

Did You Know?



Galaxy magnolia tree.

Scientists at ARS's U.S. National Arboretum (USNA) Floral and Nursery Plants Research Unit (FNPRU) in Washington, DC, have developed more than 650 different woody and herbaceous plants over the last 80 years.

These new plants have been released to the public through the nursery and floral industries. Since these plants are adapted to various [U.S. plant hardiness zones](#), you're likely to see them blooming all over the country.

Making headlines for its prominent newest development this spring, FNPRU released a new cherry tree variety, 'Helen Taft,' to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Japanese gift of cherry trees. The showy cherry blossoms that currently paint the Tidal Basin in Washington, DC, draw millions of visitors each year to our Nation's capital. The trees symbolize the friendship between the United States and Japan. First Lady Helen Herron Taft and Viscountess Iwa Chinda, wife of the Japanese ambassador, planted the first two cherry trees at the Tidal Basin on March 27, 1912. The flowering cherry blossoms are now one of the most celebrated icons of our Nation's capital.

The Arboretum has received [15 total Gold Medal Plant awards and All-America Selections \(AAS\) Winners](#). The Gold Medal Plant Award is presented by various well-known horticultural societies, like The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, which recognizes outstanding trees, shrubs, and woody vines. The AAS Winners are presented by All-America Selections, a non-profit organization, to recognize the best garden performers.

Among this distinguished group of garden rock stars is the dramatic ornamental pepper 'Black Pearl,' designed for containers or garden borders. The peppers on this plant emerge black and turn cherry red, making for a spectacular garden show from summer to fall. And, the belle of the South, 'Galaxy' is a unique magnolia tree that emerges with dark-red-purple flowers in the spring after all frost and snow has melted away.

The USNA serves as a kind of "Plant Hall of Fame," featuring garden legends that will go down in history. It is a living repository that preserves plant material and seeds for future research endeavors, as well as for the public to admire, appreciate, learn about, and enjoy for decades and centuries to come.

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'Helen Taft' cherry blossoms.



'Black Pearl' ornamental pepper plants.