

# Choosing Vegetables to Include in Your Edibles Program

WITH NEW VARIETIES INTRODUCED EACH YEAR, IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO CHOOSE WHICH ONES TO ADD TO YOUR EDIBLES LINEUP.

**By Diane Blazek**

**W**ith all the vegetable/edible varieties on the market, how can you possibly have confidence that you've chosen the right ones for your edibles program? The ones that will actually perform for the home gardener and have them returning for more?

The All-America Selections story is that perfect "story behind the story." The 80-year-old AAS story with more than 700 Winners not only provides enough variety but an excellent testimonial you can share with your customers. Today's consumers are much more discriminating and need a good reason to sort through the many choices presented at retail. In fact, you too probably need some assistance in wading through the many new and older varieties presented by your supplier.

You can recommend the All-America Selections Winners with confidence because every single one has been trialed by vegetable experts in trial grounds across the country, in various growing conditions then have been taste-tested to ensure that only the best entries are designated an AAS Winner award. Thus, our concise but full of meaning tagline gives the brand promise: "Tested Nationally & Proven Locally."

## Before a New Variety Becomes an AAS Winner

The world's best vegetable breeders always have a large number of possible new varieties in their pipeline. When it

comes time for new variety selections and an exceptional variety comes about, those breeders make the decision to enter that new, never-before-sold variety into the AAS Trials. Once that variety is officially entered, an experienced and knowledgeable Comparison Committee chooses the most appropriate varieties already on the market to grow side-by-side with the entry. One comparison may be chosen for growth habit, another for earliness, another for taste, or any combination of the above.

Those entry and comparison seeds are sent to 28 different judges spread out in 17 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces, representing a wide variety of climatic conditions. Those judges come from universities, commercial growers, public gardens, breeding companies, brokers and retailers representing a huge breadth and depth of horticulture experience.

[Editor's note: AAS just recently announced that in 2013, they will conduct the first vegetatively propagated ornamental trials — a departure from the seed-only trials they have done for 80 years. For now, this only includes ornamental crops.]

## What it Takes to Be an AAS Judge/Trial Ground

Not just anyone can be an AAS Judge. There are certain criteria a judge and his respective Trial Ground must meet in order to be approved. They must have:

- A history of conducting side-by-side trials including note-taking and evaluation of performance



*Every single All-America Selections winner has been trialed and taste-tested by vegetable experts in trial grounds across the country.*



# fresh fare

- Evidence of careful and methodical evaluation skills
- A record of conducting trials in an environmentally safe and attractive manner
- A location that is of a distance from already established AAS Trials to ensure unique growing conditions
- Resources to properly conduct maintain and evaluate the trials

## Judging the Entries

Throughout the season, our volunteer judges make precise trial notes on the earliness, growth habit, pest and disease resistance, ease-in-growing, total yield, taste, uniqueness, market qualities and more. At peak maturity, the entry's fruit is tasted and sometimes cooked with, to determine if the entry meets the claims of uniqueness made by the breeder and if the taste is truly superior to the comparisons. Only those

entries that outperform and taste better than the comparisons are considered for a possible award and an AAS Winner designation.

After the judge's scores are tabulated, it is then up to the entering breeder to produce enough seed to meet the demands during the first year of sales. Once that quantity is reached, an official introduction and announcement of the newest AAS Winners is made, falling in November, January or July of every year. Since 2009, this introduction announcement coincides with the seed availability. We call this an "Immediate Introduction," meaning as soon as the announcement is made, that variety is officially available for sale.

The highest achievement attainable by an entry is the All-America Selections Gold Medal award. The Gold Medal designation is only given to entries that are considered breeding breakthroughs and perform accordingly.

Longtime AAS Judge and vegetable breeder

Rob Johnston from Johnny's Selected Seeds adds this advice when choosing varieties: "The typical mixed market gardener is growing dozens of different crops and probably doesn't have ideal conditions or expertise for any of them. So ideal varieties are the ones widely adapted to different weather and soil. Enter AAS Winners — they're usually widely adapted, having scored well in trials in diverse North America locations."

As further proof of the outstanding garden performance many AAS Winners from the 1930s, 40s and 50s are still great selling varieties that are considered industry standards, proving the longevity of our trialing and judging process. A list of all AAS Winners can be found at [www.aaswinners.com](http://www.aaswinners.com). [8]

**Diane Blazek is executive director of All-America Selections. She can be reached at [dblazek@aas-ngb.org](mailto:dblazek@aas-ngb.org) or 630.963.0770.**

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