

SPECIAL REPORT: IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

GARDEN DESIGN

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for Seating,
Storage, Décor

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in Hot New Pots

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For more, go to gardendesign.com.

POSTAL INFORMATION *Garden Design*, Number 157 (ISSN 0733-4923). Published 7 times per year (January/February, March, April, May, July/August, September/October, November/December) by Bonnier Corporation, P.O. Box 8500, Winter Park, FL 32790. ©Copyright 2009, all rights reserved. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. Periodicals postage paid at Winter Park, FL, and additional mailing offices. **SUBSCRIPTIONS:** U.S.: \$23.95 for one year, \$39.95 for two years. Canadian subscribers add \$8.00 per year, foreign subscribers add \$21.00 per year. For subscription information, please call 800-513-0848. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *Garden Design*, P.O. Box 421145, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1145. For faster service, please enclose your current subscription label. Occasionally, we make portions of our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services we think may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive these offers, please advise us at 1-800-513-0848. **EDITORIAL:** Send correspondence to Editorial Department, *Garden Design*, P.O. Box 8500, Winter Park, FL 32790; E-mail: gardendesign@bonniercorp.com. We welcome all editorial submissions, but assume no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. **ADVERTISING:** Send advertising materials to RR Donnelley & Sons Company, Lancaster Premedia Center, Attn: *Garden Design* Ad Management Module, 216 Greenfield Road, Lancaster, PA 17601. Phone: 717-481-2851. Retail sales discounts available; contact Circulation Department. Following are trademarks of *Garden Design* and Bonnier Corporation, and their use by others is strictly prohibited: Fresh; Growing; Style; Sage Advice; On Design.

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on design

DAN HEIMS: STYLISH SCIENCE



Blending science and art, Dan Heims (below), co-owner of Terra Nova Nurseries in Oregon, draws inspiration from natural areas like the Olympic Peninsula (bottom) and channels it to create a wealth of new plants, like *Heuchera* 'Electra' (left).



It all started with a 29-cent velvet plant on his dorm-room windowsill. After that, Dan Heims was hooked on plants. Since then, his high-tech methods have put hundreds of knee-weakening cultivars into the hands of gardeners and designers, produced by his wholesale tissue-culture and breeding nursery near Portland, Oregon. A lecturer, plant hunter and admitted plant fanatic, Heims is credited with making foliage a megastar in the landscape. Known for his astonishing array of *Heuchera* cultivars ("No, we're not finished yet"), he continues to be blown away by the diversity of plants: "It's a miracle to see a begonia seed the size of a speck of dust grow into a mature plant with a leaf color and shape that no human has seen before." — JENNY ANDREWS

Q: Terra Nova wows us with new plants every year. What can we salivate over in 2009?

A: On average we introduce 14 plants annually, but in 2009 some 60 new plants are coming out — including everblooming coreopsis in an entirely new color range and echinaceas that Allan Armitage says will make us completely rethink the genus.

Q: You love all your plants, but are there favorites?

A: *Begonia*, *Heuchera*, *Heucherella*, *Calathea*, *Philodendron*. And I have 65 cultivars of Japanese maples in my one-third-acre garden. Walking under them is like being in a cathedral.

Q: Tissue culture is the "brave new world" of the plant business. What got you started?

A: I saw a photo of a tissue-culture lab owner with a bank of *Hosta* 'Patriot' by his pool. At the time, 'Patriot' was selling for \$100 a plant. I asked my future business partner, Ken Brown, who was a food microbiologist, "Could we do a lab?" In three years, we went from "garage band" to rock-star status.

Q: What does a plant need to make you say "aha"?

A: My radar, or "green-dar," is going all the time, and it's easy to become "chlorophyll-blind" when you're exposed to too many plants. It takes a plant with a real wow factor to grab my attention, like a flower or leaf color that didn't exist before. But I'm never jaded — it's the best kind of work.

Q: Do you see yourself primarily as a scientist?

A: I'm a hybrid between a lover of technology and a lover of nature. My most romantic vision is the mossy woods on the Olympic Peninsula. Anywhere there is light, moisture and a bit of soil, there is life.