



All America Selections - Winners and Losers

by

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Celosia 'Fresh Look Red'
Picture courtesy of
<http://www.burpee.com>

In 2003, the All-America Selections (AAS) Program celebrated 71 years of testing and introducing new cultivars to American landscapes. It is the oldest and most rigorous flower, vegetable and rose award program in the world. The GBG is fortunate to be a display garden of the annual winners. Despite being a national program, there are no trial sites in Alaska. We do not get an opportunity to “weigh in” on the initial evaluations. However, we do make rigorous comparisons of the winners and do not hesitate to give even the gold medal winners a giant thumbs down if they don’t perform well in Alaska. Some flower winners simply need warmer soils and air temperatures than our typical conditions. If they don’t perform well in the ground, we try them in raised beds or containers. If they still don’t work after at least three seasons, they get the Brown Thumb award and a swift burial in our compost pile. While perusing the garden catalogs next season, look for the All-America Selections Logo, and compare the trial results with a dose of reality from the GBG.

2004 AAS Award Winners:

Woolflower Celosia (*Celosia plumosa*) ‘Fresh Look Yellow’ and ‘Fresh Look Red’ – 2004 Flower Award Winners. Woolflower celosias are difficult plants for

Alaska. They don’t grow as big or bushy as the catalogs show but their colors are hard to beat. These new winners are no exception. They are AAS winners because of their prolific display of red or yellow plumes with an exceptionally long flowering season. We grew both cultivars in raised beds in the Speck Garden. From previous experience,

we knew they would be small. The catalog describes a bushy plant 12 to 17 inches tall with a 9-inch central plume. Our plants were shorter, 15 inches and 10.5 inches for the red and yellow cultivars respectively, and the flowering plumes were a maximum of 6 inches (red) and 2.5 inches (yellow). The plants did not branch well, producing mostly single spikes of electric crimson and golden yellow plumes. “Fresh Look Red” was more vigorous and showier than its yellow cousin. Both need close spacing (at least 6 inches) and should be planted in masses at the front edge of flower beds for the best results. (Rating 2 green thumbs)



Celosia 'Fresh Look Yellow'
Picture courtesy of
<http://www.onlineplantguide.com>

Gypsophila 'Gypsy Deep Rose'
Picture courtesy of
<http://www.genericseeds.com>



Gypsophila ‘Gypsy Deep Rose’ – This tiny ground-hugging gypsophila is a color variation on a previous 1997 AAS winner ‘Gypsy’. The former cultivar was a tiny 6-inch mound totally inundated with light rosy pink blooms. The new ‘Gypsy Deep Rose’ is a close cousin, this time with dark rose petals. Both cultivars deserve space in the front edges of gardens, especially when planted in masses. They are neat, require no maintenance, and bloom from planting to frost. (Rating 4 green thumbs)



Hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*) 'Queeny Purple'
 Picture courtesy of
<http://www.americanmeadows.com>

Hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*) 'Queeny Purple' – In a region where old fashioned hollyhocks are difficult to grow, we looked forward to seeing the results of this new 3-foot dwarf. We planted it in the Speck raised beds, and it was dwarfed by adjacent flowers. Unlike most hollyhocks, this cultivar bloomed the first season, but we almost missed the show because the plants were so short. They also had a quick burst of blooms in early July, then a hiatus as the plants grew in height. Later in the season they began blooming again – nice big pink flowers. This plant is definitely worth testing because of its first-year blooming habit, but we will save our evaluations until next season when we plant it in a different location. (Rating ?? thumbs)

Petunia (*Petunia x hybrida* Grandiflora type) 'Limbo Violet' – In recent years, many cultivars of petunias have been bred that hug the ground, reaching only 6-8 inches tall, but spreading up to 3 feet in one season. Among the most popular of these types is the Wave series such as 'Lavender Wave', an AAS winner in 2002 and 'Blue Wave', AAS winner in 2003. This year, breeders will introduce 'Limbo Violet', another in the long line of compact

petunias. This cultivar has "stretch resistance" as a growth habit in both height and spread. In the GBG, it performed as advertised, our plants reaching a couple of inches taller than the description. It has large flowers on compact plants. Despite all the rave reviews, we didn't see anything really special about this plant. It performed as well as other petunias but because of its compact habit, it needed closer spacing to fill in the bed. After the first season's trial, this cultivar is okay, but nothing to crow about. (Rating one green thumb)



Petunia (*Petunia x hybrida* Grandiflora type) 'Limbo Violet'
 Picture courtesy of
<http://www.ebay.com>

2003 Winners Still Worth Growing (Green Thumbs Up)

Petunia 'Merlin Blue Morn' – A short, spreading petunia with truly outstanding bi-color flowers. The throat is nearly pure white, but the petal edges are a deep, velvety purple. The effect is eye-catching and very ornamental. (4 green thumbs)

Petunia 'Blue Wave' – Some petunias have such a deep rich color, everyone passing wants to touch the flowers just to feel the velvety softness. 'Blue Wave' is such a flower. The trailing habit produced a carpet of the deepest dark purple we have ever seen. Next year it will grace some of our containers. This cultivar is well worth growing in beds where it spreads up to 3 feet. We are anxious to see how well it will perform in our entrance containers. (4 green thumbs)

Rudbeckia 'Prairie Sun' – Rudbeckias are a favorite mid to late season bloomer in Fairbanks. This cultivar adds to a long list of outstanding cultivars packed with flowers and puts on an outstanding show. The flowers are distinctly three-colored. They have a green center, and the petals are a deep gold tipped with a lighter primrose yellow. The effect is very ornamental. (3 green thumbs)



Petunia 'Merlin Blue Morn'
 Picture courtesy of
www.emporiadasementes.com



Petunia 'Blue Wave'
 Picture courtesy of
<http://www.ballseed.com>



Rudbeckia 'Prairie Sun'
 Picture courtesy of
<http://www.bluestoneperennials.com>

Not-so-stellar Performers (Brown Thumbs Down)

Ornamental Millet 'Purple Majesty' – 2003 Gold Medal Flower Award. Burgundy-leaved grass with tall "fuzzy" spikes of dark burgundy flowers. In 2002, this cultivar was planted in the Speck garden in raised beds. It never bloomed and the foliage

was a sickly yellowish-purple. In 2003, we tried it in containers. It bloomed, but only in September. Spikes were ornamental but too late. Foliage was ragged and scarred by wind. This plant needs heat!

Carnation ‘Can Can Scarlet’ – 2003 Flower Award. This plant was evaluated in 2002 and 2003. In both years it produced big, healthy foliage, but flowered too late to be useful. We will try this plant in containers next season to see if it will grow better in warmer soils. The flowers that did bloom are very large on upright stems.

Dianthus ‘Corona Cherry Magic’ - 2003 Flower award. This plant was a very disappointing show in 2002 and 2003. It won AAS honors because of its “capricious bicolor flower pattern”. Blooms are entirely cherry red, entirely lavender or a mosaic of both. We have grown many great dianthus cultivars in the garden over the years, but this plant performed poorly. The very tiny plants did not fill in beds well. Plants flowered all season, but were so small that they had very little show.

Gaillardia ‘Sundance Bicolor’ - The plants performed beautifully with huge bi-color flowers covering the plants. We reported this cultivar as a “must try” in our 2002 trials, however most visitors and local gardeners were not impressed with the plant. They did not like the yellow and mahogany color combination of each bloom despite the fact that this plant was covered with balls of flowers nearly all summer. So, despite the fact that it required no maintenance and experienced no disease problems, the color just didn’t work for our local gardeners who gave it a brown thumbs down!

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