

## IWGS winners for 2005 New Waterlily Competition

**Each year exciting new waterlily hybrid introductions energize the aquatic plant industry, but steady sales of tried-and-true customer favorites also keep sales flourishing.**

N. 'Blue Aster', hybridized by Charles Winch, was voted Best New Tropical Waterlily.

Each year exciting new waterlily hybrid introductions energize the aquatic plant industry, but steady sales of tried-and-true customer favorites also keep sales flourishing.

This year is no exception with the International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society's winners for the 2005 New Waterlily Competition and the three top Aquatic Plant Selections for 2006, which includes a more than 100-year-old hardy lily.

The tropical waterlily winners are singing the blues this year with the best new waterlily and best tropical *Nymphaea* 'Blue Aster' from Charles Winch of Australia and the second best tropical, N. 'Black and Blue' from Rich Sacher of American Aquatic Gardens in New Orleans. The best new hardy N. 'Maria' from Andreas Protopapas in Cyprus and the second best hardy N. 'Shady Lady' from Hazorea Aquatics in Israel showcase the top lilies from the growing international presence in the competition.

"We've always been an international group," says Paula Biles, executive director for the IWGS. "But it was surprising to see the number of non-U.S. lilies entered in the competition this year."

N. 'Maria', hybridized by Andreas Protopapas, was voted Best New Hardy.

In fact, three out of the four winners were from overseas growers. Sacher, the only U.S. grower to win and a previous winner—best in show in 2000 for N. 'Star of Zanzibar'—says 'Black and Blue' is a result of his own interest in waterlilies with very dark leaves, a trend that reaches beyond Sacher's garden.

"From a distance, the leaves look almost black," Sacher says. "Among hobbyists, there is a growing interest in waterlilies with more striking leaves. These variations add interest to the pond, even if the lily is not in bloom or the flower is not open. I think this is why my entry got some attention."

Craig Presnell, waterlily hybridizer and owner of Luster Aquatic Nursery in Zolfo Springs, Fla., who specializes in tropical lilies, says his customers are also likely to look past the traditional color of the flower when looking for something new this year.

"I think just about everybody is looking for color in the pads," he says. "I think they still prefer the blue-purple range [for blooms]."

N. 'Black and Blue', hybridized by Rich Sacher, was voted 2nd Best Tropical.

Along with more color in the pads is a trend toward variegated foliage, Biles says. Another trend in the lily competition shows greater interest in the interior portion of the flower.

"We're seeing new petal forms, especially in the interior section with a look of an anemone," Biles says.

She says the competition also has room for smaller lilies in both the tropical and hardy categories.

"We have consistently had very few entries for small lilies, and there's a general lack of new, small, attractive lilies," Biles says. "I think these lilies have the potential to sweep the market, especially with the popularity of container gardens and smaller ponds."

N. 'Shady Lady', hybridized by Hazorea Aquatics, was voted 2nd Best Hardy.

The IWGS picks for best aquatic plants this year include N. 'Wood's White Knight,' a night-blooming tropical waterlily; N. 'James Brydon,' a hardy lily that was originally grown in the Dreer Nursery in 1899; and *Pontederia cordata*, a marginal commonly known as pickerel rush.

These three plants were selected by a panel of IWGS experts and were judged on many factors including tendency to bloom prolifically, reliability, beauty, consistency, broad appeal, availability and vigor.

“The selection committee is primarily growers and retailers who are looking for plants that are easily grown, reliable, and can flourish in a variety of places,” Biles says. “We recommend these plants to add to your repertoire without hesitation.”

Biles says the IWGS is looking to expand the selections next year to include lotus.

#### Market Outlook

Presnell says he sees many growing trends, including an increase in fuller flowers with broader petals—particularly in the hybrids coming out of Thailand. He says they feature broader petals this year than their American counterparts.

Some of the most recent hybrids from Australian trendsetter, Winch, now boast more than 50 petals. Winch began importing tropicals from the United States to Australia in the 1950s, when most lilies had about 20 petals. Other varieties, such as N. ‘King of Siam’ from Thailand introduced by Sacher in 2002, have more than 100 petals.

Sacher says he is excited about what he calls the “synergism in water gardening around the world.” The exchange of information and plants is proceeding at a rapid pace, which is good for the industry, he says.

“About 10 years ago, there were very few people in the field besides Perry Slocum and Kirk Strawn, and now people are doing it all over the world,” Sacher says. “In the last five years or so, there has been a lot more contact with Asia. I think we will see an explosion of new waterlilies in the next 10 years from Asia.”

Hybrids continue to arrive from Israel as well. Bob Larson, president of LilyBLOOMS in North Canton, Ohio, will be introducing N. ‘Jerusalem Dawn’ through Hazorea Aquatics in Israel this year. He is one of Hazorea’s largest U.S. importers.

John Loggins, owner of Lone Star Aquatic Nursery in College Station, Texas, says this year is his biggest for lotus. Loggins says he tends to sell out of lotus by the end of March, but this year he was almost out by the end of February.

For marginals, Presnell says he sees an increase in his market for plants that bloom through the summer and anything with the tropical look.

“We’ve added one called rose marsh gentian; they’re all natives that bloom in the summer up until the frost,” he says.

Presnell has also added summer blooming aquatic coreopsis and sky flower, with prolific blue blooms.

Randy McDonald, president of McDonald’s Aquatic Nurseries, is introducing a new canna this year named ‘Sun of Ra.’ This new pastel-colored canna stands in stark contrast to the bold colors of bright yellow ‘Ra,’ pink ‘Erebus,’ red ‘Endeavor,’ and dark orange ‘Taney,’ which were all produced between 1969 and 1972 by Longwood Gardens.

#### Tried and True

Despite the wealth of new plant material on the market this year, Larson continues to prosper with tried-and-true favorites.

“The old staples are what you make your money on,” he says.

Loggins says he continues to work with plants he loves at his nursery, and these varieties give him more than enough to work with each year.

“I don’t grow anything that I don’t personally like,” he says.

He will be introducing a red tropical lily, N. ‘Frankly Scarlet,’ to the market this year and says he will continue with a red lotus, *Nelumbo* ‘Red Scarf,’ which he has had success with the last few seasons.

Larson suggests several plants that continue to sell well for him year after year, including water hyacinth, hornwort, anacharis and water lettuce. Others, like dwarf cattails, pickerel rush, zebra rush, corkscrew rush and marsh marigold, continue to make up the majority of his marginal sales.

Larson also carries eight to 10 varieties of Louisiana iris, merchandised by color, that continue perform well with his

customers year after year.

He also sells a variety of standby waterlilies by color and says that customers respond well to products arranged in this straight-forward way.

“We sell a ton of them that way,” he says. “Some of the old standards, like a N. ‘Black Princess’ for reds, and for your pink, N. ‘Mayla’ has been a really good seller.”

Standby tropical marginals, such as umbrella palm, canna and taro, also sell well year after year, Larson says, especially the dwarf varieties.

As far as competition with plants from big-box stores, Larson stresses the importance of always adapting and changing to fill a niche they can't.

“Business changes every year,” he says. “With big-box stores bringing in lilies from China, it's hard to compete. Sure, if you're just growing waterlilies, it's going to be tough.”

His advice: diversify your product line as much as possible to provide what they can't.

### IWGS Picks a Sure Thing

Each year the International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society chooses three plants it would recommend as proven winners. A panel of IWGS experts judge their picks on many factors, including tendency to bloom prolifically, reliability, beauty, consistency, broad appeal, availability and vigor.

“The selection committee is primarily growers and retailers who are looking for plants that are easily grown, reliable, and can flourish in a variety of places,” says Paula Biles, executive director for the IWGS. “We recommend these plants to add to your repertoire without hesitation.”

These are their choices for 2006.

N. ‘Wood’s White Knight’ was voted a proven winner in the Tropical Waterlily category by the IWGS.

N. ‘James Brydon’ was voted a proven winner in the Hardy Waterlily category by the IWGS.

Pontederia cordata ‘Pickerel Rush’ was voted a proven winner in the marginal category by the IWGS.]