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Janene Mickel of Beach Lake, Pa., says her purple oxalis, with its black overtones, literally stops traffic when guests arrive. She's always giving away cuttings. *Associated Press*

GARDEN NOIR

Black and near-black blooms, plants add spice to sophisticated landscapes

By **DEAN FOSDICK**
Associated Press

NEW MARKET, Va. — When you want to be belle of the ball, what do you wear? Chances are, you wrap yourself in a stunning something done in basic black. Designers generally agree black is the best choice for knockout simple, center-of-attention fashion.

Now move that eye-catching concept from ballroom to flower garden. Dark or black-appearing plants are making fashion statements of their own in residential properties across the nation.

"Black is being used in nature by your more sophisticated gardeners," said Debbie Knitz, sales manager for Terra Nova Nurseries Inc., Tigard, Ore. "It brings more drama and more excitement to the garden."

Black-appearing blooms are not, as you might imagine, drab and uninteresting. No wallflowers, these.

Some are real lookers. Dark foliage plants are great choices for accenting borders, adding punch to containers, defining water and rock gardens. They make sensuous centerpieces, too.

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Black plants: Dark foliage offers an offbeat way to landscape

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"Dark foliage plants — the darker the better — can evoke a number of different emotions," Knitz said. "A lot of that depends upon what you have them planted with. They need to be offset. They need to be companion-planted."

Terra Nova is promoting a distinctive black calla varietal in its current catalog. The German import is called Edge of Night and is said to be one of Europe's most popular cut flowers.

"The dramatic richly colored three-inch flowers resemble black velvet and add a new dimension to this popular group of plants," the Terra Nova horticulturists say in the catalog.

"Black edges outline the glossy green, silver-flecked leaves and provide the perfect backdrop for the floral display. In colder regions, Edge of Night can also be moved indoors for winter-long enjoyment."
No flower is truly wholly black, but the funnel-shaped Edge of Night bloom comes close, Knitz said.

"You're probably looking at deep purple, dark red, burgundy or rich chocolate for what the industry calls 'black,'" she said. "Many of these plants look black in the right color light. The more sun the better for bringing out the black."

The Edge of Night varietal is part of a plant group commonly called "calla lilies," although it actually is a member of the water-loving aroid lily family. Most callas flower in a creamy white, but some have been hybridized to bloom in red, yellow, pink or black.

A calla likes sun, but not too much sun. It needs frequent watering and feeding with a balanced liquid fertilizer every



"Edge of Night," the Calla Lily developed by Terra Nova Nurseries in Oregon, has a deep purple flower with black edges. Courtesy www.terranovahnurseries.com

couple of months. In colder climates, they do well as tender perennials, grown outside in summer and over-wintered indoors.

For more consistent flowering, rest the rhizomes in a cool area (50 degrees) for a month or so before reporting them in rich and moist but well-drained soil.

■ ■ ■
If callas don't interest you, then consider some of these other dark-foliage plants:

Oxalis: The so-called "shamrock plant," some of which produce deep purple leaves (Lone Hecker). Beware your choices, however. A few

aggressive oxalis varieties are considered invasive.

Actaea: Black Negligee hybrid. Lacy, purple-tinted foliage that develops fragrant white flowers. A good accent plant; one that can provide contrasting foliage in border plantings.

Geraniums: Also called Cranesbill. The Midnight Reiter is a semi-dwarf varietal with deep purple foliage and dark lilac flowers.

Roses: Black Magic, Black Beauty, Black Baccara. All are so deeply red that they appear almost black.

Tulips: Black Diamond, Black Parrot, Queen of Night. Their names speak for themselves.

Some other dark, nearly black plants to consider include iris (Dark Vader, Superstition), pansies (Bowles Black), dahlias (Arabian Night), columbine (Black Barlow), and daylilies (Stirling, Black Jack), among others.

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For more about the calla Edge of Night, see the Terra Nova Nurseries Web site: www.terranovahnurseries.com
Or visit the Virginia Tech Web site for more genetic information about growing calla or arum lilies: www.ext.vt.edu/departments/envirohort/factsheets/cut/callali.html

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