

2008 Plants of the Year

For the FFGC District I Judges Council meeting in Ft Walton on 7 February
Tina V. Tuttle

It's the International Year of the Potato! Proposed by the government of Peru and adopted by the United Nations, the mission of the IYP is to "increase awareness of the importance of the potato as a food in developing nations, and promote research and development of potato-based systems as a means of contributing to achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals," some of which include alleviating poverty and developing methods of sustainable farming. The potato is an obvious choice: It has a high nutritional content, grows relatively quickly, can tolerate harsh climates, and about 85% of the plant is edible.

Perennial Plant Association: How is the Perennial Plant of the Year selected? The selection process is quite simple – PPA members vote for the POY. In addition to their vote, each member nominates plants for future consideration. The Perennial Plant of the Year Committee reviews the nominated perennials and selects 3 to 4 plants to be placed on the ballot. Nominations are based on the following criteria:

- Suitable for a wide range of climatic conditions
- Low maintenance
- Pest and disease resistant
- Readily available in the year of release
- Multiple season of ornamental interest
- Easily propagated by asexual or seed propagation

Customarily, a high percentage of returned ballots are received, certainly much higher than in the November general election. The voting reflects the interest in the Plant of the Year© and the enjoyment and impact felt by the perennial market and consumers alike.

Geranium 'Rozanne': Donald and Rozanne Waterer discovered this strong performing hardy geranium in their garden in Somerset, England in 1989. It has 2 ½ inch, iridescent violet-blue, saucer-shaped flowers with purple-violet veins and radiant white centers. Bloom time is from late spring to mid fall.

- Hardiness – USDA Zones 5 to 8
- Size – 20 to 24 inches tall and 24 to 28 inches wide
- Light – Best in full sun to partial shade, afternoon shade is advisable in hot climates
- Soil – Prefers moist, well-drained soil
- Uses - *Geranium* 'Rozanne' may be used as a dynamic ground cover or as an attractive specimen plant. It is a good companion plant to Shasta daisy, perennial salvia, speedwell, hostas, and short ornamental grasses. Rozanne's energetic habit makes it a worthy tenant of patio containers, window boxes, and hanging baskets.
- Unique Qualities – The large violet-blue flowers with purple-violet veins and small white centers offer non-stop flowering through the growing season. It has one of the longest flowering periods of any of the hardy geraniums.

All American Selection:

Osteospermum 'Asti White' **AAS Bedding Plant Award Winner**

Pure white daisy flowers with blue centers are the main attraction for 'Asti White.' The large blooms, 2 to 2-1/2 inches across are borne on stems that gracefully wave in the wind. The thick fleshy leaves indicate its drought

tolerance, which makes this a preferred annual in any area subject to dry conditions. 'Asti White' is the first white *Osteospermum*, or Cape Daisy, propagated from seed. There are several advantages. The flowers will remain open under cloudy conditions, unlike other daisy flowers originating from South Africa, which close. 'Asti White' plants will flower uniformly about 17 weeks from seed. Gardeners have the choice of growing from seed or purchasing plants depending upon their resources. 'Asti White' plants will bloom and recover from a slight frost. These plants can be placed in the spring or fall garden, weeks earlier than other tender annuals. The uniform plants thrive in a sunny garden, reaching about 17 to 20 inches tall and wide. 'Asti White' plants adapt perfectly to growing in containers, preferably 6-inch pots or larger. Bred and produced by Goldsmith Seeds, Inc.

Genus species: *Osteospermum ecklonis*

Common names: African Daisy, Blue-eyed Daisy, Cape Daisy

Unique qualities: First white *Osteospermum* propagated from seed. Freedom of bloom and uniform size plants

Flower size: 2 to 2.5 inches

Color(s): White with blue center

Plant height: 17-20 inches

Plant width: 17-20 inches

Garden spacing: 12 inches apart

Length of time from sowing seed to flower: 17 weeks from seed

Closest comparison(s) on market: 'Sky and Ice,' 'Passion Mix'

Viola 'Skippy XL Plum-Gold' [AAS Cool Season Bedding Plant Award Winner](#)

Sunny gold faces charm people gazing at 'Skippy XL Plum-Gold.' The flowers are uniquely designed with plum shades surrounding the golden centers (face), which contain radiating black lines affectionately called whiskers. The blooms are small, about 1-1/2 inches, but are not to be underrated. The number of blooms produced more than makes up for the size. 'Skippy XL Plum-Gold' won the AAS Award for its ability to grow a lavish number of blooms. In the North, plants can be expected to bloom beginning with spring to the heat of summer. In the South, a fall planting may provide flowering golden faces throughout the winter. The petite plants growing 6 to 8 inches tall and wide are highly recommended for combination planters. Gardeners can rely on 'Skippy XL Plum-Gold' to provide abundant blooms whether growing in containers, window boxes, an annual or perennial garden. 'Skippy XL Plum-Gold' may be a perennial in southern regions. Seed or bedding plants will be available in garden centers this fall or spring. 'Skippy XL Plum-Gold' was bred by Kieft Seeds Holland.

Genus species: *Viola cornuta*

Common name: Viola

Unique qualities: Color combinations, vigorous and floriferous, flower size

Flower size: 1.5 inches

Form: Single

Color(s): Plum shades with golden center

Plant height: 6 inches

Plant width: 8 inches

Garden spacing: 8 inches

Length of time from sowing seed to flower: 10 weeks

Closest comparison(s) on market: 'Skippy Lavender/Yellow Face,' 'Panola Lavender'

Eggplant 'Hansel' [2008 AAS Vegetable Award Winner](#)

Best described as a miniature eggplant, 'Hansel' is a smaller-sized plant with finger-sized clusters of fruit. Just because of its smaller size, don't make the mistake of thinking it produces less fruit. The strong plant, reaching less than three feet, produces clusters of three to six fruit. They mature early, about 55 days from transplanting into warm soil. This is about 10 days earlier than the comparison eggplant. If the 3-inch fruit clusters are left on the plant, they grow in size, but remain tender and non-bitter, unlike other eggplant. This trait offers gardeners flexibility in harvest such

as when taking a much-needed vacation. The fruit will be waiting for you as long as it's not a three-week cruise. If you prefer to garden in containers, 'Hansel' is highly recommended for your shopping list. 'Hansel' adapts perfectly to container growing conditions. The diminutive plant fits on smaller patios or decks but provides high yields of shiny purple eggplants ready to marinate and grill. 'Hansel' will be available as seed and young bedding plants. This AAS Winner was bred by Seminis Vegetable Seed.

Genus species: *Solanum melongena*

Common names: Eggplant, Aubergine

Fruit size: From 3" to 10" in length

Fruit shape: Elongated shape

Color: Glossy dark purple fruit

Plant height: 36 inches

Plant width: 30 inches

Plant habit: Compact upright

Garden spacing: 2 feet apart

Unique qualities: Miniature plant. Clusters of tender sweet fruit with few seeds, early

Length of time from transplanting to harvest: 55 days

Closest comparison(s) on market: 'Little Fingers,' 'Orient Express'

Herb of the Year:

Calendula officianalis: Height: 24 in Spacing: 15 in. Type: annual. Flowers: Yellow, orange, cream. Calendulas grow best in full sunshine and a rather dry soil. The plants bloom most of the summer, but

are intolerant of intense heat and may die out during periods of hot humid weather. The flowering season is prolonged when old flower heads are removed. Pot Marigold can be used as a bedding plant or as a source of cut flowers. The plant can also be used as a potted plant. The flowers are edible.

Propagation: The seed may be started indoors or planted directly into the garden. Germination takes 10 to 14 days at 70 degrees. Cover the seed with soil to exclude light. Seeds sown in July bloom in late summer. When transplanting Calendula, try not to damage the taproot.

Hosta of the Year:

"Blue Mouse Ears" A mature plant can grow to 8" high by 19" wide, with thick substance, nearly round, blue-green leaves 2 1/2" long by 2 1/4" wide. In July the plant is topped with dense clusters of pale purple flowers on scapes that rise to 12".

Rose of the Year: Jackson and Perkins announced their 2008 Roses of the year as follows:

'April in Paris' as Hybrid Tea, a cross between 'Pristine' and 'New Zealand'. Classic seashell buds open to the palest dawn pink edged in soft pink. Intense tea rose scent. 4 1/2 inch bloom, 30 petals, 16-10 inch stems.

'Lovestruck' as Floribunda, features a glowing hot pink-brushed cream petal with soft white reverse. Long-stemmed buds open into cupped, ruffled blooms. 4 inch blooms with 25 petals and 14-16 inch stems. Light spicy fragrance.

The AARS (All American Rose selection) for 2008 is 'Dream Come True', hybrid tea with double flowers opening a clear yellow with ruby red edges. 5 inch blooms, 40 petals, long stems and mild fragrance.

'Mardi Gras', a floribunda, apricot orange buds open to reveal bright pink and yellow blooms with a yellow base. 4 inch blooms, 16-20 inch stems and a light fragrance.

Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) 2008 selections for Florida Plants of the Year. The Florida Plants of the Year program is designed to promote the use of superior and proven Florida plants.

The almond bush, *Aloysia virgata*, is a small tree or large shrub reaching about 12-feet high and 14-feet wide. This

sweetly fragrant, vigorous, drought-tolerant, upright-growing tree/shrub from South America produces finger-like spiked clusters of small, white, almond-scented flowers. With an extended bloom period, this shrub is a good nectar source. The branches are slightly weeping. To keep this tree/shrub looking its best, prune between bloom cycles for bushier and denser growth. In our zone 8, this plant dies down with a freeze and regrows as a 3- to 4-foot shrub.

Blue ginger, *Dichorisandra thrysiflora*, is a perennial that can reach 8-feet tall and 3-feet wide. Deep purplish-blue blooms grow on 6-inch spikes in summer and fall. Tropical glossy green foliage with stiff succulent stems spread slowly underground creating a dense mass with a tremendous show of blooms. While commonly referred to as blue ginger, ginger is a misnomer, as the *Dichorisandra* is related to the Wandering Jew. Growing well in part to full shade with moist, well-drained soil, mealy bugs are its only pest issue.

Mimosa strigillosa is a ground cover with a mature height of 6 to 9 inches and a spread of 3 to 5 feet. This reliable and vigorous low-grower is **native** and drought tolerant, growing in moist or dry soils. It produces pink, ball-shaped flowers in warmer seasons, which attracts butterflies and provides butterfly larva with food. The foliage looks delicate, with small, compound leaves that draw back when touched, yet are durable enough to walk on, park on, drive on and even mow. In sun or shade, it grows best when well watered and grows well intermingled with sod. With virtually no major insect or disease problems, this ground cover is a winner.

The sand live oak, *Quercus geminata*, typically reaches about 20- to 30-feet tall with a 15- to 20-foot spread. Similar to Southern live oak but smaller in stature, this salt- and drought-tolerant Florida **native** tree has an irregular growth habit and spreading canopy. Some forms are tree-like and some may form a thicket. The dark green cupped leaves are distinctly boat shaped with whitish gray on the undersides. The acorns are sought by wildlife. The sand live oak has proven severe storm durability making it an ideal tree for Florida's sometimes stormy weather.

The dwarf palmetto, *Sabal minor*, is a shrubby palm with a mature height and spread of 4 to 6 feet. *Sabal minor* is one of the most durable cold-tolerant palms in the world. This Southeast **native** is a small, drought-tolerant palm with fan-shaped fronds. The foliage is green to blue-green and long stalks of white flowers produce small black fruits enjoyed by wildlife. It grows in very moist to dry soils in shade or in sun. The dwarf palmetto usually appears trunkless due to its subterranean trunk and adds a great native touch when a smaller scaled plant is needed.

For its indoor plant selection, the Association chose *Stromanthe sanguinea* "Triostar."

"Triostar" is a striking upright foliage plant that is grown mainly for its beautiful coloration. The oblong leaves are thick and glossy and variegated with white, green and reddish-pink coloring. "Triostar" is very eye-catching and thrives as an indoor plant as well as having outdoor shade applications throughout Florida. In North Florida, "Triostar" should be used as an annual. Caterpillars and slugs may pose an issue, and leaf-burn in full sun.