

# SAN DIEGO HOME/GARDEN

LIFESTYLES

## REFLECTION GARDEN

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## IN THE GARDEN

- 63 **GARDENS:** Two award-winning Coronado gardens
- 70 **GARDEN PLANNER:** Checklist and growing tips
- 76 **GARDEN ORNAMENTALS:** Heuchera

## LIFESTYLES

- 80 **ENTERTAINING:** Thornton Winery dinner and concert
- 86 **RUNWAY:** The latest trends in fashion, jewelry and more
- 92 **ON THE SCENE:** Great causes and good times
- 96 **ART & ARTISTS:** Faiya Fredman
- 100 **SAN DIEGO LIFE:** Places and faces
- 102 **PETS:** Above-average best friends
- 104 **FARMERS' MARKETS:** Tips and recipes for produce lovers
- 114 **RECIPES:** Shellfish
- 117 **RESTAURANTS:** Illume Bistro, Tea Upon Chatsworth and Alchemy
- 117 **HOT 150:** San Diego's finest restaurants
- 129 **AROUND SAN DIEGO:** September's best events

## MISCELLANEOUS

- 141 **RESOURCES:** Where to find the people, products and services in this issue
- 144 **BACK PAGE:** Balboa Park gardens



ILLUMUS PHOTOGRAPHY



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# TRIPLE TAKE

Heuchera — colorful and easy to grow

**H**eucheras (coral bells) are old-fashioned American charmers with scalloped foliage and airy blooms that float on graceful stems. They are worth a second — and third — look. New hybrids arrive each year. Recent introductions stretch the possibilities for foliage color with a striking palette that ranges from green, pink, red, gold, silver and chartreuse, to nearly black. These low-maintenance beauties flourish in dry shade.

*Heuchera* 'Wendy' (shown) is a choice cultivar for San Diego gardens. 'Wendy' was hybridized by Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Garden from two un-thirsty Southwestern natives, (*H. maxima* and *H. sanguinea*). 'Wendy' asks for little water, and once established, this plucky, evergreen perennial brightens the shade with tidy rosettes of deeply lobed leaves and cheerful pink flowers on nodding stems.

*Heucheras* are well suited for mass plantings in deep shade and dappled coastal sunlight where their leaves won't scorch. They bloom lavishly in spring, and intermittently, through a long bloom season that extends from May through October, depending on the variety. As a wonderful plus, their open flowers attract nectar-seeking birds, bees and butterflies.

A Valley Center gardener writes: "My mother loved coral bells and always included them in her garden. Perhaps this is why I enjoy their daintiness so much — although some of mine are Amazons! I grow several varieties of *Heuchera* beneath my native oaks. All are in shades of pale: one lovely salmon pink and three creamy whites that look light yellow from a distance. One of the creams is more than three feet across and mounded two feet high — with big lush leaves. They thrive in leaf litter despite near total neglect — perhaps a few little soaks during the driest part of the year. For once I planted something where it was meant to be!"

Native western *Heucheras* and their hybrids require the least care and water. *H. Rancho Santa Ana* hybrids and the *H. Canyon* series are tough. *H. maxima* (from the Channel Islands); *H. micrantha* ('Painted Lady', 'Purple Palace' and 'Ruffles'); and *H. sanguinea*, are some to try.

Cultivars that promise delicious color: 'Chocolate Veil' (maroon leaves marbled with purple and lime); 'Crème Brûlée' (peachy orange with yellow flowers); 'Lime Rickey' (ruffled chartreuse leaves); 'Marmalade' (reds, orange, rich brown); 'Peach Flambe' (apricot tones); 'Plum Pudding' (yum!).

Growing a living mural: 'Amethyst Mist', 'Garner', 'Crimson Curls', 'Obsidian' (nearly black), 'Persian Carpet', 'Pewter Moon', 'Silver Scrolls', 'Velvet Night', 'Ring of Fire' and 'Vesuvius'.

This page and opposite: *Heuchera* 'Wendy'. [www.rancho-santa-ana-botanical-garden.org](http://www.rancho-santa-ana-botanical-garden.org)

## GROUND WORK

- Give full shade in dry heat or foliage will burn. Semi-shade in cool areas.
- Once rooted, native hybrids require minimal water or care. Others need regular water for foliage production. Good drainage is important.
- Light feeder. Prefers mulch and acidic conditions. Tolerates gravel, sand and stony soils.
- Pests: Few. Keep dry to avert root rot and mildew.
- Size: Dwarf cultivars, one foot by one foot. Larger varieties grow five foot by three foot.
- Divide every three to four years in spring or fall. Cut back old woody stems and let them regrow. Propagation is easily done by root division or from seed sown in sand in the spring. ∞

Where to find it, page 141

