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For Immediate Release

New Breakthrough Hydrangeas Drastically Improve Famous ‘Annabelle’ Hydrangea

Discover Two New Amazing Hydrangea from Proven Winners® ColorChoice® This Spring

Grand Haven, Mich., March 1, 2010 – At long last, the famously super-hardy and easy-to-grow ‘Annabelle’ hydrangea is now entering the 21st century with a pair of new and improved hydrangeas hitting garden centers this spring.

The best known and most widely grown of the native, *Hydrangea arborescens*, the ‘Annabelle’ smooth-leaf hydrangea is an extremely reliable bloomer, even after the harsh winters and spring frosts of northern climates. ‘Annabelle’ is also renowned for its white mop-head flowers resembling large, fluffy white snowballs.

Though wildly popular and attractive in gardens north and south, ‘Annabelle’ is handicapped with two powerful limitations. First, its large flower heads are known to flop to the ground during a heavy rain, tipping over after its flowers become weighted with rainwater. Second, ‘Annabelle’ is also limited by its single color option - its flowers only grow in shades of white.

Now thanks to plant breeding breakthroughs by Proven Winners ColorChoice (www.colorchoiceplants.com), gardeners will have access to the most exciting improvements to this famous hydrangea since the late J.C. McDaniel first introduced the Annabelle to the public in 1962.

Invincibelle® Spirit Hydrangea, the first pink Annabelle hydrangea, and Incrediball™ Hydrangea, an improved white Annabelle breed with a stronger stem and four times the flowers, will be available for the first time to the public on a national level.

(Note to Editors: For high-resolution photography of these plants, or to secure interviews with the plant breeders, please contact Ryan McGrath at 616-223-3368 or email ryan@springmeadownursery.com.)

“For years, hydrangea-lovers have demanded improvements to the Annabelle’s stem strength and color selection,” said Tim Wood, product development and marketing manager for Proven Winners ColorChoice. “With Invincibelle Spirit Hydrangea and Incrediball Hydrangea, we have taken the best and most-popular qualities of the ‘Annabelle’ and improved these plants in amazing new directions. If you’ve ever grown and enjoyed ‘Annabelle’ in your garden or landscaping, you can believe these new and improved hydrangeas will exceed your expectations.”

The First-Ever Pink Annabelle Hydrangea™

Invincibelle Spirit Hydrangea is very first pink-flowered form of the ‘Annabelle’ – and the only Annabelle-type on the market today with a natural color beyond white. Dr. Tom Ranney of the North Carolina State University’s Mountain Horticultural Crops Research Station, along with his team, developed the new hydrangea (cultivar name: *Hydrangea arborescens* ‘NCHA1’ ppaf, cbraf) after years of breeding research.

The Invincibelle Spirit’s story began after Richard Olsen, a graduate student of Dr. Ranney, discovered a pink-flowering lace-cap hydrangea *arborescens* while hiking in the Blue Ridge Mountains. He brought his prized discovery back to the research facility in Asheville, NC, where the team went to work crossing it with ‘Annabelle.’

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Following numerous generations and backcrosses, Ranney selected one outstanding plant from over 1,500 variations that had the desirable form, foliage, and exceptional pink color in its flowers. This single plant became the ancestor of all Invincibelle Spirit Hydrangeas today.

Building upon its ‘Annabelle’ ancestry, Dr. Ranney developed a hydrangea with large pink flower heads just a bit smaller compared to Annabelle, with more than 100 blooms on a single plant. The slight reduction in flower size created flowers less likely to droop after rain. The plant also inherited the legendary hardiness of ‘Annabelle’ – growing in zones 3-9 and taking sun to part shade. Recognizing the potential of his discovery, Dr. Ranney collaborated with Proven Winners ColorChoice to secure wider market distribution for the breakthrough plant.

A Modern Marvel of Plant Breeding

“Dr. Ranney has discovered what should be seen as a modern marvel of plant breeding,” said Wood. “All preceding cultivars of smoothleaf hydrangeas were exclusively white in color. The flowers of Invincibelle Spirit offer pink color for the first time in an ‘Annabelle’ – a quantum leap in the horticulture world. The plant is also a continuous bloomer, which means it produces new flowers from early summer until frost. Extremely hardy and easy-to-grow, it



will bloom year-after-year without the special pampering required by other hydrangeas, an attractive quality for most gardeners and homeowners.”

Invincibelle Spirit continues to produce new pink flowers right up until frost, providing a beautiful display across several seasons in your garden, from mid-summer to fall. Because its flower buds are produced on new wood, the hydrangea will still produce flowers – even if the stems are damaged by extreme weather or cold. The blooms remain pink all season, regardless of the soil’s acid levels.

Standing a compact 3-4 feet in height, the new hydrangea can fit any sized garden. Wood recommends enjoying the plant as a single specimen on display in a garden or container, as part of a hedge or incorporated into perennial gardens or a woodland setting. And the plant’s flowers can be cut into both fresh and dried bouquets for indoor enjoyment all year long.

Million Dollars for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation

A fund-raising campaign associated with the Invincibelle Spirit Hydrangea is perhaps as unique as the plant itself in the horticulture industry. For every Invincibelle Spirit plant sold, \$1.00 will be sent to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation as part of the national Invincibelle® Spirit Campaign.

“This plant is a million dollar idea in more ways than one,” said Wood. “Our goal is to raise \$1 million for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation through the Invincibelle Spirit Campaign. We believe this campaign is much bigger than just selling hydrangeas. It is an opportunity for our industry and the plant-buying public to get involved with a noble cause, make a difference and become part of a movement. For example, we are working with garden centers across the country to put on ‘Pink Days’ to raise money for Breast Cancer Research above and beyond the \$1 donated for every plant sold.”

Breast Cancer is the second leading cause of death among women, exceeded only by lung cancer. Experts estimate that in 2009 alone, over 190,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed among U.S. women. For more information about the Invincibelle Spirit Campaign, visit <http://invincibellespirit.net>.

The “Annabelle on Steroids” With Four Times the Flowers

Another new hydrangea breakthrough, Incrediball Hydrangea has the biggest flowers and the strongest stems of any of the ‘Annabelle’ cultivars. Wood, the breeder behind Incrediball Hydrangea, said the plant was born as part of a special breeding program to increase the thickness of Annabelle’s stems. However, Wood also discovered an unexpected benefit – hydrangeas with roughly four times the flowers seen on a typical ‘Annabelle.’

“As expected, we developed an Annabelle type with very strong stems,” said Wood. “What came as a surprise was the hydrangea also having incredibly larger flower heads, with white blooms bigger than a basketball. When we counted the individual flowers, we found the selection had four times as many individual flowers as Annabelle. Even with the additional flowers, the mature hydrangea will not tip over like the original Annabelle, even after a summer thunderstorm. The Incrediball is like an ‘Annabelle on steroids’ – but with even larger flowers.”



The explosive blooms of Incrediball open to a very pale shade of green and mature to a pure white. Incrediball (cultivar name: *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Abetwo' ppaf, cbraf) begins blooming in mid-summer and continues to bloom all season, even into the autumn months. The plant is hardy in USDA Zones 3-9, thriving in sun to part shade, and in many types of soil conditions. Heat tolerant, it can be planted in the southern U.S. It also flowers on new wood, producing flowers even after the harsh winters in the northern U.S. and Canada. Largely trouble-free, it has few natural pests or diseases.

Incrediball is relatively compact, standing 4-5 feet tall fully grown. It is useful as a mass planting in a foundation, hedge or border, or incorporated into a woodland setting to attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Planted as a single specimen, it can be displayed to give a burst of white in the garden, as part of a landscape or in a container. The cut blooms from Incrediball make eye-catching fresh or dried arrangements, which last for months indoors.

“Because it’s as easy to grow as ‘Annabelle,’ Incrediball is a natural choice for anyone who wants everything they love about the Annabelle, but with huge flower-heads and improved stems which resist flopping,” said Wood. “Both Incrediball Hydrangea and Invincibelle Spirit Hydrangea are the result of years of development and testing, and have already attracted a large amount of exciting buzz within the professional plant world. And we are anticipating these new hydrangeas will become hits with plant consumers.”

Look for These New Hydrangeas at Garden Centers Starting This Spring

Proven Winners ColorChoice has built a reputation of introducing new plants offering superior genetics and quality, including the bestselling ‘Limelight’ Hydrangeas and Wine & Roses® Weigelas. Proven Winners ColorChoice designs new plant introductions to meet highest standards for growers, retailers and consumers using a combination of plant breeding expertise, and a minimum of five years of development and testing.

To purchase Invincibelle Spirit Hydrangea and Incrediball Hydrangea, look for the Proven Winners white pot at better gardening centers this spring. Or visit www.provenwinners.com to locate a retailer near you.

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About Proven Winners® ColorChoice®

Spring Meadow Nursery, Inc. is a market leader in flowering shrubs, potted liners and starter plants, and the developer behind Proven Winners ColorChoice branded shrubs. Located in Grand Haven, Mich., the wholesale nursery has specialized in flowering shrubs for over 25 years. Spring Meadow Nursery has over 500 varieties in their catalog, which include more than 100 varieties marketed under the Proven Winners® ColorChoice® brand, including Incrediball® Hydrangea, ‘Limelight’ Hydrangea, Pinky Winky™ Hydrangea, My Monet™ Weigela, Little Henry® Itea, Wine & Roses® Weigela, Quick Fire® Hydrangea and Invincibelle® Spirit Hydrangea. For more information, visit www.colorchoiceplants.com and www.springmeadownursery.com.