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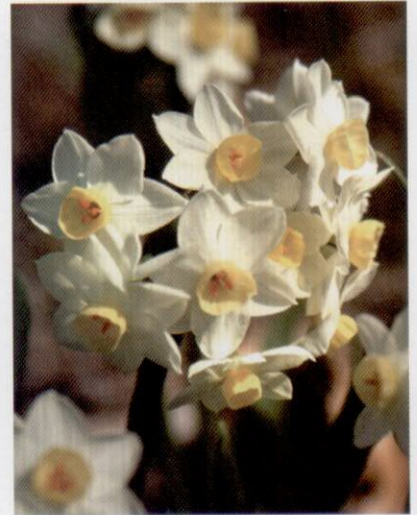
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Oleander; spiraea. *By Neil Sperry*

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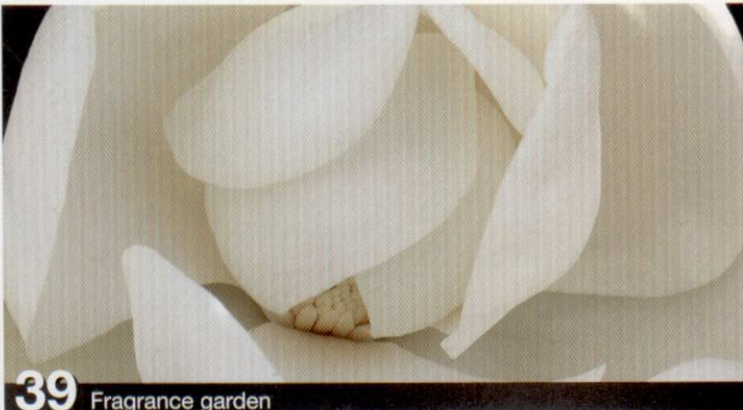
Planting the fragrance garden

By Mary Wilhite



on the cover

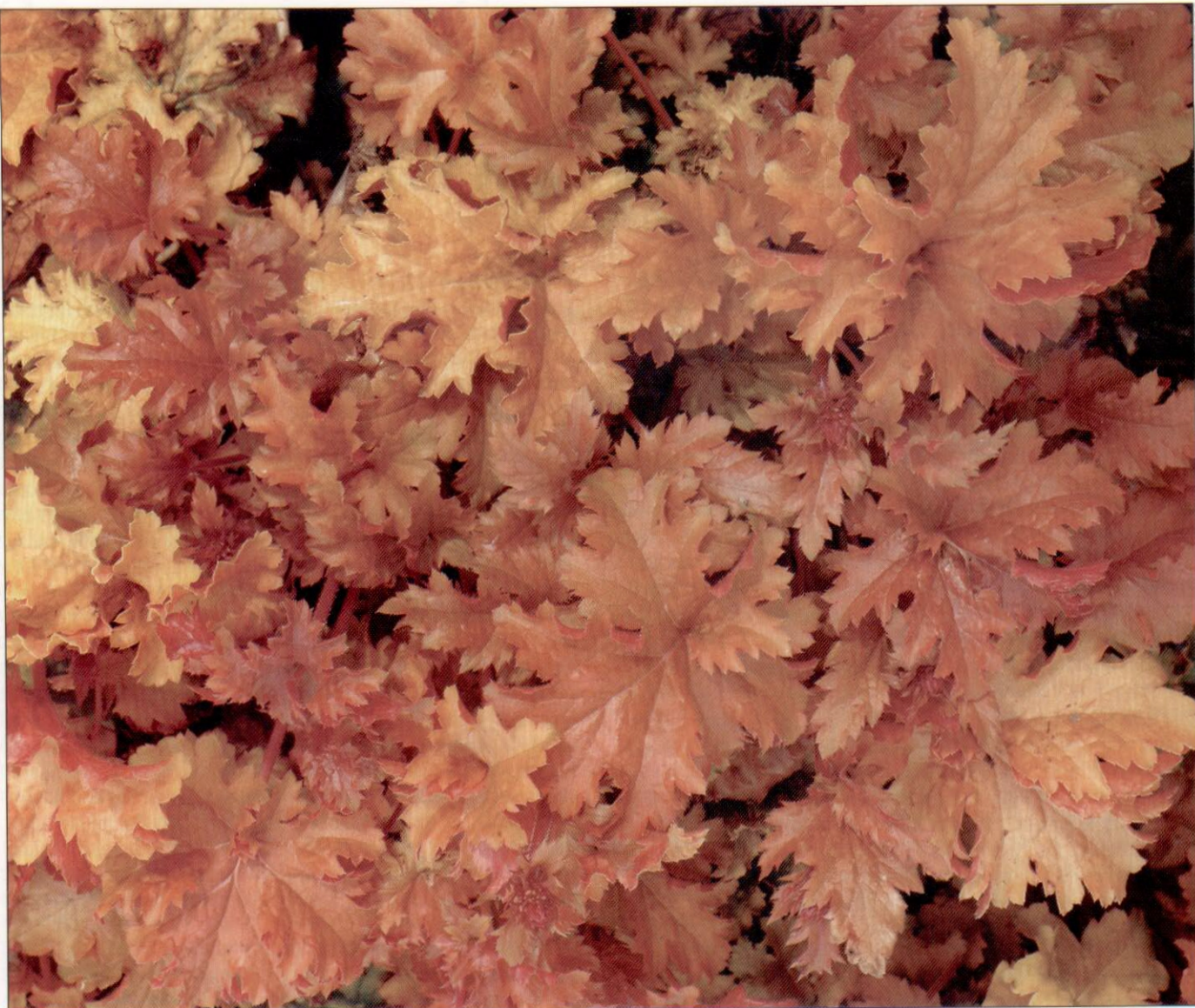
The fragrant *Narcissus tazetta* 'Grand Primo' is a long-proven and popular performer in Texas gardens. Photo by Neil Sperry.



39 Fragrance garden



16 Heuchera



TERRA NOVA NURSERIES

Above: *Heuchera* 'Amber Waves' is colorful and beautifully ruffled.

Heuchera

An explosion of color for the shade garden

Leslie Finical Halleck

Large shade trees have become a staple in the urban Texas landscape. Many homeowners find that once they've successfully shaded their homes from the hot Texas sun, they've also created a garden environment that requires a very different palette of plants. The shade garden can present challenges when it comes to choosing plants that will not only thrive, but also put on a nice show. While the roses, sages, daylilies and other sunbathers will have to "exit stage right" in the shade garden, there are many beautiful shade-loving varieties waiting

to take their places. Heucheras, also known as coral bells, fit the bill nicely.

The genus *Heuchera* includes approximately 50 species of herbaceous perennial plants, all native to North America. In addition to coral bells, plants in this group are also referred to as alumroot. Heucheras grow in many different habitats, so there is a broad range of physical characteristics among the different species, not to mention tolerance to different climates and soils. Hybridization of heucheras exploded in the 1990s, resulting in

a stunning array of new and colorful varieties. If you haven't explored heucheras in the last few years, then you may be envisioning a somewhat demure clumping, green-leafed perennial with slender spikes of tiny pink blooms. Nice, but not terribly exciting. Not so any longer.



Heuchera foliage has come a long way in the last several years. One used to have the choice of only the old-fashioned green-leafed variety or one or two purple varieties. Nowadays, you can choose from an almost intoxicating color assortment of peach, orange, chartreuse, amber, silver, deep purples and almost blacks. With names like 'Crème Brûlée', 'Marmalade', 'Ginger Ale', 'Mocha Mint' or 'Peach Flambe', you might think you're reading from a tasty dessert menu rather than a list of plant cultivars. In my opinion, heucheras have become one of the best color accessories for the shade garden.

While grown in sunny locations in Northern gardens, heuchera prefer a shady spot in Texas gardens. They can tolerate some direct morning sun, but it's best if they receive afternoon shade, or just dappled sunlight throughout the day. Heucheras are relatively easy to grow and perform best in fertile, well-drained soil. To create a good environment for your heucheras, amend your beds with compost, and top-dress with mulch after planting. Apply a new top-dressing of mulch before winter to protect the shallow root system. Clumps will increase in size over the years, but can be divided if they appear to lose vigor. A light fertilization in spring will help keep your heucheras looking their best.

As the plants are mostly evergreen, spent foliage from the previous year should be removed in late winter and early spring. During spring and fall, heucheras require only moderate watering. However, during the hot summer months, keep the plants watered regularly. While heucheras are, for the most part,



Above: 'Obsidian' leaves are a stunning, shiny black.

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pest-free, powdery mildew can sometimes be a problem in the humid parts of spring. The best way to prevent powdery mildew is to water your plants in the early morning, as opposed to the evening, and provide plants with good air circulation by not overcrowding.

TERRA NOVA NURSERIES

During spring and early summer, heucheras produce slender spikes sporting tiny, bell-shaped blooms. Foliage is definitely the focus when it comes to heucheras, with these flowers being a bonus. Foliage clumps generally grow to heights and widths of about 12 inches, and flower spikes can grow up to 24 inches. To keep plants looking tidy, remove the flower stems after blooming has finished.

For a stunning shade display, you can combine

LESLIE FINICAL HALLECK

heucheras with other shade lovers such as hostas, Lenten roses, hydrangeas, impatiens and many others. Heucheras also make excellent container plants and will usually over-winter in containers outdoors. Just because they are perennials, don't hesitate to add them to your seasonal shade planters for fantastic foliage color. ★



A FEW OF MY NEW FAVORITES...

'Peach Flambe' – Large, smooth leaves radiate a bright peach color in spring and summer before turning purple in winter. White flowers.

'Obsidian' – Stunning, shiny black leaves and a compact growth habit. Beautiful *en masse* or in containers. White flowers.

'Lime Rickey' – Bright chartreuse leaves make a beautiful contrast with dark foliage. White flowers.

'Amber Waves' – Showy ruffled, amber-gold foliage that is brightest in spring and fall. Light pink flowers.

'Amethyst Myst' – An unusual glowing shade of purple with a silvery overlay. Cream-colored flowers and striking fall foliage.

Above: 'Lime Rickey' adds spark to this combination.

About the Author: Leslie Finical Halleck is a horticulturist and the general manager of North Haven Gardens in Dallas.

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