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Chelsea Plant of the Year

THE SEVENTH annual Chelsea Plant of The Year competition gave us a genuinely new and innovative winning plant, but one which came about in the most familiar of ways,

together with a wide range of other contenders. The aim of the competition is to bring the best new plants to the attention of visitors to the Show and, more importantly, to the attention of the wider gardening

A diverse range of cultivars was in contention for this year's award. GRAHAM RICE discusses the plants and their breeding

public. All the successful plants since the first winner in 2010 have gone on to be widely grown and to enjoy significant commercial success.

The judging criteria are very specific; plants are assessed on the following features:

Innovation – Is the plant genuinely new, does it show features not seen before and how significant are they? An intergeneric hybrid seen for the first time is given more weight than a new colour form of a familiar plant.

Appeal – Will the plant be popular with gardeners over the long term? Enduring popularity is important, potential 'one-hit wonders' are seen as less significant.

Excellence and Impact – The individual specimen on display must show off the plant's best qualities, its impact is part of what convinces both judges and gardeners.

Winning plants must combine all three features.

Those are the criteria used in judging, but there are other requirements in order to be accepted in the first place. The one that causes the most to fall stipulates that every plant must be a new introduction launched at Chelsea this year, or introduced for sale since June 2015. Plants already launched at a public show in the UK cannot be accepted for entry, but plants launched at a trade show since June 2015 can be entered.



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This rule can be difficult for plant breeders and nurseries to meet and difficult for the RHS to police. For example, *Acer shirasawanum* Moonrise ('Munn001'), a lovely small tree, was entered by Hillier Nurseries and was initially accepted. Hillier are promoting the plant heavily but it was discovered at the last moment that it had been included, without fanfare, on last year's Chelsea exhibit staged by Hippopottering Nursery. Hillier were under the impression that they had exclusive UK rights to the plant but that turned out not to be the case.

Entrants are asked how many plants are available for sale and that is an important factor. What is the point of crowning a new introduction Plant of The Year if none are available to buy?

The final shortlist included an exceptional range of different plant types including five perennials, four patio plants, three rhododendrons and two roses (but no other shrubs), two indoor plants, a bulb, a cut flower, a vegetable and one climber. The last, *Clematis koreana* Amber ('Wit141205'), turned out to be the winner. *Geum* 'Scarlet Tempest' came second and *Calendula* PowerDaisy Sunny ('Kercalsun') came third.

1 *Clematis koreana* Amber ('Wit141205')

This is the first double-flowered, yellow *Clematis*. Not a large-flowered hybrid, but a selection of *C. koreana*, a species from northwest China and North and South Korea. It belongs to the Atragene Group, along with the more familiar *C. alpina*.

Amber is double-flowered with pale, creamy yellow sepals, the outer ones slightly flushed red. Flowering is mainly in May and June but there is a significant second flush in September. It flowers on old and new wood and the flowers are followed by large, silky seedheads.

It is also resistant to clematis wilt.

Amber was entered as a cultivar of *C. chiisanensis* but soon after the show RHS botanists confirmed that *C. chiisanensis* should be treated as a synonym of *C. koreana* var. *carunculosa*. It was found as a seedling of *C. koreana* 'Love Child'.

■ 2.0–2.4m × 0.9–1.2m. H6. Marco de Wit, Boskoop, the Netherlands.

2 *Geum* 'Scarlet Tempest'

This cultivar has large, orange, semi-double flowers with scarlet veins. The first are 6.5cm across but later ones are 5.5cm. It blooms prolifically from April to October on well-branched plants.

The raiser, whose *Anemone* 'Wild Swan' won Chelsea Plant of The Year in 2010, crossed *G.* 'Beech House Apricot' with *G. chiloense* 'Red Dragon' and selected 'Scarlet Tempest' from the three seedlings. A sterile hybrid, it is more red than cultivars such as 'Dolly North', 'Firestorm' and 'Prinses Juliana'.

■ 55cm × 50cm. H7. Elizabeth MacGregor, Kirkcudbright, Scotland.



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3 *Calendula* PowerDaisy Sunny ('Kercalsun')

Completely new types of patio plant are relatively uncommon, most ➤

are simply new versions of old favourites, and while the annual cultivars of *Calendula* are both familiar and popular this is a different plant altogether. Making a wide, low and bushy mound the neat, dark green, mildew-free foliage is the ideal background for the exceptionally long succession (March to November) of flat, fully double, sterile, yellow flowers.

Cambridgeshire breeder Tim Kerley has crossed cultivars of the familiar hardy annual, *C. officinalis*, with two unfamiliar species: the critically endangered *C. maritima* and the shrubby *C. suffruticosa*. Over the last 10 years his selections of these crosses have been refined from unruly plants 1m tall to the neat, compact and prolific PowerDaisy Sunny. More colours are on the way.

■ 30cm x 80cm H3. Tim Kerley, Kerley & Co., Cambridgeshire, UK.



RUNNERS-UP (listed in alphabetical order)

4 *Chrysanthemum* 'Rossano Charlotte' (Rossano Series)

Cut flowers are rare as entrants to this competition so it was refreshing to see this striking new cultivar entered by the National Chrysanthemum Society. *Chrysanthemum* 'Rossano Charlotte' is a two-purpose cultivar, and the first pink and green bicoloured chrysanthemum.

It is the latest addition to the well established Rossano Series. Grown as a cut flower, raiser Deliflor recommend it be disbudded so it will develop a stem 1m long with an exceptionally long vase life. 'Rossano Charlotte' is also being sold as a pot plant under the name of Princess Charlotte.

■ 1m. H2. Deliflor Chrysanten BV, the Netherlands.

5 *Gerbera* Garvinea Sweet Memories ('Garmemories') (Garvinea Sweet Series)

Extensive breeding work continues to improve *Gerbera* hybrids in terms of their hardiness, colour range, productivity, flowering season and flower form and colour. As with *Calendula* PowerDaisy Sunny, wild species not previously used in their breeding have been added to the mix to significantly widen the gene pool. Last year's Plant of The Year shortlist included *Gerbera* Garvinea Sweet Surprise ('Garsurprise') which had a new selection of *G. viridiflora* in its background, while *Gerbera* Garvinea Sweet Glow was placed third in 2013.

In the case of Garvinea Sweet Memories, blood from *G. aurantiaca* has been added to the mix. The result is a plant with the added hardiness of this series, and on which far more flowers are open at the

same time, and which come in a succession from spring until the first frost. The flowers open almost red in colour, maturing to rose-pink with a golden-eyed crown of white in the centre.

■ 30 x 30cm. H3. Marcel van Vemde, Florist Holland BV, the Netherlands.

6 *Iris* 'Terre à Silex'

Since 1892 the Cayeux family has been developing new *Iris* cultivars in France, 160km south of Paris, and today Richard Cayeux continues the family tradition. One of his main aims, for many years, has been to create an iris with black falls, white standards and a red beard. 'Terre à Silex' is the best of this type so far, and an improvement on his 2014 shortlisted entry 'Domino Noir'. It features falls with a broad band of black around the edge fading to purple, and white with purple veins in the throat topped with a vivid, bright orange beard. The standards are white with hints of a purple picotee and the whole flower is nicely ruffled.

'Terre à Silex' has 'World Premier', 'Futuriste', 'Starring' and another Amoena seedling in its





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background and was selected from seedlings of a cross made in 2007. Its name translates as 'flint rich soil', which describes the soil on the Cayeux nursery.

■ 85 × 35cm. H7. Richard Cayeux, Cayeux Iris, La Carcaudiere, France.

7 *Lilium* 'Perfect Joy'

Lily breeding is big business. New lilies are primarily developed in the Netherlands and mainly for cut-flower use, so it is exciting to see a British lily breeder heading in a different direction.

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Disappointed by the range of colours, especially bicolors, available in Asiatic lilies for growing in pots, Stuart Paton decided to develop his own. After 15 years of work, trialling an amazing 35,000 seedlings a year, four new cultivars have been selected and 'Perfect Joy' is the pick. Especially impressive is the clean distinction between the rich pink of the outer half of each tepal and the pure white of the central half, with its clearly defined zone of dark spots.

'Perfect Joy' is neat enough for pots or it can be grown at the front of a well-drained border and treated as a hardy bulb.

Stuart Paton, and his twin brother Ian, also hold the record for the largest pumpkin grown in Britain: 854kg!

■ 35cm. H5. Stuart Paton, Pinetops Nurseries, Hampshire, UK.

8 *Nepeta* × *faassenii* 'Crystal Cloud'

Catmints are undervalued as border perennials but in recent years there have been some good new introductions. Two were entered this year but only *Nepeta* × *faassenii* 'Crystal Cloud' made it to the shortlist. Graham Spencer of Plants

For Europe, who is marketing the plant, told me about it.

'The special feature is the colour,' he said, 'which is a soft, pale lilac, which is unusual in *Nepeta* – there is a hint of pink in it, so it is not quite a pale blue. The plant has a tidy, upright habit, more erect than most cultivars and the leaf is a good grey-green colour and is distinctly longer and less wide than other cultivars.'

'We think it would look good in Oudolf-style planting or in traditional English cottage-style schemes, particularly if combined with shrub roses.'

'Crystal Cloud' was found in 2013 as an open-pollinated seedling by Sonia Wright at her nursery.

■ 50 × 50cm. H7. Sonia Wright, Devizes, Wiltshire, UK.

9 *Petunia* NightSky ('Kleph15313')

All over the world, major plant breeding companies are developing new petunias. They are big business, and types with new flower patterns are constantly sought. NightSky is the first with speckled flowers, the name being derived from the deep violet-blue background colour spotted with white speckles in a range of sizes.

The crucial factor in patterned ➤



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petunias is that the colour form must not only be attractive but be stable. Breeder Antonella Capo spent some years stabilizing the pattern before it was released.

‘The variety is proven stable,’ Richard Petri of Selecta Klemm told me, ‘but reacts as all other modern patterned petunias to certain environment conditions. It is proven that high day and very low night temperatures lead to whiter petals and a disappearing night-sky effect.



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This effect will turn round when summer brings milder night temperatures.’ Asked about the origins of the cultivar, he added cryptically: ‘You won’t get an answer from a master of the finest dishes when you ask him for his recipes.’

■ 40cm x 50cm. H2. Antonella Capo, Selecta Klemm, Germany.

10 *Phalaenopsis* Sunny Smell

Phalaenopsis are now Britain’s favourite houseplant, with flowers available in a vast variety of colours and patterns. However, adding fragrance while maintaining flower quality has proved difficult: most scented cultivars have had short stems, a short flowering season and have not been widely available. Unfortunately, its fragrance was not at its best during the assessment.

Phalaenopsis Sunny Smell, a grex hybrid created by crossing Gold Tris with *P. equestris*, brings together *P. amboinensis* and *P. violacea* for the scent, plus *P. equestris* for its relatively large flowers and neat habit. It has been sold in supermarkets this spring and this availability sets it apart from the scented *P. Tzu Chiang Balm* which was launched at the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show in 2009 but is rarely seen.

Sunny Smell, with its pale, apricot-yellow, 4cm-wide flowers suffused in pink and with a rich pink lip, was selected by Matthias Bremkens in 2009. It arose from plants resulting from a cross made by his father, Johannes Bremkens, in 2006.

■ 40 x 30cm. H1a. Matthias and Johannes Bremkens, Bremkens Orchids, Germany.

11 *Primula vialii* ‘Alison Holland’

When *Primula vialii* was discovered in China by the French missionary and botanist Père Delavay it was widespread. Soon after, George



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Forrest, who introduced it in 1906, described seeing it ‘in masses’. But all the plants were of the form with which we are now familiar – red buds above opening to lilac flowers below, creating a dramatic spike. ‘Alison Holland’ is the first white-flowered cultivar of this species.

Gary McDermott of Harperley Hall Nurseries, who introduced the plant, told me: ‘It turned up as a seedling in the Northumberland garden of John Holland. He knew it was special and collected seed from



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it. The seed failed to germinate so it has been propagated by tissue culture.' He also pointed out that 'Alison Holland' is more vigorous and flowers for longer than the usual type. It is named for John Holland's daughter-in-law.

■ 30–50 × 20–30cm. H5. John Holland, Northumberland.

12 *Rhododendron* 'Hachmann's Orakel'

This is the first year that rhododendrons have made the shortlist, and here there are three. This new cultivar brings us a combination of excellent garden habit and striking dark purple flowers with a bold, blackberry-coloured blotch.

'It's a little bit like 'Purple Splendour', which has been around for years,' said David Millais of Millais Nurseries who are introducing the plant. 'But unlike 'Purple Splendour' it really is a very clean-growing plant. 'Purple Splendour' has a lot of problems with leaf spots and disease and general straggleness. This is a neater growing plant with a very striking flower. It has a nice, distinctive blackberry blotch, flowering late in May and early June. It was bred in north Germany and is particularly tough, it will take -24°C.'



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Developed by Holger Hachmann, it is the result of crossing two of his earlier hybrids, 'Pfauenauge' and 'Galaxis', and was named in 2011.

■ 40 × 40cm. H7. Holger Hachmann, Barmstedt, Germany.

13 *Rhododendron* 'Huisman's Sun Star'

This yellow, double-flowered, heavily scented azalea is an improvement on Donald Waterer's similar 1959 hybrid, 'Imago'.

David Millais of Millais Nurseries explained its special features: 'The flowers are that much bigger than those of 'Imago', it's a more impressive flower. Very fragrant, it has good foliage in the autumn, and it has nice distinctive colours from when it first opens in salmon-pink, and then as it goes through the yellows to an orangey colour.' The buds are tinged with pink to make a very appealing flower cluster, and the plant is hardy to -20°C.

Developed in the Netherlands by Tijs Huisman, it was derived from seed sent by Seattle azalea enthusiast Fred Minch.

■ 60 × 30cm. H7. Tijs Huisman, Drenthe, The Netherlands.

14 *Rhododendron* 'Prinses Máxima'

This distinctive, double-flowered cultivar, has a petaloid calyx, creating what in a primrose would be called a hose-in-hose flower form. It features creamy white flowers heavily spotted in crimson, with an especially dense concentration of spots on the upper petal.

The complex parentage of 'Prinses Máxima' features unnamed seedlings bred by its raiser, Tijs Huisman, along with 'Cosmopolitan', 'Goldkrone', 'Scintillation' and 'Whitney's Tigerlily'. The plant is hardy to -20°C and is named for the Dutch princess who is married to Crown Prince of the Netherlands.

■ 50 × 40cm. H7. Tijs Huisman, Drenthe, the Netherlands.

15 *Rosa* Roald Dahl ('Ausowlish')

Twenty-first-century roses need more than attractive flowers, and in Roald Dahl a number of important features come together. 'When we first saw this rose on the trials field about 10 years ago we saw something special,' Michael Marriott from David Austin Roses told the assembled voters at this year's Chelsea >



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Plant of the Year meeting. 'But unlike the other good cultivars we saw that year this one stayed really healthy. It has lovely apricot-coloured flowers, the buds are peach-coloured, and it's very free-flowering.' It is also neat in growth, bushy and free-flowering, has few thorns and the flowers are unusually tolerant of bad weather.

Roald Dahl was picked out from 96,000 seedlings grown that year, and is the latest from David Austin in more than 70 years of breeding new roses.

■ 1.2 × 1m. H6. David Austin, David Austin Roses, Wolverhampton, UK



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16 *Rosa Sandringham* ('Beamolly')

Three features make Sandringham notable among the mass of new rose introductions seen each year. Firstly, this is a multi-purpose rose.

Reaching 60–90cm in height, it can be grown as a bush rose in a sunny or partially shaded border, as a specimen in a small garden or in a group if space allows; it can be grown in a large container; and it also makes a good short climber on an obelisk or on a cottage or bungalow wall.

The latest in the Peter Beales Modern Classics series, it was selected from 2010's hybrids. Ian Limmer of Peter Beales Roses says the plant has 'medium-sized, fully double blooms in deep pink with an absolutely wonderful fragrance. It has a good flowering season, flowering in June and July and again in September and October'.

■ 1.2 × 0.9m. H6. Peter Beales Roses, Attleborough, UK.

17 *Solanum tuberosum* + *S. melongena*, Egg And Chips Plant

Following the launch of a tomato grafted on to a potato (TomTato) in 2013, Thompson & Morgan have now gone a step further with the Egg And Chips Plant, which is an aubergine



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grafted on to a potato. At the presentation of the plants to the judges Michael Perry of Thompson & Morgan said: 'Each plant will give you three to four, bitterness-free, easy to ripen aubergines and around a kilo of late-cropping white potatoes. There is no change to the flavour of each vegetable.'

In the search for the perfect combination of an easy-cropping aubergine and a versatile potato cultivar, plants were trialled for many years with different aubergine cultivars grafted on to different potato cultivars. Understandably, Thompson & Morgan will not disclose the cultivars chosen to make up this unlikely union.

■ 45 × 30cm. H1c. Thompson & Morgan, Ipswich, UK.

18 *Solenostemon scutellarioides* Campfire ('Uf12823')

After many years out of fashion in the UK, gardeners are again beginning to realise what superb summer foliage plants coleus can be, in containers or in exotic borders. Their continuing popularity in the US encouraged the Ball Horticultural Company in Chicago and the University of Florida to collaborate on developing new cultivars. Campfire is the most distinctive.

Developed by David G Clark and Grayson M Clark of Florida Foundation Seed Producers, who have developed around 50 *Solenostemon* cultivars so far, the pink-tinged coppery foliage of Campfire is unusually vivid and intensifies in full sun. Importantly, it produces no flowers to detract from the display until very late in the season. It was first trialled in 2012 and is now widely available.

■ 35–90 × 60–90cm. H2. David G Clark and Grayson M Clark, Florida Foundation Seed Producers, USA.



20 *Zantedeschia* 'Nashville'

In recent decades the development of *Zantedeschia* cultivars has moved towards compact plants for summer containers, with an increasingly wide range of colours and colour combinations being created.

Matthew Smith of Brighter Blooms, who entered the plant, told the judges that 'Nashville' would build upon the success of the popular purple and white bicolor, 'Picasso'. 'In 2004, Sande selected two of their own parent lines. They were crossed to combine a short, yellow, patio variety with a bicoloured 'Picasso' type. In 'Nashville', not only have they achieved a compact plant, they have created a unique bicolor, with a creamy yellow centre and a wide mauve brim which turns to deep purple as the flower matures.'

■ 30 × 20cm. H3. Sande Group BV, North Holland, the Netherlands.

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19 *Streptocarpus* 'Amy'

Streptocarpus 'Harlequin Blue', also from Dibleys, was the first winner of the Chelsea Plant of The Year competition in 2010. Over the years their extensive breeding programme has continued to generate fine new introductions, some of which have been shortlisted before.

Prolific flowering over a long period plus new and dramatic flower colours and markings are a feature of their introductions, and 'Amy' combines these attributes. It is a cross between two of Lynne Dibley's earlier selections, was selected in 2014, and stock has been built up

rapidly for sale.

The underlying flower colour is white, but the blooms are very heavily veined and blotched in rich, deep purple creating a noticeably sultry effect. 'The amount of flower on a mature plant is phenomenal,' said breeder Lynne Dibley, 'we've had 50 blooms open at any one time and this is true for the eight months of its flowering season. 'Amy' also has a good structure, the strong flower stems help prevent the blossoms becoming bruised.'

■ 25 × 40cm. H1c. Lynne Dibley, Dibleys, Ruthin, Wales.

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