

Coral bells – *confused yet?*

BY DAVID VAN DE VEN

There are literally hundreds of varieties of *Heuchera* on the market today. How do you choose the best performing plants for your professional landscape design/build project? Until recently, *Heuchera* were generally planted in partial to full shade, but not any more. Just to make things a little more confusing, plant breeders have introduced entire new lines of coral bells suitable for planting in sun. Yep, you heard right, sun.

Part of my job is to take the time to plant these new introductions in a trial garden. Which, to be quite honest, ends up being our own garden (Zone 4b-5a), but it gives us realistic results of cold hardiness and overall garden performance.

New varieties of *Heuchera* are being introduced every year. In the very near future you will start hearing names like *H.* 'Electra', *H.* 'Berry Smoothie' and *H.* 'Fire Chief', and more, I am sure. Some will be immediate hits with gardeners, others will disappear almost immediately, and hopefully one or two will be useful for the professional landscape, giving us some new additions to impress your clients.

Here are my favourite *Heucheras* (in alphabetical order).

David Van de Ven is a perennial grower in Mount Albert, Ont.

Heuchera 'Caramel' PP16560

'Caramel' coral bells (30 cm tall, 60 cm flower stalks)



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This is a relatively new introduction, but it is one of the top varieties available today. *H.* 'Caramel' is a great performer in the garden in full sun to part shade — and is very cold hardy (Zone 4). The foliage is, as the name describes, a warm orange colour with purple to red leaf undersides, no matter the season. Cream flowers will appear in early summer. Even though the colour is not very bright, the flowers attract

bees, butterflies and the odd hummingbird. The foliage has a wavy texture, giving us the ability to use it in large groupings, specimen situations and even in large container plantings. The colour does lend itself to be very useful for autumn decoration, but I think it looks great and performs well any time of the year.

Heuchera 'Citronelle' PP17934

'Citronelle' coral bells (30 cm tall, 35 cm flower stalks)



Again, another relatively new introduction — from the same French breeder as *H.* 'Caramel'. And again, another example of one of the top varieties available today. *H.* 'Citronelle' is a fantastic bright yellow- to chartreuse-coloured plant with a wavy leaf form. Tight growth habit, great cold hardiness and garden performance make this plant a top choice in the huge selection of *Heuchera* available. Plant it in full sun to part shade, and do not worry, it will not burn in the strong sun. This is another plant that deserves more use in the professional landscape — it looks similar to introductions of past years, but is much more suitable for the professionally planted and maintained garden. The flowers are, again, a dull cream colour but do last for a considerable amount of time in the early summer. I would suggest this plant be used in the same manner as *H.* 'Caramel' — large groupings, specimens and container plantings.

Heuchera 'Rave On' PP18127

'Rave On' coral bells (20 cm tall, 40 cm flower stalks)



After years and years of *Heuchera* introductions, we are finally starting to see the stunning flowers being brought back into the breeding. *H.* 'Rave On' puts on a show! Huge amounts of blood red-coloured flowers stand tall above the purple foliage with the typical silver/white overlay. Nice, tight growth habit with slightly smaller leaves make for a great backdrop when the flowers appear in late spring. *H.* 'Rave On' looks great in large groupings or in container plantings. Not to say that it couldn't be used as a specimen plant, but it is a smaller plant and may be more appropriate planted in a noticeable location. Plant it in part shade and your clients are sure to be impressed with this little *Heuchera*.

Heuchera 'Midnight Rose' PP18551

'Midnight Rose' coral bells (25 cm tall, 60 cm flower stalks)

Very unusual foliage — deep purple, almost black, flecked with hot pink spots. A better-known variety, likely because of its elegant appearance and close relation to the long popular *H.* 'Obsidian'. This herbaceous perennial plant, *H.* 'Midnight Rose' is not only an unusually coloured, it performs very well in the landscape — good vigor and certainly cold hardy (Zone 4). Like the others listed here, plant it in full sun to part shade (likely happiest in partial shade). I would suggest using *H.* 'Midnight Rose' in locations that it can be noticed; specimen plantings in areas that the great leaf detail can be seen, like raised beds and container plantings.



Heuchera 'Sashay'

'Sashay' coral bells (20 cm tall, 40 cm flower stalks)

This is a very different looking *Heuchera*, and one of my favourites. Heavily ruffled leaves appear "frilly" and the green leaf surfaces with red/purple undersides add to the dramatic look. Most of the photos (below) offered by the breeder shows it with a slight coating of frost, which looks absolutely incredible, but the plant really does look great without frost! The colour is not as bold as some other varieties, but its texture is outstanding, resembling a colourful head of lettuce or garden kale. *H.* 'Sashay' is not well-known, but has shown excellent garden performance when planted in full sun to slight shade. I would be more inclined to use this individually, in groupings with a little more space between plants, and of course specimen or container plantings.



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