

American Garden Award **Rick Abrahamson**

Recently, I received an email from All-America Selections announcing “The American Garden Award” for 2010. They are asking for gardeners and professional horticulturists to vote on the plant they think have the most garden appeal. AAS has selected four different plants to choose from. They are hoping gardeners will purchase the plants and vote based on how well the plants do in their area. There are several ways to participate in the voting.

Gardeners can vote online at www.americangardenaward.com, text a code to a phone number, mailing postage-paid postcards that are available at most garden centers, or by becoming an AAS fan on Facebook. Several public gardens have agreed to display the four plants so that the public can see them in action. The closest gardens to South Dakota are Denver Botanic Garden, Boerner Botanical Gardens, Chicago Botanic Garden, and Chicago Park District gardens. Other sites include Dallas Arboretum & Botanical Garden, Longwood Gardens, Missouri Botanical Garden, and Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City just to name a few. This summer consider visiting a botanical garden while on traveling to see some of these plants.

The four plants in the running are: Echinacea ‘Purple SplendorTM’, Ornamental Pepper ‘Purple Flash’, Rudbeckia ‘Denver Daisy’, and Zinnia Profusion ‘Knee-High Red’. ‘Purple Splendor’ is a non-stop blooming coneflower that blooms well into the fall. Adding years of enjoyment to a perennial border and will blend well into a wild garden and will attract butterflies. Flowers are a large 3 inches or more in size and the plant grows 24 inches tall with a spread of 14-16 inches. The ornamental pepper ‘Purple Flash’ grows to the height of 10-12 inches with a spread of 14-16 inches. This plant boasts leaves that are almost black in color with bright purple flashes with glossy black peppers. Drought tolerant and easy to care for this plant will enhance any mixed container as well as in-ground plantings. ‘Denver Daisy’ is a summer-long Rudbeckia that stands up to extreme weather. Large 4-6 inch flowers are golden in color with red rings. The plant grows to a height of 18-20 inches and a spread of 12-15 inches. ‘Knee-High Red’ is a profuse bloomer with red two inch flowers and grows to a height of 16-24 inches with a spread of 12-15 inches. This zinnia will work well in a cottage garden and is very tolerant of cool, wet and hot, humid conditions. The flowers are long-lasting in a cut arrangement and growing is easy as it is perfect for low maintenance and low water gardens.

Voting will continue until August 31st but consider voting today. The AAS website has a graph that illustrates how each plant is doing. While surfing the website be sure to check out all the past All American Selection winners for the past several years.

Feel free to call on me if you have any questions about the voting process or any other horticultural issues. I can be reached at 605-394-2188 or via email at ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu. Also, be sure to check out our website at <http://www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html>.