

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

And the winner is...

By Cynthia Brian

"People are always in good company when they are doing what they really enjoy." ~Samuel Butler



Award winners in the garden world, Black-Eyed Susan and 2018 Coreopsis and Daisies.

Photos Cynthia Brian



The bright fluorescent pink of Chinese Fringe.



Cut a branch from a gorgeous magnolia to highlight the end of winter.

In the first three months of the year, we get to be bystanders at numerous red carpet events. Hello awards season! The Golden Globes, People's Choice, Screen Actors Guild Awards, the Grammy's, and the Oscars are all highlights. Add the Olympics to this year's lineup and we have a full roster of gold, silver and bronze. Over the years I've been privileged to enjoy my share of walking the red carpet in the entertainment industry, and in the plant world, we have our winners, too.

The Perennial Plant Association awarded *Allium Milnenium* the plant of the year. It boasts glossy green leaves with a profusion of large, rosy-purple clusters of flowers that bloom in mid-summer. As butterfly magnets, alliums are beautiful as well as being deer and rabbit resistant. The Perennial Plant of the Year program showcases outstanding perennials that grow in a variety of climates, are disease free, and are low maintenance. A few of the past winners over the years have included lavender, which deer and rabbits won't eat as well as dianthus, phlox, black-eyed Susan (*rudbeckia*), echinacea, salvia, catmint, sage and coreopsis.

The National Garden Bureau also designates award winners annually. For 2018, the winning bulb is the tulip,

the vegetable is the beet, the perennial is the coreopsis, and the star of containers and hanging baskets is the *Calibrachoa*.

With the unusually warm weather we've experienced this February, gardens have exploded into blooms more than a month earlier than in previous years. With the slightest breeze, the sky rains white petals from pear and plum trees while hillsides and paths are lined with dancing daffodils.

The vivid, paint-box colors of tulips are filling our souls with joy. Part of the lily family and relatives of alliums, tulips comprises 150 species with over 3,000 varieties. Although we plant them in fall after four to six weeks of cooling for spring sprouting, they can be forced to bloom in winter. People often ask me why tulip bulbs need to be refrigerated before planting. The answer is that in their native habitats where winters are colder, they would go dormant allowing for the bulbs to sprout roots while the development of the embryonic leaves and flowers inside the bulb occur. I lived in Holland for 18 months where "tulpen" were the pride of every household, even tough tulips originated in Asia. Did you know that the Netherlands

produce most of the world's annual tulip crop exceeding four billion bulbs annually? Tulip mania (*tulpenmanie*) reached its crescendo in 1637 when the bubble collapsed, and overnight, many rich traders became paupers. One bulb could buy a house on the Amsterdam canal. Folly! According to the Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center, the United States is the biggest importer of Dutch bulbs to the tune of \$1.3 million in wholesale prices annually. The colors of the tulip have significant meaning: red equals love, purple represents loyalty, and white whispers, "I'm sorry!"

The winning edible of the year is the beet and I am so thrilled as this is probably my favorite of all of the root vegetables. I planted my seeds directly in the soil last spring and am still harvesting. When I thin, I eat the seedlings. Beets like acidic soil and they withstand cooler temperatures before harvest. Colors are typically red, purple, yellow, or red with white ring stripes. They are consumed in salads, soups, and pickled. Rich in fiber, potassium, calcium, folic acid, and phosphorus, high in fiber, vitamin A and C, beets have more iron than most other vegetables.

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