



## APS Gold Medal Through the Years

The American Peony Society, by way of awarding medals and certificates, has long recognized exceptional peonies. In this scheme of things the Gold Medal has always been considered the ultimate accolade, but as the Society and the interest in peonies have evolved, so too have the criteria by which these medals were awarded. Beauty is always expected in a plant awarded a society's highest honor but it is no longer the overriding factor that it once was.

Today, the Society's Board of Directors at their annual meeting chooses the Gold Medal peony. The criteria for recent years was written to emphasize qualities important to most of the peony growing public, which included availability, dependable performance, the absence of the need for mechanical support, good plant habit and good foliage throughout the growing season and reasonably priced in relation to its variety and originator.

In 2008 the Gold Medal process changed to incorporate the new Award of Landscape Merit (ALM) program. The only cultivars that were eligible to be considered for the 2008 Gold Medal were those that had been chosen by the ALM Committee as Award of Landscape Merit recipients for 2009. Some of the ALM recipients had already received the Gold Medal and, so were not eligible. ALM requirements are listed in a separate article. Currently the Gold Medal cultivar is also named the following year's Peony of the Year.

In looking back, there seem to be anomalies in the Gold Medal lists as periodically published. Most obvious are the two double winners, MISS AMERICA and NICK SHAYLOR, but also curious is MRS. A.M. BRAND, which was awarded a Gold Medal in 1923, before it had ever been introduced into commerce. A return to original documentation, which in this case consists of show reports and minutes of meetings as published in past Bulletins, reveals that the awards were made to different peonies for different reasons, and it was not until 1948 that we see the awarding of Gold Medals using criteria much the same as the ones we use today. Prior to this date the Seedling Committee had awarded almost all medals with the recipients being chosen from the show table displays.

The first six Gold Medals (those prior to 1946) were awarded by the Seedling Committee. The Committee judged seedlings and new cultivars entered in the appropriate classes on the show bench. The distinction between seedling and cultivar was that a seedling did not become a cultivar until it had been named, registered, and offered in commerce. This explains how MRS. A.M. BRAND received a Gold Medal in 1923, since its award was for a seedling not yet introduced into commerce. New cultivars were considered to be those peonies, which had been in commerce for a "comparatively short," but unspecified, time.

There were two Gold Medals awarded in 1946, and neither had garden worthiness as the prime consideration, nor were they new cultivars or seedlings. The medal, considered to have been awarded to GOLDEN GLOW, was actually inscribed "Awarded to Lyman D. Glasscock for his excellent work with hybrids, as typified by his origination of GOLDEN GLOW." Thus, Glasscock became one of the first persons to be recognized by the Society for their hybridizing efforts. The second 1946 recipient,

HANSINA BRAND, received the medal "for its consistent winning at many shows" and true to form, it had been judged the best bloom once again at the show at Rockford in 1946.

In 1948 the Directors unanimously passed the motion "that the awarding of medals to (cultivated) varieties that have been in commerce for longer than three years be left to the discretion of the Board of Directors, but require unanimous agreement of the directors present at a regular annual meeting." Their selection of MRS. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT for "outstanding merit and excellence in all sections of the country" makes it the first time the Gold Medal had been awarded using criteria much the same as those applied today. The Directors' resolve didn't last a year as in 1949 the Gold Medal was awarded to DORIS COOPER as the best entry in the show's seedling class.

Two awards were made in 1956. The Directors reported that "As no recent recognition of any new cultivars had been made by the Society, it was voted to award the Gold Medal to MISS AMERICA and RED CHARM, both of which have been prominent in shows in recent years and have proven their worth in all sections of the country in which they have grown."

There was no show in 1957. Adverse weather conditions forced cancellation of this part of the Convention, but the AGM and Directors' meetings were held regardless. The Gold Medal Certificate was awarded to KANSAS for "outstanding performance in all sections of the country" and all subsequent medals, to this day, considered garden performance as one of the primary criteria for selection.

As almost always happens, there was one exception to this. In 1969 Lyman Cousins exhibited his new seedlings at the Mansfield, Ohio, show. At this show there was no entry class for un-registered seedlings, but undeterred, the Judges awarded a Gold Medal, a Silver Medal, and a First Class Certificate to three of these seedlings. None of these seedlings were named, and no record exists to tell us under which name they were eventually registered, or if they were ever named and registered at all.

A note here about the 1994 winners, of which there were three. No awards were made in 1993, and to make up for this MOTHER'S CHOICE was elected in 1994 "retroactively". The third 1994 selection was the tree peony SHINTENCHI. It is the only origination from outside of North America to be so honored.

Gold medal recipients are published annually in the September issue of The APS Bulletin.

From the original article "The Silver and the Gold"; Reiner Jakubowski — Waterloo, Ontario, Canada