

KEEP THE OLD AND BRING IN THE NEW

BY CHERYL DOYLE KEARNS

Mandalay Flamingo Begonia
Photo courtesy of www.provenwinners.com

If you need help getting spring fever, let me help. There are so many exciting new plants coming along in 2009 to tempt you! This is a mere sampling of what to look for.

Proven Winners has a couple of new begonias that do particularly well in containers or window boxes in part shade. The Bellagio series are doubles in three colors: Apricot, Blush (light pink and white), and Flamingo (pink). A good strong weeping form, they will get a foot tall and wide in part shade and with medium watering.

Like the Bellagio series, the Mandalay series love heat, even our 90 degree days, but Mandalay begonias will also take full sun, and grow to a 14" tall and 30" wide fullness. They are striking for their very large, airy-looking single blossoms in deep pink (Flamingo), red (Mandarin), and shimmering white (Pearl). Narrow green leaves emphasize the pendulous look. Being quite vigorous growers, they would look equally stunning in taller containers or hanging baskets. Got a brown thumb? It will be green when you try these!

For shadier conditions, Terra Nova is introducing two begonias, both of which have leaves that are as colorful and interesting as any blossom. 'Curly Fireflush' has a heavily textured leaf of dark green and reddish-brown edges that look like a spiral. 'Madame Queen' is royally ruffled and frilly, with copper coloring on the top and red on the bottoms of the leaves. Flowers of deep pink compliment the leaves on this upright grower. Both of these also do well in humid conditions.

The ever-popular series of Wave petunias has a new addition to

the family this year. A series of 14 colors of Easy Wave offers 2" flowers with marble coloring that will reach 6"-12" in height and thrive in both cool and hot weather.

Those who love "weird and wonderful" should look for an ornamental eggplant called 'Pumpkin on a Stick'. Picture a 3'-tall eggplant with clusters of one-inch pumpkins sitting on top of the plant. Although bitter, these fruits, also known as Red China eggplant, are used in Asian cooking.

Terra Nova is probably best known for its introductions of coral bells (*Heuchera*) and foam flowers (*Tiarella*); this year is no exception. Fans of purple colors will appreciate *Heuchera* 'Plum Royale' all seasons. Summer's shiny purple leaves will turn to silver with purple tints in winter. Pink and white flowers on tall dark stalks add drama in spring to the part-shade garden.

Purple coneflowers come in just about all hues except blue and red. No longer will that be true of the red. *Echinacea* 'Tomato Soup' is a fiery tomato-red with 5" blooms all summer on 3' tall plants. If the mention of tomatoes makes you hungry, try adding *Echinacea* 'Mac 'n Cheese' to the full sun menu. This bold beauty's color will deepen in cooler weather, making it a perfect fall feature fronting a burning bush.

Stepping down some in height to approximately 2' is a new perennial, *Heliopsis* 'Tuscan Sun,' another new release from Proven Winners. This summer sunflower is a compact 20" x 24" at most, and has solid yellow flowers enriched by dark green foliage.

This winter, I'm going to be seeking out a nearly black double hellebore (Lenten rose) to add to my collection. If you have shady areas with hungry, furry, four-footed visitors, this plant is a must. An added benefit is the bloom time, which starts about mid-January and lasts till April, and they make wonderful cut flowers. Pair it with another new Lenten rose, 'Golden Lotus', or *Carex* 'Lemon Zest' for a dramatic look. You can order these and other new offerings directly from www.greatgardenplants.com or check your local garden centers.

Rose lovers will be pleased to see two new roses—a yellow addition named Sunny to the KnockOut series, and a pristine, glowing white rose named after Pope John Paul II.

Other shrubs to be looking for are a new gardenia called 'Heaven Scent.' Although the literature says it doesn't like temperatures colder than the low 30s for short periods of time, I have a small pot next to a wall where it has survived nights in the 20s. It might be one to try in a container that you could overwinter in a cool room or greenhouse. Why bother? Because it blooms almost non-stop, even when young, and will have very fragrant single and semi-double flowers, especially heavy in spring.

If you need something a bit larger, search for a new silver maple that won't spread seedlings everywhere. *Acer freemanii* 'Marmo',

while introduced in 1994, isn't well known in our area yet. The silvery underside of the leaf fluttering in a breeze offers an artistic look to the landscape. Oval in structure, it will put on up to 2' of growth a year in its youth, and fall foliage ranges from scarlet to maroon, with some green, for as long as four weeks.

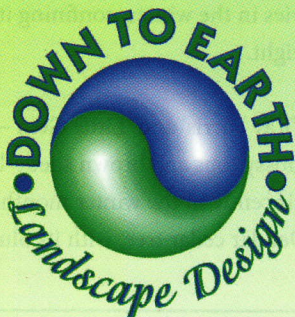
Peking Lilac China Snow is another tree that I'm really excited about. Not your ordinary lilac, this one loves full sun, tolerates both heat and drought once established, and grows around 15'-20' tall in an upright shape. The fragrant flowers, which appear in June, are a fuller, cloudier white form of the common lilac blossom, and the bark, which peels back, is more reminiscent of a cherry than a lilac. This is truly a magnificent four-season tree.

While the two trees I just mentioned are from the Morton Arboretum in Chicago, you will find new redbuds and butterfly bushes being released closer to home, by the JC Raulston Arboretum. Last year saw the release of a compact, non-seeding form of butterfly bush called 'Blue Chip.' This easy-care shrub is great for a container or in a mixed border of well-drained soil, where it will remain a petite 3' tall. It was available last year, but should be more readily available in greater numbers this year.

Be on the lookout for some exciting new additions to your garden this summer! ■



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