The second annual Plant of the Year competition took place at this year’s Chelsea Flower Show following last year’s inaugural event. The competition is for the best new plant introduced at the show or during the previous year and all exhibitors are invited to enter.

All the entries were vetted by RHS staff to ensure that each qualified as ‘new’, then the RHS Plants Advisory Committee drew up a list of 20 finalists. They considered these three qualities in particular:

- Innovation: how different is this plant from what has been seen before?
- Excellence and impact: what level of impact does the plant have? Is it horticulturally excellent?
- Appeal: is the plant likely to have wide appeal?

There were 33 valid entries from which the Plants Advisory Committee drew up a list of 20 finalists. Each was presented to around 80 members of RHS plant committees on the afternoon of Monday 23 May, all the plant committee members voted, and the result was unexpectedly close: just one vote separated Saxifraga ‘Anneka Hope’ from Anemone ‘Wild Swan’ in second place. A second vote covering only the top three plants followed. The result was reversed in this final vote and Anemone ‘Wild Swan’ triumphed as 2011 Chelsea Plant of the Year.
Plant of The Year – again, by just one vote – with Saxifraga ‘Anneka Hope’ in second place. Verbascum ‘Blue Lagoon’ was in third place.

All 20 finalists are profiled here, beginning with the winner and the two runners-up.

1 **Anemone ‘Wild Swan’**
The winner of the 2011 Chelsea Plant of the Year is Anemone ‘Wild Swan’, raised by Elizabeth MacGregor, who runs a nursery under her own name in Scotland, and entered by Hardy’s Cottage Garden Plants.

This lovely new hardy perennial blooms from May to November and each 5–7.5cm pure white flower is shaded and banded with greyish blue on the back. In the morning and evening, when the flowers nod and half close, the blue backs are revealed. Then, for the rest of the day, the flowers open wide and show their pure white faces. The plant is sterile.

Reaching about 40–45cm high, ‘Wild Swan’ grows best in partial shade in humus-rich soil where it is valuable after earlier flowering shade plants have passed their peak.

It was selected from a group of unusually vigorous seedlings chosen from a batch grown from open-pollinated seed of Anemone rupicola. Five or six other anemones were growing nearby in the walled garden at Elizabeth MacGregor’s Kirkcudbright nursery and these included A. rivularis, A. levellii and many A. hupehensis and A. x hybrida cultivars. Subsequent controlled pollinations indicate that a form of A. hupehensis is the other parent.

In the 10 years it has been on trial it has consistently proved to be unusually vigorous and long flowering. **Exhibitor:** Hardy’s Cottage Garden Plants

2 **Saxifraga ‘Anneka Hope’**
In second place came Saxifraga ‘Anneka Hope’, raised by Matthew Ruane and exhibited by Kevock Garden Plants. Matthew Ruane has been breeding silver saxifrages for many years, using S. longifolia, S. callosa and other related species. Selections for vigour, foliage quality and variations of flowering characteristics have been made, and ‘Anneka Hope’ was chosen for its prolific bloom, its red flower stems, its well-silvered rosettes and the elegance of its display.

Reaching about 45cm wide and about 30cm high, it makes an effervescent specimen in a pot or is lovely cascading over a low wall. **Exhibitor:** Kevock Garden Plants

3 **Verbascum ‘Blue Lagoon’**
The first blue-flowered garden Verbascum was voted into third place. Reaching about 75cm in height, with a noticeably upright habit and slender, wiry stems, the flowers of ‘Blue Lagoon’ are a genuine bright blue – a colour not seen before in this genus.

It came about almost by chance as Thompson & Morgan plant breeder Charles Valin worked towards creating a red Verbascum. Red shades usually come from crosses between a yellow-flowered plant and a dark violet-flowered plant. In 2006 Valin grew a wide range of Verbascum species to find one with the deepest possible violet colouring. Among them was a species native to Armenia and Turkey, probably V. armeniacum, and in 2008 he selected one seedling with violet flowers and a slight blue tint. In 2009, among the violet seedlings of this plant was one in an extraordinary Meconopsis blue.

The plant was sent for tissue culture and, unusually, the petals were used as the starting material for micropropagation. This method of propagation enabled the plant to be offered commercially just two years after discovery. **Exhibitor:** Primrose Bank
RUNNERS-UP (listed in alphabetical order)

4 Begonia Apricot Fragrant Falls
In recent years begonias have become increasingly important plants for summer containers, a trend accelerated by the addition of fragrance as a valuable extra feature. The aim of Thompson & Morgan breeder Charles Valin was to add fragrance to their top selling begonia, ‘Illumination Apricot Shades’.

Work began in 2007 by crossing a plant chosen from ‘Niagara Yellow Red’ with an intensely fragrant compact plant with salmon flowers selected from offspring from ‘Aromantics’. This second selection is unusual in passing on its fragrance very well to its offspring, which is not usually the case. More crosses were made in 2008 and, after raising about 3,750 seedlings, one with heavily fragrant, apricot blooms was chosen. The flowers are often quartered and look almost like old-fashioned roses, with a heady fragrance to match – a sweet rose and honey scent with notes of citrus. The petals are light apricot with an orange reverse, creating everchanging shades of colour.

Exhibitor: Class Gardens

5 Brachyscome ‘Magenta Delight’
The first Brachyscome in this vivid shade, ‘Magenta Delight’, is compact and well-branched, reaching about 15–20cm in height and a width of about 20cm. It has fresh green foliage prettily divided into three at the tips. The single flowers have bright magenta pink ray petals around a yellow eye which becomes more honey-coloured as the flowers mature.

Derived from hybrids with B. angustifolia, ‘Magenta Delight’ is the latest in a series of cultivars developed at Outback Plants in Australia, and was created by breeder Roger Elliot, recipient of the RHS Veitch Memorial Medal and board member of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Outback Plants have been breeding brachysomes for about 15 years, and previously created ‘Mauve Delight’, one of the most widely grown cultivars worldwide.

Exhibitor: Plantagogo.com

6 x Heucherella ‘Brass Lantern’
The first cross between Heuchera and Tiarella was introduced by the Lemoine Nursery in France in 1912, and Alan Bloom introduced the still popular ‘Bridget Bloom’ in 1955. Flowers were the primary feature of these early introductions, but more recently the emphasis has switched to the evergreen foliage.

Terra Nova Nurseries of Oregon introduced their first Heuchera in 1988, and when they began work with Tiarella in 1996 they also started to cross the two and have now introduced about 30 heucherellas. This cultivar is one of them.

Making a large and vigorous plant about 50cm high and 60cm wide, the maple-shaped foliage of ‘Brass Lantern’ is glossy coppery gold with red markings in spring, becoming richer and darker in the autumn as it loses its shine and eventually matures to olive and brown. It produces white flowers on reddish stems from spring to late autumn.

Exhibitor: Plantagogo.com

7 x Heucherella ‘Solar Power’
This is another cultivar from the breeding programme at Terra Nova Nurseries, led by Janet Egger. ‘Solar Power’ is especially valuable as, unlike any other yellow-leaved
heucherellas and most yellow-leaved heucheras, it thrives in sun. It has been undamaged in 32°C in full sun.

The elegantly lobed foliage is bright yellow with a slightly variable crimson mottling towards the centre of each lobe; in shade the colouring tends to lime green with red markings. More modest in size than ‘Brass Lantern’, it reaches about 30cm in height and spreads to about 50cm. The UK nursery Plantagogo.com also suggest growing ‘Solar Power’ in hanging baskets.

Exhibitor: Plantagogo.com

8 **Hydrangea macrophylla Avantgarde (‘Hedi’)**

This cultivar is a traditional mophead hydrangea developed by the Hydrangea Breeders Association – but with the addition of some of the newer features which have been incorporated into hydrangeas in recent years.

First of all, the flowerheads, and also the leaves, are unusually large. The former are 25cm across on young plants, so the impact is impressive. However, as the plant ages and branches, subsequent flowerheads are smaller. Also, the flowers change colour intriguingly as the age, opening white, they mature to pale pink (blue on acid soils) then turn to green. Finally, the other special feature of Avantgarde is that it not only flowers in late spring and early summer, but also flowers again later. It does not require vernalization.

Especially valuable as a long flowering pot or container plant, with its large flowerheads and unusually large foliage it needs more moisture than most hydrangeas.

Exhibitor: Miracle Growers Learning Journey

**Lewisia ‘Little Mango’**

This is the third in a series of dwarf, adaptable lewisias developed by Georg Uebelhart of Jelitto Perennial Seeds in Germany. Reaching only about 15cm in height, ‘Little Mango’ has yellow flowers with orange overtones in May and June, then again in September. It does not suffer from rust or basal rot as other lewisias do in less than ideal conditions.

‘Little Mango’ is derived from a plant of the purplish plum-coloured ‘Little Plum’ given to Uebelhart by John Lawson at Inschriach Nursery in Scotland about 20 years ago. This was first stabilized so that it came true from seed, then the peachy pink ‘Little Peach’ was developed from it. Further crosses with ‘Pinkie’ and other lewisias eventually led to ‘Little Mango’.

All three cultivars are unusually tolerant of wet conditions and fully hardy.

Exhibitor: D’Arcy & Everest

**Lilium ‘Firebolt’**

Said by some lily enthusiasts to be the best dark red Oriental hybrid lily, ‘Firebolt’ was developed primarily as a cut flower by Mark Breeding BV in the Netherlands. It is also a good garden lily.

The sultry deep red flowers feature contrasting yellow-green ridges along the length of the buds and as they open are unusual in
11 **Lilium ‘Julie Fowlis’**

This is an example of an OOT lily, created when an Oriental lily is crossed with a trumpet lily, and the resulting plants backcrossed to another Oriental. The result is large-flowered, vigorous plants with an unusually strong scent.

‘Julie Fowlis’ is a new OOT lily created by Arie Vletter of Dutch lily specialists Vletter & den Haan. It is named for the Scottish folk singer; Arie Vletter is a big fan.

It carries large, highly fragrant, vivid pink flowers which are a little darker towards the centre of each tepal and towards the base. With a slender green flash at the base of each tepal, the effect is like a three-pointed star. ‘Julie Fowlis’ is especially easy to grow in any rich but well-drained soil, and although originally developed as a cut flower it will also thrive in the garden.

**Exhibitor:** HW Hyde & Son

12 **Lilium ‘Lankon’**

This is a hybrid between *L. longiflorum*, the familiar Easter Lily, which grows wild on a number of Japanese islands, and *L. lankongense* from Yunnan in China. It brings together the large, pure white trumpets of *L. longiflorum* and the speckled Turks cap flowers of *L. lankongense*. This is the first such hybrid available to gardeners.

Its flowers are intermediate between those of its two parents; each flared, slightly blushed white flower is delicately spotted with tiny freckles and has a pink flush to the back. The flowers are also well-scented and carried on strong stems reaching about 1.2m in height.

Raised in the Netherlands by Erwin Hoogendijk, this cross has been made before experimentally but in this case the use of embryo rescue techniques allowed a seedling to be grown on to develop into a mature plant. ‘Lankon’ is perfectly hardy, is a good perennial in the garden, and multiplies well in a fertile, well-drained neutral to acid soil.

**Exhibitor:** HW Hyde & Son

13 **Lobelia erinus Waterfall Blue Ice (Waterfall Series)**

Traditionally, lobelias for hanging baskets have been raised from seed but in recent years plant breeders have begun to capitalize on the fact that they are inherently perennial plants and developed forms intended to be propagated vegetatively. In doing so they have been able to refine their growth habit, significantly reduce burn-out in hot dry spells, increase the flower size and also create new colours.

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and patterns.

In this style, Scott Trees of Ball Horticultural Company in California created the semi-trailing Waterfall Series. His latest raising is ‘Waterfall Blue Ice’, a vibrant bicolour. The large, vivid blue flowers feature a large, bright, pure white centre to each flower, clearly delineated from its blue border. This is probably the most eye-catching basket lobelia yet.

Exhibitor: Class Gardens

Nepenthes ‘Princess’

Rob Cantley at Borneo Exotics not only makes available Nepenthes species from legal wild collections, but also breeds new cultivars. ‘Princess’ is a cross between N. mirta and N. ventricosa, both from the Philippines. Seed of both parents was collected legally from the wild and germinated at the Sri Lankan nursery in 1997. Hybridization took place in September 2005 and this plant was chosen from the resulting seedlings.

Nepenthes ventricosa has almost white pitchers with a few red speckles and a vivid pink lip, while N. mirta, only described as recently as 1998, has reddish, heavily spotted pitchers with a pale lip. ‘Princess’ features well spotted pitchers with a rich red lip.

This is a vigorous hybrid which can be grown in a glasshouse or on a bright windowsill with only a little direct sun. Mist regularly to maintain high humidity.

‘Princess’ was named in honour of Catherine Middleton, now the Duchess of Cambridge.

Exhibitor: Class Gardens

Phalaenopsis Ming-Hsing Eagle

This is a fine example of the current trend for larger, pastel-coloured, cascading Phalaenopsis that are being introduced into the European market from Taiwan. A hybrid between P. Arai and P. New Eagle from Taiwan breeder WT Chien, the cross was first made in 1998.

It is not unusual for an older orchid hybrid to enter the trade as a new line for the consumer: several small nurseries in Taiwan are making interesting hybrids and holding a variety of good old and new cultivars. Some of these are then selected for mericloning (vegetative propagation in the laboratory) to suit the current market.

Exhibitor: Taiwan Orchid Growers Association

Rhododendron ‘Rabatz’

Most good rhododendrons with deep red flowers tolerate cold less well than rhododendrons in other colours. However, starting in 1978, world renowned German Rhododendron breeder Hans Hachmann began to develop a good deep red with attractive foliage
and which is cold tolerant. ‘Hachmann’s Feuerschein’, a hybrid of *R. griersonianum*, was the first but he continued the work, crossing and back crossing, until in 2001 he raised ‘Rabatz’, which is hardy to -22°C.

Flowering in late May, and reaching about 1.5m in height and 1.8m across in ten years, ‘Rabatz’ has bright fiery red, widely flared flowers showing off the darker red speckling and contrasting bright yellow anthers.

Hans Hachmann was awarded the Gold Medal of the American Rhododendron Society in 1996. **Exhibitor:** Millais Nurseries

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### Sarracenia ‘Johnny Marr’

Hampshire Carnivorous Plants have a continuing programme of developing new hybrid sarracenias. *Sarracenia* ‘Johnny Marr’, named for the guitarist formerly of The Smiths and later of The Cribs, was selected for three main reasons. Firstly, it is a vigorous selection which makes it easier for non-specialists to grow. Its pitchers are also unusually long-lasting and their colour is also very striking: in spring, the pitchers are a bright coppery shade then later in the season they turn to dark burgundy.

‘Johnny Marr’ is a complex hybrid, created in 1999: *S. flava* var. *cuprea* was crossed with *S. purpurea* subsp. *venosa* and one of the resulting seedlings was backcrossed with *S. flava* var. *cuprea*. It first flowered in 2003, and the bright coppery colouring of the pitchers proved to be a stable feature. **Exhibitor:** Hampshire Carnivorous Plants

### Streptocarpus ‘Sioned’

From Dibley’s Nurseries, the Streptocarpus specialists whose ‘Harlequin Blue’ won the Plant of The Year award last year, ‘Sioned’ is another from their own breeding programme.

Flowering continuously for 10 months of the year, each bloom opens in rich cream, almost yellow on the upper two lobes, and with vivid magenta pink veining on the lower lobes shaded with orange in the throat. The yellow colouring becomes paler as the flowers mature.

Ideally suited to a bright position on an indoor windowsill, do not allow the plant to receive full midday sunshine. Keep it slightly dry, feed regularly with high potash feed while flowering and remove dead flowers promptly.

‘Sioned’ was chosen from a batch of seedlings derived from crossing two existing Dibley’s cultivars, ‘Sioned’ first flowered in 2008. **Exhibitor:** Dibley’s Nurseries

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### Uncinia rubra Everflame (‘Belinda’s Find’)

This colourful variegated cultivar of the evergreen sedge *Uncinia rubra* features long, slender purplish green leaves striped in various shades of pink; the result is an eye-catching plant. It makes a compact subject about 20–30cm high.

It was first spotted as a sport of *U. rubra* by Belinda White, dispatch manager at Lyndale Nurseries in Auckland, New Zealand, but proved unstable. Seed from it was sown under the eye of nursery director Malcolm Woolmore, and from those seedlings one that best showed off its variegation and which was also very stable was selected for introduction. Everflame is ideal as a specimen in a pot, or at the front of a border that does not dry out, in sun or light shade. **Exhibitor:** John Woods Nurseries

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Graham Rice is Editor-in-Chief of the RHS Encyclopedia of Perennials. He also writes the New Plants blog at http://rhsnewplants.co.uk