

2003 Florida Plants of the Year

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The Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association (FNGB) has announced their 2003 Florida Plants of the Year. The Florida Plants of the Year program was established to promote under-used but proven plant material. Today, I'll share some of their selections.

This program features a limited number of plants each year that are judged to have superior characteristics. A selection committee representing the professional horticulture industry from North, Central and South Florida choose the plants. Plants featured in this program are judged to be superior selections on the basis of characteristics such as consumer appeal, low maintenance, survivability and seasonal interest.

You can view the plant selections from previous years at www.fnga.org, which is FNGB's Web site. Select the consumer information section and then select Florida Plants of the Year. You can see color pictures of the plants and gather important information such as the common name, botanical name, hardiness zones, plant characteristics and care requirements. The 2003 selections will be added to the site in the near future.

Florida Plants of the Year for 2003 suitable for our area:

Stokes' Aster, *Stokesia laevis*

Mature Height and Spread:	Foliage 8 to 12 inches tall, 14 to 18 inches wide, flower stalk may reach 16 to 24 inches tall
Classification:	Herbaceous perennial
Landscape use:	Mixed border or massed near front of perennial beds in full sun to light shade
Characteristics:	This Florida native features 2-4 inch flowers ranging in color from deep blue to lavender. The flowers are attractive to butterflies. It tolerates a wide range of soil conditions. It may drop its leaves during a cold winter

Evergreen paspalum, *Paspalum quadrifarium*

Mature height and spread:	3 to 4 feet tall with an equal spread
Classification:	Ornamental grass

Landscape use:	Accent, tall groundcover, mass planting
Characteristics:	This attractive bunch grass maintains a dark green color all year. Blades are broad but roll up and take on a blue-green appearance when grown on the dry side. It is moderately salt tolerant.

Yesterday-today-and-tomorrow, *Brunfelsia grandiflora*

Mature height and spread:	5 to 8 feet tall with an equal spread
Classification:	Flowering shrub
Landscape use:	specimen or color accent
Characteristics:	One of several species all bearing masses of large flat flowers that open purplish-blue and fade to light blue then white. All three colors are noticeable on the plant at the same time. This evergreen shrub has somewhat glossy leaves and continual summer flowering.

Beautyberry, *Callicarpa americana*

Mature height and spread:	4 to 7 feet tall and wide
Classification:	Native deciduous shrub
Landscape use:	Accent or massed in partial or full shade
Characteristics:	The small pinkish-white flowers appear at leaf axils and are attractive to butterflies. Showier are the clusters of brilliant violet to magenta fruits that replace them and encircle the stems at 3 to 6 inch intervals. This deciduous native thrives in shade but flowers and fruits abundantly in more sun. Birds are

	attracted to the berry-like fruit.
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Little Gem Magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora* 'Little Gem'

Mature height and spread:	30 to 40 feet tall, 10 to 15 feet wide
Classification:	Evergreen tree
Landscape Use:	Compact specimen tree
Characteristics:	This moderate grower has compact, upright branches in a narrow form. The dark green leaves with rusty-bronze coloring on the undersides are smaller than those of a standard magnolia. Smaller fragrant white blooms 6 to 8 inches across appear in spring and then emerge sporadically through late summer.

I can't promise that you will readily find these plants at every nursery or garden center. But consumer awareness can help encourage better availability of these plants. Plus FNGA has a good promotion program, which includes pot labels, posters and other point of purchase materials.

So begin looking for some of these plants at a garden center near you.

For more information on gardening in our area, visit the UF-IFAS Extension website for Leon County at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

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