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- [News](#)
- [Editorial](#)
- [Letters](#)
- [WestCoast News](#)
- [BusinessBC](#)
- [WestCoast Life](#)
- [Househunting](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [B.C. Traffic Cams](#)
- [The Stocks Pages](#)
- [Send News Tips](#)
- [Sun Columnists](#)
- [30 Day Archive](#)
- [Headline Scan](#)
- [Newspaper Ads](#)
- [Special Sections](#)

Weekly Sections

- [At Home](#)
- [Automotive](#)

- [WestCoast Life](#)
- [Weekend Review](#)
- [WestCoast Homes](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Working](#)

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- [Secret World of Polygamy](#)
- [Road to 2010 Olympics](#)
- [The Air India Bombing](#)
- [The Pickton Case](#)

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New perennials make a splash

It's fun to add some novelty, especially plants that bring pleasure year after year. Here are some making their debut

Steve Whysall, Vancouver Sun

Published: Friday, April 18, 2008

It's always fun to add a few new perennials to your garden at this time of year.

These are plants that will give you pleasure year after year. They're great value for money, I always reckon.

You'll find all sorts of new introductions on offer at your garden centre.

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Some of the best ones are being produced by Van Noort Nursery in Langley. As well as being one the main suppliers of bulbs in Canada, Van Noort also grows thousands of perennials, which are snapped up by other growers and garden centres.

Heuchera 'Midnight Rose' is one of their exciting new cultivars. It has burnished black leaves with pink spots. Like all heuchera, it makes a great plant for growing in a container as well as at the front of the perennial border. It grows about 10 inches high.

Other interesting heucheras to check out are 'Citronella' with bright lime-green leaves, 'Mocha' with dark chocolate foliage and 'Caramel' with bright orange leaves.

If you're a lover of euphorbia -- and I most certainly am -- you'll want 'Tiny Tim,' a dwarf cultivar of *E. martinii* that grows into a mound of green and burgundy leaves only 12 inches high and produces a cloud of chartreuse flowers.

And while you are looking at euphorbia make sure you check out 'Blackbird' and 'Glacier Blue,' two other excellent hybrids.

In the echinacea group, there's another new addition, this one from the Netherlands -- 'Coconut Lime,' which produces a ruffle of pale green petals around the cone in the centre and a skirt of white petals on the outside.

You will also not want to miss 'Pink Double Delight,' a new form of *E. purpurea* that has the same flower arrangement as 'Coconut Lime' only in hot pink.

Both of these new echinaceas are said to be capable of blooming non-stop for eight to 12 weeks.

Moving into the shadows, the hottest new cultivar in hostas is one called 'Blue Mouse Ears,' which only grows to about eight inches high by 10 inches wide and produces a mound of small, rubbery mouse-ear-shaped blue leaves about two-inches wide. This hosta is also reported to be very slug resistant.

Hakonechloa macra 'All Gold' is a great golden Japanese forest grass that thrives best in an east-facing location where it gets morning sun and dappled or full shade in the afternoon.

It is recommended as an excellent accent plant in the woodland garden or for use in containers or to edge paths.

Another terrific plant for the woodland garden, or for any shady spot for that matter, is *Astrantia* 'Star of Heaven,'

a new form of masterwort.

This has flowers that are thought to resemble an Elizabethan collar because of the ornate and intricate arrangement of the stamen and circle of white petals with green tips.

'Star of Beauty' is similar but with ruby red petals and purplish-pink stamens on a white pincushion centre.

The flowers from both cultivars of masterwort can be cut and used to great effect in summer table floral displays.

Tetraploid daylilies (genetically pumped hybrids in the hemerocallis family) continue to offer all sorts of wild and fanciful new flowers. 'Blueberry Sundae' is one of the most dramatic with its exotic purple throat and soft pinkish-purple petals.

Other stars in this category include 'Bela Lugosi,' 'Anzac,' and 'Canadian Border Patrol.' These are all flowers guaranteed to stop you in your tracks as you wander through the garden this summer.

Lithodora 'White Star' is a new groundhugging perennial for a sunny site. It is an improved variety of 'Grace Ward' originally introduced by the famous British nursery, Blooms of Bressingham. 'White Star' has a white central star with a bright blue edge.

Finally, the must-have perennial of the year is Geranium 'Rozanne', which has been voted the Perennial of the Year because it is such an outstanding performer.

It has lovely violet-blue flowers that have small white centres and thrives in full sun to partial shade. It prefers moist, well-drained soil and has the added attraction of being able to flower virtually non-stop throughout summer.

swhysall@png.canwest.com

PERENNIALY INTERESTING

Heritage Perennials, of Abbotsford, and Free Spirit Nursery, of Langley, always have new and interesting perennial offerings. Here's what they have for you this year.

FROM HERITAGE:

- Paeonia 'Singing in the Rain' (below). A new Itoh variety with large semi-double blooms that have creamy yellow petals flushed with peachy salmon.

- Achillea 'Strawberry Seduction' (below): This is a new Blooms of Bressingham variety, which has clusters of rich strawberry-red flowers, each with a tiny yellow eye.

- Salvia 'Merleau': The perennial sages are invaluable for their rich display of spiky flowers in the early summer border. This compact selection has deep violet-blue shade. Drought-tolerant once established, it is attractive to both butterflies and hummingbirds.

- Ajuga 'Toffee Chip' (above): From Terra Nova Nurseries in Oregon, this plant has grey-green leaves with a bright streaky margin of creamy yellow. Short spikes of blue flowers appear from mid- to late spring.

- Aquilegia canadensis 'Pink Lanterns' (above): A compact selection, ideal for edging along woodland pathways or growing near the front of a border, this plant makes a low mound of lacy, fern-like leaves, bearing sprays of small soft-pink flowers with creamy-yellow centres.

FROM FREE SPIRIT NURSERY:

- *Aquilegia chrysantha* 'Yellow Queen.' Unlike many other forms, these flowers fade sideways and outwards.
- *Sedum* 'Lasqueti Gem.' Collected on Lasqueti Island, this has blue-green, needle-like foliage.
- *Echinacea purpurea* 'Vintage Wine': This has intense purple-red flowers and mahogany stems.
- *Monarda* 'Snow Queen.' Tall, slender bee balm with clear white flowers.
- *Macleaya cordata* 'Spetchley Ruby.' The foliage emerges purple-blue suffused with red and the flowers are deep brown-red.
- *Diarrhena japonica*. Clumping grass with wide bright-green blades.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: What roses should I plant in my front yard to provide maximum colour impact? I like roses, but I don't like it when they stop blooming and all you have is leaves.

SW: Floribunda roses tend to flower the most prolifically. Hybrid teas tend to bloom spectacularly and stop. Same with some grandifloras and climbers. Old garden roses put on a wonderful splash of colour and then it's over. If you are not too fussy about fragrance, I recommend any of the Meidiland landscape shrub roses (pink, white or red) or the Flower Carpet roses (pink, red, white or coral). All these roses are non-stop bloomers that pump out blooms from June to October.

Q: I would like to do a border composed of all-white flowering plants. Which kinds would you recommended?

SW. Monochromatic colour schemes are never as easy as they sound. Sissinghurst Garden in England has the most famous "white garden" but it is intensely managed to make sure it looks good all the time. My tip is not to just think of white-flowering plants such as double impatiens and Iceberg roses but also ones with white or silver foliage such as *Stachys argentiana*, *Artemisia* 'Silver Brocade.' 'Stachy's byzantina and *Brunnera* 'Looking Glass.' As well, I would look at trees with wonderful white flowers such as *Magnolia sieboldii* and shrubs like *Viburnum* 'Summer Snowflake.' You're going to end up with some blues and greens but the predominant colour will be white. Some other plant suggestions: *Clematis henryi*, *Erica carnea* 'White Perfection,' *Lilium* 'Casa Blanca,' *Campanula persicifolia* 'Alba' and *Phlox* 'David.'

Q: My shrub roses are covered in white froth spit-like stuff. Someone tells me they are spittle bugs and they are harmless. Is that right? Should I be spraying the bushes?

SW: Yes, they are spittle bugs, little green creatures that like to start their life in a moist, spittle-like froth that they produce. Without the bubbly foam, they would die from dehydration. Spittlebugs suck sap from plants and can cause leaf-curl. If your garden is plagued every year consider spraying dormant oil spray at the end of winter before foliage emerges. If you are not squeamish, squeeze the nymph from its hiding place and dispose of it. An organic spray containing pyrethrin also works. The best action is to be patient and wait for the bugs to grow up and move away. The damage to plants is usually minimal. A strong jet of water can knock bugs to the ground where they become food for birds.

ONLINE

Remember, you can download an In the Garden podcast by Steve Whysall from www.vancouver.sun.com.

The rules of container gardening that will guarantee you safe and happy gardening on your balcony, patio, terrace or deck.

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