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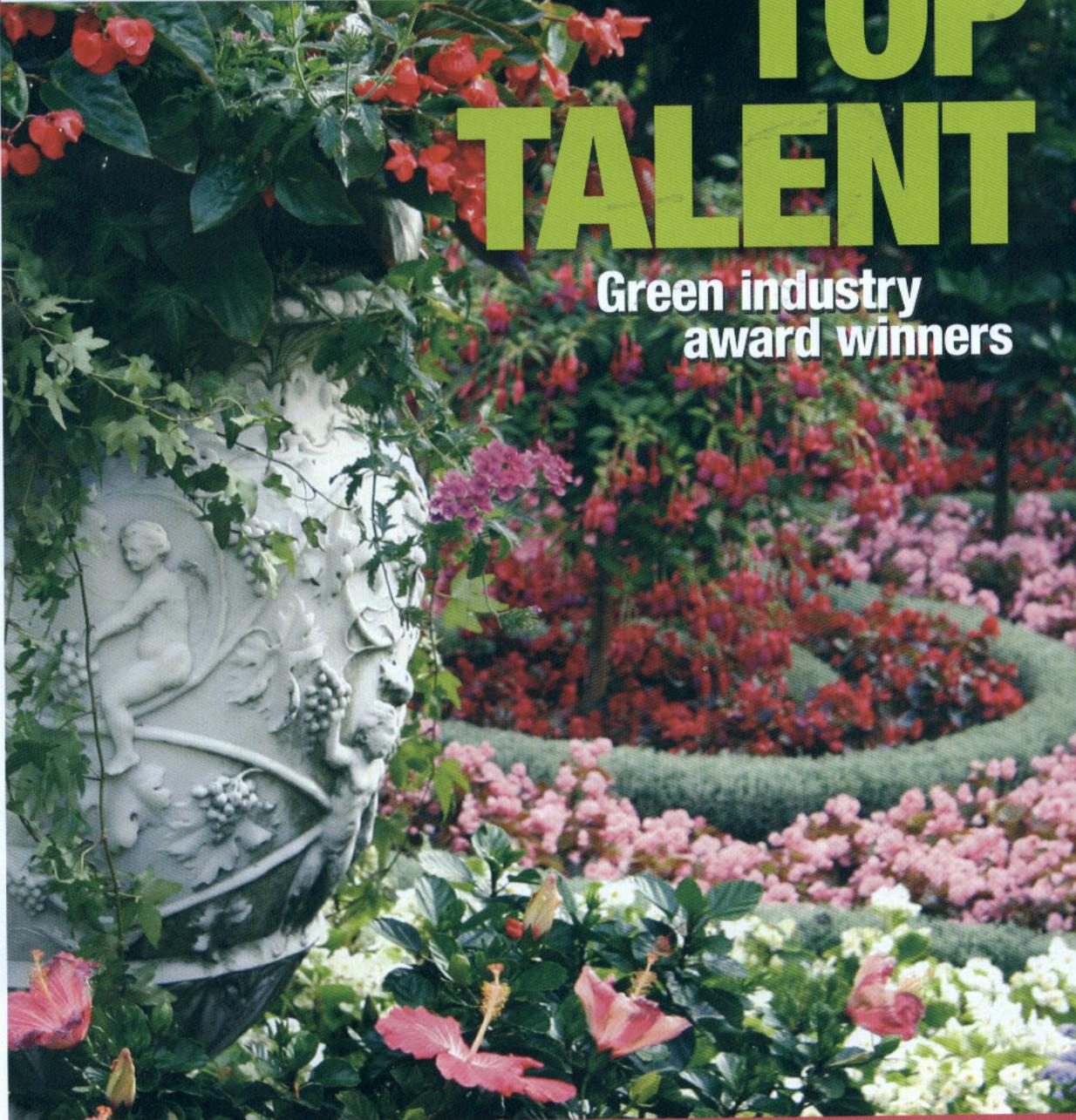
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Reliable spring bloomers

BY DAVID VAN DE VEN

Spring can be a tough time to pick perennial plants that will bloom no matter what weather is thrown at them. Living in Canada, the weather seems to change in a moment's notice. As I write, southern Ontario is being blanketed with another covering of snow – and just yesterday it was sunny and 10 degrees Celsius. That makes it difficult to choose great spring-blooming plants for a very

important reason. We, as landscape professionals, want to excite our clients in the spring; it will always lead to great referrals! Here are a few very reliable considerations.

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

Euphorbia polychroma 'Bonfire' Cushion spurge



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Another twist on an old perennial plant, *Euphorbia polychroma* does technically have flowers, but it is the colourful bracts that we notice in spring, splashed with bright yellow/orange tips very much like a Christmas poinsettia. Poinsettias are, of course, also *Euphorbias*. The nice difference about *Euphorbia* 'Bonfire' is that not only does it have a nice colour flash in spring, but it also keeps beautiful deep purple-red foliage for the remainder of the season. Hardiness to zone 4 makes it a good choice for lots of the country. Grows 45 cm tall and wide. A great choice for the sunny border, as specimens or in groupings. Not recommended for container planting, as it prefers to have its roots kept in the cool garden soil.

Iris germanica German iris

We all can remember our grandmother's garden, sure to have a few clumps of German iris. While not as temperamental as most think, be sure to stimulate some new growth after several years if the flowers become weak. New varieties include *Iris* 'American Classic,' *I.* 'Before the Storm' (black flowers!), *I.* 'Chasing Rainbows' and *I.* 'Red at Night,' but several more are very suitable for your client's sunny garden. Be sure to plant them in an area that is a bit on the dry side, and where they will be noticed when



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in-flower early in the season — you will be sure to impress. Grows 70-95 cm tall depending on variety. German iris is hardy to zone 3 and is quite happy as long as there isn't too much water present. Plant in masses or as specimen plants — not a good choice for container planting. The huge blooms make good cut flowers if your client chooses to bring them in.

Polygonatum odoratum 'Variegatum' Solomon's seal



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A good choice for the shadier site, Solomon's seal is a bit unusual, but very useful in professional design. A few *Polygonatum*s are suitable for garden plantings, but in my opinion, this Solomon's seal is the best all-around choice for professional use; not too

tall or fast-growing, and a very sturdy garden plant if planted in shade. White flowers in spring that form under the arching canopy and are quite fragrant. Looks great when planted with other shade-loving plants like *Hosta*, ferns and some *Heuchera* varieties. Plant it in masses for best effect. Grows 50 cm tall. Hardy to zone 3 and quite happy in the irrigated garden or by pondside. If the site is suitable, Solomon's seal can be used as a ground cover if it is left alone for several years, and its root system is left undisturbed.

Pulmonaria 'Raspberry Splash'
Lungwort

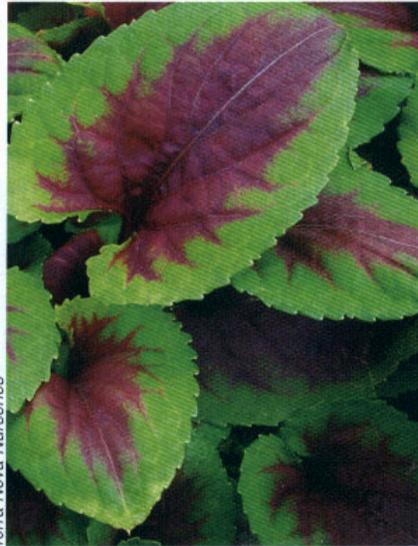


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Another great choice for shady sites. The blooms will start as a bright pink bud, then open to a raspberry pink and then fade to a

shade of blue. Not only are the flowers fantastic, but *Pulmonaria* 'Raspberry Splash' will provide all-season interest with its unusual silver dotted foliage. Grows 30 cm tall. *Pulmonaria* is hardy to zone 3, and will adapt quite well to a moist area or an irrigated garden. This is another plant that should be enjoyed in large groupings, but will do quite well in a container if it is cool and shaded.

Viola 'Heartthrob'
Perennial violet

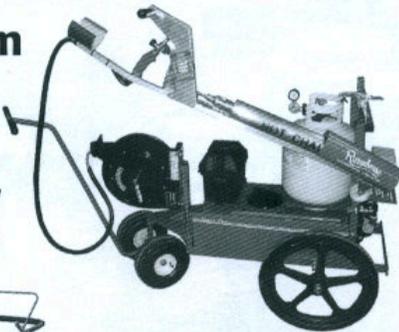


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This *Viola* is like none you have seen before, and is hardy to zone 5. A beautiful pale blue bloom in spring is just the beginning — the foliage is the unusual part. Stunning green heart-shaped leaves with a deep maroon patch in the centre make this plant an eye-catcher all season long. Grows 20 cm tall. Best planted in masses, in partial shade, with moderate waterings. Not your ordinary *Viola*! **LT**

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