

The All-Americans by Laura C. Martin

They can grow in any garden

No matter where you live, spring means magic to a gardener. For those of us who love to dig in the dirt, there may be nothing more exciting than watching the earth begin to wake up from a long winter's nap. As shoots poke above ground and buds begin to swell and finally burst into beautiful, fragrant flowers, gardeners everywhere rejoice at the advent of another growing season.

Spring is the season of hope and optimism. This year, we promise ourselves, we will be diligent. We'll keep the weeds out and the mulch on. We'll water carefully and thoroughly. We'll shoo away the bugs and welcome in the birds. In spring, it all seems possible.

And it is possible. With a little information and a lot of enthusiasm, this truly can be the best gardening season ever. So, pull out the shovel and the trowel, open up the door—and welcome spring to the garden. Have fun!

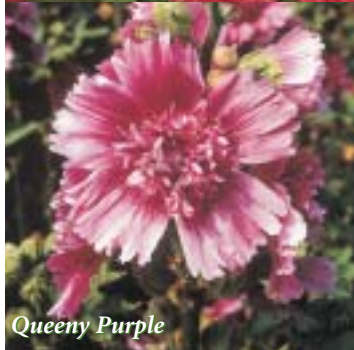
All-America Selections



Arizona Sun



Magellan™ Coral



Queeny Purple



Fairy Tale

New for the flower garden

Each year the All-America Selections committee chooses new cultivars that do exceptionally well throughout the United States. With thousands of new varieties of flowers and vegetables coming on to the market each year, you can imagine how fierce the competition is. That means that the winners are truly outstanding in their field!

2005 flower winners:

Gaillardia aristata 'Arizona Sun'

These yellow-tipped petals surround a bright red center, making a great spot of color in the garden. Gaillardia loves heat and sunshine and has proven to thrive in even the harshest of conditions. It grows to be 12–14 inches tall, begins blooming early and will continue until fall. Perennial, but will bloom the first year.

Vinca 'First Kiss Blueberry' (Catharanthus roseus)

If you like the bright blossoms of vinca, you'll love this new variety that has violet blue flowers—with a dark violet eye. Each blossom measures 2 inches across. The plants, at maturity, grow 11–12 inches tall and spread about 16 inches. This is both heat and drought tolerant and needs full sun to perform best. Annual.

Zinnia Fl 'Magellan™ Coral' (Zinnia elegans)

These tall (15–19 inch) plants bear gorgeous coral-colored blossoms that measure 5–6 inches across. Both the flower quality and color are superior. It blooms early and continues to produce consistently throughout the season. This is an annual flower, needs full sun.

2004 flower winners:

Celosia 'Fresh Look Red' (plumose)

This flower remains fresh and perky even in the midst of summer's heat and humidity. It produces beautiful plumes of rosy red flowers, is considered easy to grow and pest free. The plants grow about 12–18 inches tall. Needs full sun. Flowers can be cut and dried for everlasting bouquets. Annual.

Hollyhock 'Queeny Purple' (Alcea rosea)

This is the first purple hollyhock that is available as a single color rather than being striped or mixed. Edges of the petals are frilly and scalloped, blossoms measure 3–4 inches across. The plant, which grows 20–30 inches tall, produces blossoms abundantly. This is an annual flower, needs full sun.

2005 vegetable winners:

Eggplant Fl 'Fairy Tale' (Solanum melongena)

This is an excellent vegetable to include in a container garden. It grows only 18–24 inches tall and has abundant yield. The fruit is purple with white stripes and is most tasty when harvested at a size of 4 inches long. It takes about 50 days to mature from planting a seedling or transplant.

Tomato Fl 'Sugary' (Lycopersicon esculentum)

These little cherry-sized tomatoes are amazingly sweet, earning it the name 'Sugary.' Growing in clusters, somewhat like grapes, the plants produce consistently high yield. From transplants, it takes about 60 days to mature into eating-sized fruit.

Winter Squash Fl 'Bonbon' (Cucurbita maxima)

Another incredibly sweet vegetable, this winter squash has deep green skin and orange flesh. Each fruit is about 4–5 pounds. The yield is consistently high. From transplants, it takes about 95 days to mature.

For more information about these and other winners, go to the AAS Web site: www.all-americanselections.org

Laura C. Martin is a garden writer and illustrator in Georgia.