2006 Florida Plants of the Year

The Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) announced their Florida Plants of the Year for 2006.

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.

You can view the plant selections at www.fnga.org. Click on the Florida Plants of the Year logo.

**Florida Plants of the Year for 2006 (Note cold hardiness zone. Okaloosa County is zone 8. Not all in the list are suited for our zone):**

**Cast Iron Plant, Aspidistra ‘Milky Way’**
Hardiness: zones 7 – 10
Mature Height and Spread: 2’ X 2’
Classification: Ground cover, perennial, houseplant
Landscape Use: Used as a perennial for mass planting or as a specimen plant. Also does well as a container plant.
Characteristics: Leaves are glossy, dark green and speckled with white. Tolerates neglect and dimly lit areas and is ideal for shaded gardens.

**Yellow African Bulbine, Bulbine frutescens**
Hardiness: Zone 9B – 11
Mature Height and Spread: 14” – 16” tall with a 24” – 30” spread
Classification: Flowering perennial
Landscape Use: Massed perennial for color or as an accent
Characteristics: Bulbine prefers full sun, has light green succulent foliage and produces many star-shaped yellow or orange flowers late spring to early summer. It can withstand a light frost but should be protected.

**Dwarf Powderpuff, Calliandra emarginata**
Hardiness: Zones 9B – 11
Mature Height and Spread: 5’ – 6’ tall by 6’ wide
Classification: Shrub
Landscape Use: Hedge, foundation planting in mass or as a specimen plant
Characteristics: This dwarf shrub produces silky leaflets which are bronze and turn green as they mature. The small flat bloom is deep red and is produced during warm months.

**African Blue Basil, Ocimum kilimandscharicum X O. basilicum purpurascens**
Hardiness: Zones 8 – 10
Mature Height and Spread: 24” – 36”
Classification: Annual, herb
Landscape Use: Herb garden or as a fragrant ornamental
Characteristics: It prefers full sun and moist soil. Has erect purple blooms and its fragrant leaves can be used for culinary purposes.

**Phalaenopsis Kaleidoscope, Phalaenopsis Baldan’s Kaleidoscope ‘Golden Treasure’**
Hardiness: Zones 10 – 11
Mature Height and Spread: 15" and up
Classification: Tropical orchid
Landscape Use: Striking accent plant for baskets, typically used indoors
Characteristics: Is noted for its stunning coloring and abundant blooming. The flowers have red lips, reddish purple striping and a pale yellow background.

**Wild Indian Date Palm, Phoenix sylvestris**
Hardiness: Zones 9A – 11
Mature Height: Over 40’
Classification: Palm
Landscape Use: Specimen
Characteristics: This fast growing palm has a robust trunk and is drought tolerant.

**Florida Thatch Palm, Thrinax radiata**
Hardiness: Zones 10 – 11
Mature Height and Spread: 20’ tall by 5’ wide
Classification: Palm
Landscape Use: Specimen
Characteristics: An attractive, medium-sized, solitary palm but is not sufficiently cold hardy to withstand our winters.

**Amethyst Falls Wisteria, Wisteria frutescens ‘Amethyst Falls’**
Hardiness: Zones 5 – 9
Mature Height: 10’ – 15’ in height
Classification: Vine, flowering perennial
Landscape Use: Beautiful trained over an arbor or espaliered against a building
Characteristics: This woody deciduous vine produces blue-purple flowers that have a light fragrance.

I can't promise that you'll find these plants at every nursery or garden center but consumer awareness can help encourage better availability. Plus FNGLA has a good promotion program, which includes pot labels, posters and other point of purchase materials. So begin looking for these plants at a garden center near you.

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