



All America Selections - Winners and Losers 2003 - Patricia Holloway

Since the early 1970s, the Experiment Station has been a display garden for the All America Selections Program, a national program promoting the very best in plant introductions from breeders around the world. This year the winners included ten annual flowers and two vegetables. Not all of them performed well in Fairbanks, so we put the winners into three categories: must try, okay, and don't bother. Below is our evaluation of the winners.

Must try

Every once in a while a plant comes along that is so new and superior to anything else in the same category, that it deserves special recognition. So it is with **Gaillardia 'Sundance Bicolor'**. This blanket flower truly lived up to its name. It blanketed the garden with 2-inch (5 cm) fully double, two-toned blooms in mahogany and yellow. The compact plants reached 18 inches (46 cm) in height and were jammed full of blooms. Flowering started in late June but didn't reach full bloom until mid July. Best of all – not one bit of deadheading was necessary all season. The unusual flower color will be a challenge to combine with other flowers, but it is certainly worth trying.

Another must try is **Petunia 'Merlin Blue Morn'**. It is a spreading petunia with one of the most striking flower colors we have seen. The centers of the 2 1/2-inch (6 1/3 cm) blooms are nearly pure white, and they gradually change to a deep, velvety bluish purple at the edges. The 17-inch (43 cm) plants are covered with color from mid June through frost. It is also recommended for hanging baskets and containers.



Gaillardia 'Sundance Bicolor'



Rudbeckia 'Prairie Sun'

Rudbeckia 'Prairie Sun' is one more in a long list of black-eyed Susans that can be recommended as annuals in Fairbanks gardens. It lacks the black eye of most rudbeckias and instead has a light green center surrounded by brilliant gold petals. Each petal is tipped with a light primrose yellow, and flowers can reach 6 1/2 inches (16.5 cm) in size. The 2-foot (61 cm) plants begin blooming at the end of June but don't reach full bloom until the first week of August. They will become a mainstay of gardens, for sure!

One more in the long line of **Wave petunias** is **'Blue Wave'**. This plant has the



Petunia 'Blue Wave'

same trailing habit of the other wave petunias and the same terrific ground hugging, 7-inch (18 cm) tall carpet of blooms. The distinction here is the gorgeous velvety bluish purple flower color. These would be gorgeous in containers as well as the garden.



Summer Squash 'Papaya Pear'

This past season we grew the All America Selection **Summer Squash 'Papaya Pear'** along with several other summer squash cultivars. According to its catalog description "Fruits of Papaya Pear are bright yellow, uniquely pear shaped and should be harvested when about 3 1/2 inches long by 2 3/4 inches across. One of the earliest varieties, 'Papaya Pear' fruit can be harvested in about 40 days from sowing seed. The semi-bush plant requires less garden space."

In our vegetable trials, Papaya Pear matured at the same time and had higher yields than the three other yellow summer squash tested. However, it matured later and produced less than the three zucchinis tested. Due to its unique shape and excellent flavor it is worth a try in your garden.

Okay

A plant that definitely would be in the must try category if our season were about a month longer is **Carnation 'Can Can Scarlet'**. This fragrant, 14-inch (36 cm) plant began blooming the last week of July and didn't reach full bloom until September. The blooms were brilliant scarlet and very showy. This is a true florist's carnation only about half the height. With warmer weather, this plant will be a real showpiece.

Agastache 'Golden Jubilee' is a golden-leaved aromatic herb that forms bushes of yellowish green leaves topped with lavender flower spikes. The flowers are not very showy, and it would require careful placement with other flowers to complement the yellowish leaves. Barbara Fay, herb specialist, sampled the plant and declared it "absolutely worthless" as a culinary herb.

Don't bother

Ornamental millet 'Purple Majesty' was planted in the Robert Speck Memorial Garden in raised beds. Even with the bit of extra warmth, this plant grew poorly and never bloomed. Advertised as growing 3 to 5 feet (91 - 152 cm) tall, it reached only the three-foot (91 cm) mark. The foliage color was not a vibrant majestic purple but a dull, reddish-yellowish-purple. We will try the plant again next year in containers, but for garden settings, it is definitely "green thumbs down"!

Another All American selection from 2001, **'Diva' cucumber**, has not performed well in trials over the past two seasons. Both years it did not produce fruit under our long day conditions until mid August and then only a few cucumbers.

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