



2014 GreatPlants

The GreatPlants program is a joint effort of the Nebraska Nursery and Landscape Association and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum that selects and promotes exceptional plants. Each year, a tree, conifer, shrub, perennial, and grass are chosen to be the ‘pick of the year.’ The 2014 selections have been made, and here they are. If you have the opportunity, add one or more of these to your spring planting list.

Tree of the Year – Tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)

You may (or may not) be familiar with Tuliptrees. They’re not the most common tree in Nebraska, but they do great, and have a spectacular flower in early spring – the size and shape of a tulip, from which it gets its name. The foliage turns bright yellow in the fall. Tuliptrees prefer moist, fertile soil and full sun. And they’re big – 60-90’ tall, and 30-50’ wide! By the way, there’s a great specimen growing at Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha – check it out!

Conifer of the Year – Korean Fir (*Abies koreana*)

Korean firs have a soft needle, and the cones are purple. Korean firs need full sun, and well-drained soil. They are only hardy in zones 5-7, but are a great size for city dwellers; they will grow to be 15-30’ tall, and only 6-12’ wide.

Shrub of the Year – Purple Beautyberry (*Callicarpa dichomata*)

Finally, this wonderful shrub is getting the attention it deserves! The shrub itself has an informal shape, with arching branches and growing up to 3-5’ tall and 4-6’ wide. The spring blooms are nice, but what it’s really grown for are the purple berries in the fall. Beautyberry can tolerate drought, and will grow in full sun or part shade.

Perennial of the Year – Showy Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *speciosa*)

Black-Eyed Susans continue to be popular, and this one is no exception. Showy Black-Eyed Susan is similar to the variety ‘Goldsturm,’ but has proven to be more drought-tolerant. It’s also bigger than its cousin, growing to 2-3’ tall and 2’ wide.

Ornamental Grass of the Year – Gray’s Sedge (*Carex grayi*)

Many sedges are great ornamental plants that often get overlooked. Gray’s Sedge is an example of this, but one that offers interest year-round. The leaves are large, and almost evergreen. In additions, it has spiky seedheads that last through winter. It can thrive in light shade to full sun, and prefers moist soils – so much in fact it’s a great plant choice for the edge of ponds and other water features. It can grow 2-3’ tall and 1-2’ wide.

Natalia Bjorklund is an extension educator at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, serving Dodge County. If you have a question for her, you can visit the office here in Fremont at 1206 W. 23rd, or call /email at the following: 402.727.2775 or natalia.bjorklund@unl.edu