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GARDENING

# TENNESSEE GARDENER

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# A Cool Time to Shine!

When I think about August in the garden I don't really get all that excited. However, when September rolls around the nights cool and life in the garden somehow seems better. September has now passed and even cooler weather has caused us to break out our long sleeves and jackets. You might be enjoying a break from outside work but this month is a great one to notice the plants that are comfortable in the garden, even when you're not. **Story by Andy Pulte**

When we think about the traditional plants we use to add color and excitement to the winter garden, our mind first goes to plants such as pansies and colorful kale. As the end of this year draws near, take

note of all of the fantastic alternatives there are to diversify the seasonal interest in your winter garden. Pansies and kale are great, but this year think outside of what you may have done traditionally. Find a

few new things that excite you and highlight some of the other plants that make winter bearable. Here are a few plants that would be great for both winter containers as well as cool-season flowerbeds.



Photo courtesy of Andy Pulte

△ Winter is the time to take notice of all of the plants that make the winter garden better. Shown here is *Ilex verticillata* 'Winter Gold' which holds its berry tightly to the stem well into the winter months. Utilize as a young plant to add an architectural element to a larger container or plant directly out into the garden.





Photo courtesy of Wayne Boyland, Merrimack Garden Center.

## HEUCHERA

When it comes to adding plants to your garden that add beauty and interest, don't think just about flower power. Adding plants with interesting foliage can be one of the best ways to beat back the grey skies of winter. One of my favorite winter foliage plants is *Heuchera* (coral bells). Since the 1990s, breeders have gone crazy with this plant, giving rise to colors and textures that have never before been seen. I often buy *Heuchera* in the fall, add them to my winter containers and then plant them in my perennial border in the spring.

*Heuchera* is a member of the Saxifrage family of plants. This family is full of plants that are known for growing well among rocks. This should clue you in on how tough coral bells can be in the garden. True, they like a well-drained moderately moist soil in partial shade, but don't be afraid to test the limits of this axiom. The *H. villosa* hybrids are the best at surviving Tennessee summers.

When planted in the fall, many will reveal new diverse shades as temperatures cool. Pair the foliage color of your chosen *Heuchera* with a pansy in the same color palette to bring out the color of the leaves. Buy your coral bells at a slightly larger size when adding them for winter interest, they will keep their leaves but will not grow much.

△ *Heucheras* come in surprising shades including the smoky 'Midnight Bayou' and the glossy near black 'Obsidian'.

*Heuchera* 'Autumn Leaves' changes its personality as the days grow longer: mid-sized leaves of red in spring, taupe in summer and ruby red in fall, with leaves that will persist through the winter. ▽



Photo courtesy of Terra Nova Nurseries, Inc., [www.terravanurseries.com](http://www.terravanurseries.com)



## COLORFUL CAREX

~ If I told you a plant was elegant, arching, perfectly mounding, had striking texture and was brownish-orange, I assume that the word brown would get the most attention. However, *Carex testacea* does brown better than any fall fashion catalog. To be fair, most catalog descriptions don't say brown, they say olive. Olive or brown is all right by me when it comes to adding the perfect plant to my garden. This is truly one of the most underused winter plants – period. *Carex* in general can be confusing to gardeners; often listed

as grasses, they are actually grass-like sedges. However, for all intents and purposes they look very much like an ornamental grass. There are hundreds of different sedges, many of which are nearly indistinguishable. *Carex testacea*, often called New Zealand sedge, is one of the most beautiful, and breeders have been busy improving both color and form, adding many new cultivars to the fold.

When planted for winter interest, you will often purchase *Carex testacea* in the fall with more of an orange color. As winter continues to arrive, New Zealand

sedge will turn more of a corn stalk brown. When paired with the right plants this can be very eye-catching. Think about pairing it with silvers and deep purple to make the orange, brown or even olive colors of this sedge really pop.

***Carex testacea* is fabulous in the fall and will keep its upright form through winter. ▽**

