Sizzling Summer Issue!

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—The staff of Garden Gate

Making more coral bells

1 Cut or break off sections from the old plant.
2 Plant the new division into the ground so the crown is just above the soil line.

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**Colorful Coral Bells**

When you think of colorful plants, coral bells might not be the first perennials that spring to mind. But with all the new ones available these days, they really should be. I'll show you eight great coral bells here with leaves in a palette of colors. They're huge and crinkly, tightly ruffled or even undulating. Plus, you'll see one with large flowers and a couple that even rebloom! Compared to older coral bells like ‘Palace Purple’, these take more sun (the darker the leaf color, the more sun-tolerant they are). And ‘Brownies’ and ‘Electra’ also handle summer humidity better than older cultivars. Now let's look at this kaleidoscope of coral bells you'll want to know and grow!

**1. ELECTRA** The yellow spring foliage of this plant brightens up even full shade beds and does it with a zap of bright red on every leaf! White flowers open atop wiry stems in summer about the time the leaves change to chartreuse. And no matter how hot and humid your summer gets, this 6- to 8-inch-tall, 9- to 14-inch-wide plant holds up great.

**2. SASHAY** Extreme ruffling of the foliage of ‘Sashay’ causes both the green top surfaces and the burgundy undersides to show from above for a dramatic, bicolor effect. By comparison, the pink summer flowers are subtle. Frilly, 12- to 18-inch-tall-and-wide ‘Sashay’ does best in full sun to light shade.

**3. DOLCE® MOCHA MINT®** It has the same compact habit (8 to 16 inches tall, 10 to 14 inches wide) and heart-shaped leaves common to the other plants in the Dolce series. But the coral flowers of Mocha Mint that open in both spring and fall set it apart from the group. Plant it at the edge of a path or in a pretty pot where you’ll be sure to see and enjoy the green-veined silver leaves.

**4. BROWNIES** What ‘Brownies’ lacks in sizzle, it makes up for in sheer size. It can reach 12 to 18 inches tall and 24 to 36 inches wide! The huge crinkled chocolate-brown leaves with a purple-red reverse look great contrasted with the chartreuse grass below. Cream-white flowers rise above the coral bells’ huge leaves in summer.

**5. MIDNIGHT ROSE** Though its white summer flowers are inconspicuous, the dramatic purple-black foliage is splashed with hot pink spots in spring. Its small size—10 to 12 inches tall and 12 to 16 inches wide—makes it a hit at the front of the border or in containers, where you can appreciate the unusual leaves. Pair it with pink impatiens to play up the spots from summer to fall.

**6. GEORGIA PEACH** Splashy 8-inch peach-pink leaves of this coral bells stand up well to both winter cold and summer heat. Not only that, they take on a pretty rose-purple tint in fall and winter. Demure cream flowers rise above the bold leaves in early summer. ‘Georgia Peach’ is 12 to 16 inches tall and 18 to 24 inches wide.

**7. HOLLYWOOD** Though the lightly ruffled, silver-overlaid dark purple leaves of ‘Hollywood’ are captivating, the big deal about this coral bells is huge blooms. It produces dark coral flowers in late spring and even reblooms in summer! At 8 to 12 inches tall and 10 to 12 inches wide, this plant will keep you in color for most of the season.

**8. MARMLADE** Heavily ruffled amber, peach and bronze coral bells have been around for a while. But at 6 to 10 inches tall and 8 to 12 inches wide, ‘Marmalade’ is a much more vigorous cultivar. Pair it with bold leaves, as I've done below. As a bonus, tiny red-brown flowers open on 18-inch stems in late spring.

I hope this small sampling gives you a taste of these fantastic, colorful coral bells!

— Deborah Gruca
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