

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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Award-Winning Plants for Your Garden  
By Annette Meyer Heisdorffer, Ph.D.  
Extension Agent for Horticulture Education – Daviness County Office

Beautiful photographs of flowering perennial plants in catalogs and online tempt me to purchase each one. But how do I know which plants will perform well in my garden? Turning to different plant related associations, societies, and green industry professionals provides some helpful information. They name award winners that have outstanding performance over the season across the United States or in Kentucky and offer desirable characteristics for us to enjoy in our gardens. Perennial Plant of the Year<sup>®</sup>, American Hosta Society Benedict Garden Performance Award, Stout Silver Medal Award for daylilies, and a Theodore Klein Plant Award Winner will be discussed.

The Perennial Plant Association annually names an award winner. The 2026 Perennial Plant of the Year<sup>®</sup> is *Andropogon gerardii* ‘Blackhawks,’ ‘Blackhawks’ big bluestem. This grass adds textures and vertical lines to the landscape. It is a warm-season grass. In the spring, the dark green leaves emerge from the ground. The leaves develop a reddish-purple tip as the growing season continues. The flower appears in August with an inflorescence head that appears as a three-part “turkeyfoot” as described by the Perennial Plant Association. The leaves, stems, and flowers turn a deep purple by September, which adds to the fall color in the landscape. This

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compact cultivar reaches 4-5 feet tall and 2 feet wide and stays as a clump. It possibly will spread by reseeding.

‘Blackhawks’ is drought tolerant, especially when established. No major insect pests or disease problems have been reported. The required maintenance is cutting it down to the ground in later winter before new growth emerges in the spring. It prefers to grow in full sun. This plant tolerates poor to average soil quality. It can be used as a specimen plant, a border, or a background for other plants. This plant is hardy to USDA Zones 3 to 9.

The American Hosta Society chooses its winners during its conference. The 2025 Benedict Garden Performance Award is ‘Guacamole’ (*Hosta* ‘Guacamole’). This award is the top award. It recognizes superior garden-performing hostas, according to the society.

‘Guacamole’ is a large hosta. It reaches from 18-22 inches in height and 3 to 4 feet wide. The flower scapes, which are the stems with the flowers, reach up to 36 inches tall. The fragrant, pale lavender flowers of this hosta are produced in late summer. The large leaves are chartreuse in the center with a wide edge of dark green framing the leaves.

Hostas grow best in moist, well-drained soil. Also, they prefer to grow in shade to keep the leaves from scorching and looking bad in the summer, but would tolerate morning sun.

The 2025 daylily awards are presented after the growing season, in late summer to fall. The most recent Stout Silver Medal Award winner, named by the American Daylily Society for 2025, is *Hemerocallis* ‘Explosion in the Paint Factory’. This is the highest award given to the daylily that performs the best over a wide geographic area. The flower color of this daylily is described as a variable broken red pattern over yellow. The flower is about 7 inches across. It is an unusual form with the sepals more spatulate, meaning the tips of the sepals are wider at the

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end. In addition, the petals and sepals are crispate, which means twisted, pinched, or quilled. They are also described as cascading, which is curling. These terms are defined on the American Daylily Society's website. The flowers bloom in midseason and may rebloom. Even though a flower is only open for one day, the plant is covered by about 20 blossoms opening over time. The flower scape reaches 38 inches in height.

Daylilies prefer full sun, but can grow in partial shade, but will produce fewer flowers. They are desirable perennials for their beautiful blossoms, low maintenance, green foliage, and tolerance of both poor soil and drought conditions. Plants are propagated by division.

One of the 2025 Theodore Klein Plant Award Winners with excellent ornamental and performance characteristics for Kentucky's climate is the herbaceous perennial, Blue Star Amsonia 'Storm Cloud' (*Amsonia tabernaemontana* 'Storm Cloud'). This plant is a Proven Winners® selection. This species of *Amsonia* is a native plant of North America. The cultivar, Storm Cloud, is an improved form with a plant that is 24 to 36 inches tall. It spreads about 38 to 42 inches forming a wide mounding clump. Allow enough room for this plant to grow. In the spring, new stems are near-black as they come up with leaves that are described as dark green with silver veins. Sky blue, star shaped flowers form at the top of the erect stems in spring. It reportedly may bloom again during the growing season. It performs best in full sun and well-drained soil.

For more information about plant award winners, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or [annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

**Annette's tip:**

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More information about the other perennials, trees and shrubs named the Theodore Klein Plant Award Winners for 2025 is available at <https://yewdellgardens.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/TKPA-2025.pdf>. These award winners are selected by Kentucky plant professionals involved in wholesale and retail nurseries, design firms, public horticulture, and academic institutions. Theodore Klein is considered a patriarch of the Kentucky nursery industry. Yew Dell Botanical Gardens is the original piece of his farm/nursery located in Oldham County.

## **Happy Holidays:**

The Daviess County Cooperative Extension Office will be closed Wednesday, December 24, through Friday, January 2. We will reopen at 8:00 a.m. on Monday, January 5.

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