



2015 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 2015 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 – *Quercus velutina* or Black oak tree

Black oaks get their names from the bark of mature trees that starts off dark grey when young, and deepens to almost black as the trees age. The foliage is a deep green and lobed like many oaks. Black oaks are medium to large in size – usually reaching 50-60’ in height when all is said and done. The canopy is open, and little irregular, whereas some trees have very pyramidal, or rounded canopies. It’s a great addition to your landscape if you’ve got the space for it!

Conifer of the Year – *Pinus resinosa* or Red pine

Red Pines are native to areas north of here – in fact, the largest one ever grown is in Michigan (125’ tall!). Fortunately, they stay a little shorter down here where it’s warmer. A typical red pine in Nebraska could be expected to grow to 50-80’ with a variable spread. They do well in open sites, and are often used for windbreaks – but will not tolerate shade!

Shrub of the Year – *Cephalanthus occidentalis* or Buttonbush

I remember exactly where I was the first time I saw a buttonbush growing in the landscape. Once you see the flowers, you’ll understand why it can make such an impression. The shrub itself has medium green leaves and will grow to about 6-12’ tall and about 5-10’ wide. The white flowers are tiny individually, but they grow in spherical clusters, about the size of a half dollar. Bees and pollinators love the flowers! Also tolerates wet soils, so think about this if you have a spot in your garden that just doesn’t seem to drain.

Perennial of the Year – *Thermopsis villosa* or Carolina lupine

Thermopsis is a great perennial, and one you definitely should try if you need a little yellow in your garden. Like its common name suggests, it’s very similar in appearance to lupine (but isn’t one) with tall spikes of flowers rising up from the foliage. The foliage is almost grey-green and very attractive. It needs full sun and will grow about 2-5’ tall at maturity.

Ornamental Grass of the Year – *Sporobolus wrightii* or giant sacaton grass

If you need a large ornamental grass, this just might be what you need. Sacaton grass will grow close to 5 feet tall, and almost as wide. The flower heads that develop in the summer are fantastic, and the plant will grow very well in hot dry climates.

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