

In Praise of Public Gardens 🌿 Montana-tough Perennials

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TOUGH PLANTS
VARIETIES
THAT THRIVE
UNDER PRESSURE



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Echinacea 'SUNSET'
James Gagne



Don't Worry, PLANT HAPPY

Common garden problems can be solved
with plants both rugged and beautiful

by **Chuck Pavlich**

Echinacea 'Intense Orange', from Terra Nova Nurseries' KISMET series, meets the challenge of dry soil with loads of long-lasting, vividly colorful blooms.



Whether you are a novice gardener or an expert in the horticultural industry, there will always be problems that arise when you're growing, cultivating and grooming your garden. The key to gardening success is not necessarily identifying problems as they present themselves, but finding smart answers that work best for your garden over time. Regardless of region, there are always problem areas in need of a specific gardening solution. Your garden can be too dry or too shady, or it may be in a hot and humid part of the country. Luckily, there are many plant solutions that bring aid to these situations while providing surprisingly beautiful color and texture to your garden.

The basics still apply for every planting area: Choose the right soil amendments; purchase healthy plants from reputable companies; and water everything thoroughly

at first, even if the plant is drought tolerant, because nothing is drought tolerant on day one of its life in your garden.

It is also important to be patient with your choices, because plants take time to adapt from their previous environments. Before it was purchased, the plant you selected may have been in a climate-controlled greenhouse or a sun-scalded field. It will need a slight adjustment period.

SOLUTIONS FOR HOT, SUNNY GARDENS

One of the most difficult growing problems to overcome is "too much of a good thing." Sun and humidity are great in moderation and necessary for many ornamental plants to grow. However, this combination can make it difficult for non-native ornamental varieties to thrive. Heat stress can cause many problems, including wilting, even when the plant is adequately watered.

Humidity also has its setbacks to

ornamental plants. Plants in humid parts of the country are more susceptible to the spread of foliar diseases, which include ailments such as mildew and various leaf spots.

Verbascum is, without a doubt, one of the most underused genera for providing easy color in water-sensitive areas.

Agastache 'Morello,' one of Terra Nova Nurseries' newest selections, acts as a terrific solution plant for many problems that arise from



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heat and humidity. Bred from native American species, this perennial greatly impressed growers in plant trials from Michigan to Miami and coast to coast. Featuring fragrant, disease-resistant purple-backed leaves, dense branching and a glorious flower display, 'Morello' also blooms in a color unlike any other, a mellow cherry-juice shade.

Another plant that brings both beauty and solutions to a hot, sun-filled garden is *Artemisia* MAKANA. Hailing from the island of Maui, MAKANA was a crowd favorite in trial gardens. Tolerant of heat and humidity, this is as close as it comes to a plant-it-and-forget-it annual. Feathery foliage of the lightest silver color envelops this exceedingly graceful plant.

Penstemon DAKOTA 'Burgundy' represents almost 10 years of work. Drawn from a species native to nearly the entire eastern half of the United States, *P.* DAKOTA 'Burgundy' is sure to find a prime audi-

ence. Many generations of crossing, sowing and selecting went into these marvelous plants by the hands of Terra Nova Nurseries' breeding team. Topping out at about 24 to 30 inches high, DAKOTA 'Burgundy' is densely branched and very well covered with deep-purple burgundy foliage. The lavender-colored flowers continue for many weeks to the delight of hummingbirds.

PLANTS FOR THE SHADE

Shaded areas were once considered the forgotten gardening spot. However, with the tremendous plant choices that exist in today's market, shady gardens can easily be the stars in a landscape.

Pulmonaria are the unsung workhorses of the garden and they perform fabulously in the shade. Recent breeding efforts have turned these comfrey relatives into multipurpose plants, grown for flowers and foliage. *Pulmonarias* tolerate all kinds of conditions and perform as well

1 *Penstemon* DAKOTA 'Burgundy' stands up to heat and humidity.

2 *Heuchera* 'Green Spice' brings color and texture to the shade garden.

3 *Agastache* 'Morello' can't be stopped by humid conditions.

4 Chuck Pavlich, author of this article, looks for problem-solving plants as a horticulture professional and a home gardener.



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in shade as they do in the sun. *Pulmonaria* 'Trevi Fountain' is the ultimate combination of grace and durability, effortlessly flowering in early spring and then covering the old flowers with new foliage. This variety is as good as it gets—hardy, easy and beautiful.

Bergenia were once thought stodgy, with boring foliage and sparse flowers. Today's bergenia plants are much more refined and form far more flowers over a longer period of time. *Bergenia* DRAGONFLY 'Angel Kiss' brings an elegant white color to the shade, with just a kiss of light pink on the edge of each petal as the flower ages. Simply put, it is a foolproof, long-lived and sophisticated perennial.

The best heucheras for the shade are the varieties with lighter-colored leaves. Only a handful of heuchera varieties existed on the market 25 years ago, but today there are hundreds of choices, and most are garden-worthy plants. Amber-, gold-, lime- and silver-foliage varieties show up well in the shade and they are easily managed. Look for *H.* 'Green Spice' to complement virtually any landscape. Should heucheras get leggy in the garden, simply clip a two- or three-inch stem, dust it with a light rooting powder and place it back in the soil for a new plant.

HIGH PERFORMERS FOR DROUGHT

Professional and amateur gardeners alike, perhaps more than any other group, understand the serious nature of water shortages and our ever-changing climate.

Echinacea, native to the Midwest and Southeast, are quite happy in dry soils once they're established. Rapid improvements have been made in this genus in the past 10 years. They now exhibit better performance, survivability and non-fading colors.

The KISMET series from Terra Nova Nurseries is an award-winning group that has been exceptionally well received by growers and consumers alike. The variety 'Intense Orange' is aptly named, and it produces loads of medium-size flowers





- 1 *Artemisia* MAKANA serves as a low-maintenance annual in hot, sunny spots.
- 2 *Pulmonaria* 'Trevi Fountain' brings spring flowers and sparkly foliage to the shade.
- 3 *Bergenia* DRAGONFLY 'Angel Kiss' is a sophisticated and substantial shade lover.
- 4 *Sedum* 'Dark Magic' forms a mass of dramatic color despite drought.

for months on end. Well-drained soil, especially in the winter, will further the long-term success of this stunning new echinacea.

Sedum are hot, and rightfully so. Able to thrive in a dry environment, sedum does not ask much from the gardener. All they require is a sunny spot, good drainage and moderate fertility. Look for the ultimate sedum in dark-foliage varieties like 'Dark Magic'. This hybrid *Hylotelephium*-type features a stout habit and immense purple-pink flower heads. Planting 'Dark Magic' next to *Echinacea* KISMET 'Intense Orange' will make an eye-popping, photograph-worthy moment.

In the West, wild verbascum are relegated to roadsides and abandoned railroad tracks. Terra Nova Nurseries has bred a number of exceptional garden-ready varieties in mustard golds, smoky lavenders and bright yellows. Well-suited to low-water-use gardens, *Verbascum* is, without a doubt, one of the most underused genera for providing easy color in water-sensitive areas. Emerging from a gray-green foliage rosette, their spikes hold hundreds of flowers that open over many weeks, starting around Mother's Day on the West Coast.

Any garden in any region can develop problem areas. The key is to address these challenges with gusto, working to find solutions and specific varieties that continually promote progress in your garden. The results can be beautiful. ☘

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CHUCK PAVLICH is the New Product Director with Terra Nova Nurseries, a plant genetics and breeding company that has introduced more than 1,000 new varieties to the worldwide horticulture market. Learn more at terranovanurseries.com.

