

New and improved are two words we frequently see or hear from advertisers promoting a product. Often the advertised product has been in existence for many years. Have you ever wondered if the merchandise truly is new or improved? Perhaps such publicity is nothing more than a scheme to regenerate interest in a product that has fallen out of favor. It seems to me that Madison Avenue is always attempting to put a new twist on an old idea.

Perhaps you may agree that such advertising is not exclusively the fault of Madison Avenue. We consumers, and that includes me, are also guilty. We readily lose interest in the old and seek something new. I am convinced that, from infancy to adulthood we are programmed to think this way. This mindset exists in all aspects of merchandising, whether it is household cleaning products, the clothing industry, the latest trends in music, popular eating-places, or even home décor. Eventually, we consumers become bored with the old, and we look for something new and/or improved.

The gardening industry is certainly not exempt. Every year hundreds and perhaps thousands of new cultivars are developed from old standards. Plant breeders are constantly working to develop new or improved varieties. One certainly cannot deny that these tactics sell more plants; however, I am convinced that many of these new cultivars truly are new and improved.

I recently received notice from the All American Selections organization (AAS) announcing their 2012 winners. The mission of this esteemed plant organization is to promote new garden seed varieties with superior garden performance judged in impartial trials throughout North America. I can personally attest that their winning selections are quality new and improved plants.

Does this revelation mean we gardeners should get in the habit of discarding our old plants and replacing them with new ones? Absolutely not. Although these winners are improved cultivars, showing superior garden performance, they have also been developed to provide variety — more choices for us gardeners. As the old saying goes, “Variety is the spice of life,” and for me that is especially true when it comes to gardening.

Each year, Rita and I grow a number of old standards, but we also enjoy growing many new varieties. Although some of the new introductions may fit the scenario of a new twist on an old idea, I am convinced that most have been

developed with significant genetic improvements. For example, consider many of today's plants grown in agriculture. Who hasn't heard of *Round-up Ready* crops? Over the past decade or two, these new and improved genetic advances have become an industry standard. I can only wonder what is next.

With the New Year just around the corner, most seasoned gardeners, anticipate the arrival of their new mail order seed catalogs for 2012. Many of the plants advertised in these catalogs will be new and improved, especially if they are AAS winners; yet others may be featured in a manner simply to regenerate new interest in an old plant.

No matter how advertised, I am convinced of one thing. With their beautifully illustrated colorful photographs, we gardeners will be mesmerized with a plethora of wonderful choices. Furthermore, those who take up gardening for the first time in 2012 will discover that not all the plants advertised in these catalogs will be improved, but they certainly will be new.