

**Yard and Garden - 01-07-2012 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant**

It's a new dawn. It's a new day. It's a new year, and I'm feeling good. Okay, that is not exactly the lyrics of Michael Buble's song, *Feeling Good*, but that is how I am feeling. The year 2012 has arrived, and with it comes excitement. Lately, I have been leafing through the many beautifully illustrated pages of my 2012 seed catalogs. It seems that one or more arrives daily in the mail.

Planning for the new gardening season is always exhilarating, but sometimes it can be a bit confusing. With so many options from which to choose, deciding on what plants to grow can be complicated. If you find yourself in a similar situation, I have a suggestion.

Years of gardening experience has taught me that although a certain plant looks good in a catalog, it may not necessarily perform well-especially if planted in Central Nebraska. Being familiar with the growing habits and requirements of a plant should be a prerequisite before purchasing or planting. Unfortunately, that involves study and a significant amount of time. Why not follow the suggestions of the AAS, or All America Selections.

This independent gardening organization has been in existence for nearly eighty years. New garden seed varieties of flowers and vegetables are grown in trial gardens throughout North America. Impartial, independent judges manage and evaluate these gardens. Each year, the AAS announces their winners. In order for a plant to be selected, it must perform exceptionally well and display significantly improved qualities. This year the AAS has announced four winners.

An ornamental pepper called *Black Olive* is one of this year's winners. A standout, especially in gardens where heat is a major presence, this plant flourishes. An upright plant reaching heights of twenty inches, it has



draping purple leaves and clusters of fiery hot, edible, small, dark-purple/black fruits along the stem. As summer progresses, the fruits mature, turning a brilliant red. This plant is a must for container plantings because it provides a great splash of color.



*Summer Jewel Pink* salvia has been selected as this year's bedding plant. A prolific bloomer with spikes of pink blossoms on a dwarf-sized plant, it reaches heights no taller than twenty inches. This salvia should be planted in full sun and spaced about ten to twelve inches apart. As a bonus, hummingbirds are attracted to this pink variety as much as they are to red salvia.

*Cayennetta*, an edible pepper, was also selected for 2012. This tasty and mildly spiced chili pepper plant produces tapered, bayonet-shaped peppers three to four inches long on plants only twenty-four inches tall. Due to its compact size, it requires no staking, making it ideal for container gardens. A heavy producer, it is tolerant to cold as well as extreme heat. Length of time from transplant to harvest is about sixty-nine days.



The fourth and last winner selected for 2012 is a non-traditional watermelon called *Faerie*. Home gardeners will like growing this melon because its vines spread only to eleven feet; thus, it takes less space in the garden. Each melon has a creamy yellow rind yielding a sweet pink-red flesh that is crisp in texture and very high in sugar content.

Melons are only seven to eight inches in diameter weighing four to six pounds. Growers will appreciate the disease and insect tolerance as well as the prolific fruit that sets early and continuously throughout the season.

Yes, it is a new dawn, a new day, and a new year; and I hope you are feeling good. If you enjoy gardening, give All America Selections a try for 2012. I have a hunch you will feel even better.