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On The Cover
Clematis is a cottage garden classic.
PHOTO: ROBIN CARLSON, CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

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Coral Bells

We veteran gardeners know coral bells (Heuchera species) as a shade garden’s tried-and-true, spring-blooming, semi-evergreen perennial that is also a graceful ground cover. Foliage of the native Heuchera americana (‘Dale’s Strain’, ‘Green Spice’) ranges from shades of green to bronze to silver to purple.

Spring bells of pink, red, white or cream are among the first to unfurl and pop as weather warms.


Coral bells thrive in light sun to part shade. All prefer moist soil; H. villosa cultivars tolerate dry soil. Hardiness is cultivar-specific, from Zones 3 to 9. Check label for specifics.

Quick Facts & Keys to Success

Common Name: Coral Bells, Alum Root
Botanical Name: Heuchera americana, Heuchera villosa, Heuchera micrantha
Color: Coral, pink, cream or red bells dangling from stems in spring (H. americana). White to light green flowers in late summer, fall (H. villosa). Mounded, semi-evergreen green to bronze to burgundy to silver to peach to multi-colored foliage.

Blooming Period: Spring or fall
Type: Herbaceous perennial
Size: 8 to 28 inches tall and wide, depending on cultivar
Exposure: Part sun to shade
When to Plant: Spring and fall for transplants
How to Plant: Plant 1 to 2 feet apart, depending on size at maturity. Water generously to settle soil around roots and remove air pockets.

Soil: Well-drained
Watering: Moist
When to Prune: Remove dead foliage in spring
When to Fertilize: Apply organic fertilizer in spring and fall

In Your Landscape: Plant in clusters of three, five or seven in woodlands, shady perennial beds and mixed borders. 

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