

Perennial of the Year and Year of Plant

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Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia*, is a popular perennial for its yellow flowers, long season of bloom and ability to grow on tough sites. For this and more, it is being recognized on a couple of fronts in 2023.

The National Garden Bureau (NGB) has named 2023 as the Year of the Rudbeckia and the Perennial Plant Association has named the black-eyed Susan cultivar 'American Gold Rush' as the perennial plant of the year.

From NGB, here is some interesting history about how *Rudbeckia* came by its name. Taxonomy is a system of classification, especially of living organisms. Nomenclature is the naming of things. Carl Linnaeus is considered the father of taxonomy's nomenclature system.

While *Rudbeckia* is native to North America, Linnaeus named the plant when he came across it in Europe. North American botanist John Bartram sent seeds of our native *Rudbeckia* to Europe via Englishman Peter Collins.

When Linnaeus came across the plants he named them after Olof Rudbeck, a teacher he worked for at Uppsala University in Sweden. It is said Linnaeus chose the name *Rudbeckia* because the tall flower reflected Rudbeck's tall stature, and the ray-like petals bore "witness that you shone among savants like the sun among stars."

For plant lovers, consider researching how plants came by their names, both scientific and common names. There are many interesting stories and this can be a fun way to pass the time during cold winter months.

As a Nebraska native, black-eyed Susan is a sure thing for perennial gardens and pollinator habitats. It's a tough plant with excellent heat tolerance and blooms from July up until frost, making it one of our longest blooming perennials. Once established, it is drought tolerant.

Plant *Rudbeckia* in full sun and provide consistent soil moisture for the best flowering. Avoid overwatering or drought stress. While tolerant, drought stress can cause browning of leaf edges. Avoid overhead watering late in the day to reduce the risk of *Botrytis* blight and other fungal disease.

Fertilize about once a month with a balanced fertilizer. One that has all three numbers on the label, such as 10-10-10 or 20-5-10. If compost is added to the soil on an annual or biannual basis, reduce fertilization.

*Rudbeckia* grows well and the two to three-foot tall plants need to be divided every three or four years to prevent overcrowding and a reduction in blooming. Division can be done in early spring or fall and is an easy task to do with black-eyed Susan.

'Goldstrum' black-eyed Susan was the Perennial Plant Association's (PPA) Perennial of the Year in 1999 and has been popular ever since. 'American Gold Rush' is the Perennial Plant of the Year for 2023.

It has bright golden-yellow flowers with arching rays and a reddish halo surrounding the dark brown center cones. According to PPA, three-inch flowers blanket the compact, 22 to 27-inch tall plants, that grow to 40 inches wide. Keep this in mind when spacing plants at planting

The foliage is resistant to *Septoria* leaf spot which causes unsightly black spotting and premature leaf drop. In contrast, 'Goldstrum' is highly susceptible to this fungal disease.

Butterflies, bees and other pollinators visit *Rudbeckia* for pollen and nectar. If left standing during winter, the spent blossoms provide winter interest and food for songbirds long into the winter.