

IOWA gardening®

Nature's Crown Jewels LILIES IN PERRY-DISE

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DISPLAY UNTIL MAY 31, 2011

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in This Perry Garden**

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holding court

'Fairy Cupz', a 2011 introduction (on the cover), and LA hybrid 'Desert Song' (this page) are just two of some 200 (and counting) different gems blooming in Randy Hall's majestic garden. Photos by John Holtorf. See story, page 20.



Ipomea
'Sweetheart Red'

COURTESY PROVEN WINNERS
(PROVENWINNERS.COM)

Anticipation

2011 arrivals promise performance and pizzazz

by DEB WILEY

Collegiate sports celebrations in Iowa could experience a refinement this year. Among the fans, flags, and face paint, be on the lookout for beautiful new adornments — potted annuals.

Iowa's nurseries and garden centers will soon fill with enticing new plants in unusual shapes, sizes, and shades: pink 'Annabelle'-type hydrangeas, red coneflowers, and, yes, petunias sporting the Black and Gold. This spring gardeners will find larger blooms and stronger stems, plants tweaked to trail over the side of a basket, dwarf versions of large shrubs, and color. Lots of color.

The 2011 introductions originate from a variety of sources around the world: breeders, hybridizers, plant hunters, and eagle-eyed gardeners who find new sports — unusual variations of established plants.

In most cases these plants have run at least a 10-year gauntlet to get to the Hawkeye State. It takes breeders four to six years to grow the new creations large enough to test and evaluate before a plant company becomes interested enough to produce. Then the company tests another couple of years before taking one to two more years to grow enough plants to satisfy the market.

Because of the lead time needed, the horticulture industry reacts more slowly to garden trends. Unlike

the fashion and design industries, plant picks can't be influenced by the Pantone colors of the year (although this year's selection, Pantone 18-2120 Honeysuckle, takes its juicy red-pink inspiration from a shrub many Iowans still grow in their gardens).

A plant needs more than attractive hue to make it to our gardens. To become a member of the Proven Winners family, for example, a plant must have exceptional overall performance. "If it doesn't have the amount of flower power we are looking for, it won't be introduced," Danielle Ernest, Proven Winners public relations and brand development coordinator, assures gardeners. "We look for consumer performance — such as drought tolerance, more flower power, better pest and disease tolerance — compared to what is already out there. We do a lot of comparison trialing, so we know we are introducing the best variety in relation to one of its ancestors."

Monrovia, a California-based company, evaluates 50 plants for each one that's released, seeking innovations in perennials and woody plants that are "healthier, hardier, and easier to care for."

We asked some of Iowa's independent garden center experts to identify the plants they're most excited about this year. Here are their top picks.



Pop and Spirit

Want to add fizz to your garden? Wallace's Terrell likes 'Cherry Cola' and 'Ginger Ale' heucheras, part of Terra Nova's Soda series (which includes 'Root Beer'). " 'Cherry Cola' has really cool red-bronze foliage that's a very unique color," she says, "and it has nice spikes with bright red flowers." 'Ginger Ale' cools things down with champagne-color leaves and pink flowers. Terrell likes heucheras for their tidy mounding habits that mix well with other perennials along a sidewalk or in the front of a border. She also likes to use them with annuals in containers to add constant color that's low-maintenance because the heucheras don't rely on flowers to make a show. (Pop them in the ground in late summer or early fall, and they'll be ready to grow the following spring.)

Brockshus at Del's favors heucherellas (which cross heucheras with tiarellas), partly because of their good manners. "They're not spreading and don't get that big," he says. He especially loves 'Golden Zebra'. "Cyclone fans have to have this one," says the proud alum. With brilliant crimson centers on gorgeous gold leaves, it's the perfect focal point for a small garden.

Heucheras and heucherellas require excellent soil drainage; they'll underperform and rot in heavy clay soil. Although they'll fry if planted in intense full sun, they do like some sun to bring out the best leaf colors.

- 'Cherry Cola' (top)
 - Sun to part shade
 - 14 inches tall
 - 6 inches wide
 - 18-inch flower stalks
 - Zones 4-9
- 'Golden Zebra' (bottom)
 - Part shade to shade
 - 15 inches tall
 - 8 inches wide
 - 18-inch flower stalks
 - Zones 4-9

COURTESY TERRA NOVA NURSERIES (TERRANOVANURSERIES.COM)

Now Available in Petite

The gorgeous, super-hardy panicle hydrangea 'Limelight' has been downsized, and gardener enthusiasm is expected to be big. "I really, really like Little Lime," says Wallace's Terrell. "I planted three last fall and they bloomed their heads off."

The cone-shape flower head emerges in midsummer in a soft green color, then transitions to pink in the fall. Compared to the 6- to 8-foot-tall 'Limelight', this plant fits easily in small spaces and makes a good accent in containers. Prune in late winter to early spring. Apply a controlled-release fertilizer in early spring. The soil acidity does not affect bloom color.

- Full sun to partial shade
- 3-5 feet tall
- Zones 3-9

COURTESY PROVEN WINNERS (PROVENWINNERS.COM)





COURTESY TERRA NOVA NURSERIES (TERRANOVANURSERIES.COM)

Near-Natives

The coneflower craze continues with a bevy of new flower and petal shapes and colors. These “nativars,” a term coined by Dr. Alan Armitage of the University of Georgia to indicate plants created from a native species, retain many of the benefits of their native cousins, such as hardiness, but have a more refined look.

The seed-grown ‘PowWow Wild Berry’ was a 2010 All-America Selections winner. It earned the designation for its 3- to 4-inch-wide deep rose-purple flowers. “I like the size and color and because it holds its blooms so long,” says Groth’s Gardens’ Groth. “I think it’ll be hardy here because it’s close to our native *Echinacea purpurea*. Some of the colored ones are not as hardy.”

Terrell saw ‘PowWow Wild Berry’ growing in trial beds and was impressed with its compact size and strong, erect stems.

Groth also likes ‘Firebird’ for its flaming red-orange blooms and stocky, stout stems.

‘Firebird’ (top)

Full to part sun

18 inches tall

22 inches wide

Zones 4–9

‘PowWow Wild Berry’ (bottom)

Full sun

20–24 inches tall

12–16 inches wide

Zones 4–9

COURTESY ALL AMERICAN SELECTIONS
 ((PANAMERICAN SEED (PANAMSEED.COM))



Sweet!

Sweet potato vines (*Ipomoea batatas*) are wonderful ground-covers but can be so vigorous they overtake a mixed container. Ann Borwick, an owner of Piney Ridge Greenhouse in Johnston, says a new generation of sweet potato vines behaves better. “They’re more dwarf, with a more controlled habit,” she says. “And they come in shades of browns and reds, so they’re really fun to mix.”

She recommends the Sweet Caroline series, including the new Sweetheart Red (a red-bronze shade) and Red, the Sidekick series in lime or black, and the Illusion Lace series with frilly, cutleaf leaves.



Sweet Caroline Red (top)

Illusion Midnight Lace (above)

Sweet Caroline Sweetheart Red (left and page 18)

Full to part sun
 6–8 feet long
 Annual (Store dormant tubers indoors through winter)

COURTESY PROVEN WINNERS (PROVENWINNERS.COM)

