

STATE-BY-STATE
GARDENING

ALABAMA GARDENER

ALABAMA'S OWN GUIDE TO GREAT GARDENING & LANDSCAPING



A Plant Collector's

\$3.95 US
MAY 2011
alabama



...ideas from
...landscape

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A Plant Collector's Garden
Feast your eyes on the garden of Harold and Teresa Culbert of Decatur. In their landscape you'll find a maze of intertwining pathways, gently leading from one lovely vista to another hidden treasure.
Photo courtesy of Loretta Gillespie.

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Alabama Gardener
(ISSN-1539-4808)

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Periodical Postage rate paid at Ruston, Louisiana Post Office and additional mailing offices.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
Alabama Gardener,
106 W. Alabama Ave.,
Ruston, LA 71270.

Subscriptions: \$24.95 for one year (nine issues)
Our address:
State-by-State Gardening
PO Box 13070
Ruston, LA 71273-3070
www.alabamagardener.com
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'FIRE CHIEF' HEUCHERA

Had enough heuchera? For me, that's like saying have you had enough ice cream? Never.

I fell in love when I saw my very first heuchera. It was 'Plum Pudding', but I was fickle, because along came 'Amethyst Mist', and I fell in love again. I thought I would never find a better, all-round plant; this one was the deep maroon that looks good with anything, just like a little black dress. It looked wonderful with blue junipers, both blue and chartreuse hosta, and with any kind of pink blooming annual. Then along came 'Georgia Peach' and I was knocked off my feet, again. Now I thought I had all the heuchera that anyone could want, but I've learned to "never say never" because the mailman brought my newest heartthrob today - the 'Fire Chief' *Heuchera* - and here we go again!

This little heuchera is blazing on my windowsill as we speak. Its leaves soak in the sun and reflect it back like a prism of wine-colored embers. This one has all the attributes of the other heucheras, such as cold and heat tolerance, disease resistance, compatibility with other plants, the ability to adapt to a wide spectrum of light, but its color is more radiant, and its blooms will be a bicolored pink and white.

This is probably one of the most versatile plants to have come along since Adam got dressed. You can stick them in containers with just about anything and they will just make your arrangement look better. You can use them in window boxes, and even in mid-winter when their pansy companions have taken a break, 'Fire Chief' will still be on the job. They make gorgeous mass plantings, hanging baskets and low border plantings. What more can you ask? Well, you might want a plant that is trouble free, or as trouble free as they come. This little firecracker is disease resistant, and with few exceptions under extreme stress, you won't have many pest problems, either. It is both cold hardy and heat and humidity tolerant.

'Fire Chief' premiered in 2010, and should be easy to find this summer in your local nursery.

Try one, but be forewarned...these plants are absolutely addictive.



Photo courtesy of Loretta Gillespie.



▲ This little beauty is so versatile that it works well with just about any other plant, with the exception of purple and red. Its leaves are comparable in color to those of the Japanese maple.

Common Name: Heuchera (alum root, coral bells)

Variety: 'Fire Chief'

Light Requirements: Sun to part shade

Water Requirements: Moderate, somewhat drought tolerant when established

Soil Requirements: Well drained, loose potting soil, or humus-rich garden soil

Height: 9 inches

Width: 16 inches

Growth Habit: Mid-sized mounds of leaves, topping short, almost black, stems

Type: Perennial in zones 4-9

Cold Hardiness: - 25 F

Leaves: Wine red

Flowers: Bicolored pink and white flowers on tall upright stems, but is mainly grown for foliage

Pruning: None required (deadhead flowers and stems)

Diseases: None listed

Pests: Somewhat resistant, but sometimes troubled in dry air with mealy bugs or scale, use insecticidal soap

Companion Plants: Ferns, hosta, impatiens, begonias, ivy

In Your Landscape: Mixed beds, front of borders, hanging baskets, potted plants, container gardens, mass plantings

Other Attributes: Deer resistant, heat and humidity resistant, drought tolerant

Loretta Gillespie lives and writes in Moulton. A garden consultant, she and husband Danny own Gillespie Gardens, a private garden retreat available for weddings and other family functions.