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Sunday, April 20, 2008 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

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### Plant Life

## A chosen few may become your new perennial favorites

By Valerie Easton

Expect confusion over what "new" means when it comes to perennials and annuals that are relatively quick to breed. Some "fresh on the market" plants may have been around awhile, but available only in England or from an obscure mail-order firm that stocked only a dozen at some absurdly high price. Maybe they've just been renamed or newly marketed. Whatever. This is the first spring most of us have been able to get our hands on these tempting selections. Powerhouse Oregon wholesalers Log House Plants and Terra Nova are supplying local nurseries. But I've also noted plants you may need to get mail-order, for this first year anyway.

#### Foliage

- *Begonia* 'Metallic Mist' from Terra Nova Nurseries, is not only hardy — which is rare for a begonia — but its large, maple-like leaves are a luminous silver. Perfect for the shade garden or a container, it has pink flowers in late summer.
- *Acanthus mollis* 'Tasmanian Angel' is the first-ever variegated bear's breeches. Its hefty green leaves are a perfect canvas for the white speckling and margins that make this bold plant even more striking.
- You knew there'd be at least one new heuchera on the list, and this spring's introduction has neon-bright foliage. *Heuchera villosa* 'Tiramisu' starts out with yellow leaves centered with a spot of red. As the leaves mature, the yellow morphs to lime and the red spreads, yet the Christmas color scheme is mellowed by a shimmery overlay of silver. (Wayside, [www.waysidegardens.com](http://www.waysidegardens.com), and others)
- Even if you don't love variegation, you'll fall for *Bergenia* 'Solar Flare,' a twist on this dependable clumper for pots and rockeries. This version has the familiar rounded, paddle-shaped leaves, but they're warm cream and green, shading to pink and green in autumn. The cooler the weather, the more distinct the variegation.

#### Flowers



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- The weird, undersea looks and name of this campanula might suggest it was discovered by Jacques Cousteau if it hadn't been bred by the ever-inventive Log House Plants. But *Campanula* 'Pink Octopus' is beautiful as well as unusual, with candy-pink petals so dissected they appear to swirl about even on a windless day.

- *Lupine* 'Pashmir' was found in India and is now debuting in our country. It's a sturdy, healthy lupine, distinguished by its luminous shade of true blue.

- Scabiosas are among the longest-blooming perennials, and their pincushion-like flowers make great cut flowers. But they tended to grow lanky and get mildew. S. 'Vivid Violet' has especially large, bright flowers on a low, mounding plant that is drought tolerant. Breeder Dan Heims describes its greatest virtue as "blooms, blooms and more blooms," from late spring through October.

- *Echinacea purpurea* 'Coconut Lime' is the first pale coneflower with double flowers. It's a compact, sturdy plant with ruffly green cones and white recurved petals set off by a russet-brown cone. Plant it where it you can enjoy all the butterflies that will flock to it.

- *Salvia* 'Ultra Violet' is a tough, hardy perennial that is drought resistant. I love that it was "a hummingbird-initiated cross," meaning that birds bred this beauty. It has aromatic foliage smothered in violet-pink flowers from July through frost, and is rabbit and deer resistant. (Available from [highcountrygardens.com](http://highcountrygardens.com)">[www.highcountrygardens.com](http://www.highcountrygardens.com).)

**Web extras!**

**Flowers**

- A new daylily (*Hemerocallis* 'Dynamite Returns') blasts the garden with summer color. Its ruffled flowers bloom early and bountifully, with dozens of buds and branches on each stem. (Available from [www.whiteflowerfarm.com](http://www.whiteflowerfarm.com).)

- *Coreopsis* 'Moonlight' is as pretty as the popular 'Moonbeam,' but its yellow, daisylike flowers turn peachy-toned as they age. And age they do, for these Energizer Bunny flowers bloom for more than 3 months.

Valerie Easton is a Seattle freelance writer and author of "A Pattern Garden." Her e-mail address is [valeaston@comcast.net](mailto:valeaston@comcast.net).

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