

PROMISING PLANTS 2015

Thanks to everyone for submitting their choices. We have a great selection to present to the members in Williamsburg next year. The plants that were top vote getters are:

Annuals- *Helianthus annuus* Hopi Dye
Nigella orientalis

Perennials- *Trachystemon orientalis*
Rosemary Mozart

Tree/ shrub- *Chionanthus virginicus*
Cydonia oblonga

HOY- Pepper- Fish

Notable Native- *Pycnanthemum muticans*

Many thanks to Susan Anthony for putting it all together. And extra thanks to Elizabeth Kennell, for walking both Susan and I through the process!

I want to let all of you know how we plan to move forward with this program. There will be changes ahead, so I'd like to share what I know with you. First, you have noticed, I'm sure, that I reduced the number of plants to be highlighted. My thoughts were that we should select top-quality plants for inclusion, and ones that would be readily available, if possible. I have heard from many that sources for some of the previous years' plants were hard to find. I also wanted to have annual, perennial and tree/shrub choices, so we did not limit ourselves to any particular category of plant. It's also necessary for us to have plants that can be grown in most areas of the country, and not narrow our selection unduly by zone. Not everyone has a greenhouse with which to winter over tropicals, for instance.

Second, we will be moving towards more emphasis on our Notable Native. The Native Herb Conservation Committee will be choosing a genus, so as not to be encumbered with plants that are not viable in certain zones. The Essential Guide will contain several suggestions for varieties within the genus. So, going forward, each year we will decide on the most promising Notable Native, and choose a cultivar or species that is particularly interesting.

We come to change number three – the Herb of the Year™. As I'm sure you know, this initiative, though very popular with our members, is a product of the International Herb Association. They are the ones who conceived of the idea and have made this a significant part of their outreach efforts. The HSA Board, in keeping with our strategic plan, decided to reevaluate this initiative slightly, and concentrate our efforts on the Notable Native, which was introduced in 2012 as an HSA signature program. There will still be a Power Point program on the Herb of the Year, expanded fact sheets, and handouts made available to our HSA members for use by the many units who do yearly programming on the Herb of the Year™, making their programming easier and less work. We decided not to be in competition with IHA and preferred to work with them, directing our members to purchase, if they choose, the highly-rated HOY publication that IHA produces. This will free up staff time, printing costs will be reduced, and we can bolster our Notable Native as well. IHA in turn will publicize our Notable Native program and guide.

Fourth, at the Educational Conference this year, Promising Plants will share program space with the Notable Native. There will be a one hour session and we will present both programs. We will also be having space at the Festival of Flavor and Fragrance, and hope to entice members of the public to learn about these and other initiatives we have. As we move towards a biennial conference and meeting of members, we will have to adjust how we present the materials to our membership, too. It may even be by webinar – who knows?

In the past, there have been enormous costs associated with our program. This was partly due to the number of selections – some years there were over 30! Computers have allowed us to create beautiful Fact Sheets – with lots of color photos, etc. But, this creates a significant cost, since printing those are expensive, and most folks want those handouts. And sometimes we have had to rely on outside vendors to supply the plants for the committee and evaluators – again, raising costs for the program. Fortunately, whittling down the number of plants to a reasonable number, and creating handouts in digital form is allowing us to bring our budget down.

As to the plants, I had hoped that we would purchase seeds for any annuals, and send them directly to the committee and evaluators. That way, the seeds can be started at the appropriate time for each zone. I have heard many complaints that plants, annuals in particular, were not always able to be planted in order to fully evaluate their growth, since it was too early or too late in the season, depending on where the evaluator lived. I still expect that we will have plants to “show”, and Billi Parus and Henry Flowers have generously offered to grow as much as they can. If anyone else on the committee would like to do that, please let me know. We will be sending seeds of those plants, mostly the annuals, to those of the group who want to try propagation.

I know this is a lot to digest, and that changes can be difficult to accept. If you have comments or suggestions, I welcome the opportunity to hear from you. I hope that we can all work together to present Promising Plants in a timely, well-ordered manner, and that even more members will be able to access these materials and enjoy this member benefit.

All the best for the holidays, and here's to making Promising Plants a success in the year 2015!

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