Jewel Pink,” with blooms that appear two weeks earlier than other pink salvias, is prolific throughout the summer.

—Pepper. “Cayennetta” required no staking on this well branched plant that produced bigger yields. It has an excellent mild spicy taste and was easy to grow for beginner gardeners. It also has good cold tolerance and handled extreme heat, as well.

—Watermelon. The vines of “Faerie” spread to only 11 feet with prolific fruit set and general disease and insect tolerance. The fruit has a high sugar content with a crispy texture. The outside of the melon is creamy yellow with thin stripes.

Give these All-American Selections a try. Let your local greenhouse know that you are interested in growing these plants this season. Remember: consumers drive the market.

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