

## Horticultural News and Research Important to American Gardeners



'Lambkin' melon

### 2009 ALL-AMERICA SELECTIONS WINNERS

Four new varieties—three vegetables and one flower—have been given the All-America Selections (AAS) distinction for their outstanding performance in comparative trials across the country.

*Viola* 'Rain Blue and Purple' is the 2009 AAS Cool Season Bedding Plant award winner. Its flowers exhibit an unusual trait of naturally changing color, opening purple and white, then turning purple and blue. This plant is both cold and heat tolerant, so it blooms during fall and winter in the south, and in spring and summer in northern regions.

For vegetables, flavor is an important factor in the evaluation process so all are taste-tested. In addition to its sweet flavor, 'Honey Bear' acorn squash received top ratings for its compact habit and high yield due to its tolerance to powdery mildew. 'Gretel' eggplant's three- to four-



'Gretel' eggplant

inch slender white fruits with tender skins and sweet flesh impressed judges, along with its ability to reach maturity in only 55 days. A Christmas type melon, 'Lambkin' stood out for its sweet, aromatic, juicy fruits that mature early.

For more information, visit the AAS website at [www.all-americaelections.org](http://www.all-americaelections.org).

### NEW PLANT HORMONE DISCOVERED

A handful of known plant hormones, such as auxins and gibberellins, have been utilized for decades by plant scientists for their ability to regulate shoot and root growth. Scientists have now identified a new group of plant hormones, called strigolactones, that play a role in controlling branching in plants. Research published in the journal *Nature* last year showed that plants with a mutation causing them to lack the ability to create strigolactone branched without restraint. If treated with strigolactone, these plants returned to a normal branching pattern.

Prior to this discovery, scientists had known that strigolactone exuded through roots induces beneficial fungi such as mycorrhizae to form symbioses with the plant. As root exudates, these molecules

also stimulate the seeds of nearby parasitic plants to germinate and attach to their victims. Now that strigolactone has been identified as a plant hormone, scientists will have many more avenues to explore as they learn more about its potential effects and applications.

"We still don't know the details about how it is made," says Harry Klee from the Horticultural Sciences Department at the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville. "We know virtually nothing about how it actually works and how the plant uses it to control the degree of branching." Klee and other UF scientists were among the first to identify the genes that synthesize strigolactones, which facilitated the discovery that these chemicals act as plant hormones.

### FINANCIAL WOES BESET MASSACHUSETTS HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Beleagued by financial difficulties, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society (MHS) has canceled the 2009 New England Flower Show that was scheduled for March, though the organization is planning two smaller events for the spring and summer instead.

In a recent *Boston Globe* article, Betsy Ridge Madsen, president of the society's board of trustees, stated that MHS canceled the show because of the sluggish economy and the fact that last year's show lost money. With a 137-year history, this event was one of the nation's longest continuously running flower shows.

Another significant strain on the organization's resources has been the creation of its newly completed "Greenway Gardens," part of downtown Boston's Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway built above the Big Dig's highway tunnel system. Though not as grand as the botanical showpiece MHS originally had planned, the installation and maintenance of these gardens on nearly five acres of land have cost the organization hundreds of thousands of dollars.



'Honey Bear' acorn squash

Last year the 180-year-old organization also laid off more than half its staff as a result of its financial predicament, and changed the leadership of its board of trustees. It has launched a "Save Our Society" campaign, "reaching out to foundations, businesses, and individuals with the goal of putting the Massachusetts Horticultural Society back in the black and continuing our most fundamental programs." For more information, visit [www.masshort.org](http://www.masshort.org).

### OUTSTANDING REDBUD COLLECTION RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION

The North American Plant Collections Consortium (NAPCC) recently recognized the redbud collection at the JC Raulston Arboretum at North Carolina State University in Raleigh as one of the nation's best. The collection features 41 taxa of *Cercis*, including several hard-to-find species such as giant redbud (*C. gigantea*) and smooth redbud (*C. glabra*).

In addition to the collection's comprehensiveness, its research value also earned it the NAPCC distinction. Den-



JC Raulston Arboretum Director Dennis Warner, right, and Research Assistant Layne Snelling hand-pollinate redbud flowers in an attempt to create new varieties.

nis Werner, director of the arboretum and a horticulture professor at NC State, has developed a redbud breeding pro-

gram, focusing on native eastern redbud (*C. canadensis*). According to Mark Weathington, assistant director and curator of collections, they are "breeding for novel weeping forms such as purple, gold, and variegated foliage forms." Additionally, research with the collection includes "evaluating the landscape suitability of the various species, and evaluating the numerous named and unnamed selections," Weathington says.

The NAPCC is coordinated by the American Public Gardens Association in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service and the U.S. National Arboretum. The consortium designates outstanding collections of landscape plants in an effort to encourage the preservation of plant germplasm and high standards of plant collections management.

### ROBOT'S AWARD-WINNING RECYCLING PROGRAM CELEBRATES NEW SUCCESS

Look in just about any gardener's shed and you're bound to find a pile of empty plastic pots, cell packs, and trays from previ-

The American Horticultural Society's

## SPRING GARDEN MARKET

at River Farm

A Plant Sale and Marketplace of Garden-Inspired Items



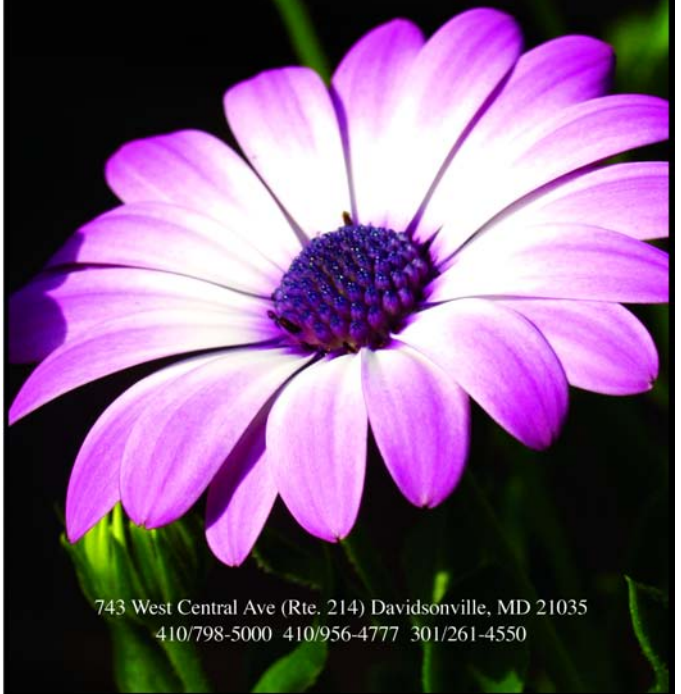
### Vendors Wanted for Spring Garden Market!

The American Horticultural Society is looking for vendors for its Spring Garden Market taking place from April 16-18, 2009 at its River Farm headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. A variety of spaces are available for vendors of plants and garden-related items. Contact Sharon Grant at (703) 786-5700 ext. 114 or [sgrant@ahs.org](mailto:sgrant@ahs.org) for more information.



## Homestead Gardens

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ous planting seasons. But this is less likely to be true in St. Louis. In 2008, the Missouri Botanical Garden's (MOBOT) pot recycling program set a new record for itself by collecting and recycling 75 tons of plastic. Since it launched in 1998, the program has recycled approximately 330 tons of horticultural plastic waste.

For several months each year, MOBOT serves as a central collection site for residents and businesses. A number of retail garden centers throughout St. Louis also serve as satellite collection sites. The plastics are then ground down and recycled into other products by various manufac-



**MOBOT's Steven Cline sorts through a pile of plastic containers ready for recycling.**

turers. One of the only recycling programs of its kind in the nation, it was recently recognized by the American Public Gardens Association with its Award for Program Excellence, given to innovative and pioneering horticultural programs.

"This is a model system designed to show how important recycling is to getting waste back into useful production," says program founder and organizer Steven Cline, manager of the MOBOT's William T. Kemper Center for Home Gardening. While the program has recycled pots into planks, landscape timbers, and other products "the plastics industry changes all the time, depending on the price of oil," says Cline. "That price dictates the kinds of products that can be made and the overall sustainability of the program."

For more information on MOBOT's plastic pot recycling program, visit [www.mobot.org/hort](http://www.mobot.org/hort) and click on "Activities and Events" or call (314) 577-9561.

## PEOPLE and PLACES in the NEWS



The Haupt Conservatory at the New York Botanical Garden

### Enid A. Haupt Honored by New York Botanical Garden

The late horticultural philanthropist Enid A. Haupt was recently honored with a Gold Medal of the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG). Awarded infrequently, the medal is given in recognition of individuals who have made significant contributions to the garden and to horticulture, botany, plant science, and education.

"Enid Haupt was the greatest patron American horticulture has ever known and a historic figure in the life of the New York Botanical Garden, active in the garden for more than 30 years," says NYBG President Gregory Long. One of Haupt's most notable contributions to NYBG was funding for the renovation of its historic conservatory, now named in her honor. "Since the conservatory reopened in 1997, six million people have enjoyed its collections and special exhibitions—largely a result of Mrs. Haupt's commitment to public horticulture," Long adds.

Haupt, who died in 2005, donated millions to the NYBG and many other horticultural and cultural organizations, including donating River Farm to the American Horticultural Society for its headquarters in 1973.

### Syngenta Acquires Goldsmith Seeds and Yoder Brother's Brand

Last fall, the Switzerland-based agribusiness giant Syngenta purchased the Yoder Brothers, Inc. brand as well as the chrysanthemum and aster product lines from this American breeder and propagator of a variety of ornamental crops. The remaining Yoder entities will continue to be owned and operated by Yoder Brothers, Inc. until July 2009, when the business will be renamed. Syngenta also recently acquired Goldsmith Seeds, a family-owned, multinational ornamental plant breeder and seed producer. Syngenta plans to maintain both the Yoder and Goldsmith brands under its Syngenta Flowers umbrella.

"Syngenta may not be a well known name in garden and landscape circles, but it has certainly become impossible to ignore in the flower industry," says Allan Armitage, a horticulture professor at the University of Georgia. "In the last two years it has initiated aggressive breeding programs in annuals and perennials. In recent years, it has also spent enormous amounts of money on infrastructure and breeding companies in Europe and North America, putting it on the same level as large companies such as Ball Horticulture and Proven Winners, Inc."

Syngenta, which produces and markets pesticides and seeds, bills itself as a "world-leading agribusiness committed to sustainable agriculture through innovative research and technology." Syngenta Flowers focuses on the pot and bedding plant industry, breeding and marketing flower seeds and plants globally.

## CRAZY FOR CATMINTS

With their profusion of blue, purple, or white flowers, aromatic foliage, and low maintenance needs, catmints (*Nepeta* spp.) play well in a variety of garden and landscape settings. In a recent seven-year trial of 36 different *Nepeta* taxa at the Chicago Botanic Garden (CBG) in Illinois, four catmints performed exceptionally well in terms of their ornamental traits, resistance to pests and diseases, adaptability, and hardiness.

*Nepeta* 'Joanna Reed', *N.* 'Six Hills Giant', *N.* *xfaesenii* 'Select Blue', and *N.* *racemosa* 'Walker's Low' all bloomed heav-



*Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant'

ily and kept neat habits throughout the season without the need for shearing back, unlike several other taxa in the trial. Each of these cultivars produces lavender-blue flowers on stems that can reach up to three feet, with the exception of 'Select Blue', which has more compact stems up to 14 inches. They all grow well in USDA Zones 4–8 and AHS Heat Zones 8–1, though soggy conditions for prolonged periods should be avoided because catmints do not tolerate wet feet.

For a copy of the full report on the trial, call the CBG at (847) 835-5440 or visit [www.chicagobotanic.org](http://www.chicagobotanic.org).

## ACORN SCARCITY CAUSES CONCERN

In parts of the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest, acorns were almost completely absent this

past fall, sparking concern among homeowners, naturalists, arborists, and other scientists. Oaks (*Quercus* spp.) are known to go through cycles of abundant and poor production, depending on the species, but a complete lack of acorns is unusual. "Most people," explains Guy Sternberg, an oak expert and founder of Starhill Arboretum in Petersburg, Illinois, "believe it has to do with the weather—say a late freeze or heavy rain during pollination—coupled with the trees' inability to produce good crops in successive years."

Other theories have linked the shortfall to factors such as acid rain and the emergence of the 17-year-cicadas last spring. However, other areas of the country reported bumper crops of acorns, so the consensus is that the localized acorn shortage, though out of the ordinary, is probably not a calamitous occurrence—unless, of course, one is a squirrel.

## SLOWER-GROWING GRASS FOR SOUTHERN REGIONS

St. Augustine grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) is one of the most widely used grasses in much of the Southeast, Gulf of Mexico region, and parts of California because of its tolerance for high temperatures. A newly released slower-growing selection called Captiva™, resulting from 15 years of breeding and research at the University of Florida (UF), could mean significant savings in mowing fuel and time. Since it grows between one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half inches per week—about half as fast as other types of St. Augustine grass—it needs less frequent mowing. Russell Nagata, a horticulturist at UF who helped develop Captiva, estimates that if everyone in Florida alone could mow half as often, it would save up to 30 million gallons of fuel a year and reduce harmful emissions.

Additionally, Captiva has a softer texture and greener color than other St. Augustine grass selections. When trialed at sod farms across the south, it also appears to have good resistance to chinch bug, a common pest of turf grass in southern regions. Currently it is available in limited quantities, but will have greater distribution within the next year.

*News written by Associate Editor Viveka Neveln.*

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⑦ LAWNS	To Make QUICKER, deeper, TOUGHER TURF from SEED, SOD, Stolons, Sprigs, HYDRO-seeding
⑧ FRUITING	For EARLIER, HEAVIER, BEARING?

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