

Garden Sages/Marge Hols
Superstar seeds to try

It's only February and I've already broken my one New Year's resolution: Order fewer seeds this year. Once again, I've been seduced by the luscious photos and rave reviews in catalogues.

High on my list are three 2010 All-America Selections (AAS) that Carla Henry and I previewed last summer. All were easy to grow from seed.

Zinnia 'Zahara Starlight Rose' is a small, but striking, rose-white bicolor that visitors to my garden liked a lot. The 14-inch plants bloomed brightly from June to frost. 'Starlight Rose' is a new Zahara-type zinnia bred to compete with the fabulous Profusion zinnias in size, flower power and disease resistance. Flower petals are deep rose with white tips. Plants in one bed did suffer from mildew, but not until September. Park Seed.

Snapdragon 'Twinny Peach' is a bushy snap just 12 inches tall. Carla says the plant was absolutely darling and the soft peach color worked perfectly with the peach and yellow flowers in her garden. "It was a winner," she says. "Everyone who saw it loved it." Park Seed.

Gaillardia 'Mesa Yellow' decorated my herb garden with bright yellow, daisy-like flowers from early July well into fall. This F1 hybrid blanket flower has a compact, 18-inch habit. I grew it as an annual, starting seeds March 7, but the plant is perennial in Zone 5. As a typical Minnesota gardening optimist, I'm hoping my plants may survive our Zone 4 winter since we have lots of snow cover. Park Seed.



Zinnia 'Zahara Starlight Rose'

I also recommend three other fab seed-grown annuals I tried last summer:

Salvia farinacea 'Fairy Queen.' 'Victoria Blue' and 'Evolution' mealy-cup salvias are the best performing annuals in my garden, so I was delighted when their sister, 'Fairy Queen,' came along. This blue-white bicolor salvia is a sturdy, nonstop bloomer. Park Seed.

Calendulas are cool-weather lovers and most varieties stop blooming in summer. But **Calendula 'Bon-Bon Yellow'** is a nonstop bloomer. My plants were still blooming strongly when I pulled them out on Nov. 26! They take a little care. I staked, deadheaded regularly and cut plants way back in August. Stokes Seed.

Dianthus chinensis 'Ideal Violet' makes a marvelous edger on a garden path. This AAS Classic has vibrant pink flowers that bloom to fall. Park Seed.

All-America Selections just added a second batch of 2010 winners. I haven't yet grown these plants myself. Included are two more zinnias in the Zahara series, 'Double Zahara Cherry' and 'Double Zahara Fire'. Others are an F1 African marigold, 'Moonsong Deep Orange', an F1 hybrid watermelon, 'Shiny Boy' and a sweet, mildly hot red pepper, 'Cajun Belle'. There's also a 24-inch purple coneflower called 'PowWow Wild Berry', a perennial that started this spring will flower next year.