

SEPTEMBER 2008

GARDEN MARKET EXPO ISSUE



pacific coast nurseryman

& GARDEN SUPPLY DEALER

EBERLY PUBLIC RELATIONS 2009-02
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Pacific Coast Nurseryman and Garden Supply Dealer (ISSN # 0192-7159) is published monthly by Pacific Coast Nurseryman Magazine, 105 N. Vermont Ave. P.O. Box 1477, Glendora CA 91740. Periodical postage paid at Glendora CA and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Pacific Coast Nurseryman and Garden Supply Dealer, P.O. Box 1477, Glendora CA 91740-1477

(payable in U.S. funds only)

1 year: \$30.00
2 years: \$50.00
3 years: \$60.00
Foreign: \$45.00 per year
(surface mail only)

DEADLINES:

All advertising & news copy must be received no less than 5 weeks prior to the 1st day of the insertion month.



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THE COVER

Lush landscapes in the dry state of Nevada usually rely on the smart use of irrigation water. This home landscape won the Southern Nevada Water Authority's 2008 Star Nursery Color Award. In the 2008 professional category sponsored by the Nevada Landscape Association, Courtney Lawn and Landscape won an award. The professional category sponsored by the Nevada Landscape Association garnered an award for Courtney Lawn and Landscape. The NLA co-sponsors Garden Market Expo coming up this month in Las Vegas. See story on page 28. Photo courtesy of the Southern Nevada Water Authority.

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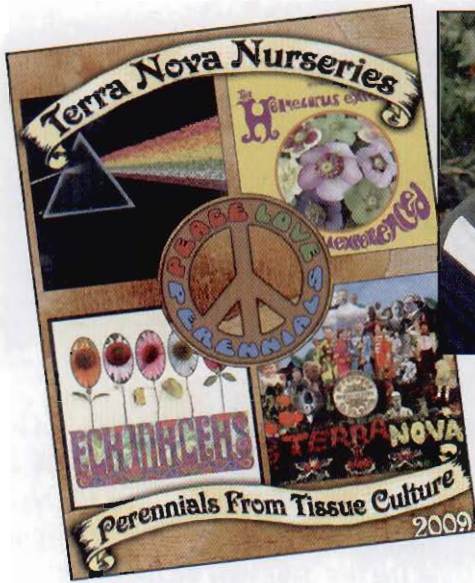
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The Perennial Wow Factor

Holy heucheras, Batman! Perennials will still sell in a downtrending economy because they're the best plant value around, says breeder Dan Heims.

By Kathleen Pyle, Managing Editor



Dan Heims

Terra Nova's 2009 catalog revisits album covers of the '60s and gives them a horticultural twist.

how to entertain himself. He writes poetry and song parodies (the latest being a lawn torch song called "Urea," sung to the tune of "Maria"), and collects vintage artifacts such as Barbie dolls. He has a mind full of creative ideas and a greenhouse full of potential best-seller plants. Most of all, Heims has a lot of fun. He's always the first to remind us that gardening should be entertaining... above all else.

Through their tissue-culture breeding program, Heims and his business partner, Ken Brown, have singularly redefined the genus heuchera as garden plants. What started out as an unassuming but attractive large-leafed woodland plant now lights up the shady borders of gardens everywhere, in colorful foliar bouquets from purplish black to gold and lime green. "Twelve years ago, there were just a few heuchera varieties on the market and they were still called 'coral bells,'" says Heims, referring to the seed-grown strains of *Heuchera sanguinea*, including 'Bressingham Hybrids' and 'Firefly.' "And now Home Depot officially labels its \$6.99 one-gallon plants as 'heucheras.' The public knows them by the Latin name. That's a point of pride for me... not the price, but the botanical name recognition."

Dan Heims has a lot of friends in the industry. The co-owner of Terra Nova Nurseries in Canby, Oregon, could be equally happy, however, alone on some horticultural desert island. Picture this: Lost, starring Dan Heims. This Renaissance man knows



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Heims' own entry into the world of heuchera breeding began with the variegated 'Snow Storm' in 1988. 'Snow Storm' had *H. sanguinea* bloodlines; Heims went on to introduce traits from the flashy yet durable *H. americana*, and cross them with the ruffled *H. micrantha*, and weather-tolerant *H. sanguinea* to create his first hybrids, including 'Plum Pudding.'

Terra Nova's latest heuchera introduction is 'Plum Royale,' featuring raspberry and silver foliage netted with chocolate veins. "it will probably kill off our standard variety 'Plum Pudding,'" Heims notes of the 1996 introduction. According to Terra Nova's 2009 catalog, 'Plum Royale' reaches a new level of Purplitude.

The full potential for heucheras hasn't yet been reached, Heims claims. They're tough landscape plants in adverse climates from the sweating borders of the Southeast to the frigid winters of the Midwest, not only surviving but



Heuchera 'Sashay' earned the Award of Garden Merit, a rare honor.

furnishing colorful foils for trees and shrubs at least three seasons of the year. Terra Nova has succeeded at producing a hosta alternative that won't wilt in Southern summers by adding *H. villosa* bloodlines in their breeding program. The *villosa* species features extra large leaves and sneers at humidity.

Why tissue culture? The variability

of heuchera coloring, even from leaf to leaf on a single plant, means varietal consistency can only be achieved through micropropagation. Mingling in the test tube may be the best traits of 5 or 6 different heucheras, native to different regions of the country.

Heims also points out that the cut flower market has yet to realize the full potential of heucheras. European breeders have long developed new heucheras for their dainty flower spikes, but cut heuchera foliage also adds color and shape to a floral arrangement, says Heims. The cut leaves may live up to two years in water, he reports.

To make sure that Terra Nova plants endure real-life tests in trial and home gardens, Heims trots around the globe to review how the plants are performing. In July, he was off to a Heuchera Happening in England to see Terra Nova varieties in the field trials. He explains that the European trials "help us develop aims and directions for the breeding program. "Terra Nova also seeks out garden writers to trial the nursery's new plants in their gardens. It takes years to make a new selection, after exhaustive trialing. "75,000 seedlings may be winnowed down to three introductions, after voting by the staff, trialing and being tested by garden writers, and adjusting the plants' hardiness range," according to Heims.

It's not all about heucheras. Terra Nova has created or has introduced

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several new varieties from various genera. You may be acquainted with a few, from *Acanthus mollis* 'Tasmanian Angel' to *Yucca* 'Sapphire Skies.'

Heims' jovial manner belies a firm control of all aspects of plant promotion from the catalog color reproduction on press (most of the photos are his own), to the marketing of new plants at trade shows. "Get out there and push the plants," he urged his sales team at a recent mega trade show where Terra Nova was promoting their new dwarf stokesia, 'Purple Pixie.' "Write that down," he instructed a trade journalist when he dropped yet another quotable gem.

Perhaps he was afraid the reporter's middle-aged memory bank wouldn't retain the quote, because Heims is well acquainted with women of an "age," his best customers. The archetypal Terra Nova customer is the fiftysomething woman still agile enough to garden and affluent enough to splash the cash on new hybrids at her local garden center. Once the plants are positioned on garden center shelves and in the glossy pages

of mail-order catalogs, Heims is fairly confident that he has "chart-toppers" that will be sure consumer hits. To keep his finger on the pulse of his average customer, he snoops around behind the scenes at plant shows and sales such as the big Hardy Plant Society sale in Portland, Oregon, every spring. "I scan the flats of plants that shoppers have picked out and see what the popular colors are. O.K., so red's still hot, I noticed." You can also find plantings of Terra Nova varieties at locales like the Woodburn Shopping Outlet just south of Portland, Oregon, where they supply horticultural eye candy for thousands of shoppers each day.

So what's hot in the near future? The penchant for comfort colors forecast for next season's fashions and home decor coincides with the khaki and whiskey-colored foliage on some of Terra Nova's latest heucheras, including 'Ginger Ale,' and 'Amber Waves.' Of 'Amber Waves,' the 2009 Terra Nova catalog raves "We had a designer grab our plant and hold it up to every colored foliage plant in

the nursery and... it worked. We have discovered the 'new neutral.' "

Speaking of comfort, the names of two new echinacea hybrids hearken back to the comforting cuisine of the '60s. Echinaceas x 'Mac n' Cheese' and 'Tomato Soup' are bound to cause a stomach rumble or two among Baby Boomer gardeners. Their intense and colorfast hues of red and yellow are a bragging point for Heims.

Heims' European travels also keep him informed of trends that will eventually hop the Pond and crest in the North American market. But the American garden stands apart from its European counterparts in scale, Heims says. "American gardens are bigger and need larger background plants." He points to Terra Nova's new dark-leaved penstemon introduction from Dale Lindgren, 'Dark Towers,' as an example of tall and dramatic background plant.

Younger gardeners may be "all about food," says Heims, but they're also fascinated by all things retro, including plants. He sees a revival ahead for one of his favorites —begonias. A recent begonia introduction, "Metallic Mist" earned him an Award of Merit from the American Begonia Society earlier this year.

Heims will be the first to admit that variegated plants can be overdone. "They add intellectual stimulation but need to be used with restraint," he comments. Ask him about the elusive variety he hasn't yet been able to conjure up, and he'll answer "A variegated gunnera!" Colors evoke emotion, Heims asserts. He recounts a magical afternoon spent observing a layer of golden-leaved perennials that illuminated a Buchart Gardens border in Victoria, British Columbia. "Foliage plants deliver longer lasting effects and offer better consumer value," he states. "Plant breeding is all about finding the WOW factor. We try to break the laws of horticulture and hopefully make a profit."

Dan Heims is a featured speaker at the upcoming Garden Market Expo. His topic is "Flash and Splash: Building the Color Story."

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