

Plants *and* Trends for 2009

BY DOREEN G. HOWARD

I'VE BEEN a garden writer and editor for a long time, so I tend to view the annual promotional crescendo for new plants with a somewhat jaded eye. Every spring, hundreds of new plants are brought to market with great fanfare in hopes of enticing consumers. A few quickly become the "hot" plant because of their look or staying power. But many fade into oblivion, just like the pop divas who dye their hair pink and sing off-key.

This year, however, I believe more than the usual number of plants are worth gar-

Saturated color, showy flower forms, and cold-hardy tropicals will be among the plant trends gardeners will see this year.

deners' attention because of the new directions in which breeders are going. Plants are crossing genetic boundaries, resulting in colors, growth habits, and cold hardiness unimaginable even a year ago.

It's part of a horticultural revolution in which rules have changed. Drought-tolerant natives like coneflowers (*Echinacea* spp.) are no longer plain Janes, but blowsy hussies that stop traffic. Indiscriminate seeders, which responsible gardeners don't allow in their yards, have cleaned up their acts. Tropical houseplants are moving outdoors to stay and developing texture and color for landscape effect.

Plant companies send me introductions at least a year in advance of release so I can test them in my garden in Illinois (USDA Hardiness Zone 4/5, AHS Heat Zone 5). In my travels around the country, I also talk regularly with breeders and plant hunters about developing trends and what is in the pipeline for the next five years or



Echinacea 'Hot Papaya'



Echinacea 'Mac 'n' Cheese'

so. Here are some of the plants that have made an impression on me; more introductions are briefly described on page 17.

CONEFLOWER COMBUSTION

The purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*, USDA Hardiness Zones 3–9, AHS Heat Zones 9–1) and the other species in the genus have exploded with new forms, fragrance, and saturated colors. It's diffi-

cult to recognize some of them as the drought-tolerant prairie natives gardeners have come to rely on in hot, dry spots. Newer cultivars are still tough but have bells and whistles like pom-pon flowerheads on 'Pink Poodle', or color-drenched red 'Tomato Soup', and heavily perfumed yellow 'Mac 'n' Cheese'—all from Oregon's Terra Nova Nurseries—or spicyscented double orange 'Hot Papaya' from Plants Nouveau.

These flamboyant selections may not be to everyone's taste, but Chris Hansen of



Echinacea 'Tomato Soup'

Great Garden Plants, which sells 'Hot Papaya', raves about its fiery orange color. "When I first saw the flower, my jaw hit the floor," he says. 'Hot Papaya' was bred by Arie Blom, a Dutch breeder whose goal was not only vibrant orange double blooms, but strong stems for cut flowers that last up to 10 days. Blom's working on 20 other selections that Plants Nouveau will be releasing in the next four years, including bi-color ruffled doubles and several with frills. Also available from Great Garden Plants is *Echinacea* Green Envy, a color breakthrough developed by Pride of Place Plants in Canada. A green flower is a

novel occurrence, according to its breeder, Tom Veeder. Round jade green petals and deep green cones gradually mature to elongated petals with magenta veining near the cone, which also turns a purplish tone.

Terra Nova, known for its cutting-edge breeding and tissue culture program, is using a process called “embryo rescue” to create its unique coneflowers. The technique, briefly, involves cross-pollinating two dissimilar species by hand. Usually in such cases plants abort any seed pod that forms within two to three weeks (this mechanism apparently developed to maintain genetic purity of the species). In embryo rescue, unripe seeds are harvested about ten days after pollination and grown on in a tissue culture lab. Among the resulting plants, new colors and forms tend to appear. Terra Nova performs some 7,000 embryo rescues every year, from which about five plants are selected for development, according to Dan Heims, president. “We may have to rethink the whole *Echinacea* genus,” he says.

ENCOURAGING ZONE DENIAL

“Everybody wants a piece of paradise, even if big tropical plants end up in the compost after three or four months of enjoyment,” says Linda Guy, director of new products at Novalis, a marketing consortium that represents several plant growers. That’s why Novalis and others are busy developing tropicals with more cold-hardiness and combing the world for species that grow naturally in harsher climates.

In 2001, Guy gathered seeds from an



Bletilla ochracea Chinese Butterfly



Athyrium niponicum var. *pictum* 'Godzilla'



Colocasia esculenta 'Mojito'

exotic cold-hardy terrestrial orchid (*Bletilla ochracea*) she found on a mountainside in the Sichuan province of China. Named Chinese Butterfly (Zones 6–9, 9–5), it’s one of Novalis’s 2009 introductions. Its soft yellow flower color, willowy form, and pleated leaves add sophistication to any woodland setting.

Well-known plant hunter Dan Hinkley also is scouring the mountains of China, Vietnam, and Thailand for exotics that take the cold. Next year, he will release through Monrovia two *Schefflera* species that are hardy to USDA Zone 7. For most people, the genus *Schefflera* probably evokes images of houseplants, but these species grow into large shrubs or small trees (eight to 15 feet), making them stunning landscape plants. New growth

on one is deep burgundy and the other features white downy hairs. In colder climates, either *schefflera* makes a striking container plant that can be brought indoors for the winter.

Tony Avent of Plant Delights Nursery in Raleigh, North Carolina, introduces two plants this season that also push the boundaries. An eye-catcher in any garden is ‘Godzilla’, a six-foot-wide Japanese painted fern (*Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum*, Zones 5–8, 8–1). The silver, gray, and purple fronds grow

over three feet tall and demand attention. It’s perfect for a shady patio as a low-maintenance focal plant. Avent also unveils another striking taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) this season, part of a series of unusual cultivars introduced in collaboration with John Cho at the University of Hawaii. ‘Mojito’ (Zones 9–11, 12–3) is a six-foot beauty that sports giant black-speckled green leaves and stems streaked with white and purple. Where it’s not hardy, the tubers can be dug up after the first freeze and stored for the next season.

STOP THE SEEDY

Certain desirable plants can turn into a gardener’s worst nightmare when they produce copious amounts of seeds that quickly sprout everywhere. One of these plants is the butterfly bush (*Buddleia* spp.), which is beloved because it draws butterflies and other desirable pollinators. Now, thanks to a breeding breakthrough, Proven Winners has developed a butterfly bush that is not only sterile, but also petite, perfect for borders, pots, and rock gardens. ‘Blue Chip’ (*Buddleia* Lo & Behold, Zones 6–9, 9–1) matures into a two- to three-foot mound that flowers continuously, putting its energy into blooming rather than setting seed. It doesn’t require deadheading, either.

Another sordid character Monrovia has tamed is Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*). According to Nicholas Staddon, Monrovia’s director of new plant introductions, orange-leaved Golden Ruby (‘Goruzam’) barberry (Zones 4–8, 8–4) produces 70 percent less seed than the



Agapanthus orientalis 'Baby Pete'

species. It's a compact, well-behaved shrub that needs little maintenance, yet provides brilliant color. Monrovia is working on botanically sterile versions of other overly rambunctious favorites such as euonymus, maiden grass (*Miscanthus* spp.), and agapanthus. Baby Pete (*Agapanthus orientalis*, Zones 7–II, 12–5) is the first of the sterile agapanthus Monrovia offers this year. Petite 15-inch plants generate nine-inch stems that hold enormous flower heads. All the plant's energy goes into non-stop flowering instead of seed production, so seed pods aren't formed.

FLOWERING SHRUBS AND ROSES

Forget spring-only bloomers, predictable foliage color, and boring roses. Breeders have answered gardeners' prayers with plants such as Bloomerang lilac (*Syringa* 'Penda') from Proven Winners, which flowers repeatedly until frost. Mine was still in full bloom on October 27 when it snowed. The dark pink panicles are lush and fragrant, plus the tidy plant only grows to about four feet.

Honeysuckle is traditionally thought of as a southern or West Coast charmer. However, a new cultivar of southern bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla sessilifolia*), developed by the Landscape Plant Development Center in St. Paul, Minnesota and distributed by Novalis, gives northern gardeners the same flowers, plus striking variegated foliage. Named Cool Splash ('LPDC Podaras', Zones 4–8, 8–4), it features yellow trumpets held in panicles over emerald leaves edged with swaths of cream. Bushy in habit, it grows to about three feet tall and colonizes by underground suckers for mass plantings.



Diervilla sessilifolia 'Cool Splash'



Hibiscus syriacus 'Sugar Tip'

Variegated foliage also punches up an old favorite, rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*). Sugar Tip ('America Irene Scott', Zones 5–9, 9–4) from Proven Winners sports cream-splashed foliage and fully double pearl-pink flowers. Growing to 12 feet, the shrub blooms non-stop from the first heat of summer to frost.

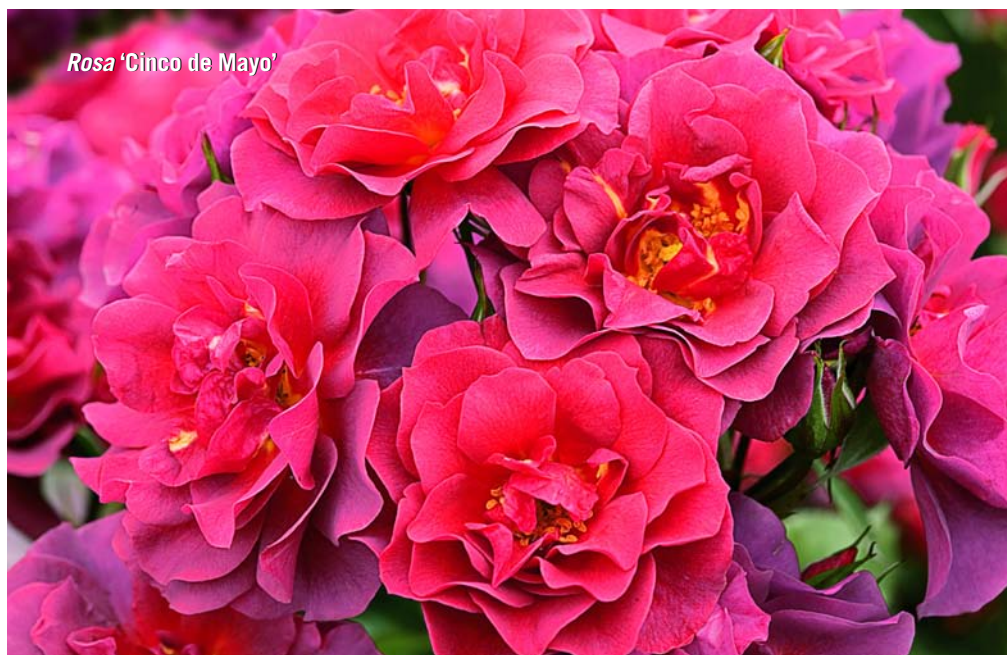
Rose breeders have given us disease-resistant, no-fuss cultivars in recent years,

but frankly many of them are boring. That's why 'Cinco de Mayo', White Out, and Amber Flower Carpet excited me with their appearance and performance. As a bonus, all were unattractive to Japanese beetles in my Midwest garden.

'Cinco de Mayo' (Zones 5–9, 9–5) is a 2009 All-America Rose Selection for good reason. The smoky lavender and rusty orange color of the flowers is stunning, and blooms smell like fresh-cut apples. I have this floribunda next to my front door in a bed of nine roses, and every visitor asks about 'Cinco de Mayo'. Bred by Tom Caruth of Weeks Roses, the well-behaved rose is very disease resistant and requires no pruning to maintain an attractive round shape throughout the season.

Bill Radler built his reputation breeding the Knock Out® series of roses, but his newest offering White Out ('Radwhite', Zones 5–9, 9–5) goes well beyond the disease-resistant non-stop flowering that marked that series. Single pure white flowers blanket a compact shrub continuously. The contrast between thick, dark green foliage and white blooms is dramatic. Like all of Radler's creations, White Out needs no deadheading, and, in fact, blooms better if spent flowers are not removed.

Flower Carpet roses, from Anthony Tesselaar Plants have been around for more than a decade and are reliable landscape additions. However, Flower Carpet Amber (Zones 5–10, 10–5) finally offers color complexity, worthy of inclusion in formal settings, along with the series' reputation for dependable performance. Clusters of multi-colored blooms (up to 45 per bunch) in a complex mix of burnt orange,



Rosa 'Cinco de Mayo'

MORE NEW PLANTS TO LOOK FOR IN 2009

■ ANNUALS / BIENNIALS / TENDER PERENNIALS

***Dahlia variabilis* 'Black Beauty'** (USDA Zones 9–11, AHS Zones 12–1). Thompson & Morgan (www.tmseeds.com). Deep burgundy-colored ray petals around yellow cones bloom in late summer on 18- to 24-inch plants.

***Lobularia maritima* 'Summer Peaches'** (Zones 10–11, 12–1). Renee's Garden (www.reneesgarden.com). Fragrant masses of flowers in peachy tones bloom on four- to six-inch plants.

***Rudbeckia hirta* 'Cherry Brandy'** (Zones 3–8, 10–1). Thompson & Morgan. Cherry-red ray petals around dark cones appear on two-foot plants that are great for containers or sunny borders.

***Setcreasea pallida* 'Blue Sue'** (Zones 7–11, 12–1) Athens Select (www.athensselect.com) and Southern Living Plant Collection. Foliage is blue-tinged with purple margins, topped by pink flowers on this six- to eight-inch-tall, heat-loving tender perennial.



Rudbeckia hirta
'Cherry Brandy'

■ PERENNIALS / GRASSES

***Eriogonum allenii* 'Little Rascal'** (Zones 5–10, 9–5). Jelitto (www.jelitto.com). Drought-resistant shale barren buckwheat, native to Northeast U.S., grows to just over a foot tall with golden-yellow summer flowers.

***Luzula sylvatica* 'Solar Flair'** (Zones 5–8, 8–4). Jelitto. Clumping evergreen grass grows to 12 inches tall, with golden twisting leaves that have fringed, hairy edges.

Muhlenbergia reverchonii (Zones 5–9, 9–4). High Country Gardens (www.highcountrygardens.com). A clumping plains muhly grass, it grows two to three feet tall and produces a showy mass of reddish flower heads in fall.

***Penstemon* 'Sweet Joanne'** (Zones 5–9, 9–5). Blooms of Bressingham (www.bloomsofbressingham.com). This drought-tolerant penstemon has tubular, lavender-pink flowers that bloom from late May through June. Grows two feet tall and wide.



Eriogonum allenii
'Little Rascal'

■ SHRUBS

***Chamaecyparis pisifera* Soft Serve ('Dow Whiting')**, Zones 4–8, 8–1). Proven Winners (www.provenwinners.com). Grows six to 10 feet with a compact, graceful conical shape and fernlike branching.

***Clethra alnifolia* Vanilla Spice** ('Caleb', Zones 3–9, 9–3), Proven Winners. Its fragrant white flowers are nearly double the size of typical summersweet flowers.

***Spiraea* Sundrop** ('Bailcarol', Zones 4–8, 8–3). Bailey Nurseries (www.baileynurseries.com). This dwarf spiraea grows 12 to 15 inches tall and two to three feet wide with lemon-colored foliage and pink flowers.

■ TREES / VINES

***Celastrus scandens* Autumn Revolution** ('Bailumn', Zones 3–8, 8–1). Bailey Nurseries. Cultivar of native American bitter-sweet climbs to 25 feet and produces extra-large red-orange berries.



Celastrus scandens
'Autumn Revolution'

Fraxinus cuspidata

(Zones 5–9, 9–5). High Country Gardens. This western flowering ash is a small Southwest native tree that grows to 12 feet with fragrant white flowers in spring.

***Lonicera* × *brownii* Honeybelle** ('Baillelle', Zones 3–8, 8–3). Bailey Nurseries. A tough, long-blooming honeysuckle that grows to 20 feet with yellow-orange blooms.

***Prunus serrulata* Angel's Blush** ('Taizo', Zones 5–8, 8–5). Monrovia. A dwarf flowering cherry that grows to six feet tall. Pink buds open to double white flowers.

■ VEGETABLES / HERBS

Corn 'Oaxacan Green'. Johnny's Selected Seeds (www.johnnyseeds.com). This ornamental corn with emerald green kernels is great for ornamental use or ground as corn meal.



'Oaxacan Green' corn

Mustard Greens 'Ruby Streaks'

Botanical Interests (www.botanicalinterests.com). The beautiful red leaves are great for eating fresh in salads, steamed, or stir-fried.

Parsley 'Italian Giant'. Thompson & Morgan. A flat-leaved parsley suitable for containers.

Tomato 'Basket Boy Yellow'. Grimes Horticulture (www.grimes-hort.com). Sweet two-inch, three-ounce, yellow tomatoes on compact plants that are perfect for containers and hanging baskets. Disease resistant.

Compiled by Editorial Assistant Caroline Bentley.



Rosa Flower Carpet Amber

apricot, peach, and amber shades blanket the spreading bush all season long. Sweet notes of fragrance are a bonus and good reason to plant Flower Carpet Amber near outdoor seating or an open window.

FABULOUS FLOWERS

‘Tiger Eye’ gloriosa daisy (*Rudbeckia hirta*, Zones 3–9, 10–1), from Goldsmith Seeds, performed better than any other annual in my garden. The 18-inch plants branched without pinching and were covered with large golden daisies from planting until the first hard freeze. No deadheading was needed, disease wasn’t a problem, and the plants tolerated drought. The only maintenance I did was to add compost to the soil before planting. ‘Tiger Eye’ rewarded my minimal efforts with brilliant color, cut flowers, and landscape magnetism.

Another profuse bloomer is Big begonia (*Begonia* spp., Zones 10–11, 12–1) from Benary. The cherry-red blossoms are over three inches in diameter, covering plants so completely that it’s hard to see the waxy deep green leaves. They perform perfectly in any exposure, from full shade to bright sun. Another spectacular Benary introduction is ‘Joey’, a cultivar of the wonderfully named pink mully mully (*Ptilotus exaltatus*, Zones 9–10, 10–3). The improved Australian native produces large fuzzy, lavender flower spikes in hot, dry conditions and thrives anywhere.

The last fabulous flower I tested in my garden is the first to flower, ‘Onyx Odyssey’ Lenten rose (*Helleborus* Winter Jewels series, Zones 5–9, 9–5). Its three-inch-diameter double flowers are inky purple, almost black, with ivory stamens. The new foliage opens purple then fades to green. ‘Onyx Odyssey’ was hand-hybridized by Marietta O’Byrne, a renowned

EXPERTS FORECAST GARDENING TRENDS

Plants bred for specific regions, succulents, minimalism, and large, dramatic plants are some trends horticulturists and plant hunters say will dominate the gardening world in the next five years. Dan Hinkley feels that plant development is going more regional. “This country is too big and diverse for that not to happen,” he says. Novalis has already capitalized on climate clamor with perennials that take the heat and humidity of the Deep South such as a *Camellia sasanqua* which will be released in 2010. One trend where the United States has taken the lead is succulents, the “got-to-have” plants now dazzling Europe. “It’s a craze that isn’t going away,” Linda Guy from Novalis says. Dan Heims of Terra Nova Nurseries agrees and is releasing a “ground-breaking” (pun intended) groundcover succulent in 2010.

With time precious and space limited in many townhouse and apartment yards, the minimalist garden is emerging. Nicholas Staddon of Monrovia identified the trend several years ago and has incorporated it into Monrovia’s plant development. An architectural plant accented with hardscape becomes an instant garden. One of Staddon’s favorite combinations is lofty *Cordylone* ‘Burgundy’ in a large blue-glazed ceramic pot set on a layer of black or gray pebbles. “It has a Zen feel to it that draws the eye and relaxes you,” he says. “The smoothness of the rocks takes away the sharp edges of the plant.” Rick Schoellhorn, Proven Winners’s new products director, sees simplicity as a trend, too, along with larger plants. “Plants with stature, even bananas in the North used as an annual, are popular.” The emphasis is moving to the landscape, Schoellhorn feels, where large plants dominate. Hinkley agrees. “I’m hoping we get away from super dwarf and compact and bring grace and stature back into landscape shrubs.” As Tony Avent of Plant Delights Nursery in Raleigh, North Carolina, explains, containers are falling from favor as landscape plants come back into vogue. “It’s a 30-year cycle we see again and again,” he says. “Besides, containers aren’t sustainable.”

Other trends in plant breeding include thicker leaves that are more pest resistant, according to Heims, and three season interest. Guy explains, “Our focus is on how we can add another season of interest with features like colored foliage or berries to shrubs.” Plants that use less water and fertilizer are a priority for Proven Winners, says Schoellhorn. “A well maintained garden does not mean excessive water and fertilizer. It means sound maintenance practices.” —D.H.



Rudbeckia hirta ‘Tiger Eye’



Ptilotus exaltus ‘Joey’



hellebore breeder based in Eugene, Oregon (available through Great Garden Plants). The black blooms look spectacular paired with green-flowering hellebores.

LAGGARDS

Several outstanding plants were released before 2009, but weren't available widely until now. Terra Nova is out with a vivid geum called 'Eos' (*Geum coccineum*, Zones 5–8, 8–5) that features bright orange flowers nestled in a thick mat of solid gold foliage. Plants will rebloom if deadheaded.

Lastly, Skagit Gardens in Mount Vernon, Washington, issued a limited release of the Commotion series blanket flower



(*Gaillardia* spp.) in 2008, so watch out for these beauties. Hardy to -20° Fahrenheit, flowers of 'Frenzy', a yellow-tipped red, and 'Tizzy', deep russet red, are fluted with a semi-double appearance. They need little care and bloom non-stop until temperatures consistently dip into the 30s during the day. The ones in my garden provided cut flowers for Halloween displays. 🍂

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Retail Sources

Annie's Annuals & Perennials, Richmond, CA. (888) 266-4370.
www.anniesannuals.com.

Big Dipper Farm, Black Diamond, WA. (360) 886-8133.
www.bigdipperfarm.com.

Bluestem Prairie Nursery, Hillsboro, IL. (217) 532-6344.
www.prairie.net.org/gpf/nurseries.php.

Botany Shop Garden Center, Joplin, MO. (417) 781-6431.
www.knockoutroses.com.

Great Garden Plants, Holland, MI. (877) 447-4769. www.greatgardenplants.com.

Green Thumbs Galore, Chattanooga, TN. (423) 596-4588.
www.greenthumbsgalore.com.

Klehm's Song Sparrow Farm and Nursery, Avalon, WI. (800) 353-9516.
www.songsparrow.com.

Johnny's Selected Seeds, Winslow, ME. (207) 861-3900.
www.johnnyseeds.com.

Northwest Garden Nursery, Eugene, OR. (541) 935-3915.
www.northwestgardennursery.com. (Reopens in March 2009.)

Plant Delights, Raleigh, NC. (919) 772-4794. www.plantdelights.com.

RareFind Nursery, Jackson, NJ. (732) 833-0613. www.rarefindnursery.com.

Thompson & Morgan, Jackson, NJ. (800) 274-7333. www.tmseeds.com.

Touch of Nature, Lawrenceville, GA. (800) 438-9309. www.touchofnature.com.

Willow Creek Gardens, Oceanside, CA. (760) 721-7079.
www.willowcreekgardens.com.

Wholesale Nurseries

The following companies supply plants to retail outlets only. Visit their websites to locate retail nursery sources in your area.

Anthony Tesselaar Plants, www.tesselaar.com.

Benary, www.benary.com.

Goldsmith Seeds, www.goldsmithseeds.com.

Knock Out Rose, www.theknockoutrose.com.

Monrovia, www.monrovia.com.

Novalis, www.novalis.com.

Plants Nouveau, www.plantsnouveau.com.

Pride of Place Plants, www.prideofplaceplants.com.

Proven Winners, www.provenwinners.com.

Terra Nova Nurseries, www.terranovanurseries.com.

Skagit Gardens, www.skagitgardens.com.

Weeks Roses, www.weeksroses.com.