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New plants include delightful mock orange

By **Jessica Walliser**
FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Saturday, February 9, 2008

I need a bib. It's been years since I've come across a drool-inducing new plant introduction, but apparently 2008 is the year. And the plant that has me salivating so: a mock orange. Yep, that's right. You might think I've stepped out of my horticultural brain for a brief moment, but I really mean it -- a mock orange.

Her official name is **Philadelphus "Snow White Sensation,"** and she's a new hybrid from the breeders at Novalis. Now, I've always rooted for the good, old-fashioned plants my Nana grew in her garden, but mock oranges have never struck me as being anything but ordinary. "Snow White Sensation" has truly knocked off my garden clogs and has already found a permanent home in my garden. With a graceful habit of arching branches, its natural, un-pruned form is beautiful; and this particular variety stands up to all the heat our summers can kick out.

But, what makes her truly a "Snow White Sensation" is her 2-inch double white flowers gathered in abundant clusters and smelling like, well, heaven. And, as if she needed to sweeten the deal even more, she struts her flowery stuff twice a year. The first flush of blooms occurs in mid-spring, then she encores in late summer. In my garden, she even had a few flowers in late October -- unheard of, but true -- I swear. Of course, this is not the only new plant to make me weak in the knees this year. But, she is by far the most surprising.

Another exciting morsel on the shrub front is the **"Amethyst" coral berry (Symphoricarpus x doorenbosii)** from the Proven Winners collection.

Where to get them

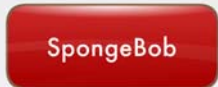
Most of these new plants should be available at local garden centers this spring, with the exception of the potatoes and zinnias. Prices will vary.

• For "King Harry" potatoes, contact Wood Prairie Farm at 800-829-9765 or [online](#). One pound of "King Harry" seeds is \$7.95.

• For "Apricot Blush" zinnias, contact Renee's Garden at 888-880-7228 or [online](#). One package of seeds is \$2.69.

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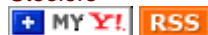
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Up until now I've never been a huge fan of coral berry, thinking they were a bit too scraggly for my garden. "Amethyst," however, has a much tamer form and eventually grows to between 3 and 5 feet high. What is so exceptional about this plant is its persistent berries. They are brilliant pink and absolutely irresistible to both human eyes and hungry birds. The berries make a great addition to bouquets, and the shrub is reported to be deer-resistant (to what extent I don't know). This plant makes one gorgeous late-season display.

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As for my favorite new perennial, I'll start with a confession. I've gotten a little tired of all the attention paid to the coral bells (*Heuchera* spp.) lately. Yes, the breeding efforts are tremendous, and yes, the new cultivars are very striking, but do we really need another *Heuchera*? Apparently, we do. And I'm glad they didn't listen to me and kept on searching for the perfect coral bell, because I believe the folks at Terra Nova Nursery have found it in ***Heuchera* "Georgia Peach."** This shade-loving gem has luscious peach-colored leaves (up to 6 inches across!) laced in a silver sheen. Late in the season, the color darkens to a rosy purple, making it seem as if you have two different varieties. Plus, "Georgia Peach" is bred for a high tolerance to heat and humidity. Sounds perfect to me.

Two other new perennials to sing about are ***Gaillardia aristata* "Oranges & Lemons"** and ***Coreopsis* "Gold Nugget."** It seems I'm constantly on the prowl for heat- and drought-tolerant plants that will thrive in my asphalt-baked front garden. These two will fit the bill and promise to keep flowering for three to four months.

***Monarda* "Bergamo"** has me excited because I haven't planted a new bee balm in 10 years, and the species as a whole has so many positives (despite its penchant for powdery mildew). *Monarda* is attractive to butterflies and bees, is practically deer-proof, and is very tolerant of my lack of

summer attention and irrigation. "Bergamo" is special because it blooms earlier and is totally resistant to powdery mildew. It's also an annual variety and is easily started from seed started indoors.

For my cutting garden, I'm going to try a new zinnia called "**Apricot Blush**" from Renee's Garden. To me, the appeal lies in the quirkiness of homespun zinnia flowers all decked out in a mellow blend of peach and blush. That and its touted mildew resistance sent me into a tizzy when I found it in the catalog. I bought five packets of seed.

Million Bells have become all the rage for container plantings over the past few years, and deservedly so. They are prolific bloomers, they cascade quite nicely over the pot's edge, and they are pretty easy to care for. And now they've created a double form. **Calibrachoa "MiniFamous Double Blue,"** and its sisters "Double Pink" and "Double Dark Pink," are low-growing but spread up to 2 feet across. They are much more tolerant of summer heat than traditional petunias and bloom continuously throughout the growing season. I'm looking forward to pairing them with Dichondra "Silver Falls" in my new window boxes this spring.

And, lastly, being a vegetable gardener at heart, I need to tell you about a new potato find. Developed at Cornell University over the past few years, "**King Harry**" potato is the answered prayer for all organic gardeners plagued with Colorado potato beetles. This variety has been bred to have millions of tiny, sticky hairs covering each leaf, creating a very unwelcoming surface for landing potato beetles and sending them over to the neighbor's veggie patch instead. "King Harry" is also delicious and high-yielding. That's just about everything I look for in a new vegetable variety.

Horticulturist Jessica Walliser, co-author of the new book "Grow Organic," can be heard from 7-9 a.m. Sundays on KDKA Radio's "The Organic Gardeners." You can also find her teaching at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, where she has been a faculty member for more than 12 years.

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