

What's New for Plants in 2009?
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It seems that spring has arrived with consistent day temperatures in the 70's. Folks are anxious to start spring planting, fertilizing and treating lawn weeds. Slow down; not so fast. Winter temperatures will likely return over the next few months. Instead, take time to check out the gardening catalogues that are rolling in and order seeds or plants. Find out what's new or improved for 2009. Some are available through catalogues or at retail nurseries, while others may take a year or two to make it to our area. Read on to learn about some of the new plants to look for.

Annual plants are evaluated at sites all over the country for the All-American Selections Winners. The Florida site is at Disney, Lake Buena Vista. 2009 winners are *Viola cornuta* F1 'Rain Blue and Purple', Eggplant F1 'Gretel', Melon F1 'Lambkin', and Squash F1 'Honey Bear'. This is a different focus from the past in that 3 out of the 4 plants are vegetables. The economy is having an impact on many things, including what we are planting in our landscapes. The trend is to plant something that we can eat to save money due to rising food costs. Even viola could be considered an edible since the flowers are edible if certain chemicals are avoided.

This new viola or Johnny Jump-Up is unique in that it has a creeping growth habit and the flower changes from a purple/white to purple/blue as they age. For our area, violas are cool season annuals so plant now or wait next fall. Plants mature at six inches tall with a spread of 10 to 14 inches.

'Gretel' eggplant is the earliest white eggplant and boasts high yields. It can be grown in the garden but is also ideal for containers. Fruit can be harvested at 3" or longer and are ready for picking 55 days after planting. Unlike other eggplant varieties, this one has non bitter fruit, with tender skin and few seeds. 'Lambkin' melon is a 2 to 4 pound gourmet melon with sweet juicy flesh that is early to mature taking just 65 to 75 days after planting. Grow in a sunny garden area or container. 'Honey Bear' acorn squash has an exceptional flavor and is tolerant to powdery mildew. Even though it is more compact than most winter squash, it requires a two foot by six foot gardening space.

2009 All-America rose selections include Carefree Spirit, Cinco de Mayo and Pink Promise. Carefree Spirit is a landscape rose with a mounding habit reaching five feet in height. Open deep cherry red flowers with white eyes fade to pink. It is carefree because it has excellent disease resistance for black spot and is totally resistant to mildew and rust. Cinco de Mayo is a floribunda that reaches 54 to 60" tall with a rounded bushy growth habit. This too has excellent disease tolerance and flowers have a fresh cut apple fragrance. The prolific flowers display a collage of colors ranging from a rust-red to lavender-smoke.

Pink Promise is a special one because for every rose sold, a percentage of the sales are donated to the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Pink Promise has excellent disease resistance and is a hybrid tea so is great as a cut flower. Flowers have a delicate pink blend and are highly fragrant.

The University of Florida Environmental Horticulture Department trialed over 850 cultivars of annuals and perennials last year and then selected ten as the best new varieties for 2009. They include the following: Ptilotus 'Joey', Heliotrope 'Scentropia Dark Blue', Calibrachoa 'MiniFamous Tangerine', Coleus 'Indian Summer', ornamental pepper 'Calico', geranium 'Caliente Fire'09', lobelia 'Techno Heat Dark Blue', Petunia 'Potunia Lobster', verbena 'Empress Strawberry Charme', and petunia 'Supertunia Vista Silverberry'. I was so



impressed with Ptilotus 'Joey' that I volunteered my home as the test site to determine it's salt tolerance but unfortunately was refused. Evidently others had made the same offer also with no success. Joey was recently featured in the Times-Union and will be hard to find this year due to its popularity across the country. Heliotrope 'Scentropia Dark Blue' (photo on left) was striking with its fragrant, deep purple flowers and compact mounding growth habit. Lobelia 'Techno Heat Dark Blue' also got my vote due to the mass of intense dark-blue flowers covering the plant.

Another plant that is on my must-have list is one developed by my alma mater, North Carolina State. Buddleia x 'Blue Chip' also called Lo & Behold 'Blue Chip' is a compact butterfly bush ideal as a landscape plant or in containers. 'Blue Chip' matures at 24" to 36" tall and produces fragrant miniature blue flowers from midsummer to early fall plus requires no deadheading or pruning. And, it attracts butterflies and hummers.

There are lots of new plants on the market so when you're out shopping, be adventurous and try something different this gardening season.