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ALL-AMERICA SELECTION WINNERS FOR 2018 by Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center



Each winter the All-America Selection winners are announced. This non-profit organization has established trial gardens throughout the United States and even as far north as Canada. New varieties, species or strains of annuals, vegetables and bedding plants are grown and judged on their performance. Those chosen as winners are outstanding plants and deserve a trial in your gardens as well.

This year's All-America Selection national winners include a cheery cuphea from vegetative cuttings, 5 flowering ornamentals from seed as well as 5 vegetables from seed. Cuphea 'Floriglory Diana' would make a wonderful border or container plant with foot high mounds of tiny, magenta blossoms. Sometimes cupheas are called Mexican heathers. These tough, drought, rain, and wind resistant plants will bloom from late spring through the fall.

Shades of orange are becoming a desirable flower color. For a bold statement, try growing canna 'South Pacific Orange F1' from seed. Depending on how early seeds are started indoors, plants may reach 52 inches tall. The tuberous roots that form can be lifted and stored indoors over winter to be replanted the following spring. 'South Pacific Orange' has large 4 ½ inch flowers that attract a variety of pollinators. Plants need no staking, develop multiple stalks and have a long blooming period.

The multi-hued blossoms of Zinnia 'Queeny Lime Orange' appear in lovely shades of lime, yellow, peach, salmon and orange when fully opened. This zinnia will liven up any bouquet. The easy to grow from seed plants reach about 2 feet in height. Plant in full sun and once established, 'Queeny Lime Orange' tolerates heat and drought.

Try marigold 'Super Hero Spry' for borders, containers or bedding. Dark maroon petals encircle a center of bright gold. Flowers are 2 inches in diameter and are produced non-stop until a hard frost hits. The foot high and wide plants are tolerant of summer heat and reputedly need no deadheading.

Baby's breath is more often found in bouquets than in garden beds but one look at 'Gypsy White Improved' and you'll see how this plant can be easily combined in containers or used in companion plantings with other cool season annuals like plum pansies or yellow calendulas. Ten-inch plants bear numerous semi double, fluffy white flowers. 'Gypsy White Improved' does well in full sun to part shade and is somewhat heat tolerant.

For a most unique look in bedding plants, check out ornamental pepper 'Onyx Red'. The dark black foliage on well-branched plants contrasts well with its bright red fruits. Use the 8 to 10-inch plants as an edging, an unusual container plant or perhaps in a planting combined with fiery red zinnias.

Those with enough space to grow corn will be raving about 'Sweet American Dream'. Seven-inch ears produce very sweet and tender bicolor kernels. Plants mature about 77 days after the seeds sprout.

Whether used for stir-fries or salad dishes, pak choi 'Asian Delight F1' is worth a try. The small to mid-sized heads have a mild flavor. Dark green crinkly leaves have a contrasting tender white rib. This pak choi is especially noteworthy as it is slow to bolt even as the days start to heat up. Plants can start being harvested 30 days after sowing so plant several rows in succession for multiple harvests.

Speaking of heat, cayenne pepper 'Red Ember F1' is pungent without being overwhelming. Red, ripe 4 ½ inch peppers are ready about 75 days after transplanting into the garden. Large numbers of fruit are produced on 2-foot plants. Judges raved about its true cayenne taste.

While it might look like a hot habanero, 'Roulette F1' is a pepper with no heat. Fruits can be eaten fresh or cooked and have a sweet, citrusy habanero flavor. The prolific 3 ½ foot plants may produce over 100 fruits throughout the growing season. The 3-inch, acorn-shaped green peppers turn red when mature.

'Red Racer F1' is a compact, determinate cocktail tomato. This hybrid is resistant to or tolerant of several common tomato diseases. Extra early plants start producing about 57 days from transplants. Round, 2-ounce fruits carry that classic tomato flavor. No staking is necessary as plants top out at 3 feet.

Six-foot 'Valentine F1' tomato plants definitely require staking. Clusters of grape-type tomatoes appear redder than most other tomato varieties because of their high lycopene content. The 1 ½ inch fruit are sweet and juicy and have an excellent postharvest shelf life. More than 100 tomatoes may be produced on a single plant and they start ripening 55 days from transplants.

Look for these 2018 AAS award winners in seed catalogs and at local garden centers. They are sure to be winners in your yard too!

For more information about this or past year's [All-America Selection winners](#). For your other gardening questions, feel free to contact us at (877) 486-6271 or at the [UConn Home & Garden Education Center](#) or your local Cooperative Extension Center.