

Plant New Fruit, Vegetable, And Flower Varieties With Confidence With 2022 All-america Selection Winners

by Bruce J. Black

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URBANA – Another Illinois winter has gone with the promise of spring to soon arrive. Garden catalogs have been arriving for months allowing gardeners to look forward to spring 2022 - the fresh air, energetic wildlife, and the gardening. While many have already bought seeds and started to sow them, what if you're just now thumbing through seed and plant catalogs looking for inspiration, warmth, and a new challenge?

“Start by keeping good garden records from previous years to aid in the planning for the new spring. I always like to test a new plant or six, that is suited for USDA hardiness zone 5, which can sometimes be a challenge without a plan or a map,” says University of Illinois Horticulture educator [Bruce J. Black](#). “After mapping out your existing perennials, think about what new plants could be added to your landscape and their space requirements. After covering this topic now for seven years, my starting place is the All-America Selections.”

All-America Selections, AAS, is a non-profit organization that releases several trialed plants each year as AAS Winners. AAS tests new varieties every year at their private and public trial sites located around the United States and Canada. Currently, there are four trial locations in Illinois – three northern, and one central.

Independent judges, who are professional horticulturists in geographically diverse areas, evaluate trial entries against comparison plants. The results and observations are compiled, and winners are chosen. For the best plants suited to Illinois, look for Great Lakes winners or National winners on the AAS winners lists.

This year, there are 12 AAS Winners, 10 of which are suited for Illinois – six vegetables, one fruit, and three flowers.

National Vegetable Winners

Eggplant Icicle F1, *Solanum melongena* var. Icicle F1: This is a white eggplant with fewer spines than other eggplants. The larger cylindrical fruits have fewer seeds. At 48 inches tall, it requires staking. It has 55 days to harvest from transplant. The plant spreads 28 inches.

Lettuce Bauer, *Lactuca sativa* variety Bauer: Ideal for in-ground, containers, or raised beds. Uniform, compact, dense heads of dark green leaves. 58 days to harvest from seed and 34 days from transplant. Harvest at baby or full-sized leaves for enjoyment. An excellent candidate for controlled environments.

Pepper Buffy F1, *Capsicum frutescens* variety Buffy F1: Good yielding, faster maturing, hot pepper with thick walls and 500,000 Scoville units. Upright, 28-inch plants with heat tolerance and ornamental value. It has 70 days to harvest from transplant.

Pepper Dragonfly F1, *Capsicum annuum* variety Dragonfly F1: Purple, four-lobed, sweet bell peppers with thick walls. The purple color changes to red if it is left on the vine too long. Plant height is 24 inches to 36 inches. Each plant produces 40 peppers. It has 75 days to harvest from transplant.

Tomato Purple Zebra F1, *Solanum lycopersicum* var. Purple Zebra F1: A sweet-leaning acidic tomato with disease resistance. It has green stripes on dark red thinner-skinned fruits. It has 80 to 85 days to harvest from transplant. Its upright growth habit requires staking. Each plant produces 150 to 200 tomatoes.

Regional (Heartland) Vegetable Winner

Tomato Pink Delicious, *Solanum lycopersicum* variety Pink Delicious: A pink, early maturing, higher yielding, and beefsteak uniform tomato. Good disease resistance. Higher Brix (sugar) for a pink tomato. A 6-foot-tall upright climber with a 3-foot spread. It has 84 days to harvest from transplant.

Regional (Great Lakes) Vegetable Winner

Watermelon Century Star F1, *Citrullus lanatus* variety Century Star F1: A 10-pound, round, seedless, spotted variety. Crisp melon with sweet flesh. Vines spread 9 feet to 11 feet. Bears two to three fruits per plant. It has 65 days to harvest from transplant and 75 days from seed.

Gold Medal Winners

Begonia Viking™ Explorer Rose on Green F1, Begonia x hybrid variety Viking™ Explorer Rose on Green F1: An annual, trailing begonia with rose-colored flowers that is excellent for hanging baskets and containers. Heat, weather, and disease tolerant. Pollinator friendly and 50 days to flower from transplant.

Petunia Bee's Knees, Petunia x hybrid variety Bee's Knees: This is the first petunia Gold Medal winner in 72 years. It has lush yellow, non-fading flowers on green leaves and needs little maintenance with a mounding and trailing habit. It is an annual flower that is heat and rain tolerant and pollinator friendly.

National Flower Winner

Sunflower Concert Bell F1, *Helianthus annuus* L variety Concert Bell F1: Sturdy and durable, Concert Bell F1 has multiple clusters of 10 to 12 annual flowers. It is a uniform height at 5 feet to 6 feet. It is earlier to flower than other sunflowers. Direct seed for a great landscape attraction or for cut flowers.

Looking for something else to fill in your landscape and gardens? The All-America Selections website, all-americaelections.org, contains a list of all past vegetables and flowers winners since its founding in 1933.

For more information about gardening, check out the Illinois Extension Horticulture website at extension.illinois.edu/global/horticulture or their YouTube channel at go.illinois.edu/UniversityOfIllinoisExtensionHorticulture.

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