greenPROFIT

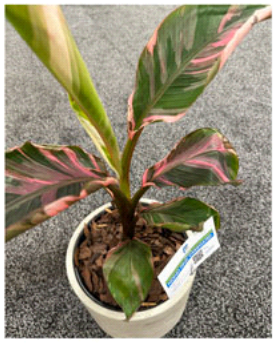
Features

9/1/2024

And the Winner is ...

Ellen C. Wells









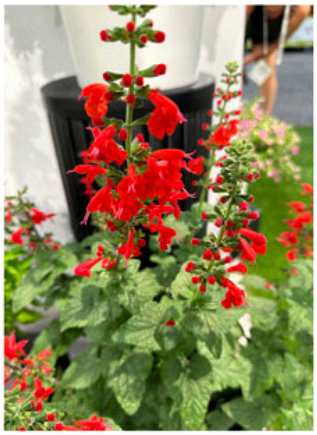
First, a quick reminder: The Retailers' Choice Awards are selected by a floor-walking troupe of garden retailers who are searching for items they themselves would have in their stores while at the annual Cultivate trade show and conference in Columbus, Ohio. These awards are presented by The Garden Center Group's Danny Summers the day after those folks walk the floor and make their selections. This year 12 companies received awards for 15 products.

We'll start with Helleborus Mount Nebo from Aris Horticulture and Must Have Perennials. Mount Nebo, part of the Rockies Helleborus series, is unlike other varieties within that series because its new foliage emerges bright red in the fall and early spring, eventually maturing to a pink, white and green speckled situation. It's buds and blossoms are rosy pink for several weeks, fading to a chartreuse. But the show the foliage puts on is equal to or even better than its blooms.

Next up is Angelonia AngelFlare from Ball FloraPlant. This series of three varieties was bred for a V- or vase-shaped habit. AngelFlare has been bred to intermix nicely in a mixed combo basket or container, with its flower spikes poking up in an angled manner through whatever it's planted with. It also has big blooms, and is heat and humidity tolerant. Black Velvet is the stunner of the three colors; the other two being Cranberry and Orchid Pink.

Darwin Perennials' Agastache Summerlong colors Lilac, Lemon and Coral are stunning pollinator-friendly tender perennials. These are heat- and drought-tolerant plants with lovely muted colors. They flower from frost to frost, too, giving retailers an extended sales window and gardens an extended time for enjoyment. Two other colors exist in the series, as well—Magenta and Peach.









This next one's a nono. I'm not talking about a no-hitter, nor am I talking about something that's not acceptable. I'm talking about ForemostCo's Retailers' Choice Award winner Musa Nono Pink Variegated. This one has pink streaks, and starts off white and green. It's currently in TC and they're ramping up production in the coming months.

I love the story behind the organic Microgreens Kitchen Garden Kit from Knowing Nature. I spoke to the company's founder and CEO Rachel Haber at length and learned that she came to this product after time spent as a corporate lawyer. Long story short, she dropped it all to have a hand in helping kids and adults build their appreciation for growing their own food. You've gotta start somewhere and microgreens is as simple as it gets. The kit includes a self-watering growing tray and enough coco coir discs and seeds (three different kinds) to grow three crops of microgreens. The tray is sized to fit on a windowsill and to be dishwasher safe. The company also has those items sold separately, but the kit is a great starter project.

Finally, it's here—the Three-Shelf Shopping Cart! This beauty comes from the folks at R.W. Rogers and was a collaboration between The Garden Center Group and the company's president Bob Rogers. Note that, though the top shelves don't fold up, it does nest nicely.

Proven Winners took home two RCAs. Their first is for the 30-Second Planter. They've had the concept of a drop-in container previously, but this product had been re-imagined for a limited relaunch for spring 2024. It's meant to be an easy access point for budding container gardeners by allowing them to simply drop the 30-Second Planter into their own decorative pot. I like it because it saves time, labor and materials on the home gardener's end. Drop it in, and voilà, you're done. A full rollout is in store for spring 2025.









The second RCA is for Unplugged Red Salvia. This is a truly scarlet-red coloration and will bloom non-stop for months on end. Tolerant of humidity, drought and heat, this mid-sized plant is just the right size for containers, but also works well in the landscape. Also, no deadheading needed!

This next plant not only gets a Retailers' Choice Award, but it also gets a "Best Plant Name" award ... from me—Li'l Annie Oakleaf from Star Roses and Plants. Great name, right? But it gets the more important RCA due to its compact habit (3- to 4-ft. tall and 4- to 5-ft. wide), its well-branched nature and its ability to be less impacted by foliar disease. Also, its flowers turn pinkish after the initial white blooms.

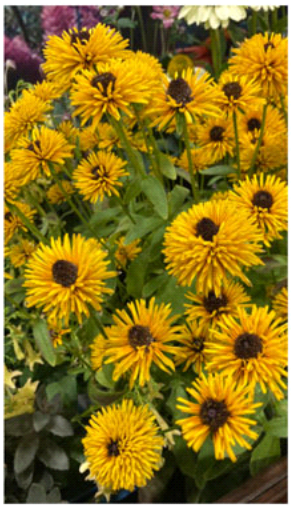
Steel Heart gets the award specifically for their metal dragonflies, but all of their garden art are spectacular. I spoke to the man in the booth who designs these, and he said he switched from producing these items from China to India for patriotic reasons, and it turns out the uptick in craftsmanship was well worth the change. This dandelion you see here has more than 2,500 individual pieces to it and it's all made by hand. He's impressed with these tradespeople's skills and so were the RCA judges.

The next two are no strangers to awards given out by retailers. Both of Suntory Flowers' Sun Parasol FiredUp Orange Dipladenia hybrid and Sun Parasol XP Bluephoria Mandevilla won The Garden Center Group's Cool Product Award at TPIE last January, and I wrote in more detail about them at the time. Still amazing innovations within the mandevilla/dipladenia class. Oh, and the news is that four new FiredUp colors are on their way.

Syngenta also took home two RCAs. The first is for the latest addition to the Calliope line of interspecific geraniums. The new Calliope Large Dark Salmon is everything its name says it is. The salmon color is on the darkish side, yes, but I'm pretty sure the "Dark" in the name is a reference to its darker foliage. And it's an overall large plant, from its form to its flowers. I "ooo"ed when it was brought on stage.







Syngenta's Cherry Blast Tomato is an upgraded trailing variety that comes from Floranova's stash of vegetables for small spaces. Use it in large containers or even in hanging baskets to keep out of reach of your friendly neighborhood groundhog (or is that just me?). Best yet, it has proven resistance to ToMV strains 1 and 2 and is tolerant to late blight. That tolerance and resistance profile is why it'll produce a heavy crop of cherry-sized fruits all through the growing season.

And, finally, Terra Nova's Lion Cub Rudbeckia is the cutest little rudbeckia out there—and it does look like the hairy scruff of a lion cub. It forms a naturally tight mound of emerald green foliage with small pom pom-like, chocolate-eyed golden yellow flowers. Lion Cub will bloom June through October and is a fast and vigorous crop. It'll be great for fall containers and displays, too. **GP**