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New Plants For 2008

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By *Peggy Riccio*



LEFT AND MIDDLE: Thai Delight Caladiums 'Notus Lotus' (left) and 'East Meets West' (middle) from Hines Horticulture

RIGHT: Pentas lanceolata 'Northern Lights Lavender,' from Ernst Benary of America.

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Ever in search of "what's new," I spent several weeks this past autumn talking with representatives from over 20 nurseries to learn about new plant introductions. I was looking for new plants to try this summer, not just new shades of petunias, or yet another begonia, but varieties that are truly unique, and that would be of interest to home gardeners throughout the region. Based on experiences in my own garden, I culled a small, subjective list from the hundreds of new introductions.

For example, 2007's summer of dry, hot days followed by an autumn of more dry, hot days has me convinced that there truly is a place in the garden for tropical plants. I would not have normally considered buying them before; what was the point of buying plants that would surely die with the first frost? A waste of money, I thought, as I busily planted my four-inch pots of perennials. But this past summer, I was lucky to receive a few tropicals and tender perennials to test in my garden. All summer long, they provided color, their leaves and blossoms unfazed by the dry soil and blazing sun, while nearby perennials whimpered for water. So this year, while I was looking for new plants, I was especially attracted to those of the tropical variety.

One new plant in particular reminded me of several red-flowering pentas we had at our house in Thailand years ago. Pentas (*Pentas lanceolata*) are tropical shrubs with small, star-shaped flowers and elliptical green foliage. Though I had not thought of planting them here before, when I lived in Thailand they were very common. Lucky for us mid-Atlantic gardeners, Ernst Benary of America, a wholesale grower, has introduced 'Northern Lights Lavender,' which is more cold-tolerant (but still not winter hardy). Grown in full sun, this two-foot shrub blooms soft lavender flowers all summer long.

Likewise, caladiums were very popular in Thailand and Hines Horticulture, a wholesale grower, has caught on to the fact that the Thais are well versed in hybridizing caladiums. This year gardeners will be able to enjoy 10 new Thai Delight Caladiums from Hines with unique names such as 'Notus Lotus', 'Thai Spice', 'Wok This Way', and 'East Meets West'. Grown for their foliage, some have variegated leaves while others have prominently colored veins. These plants are exceptionally robust in our hot summers and a great way to provide season-long color in shady areas.



TOP LEFT: Double *Impatiens* 'Rockapulco® Dark Orange' (*Impatiens walleriana*) from ProvenWinners.com
TOP RIGHT AND BOTTOM RIGHT: *Gaillardia* *Commotion* Series, 'Frenzy' (top right), and 'Tizzy' (bottom right) from Novalis.
BOTTOM LEFT: *Loropetalum chinense* 'Ever Red Sunset' from Monrovia.

Ginger plants also were very popular when I lived overseas, but I never thought to buy one until I saw *Hedychium* 'Tahitian Flame'. Introduced by Terra Nova Nurseries, Inc., this five-foot ginger plant has large, green/white variegated leaves and fragrant apricot-colored flowers. Tahitian Flame's strong vertical frame makes it a great focal point in the center of a large container.

I have long been interested in buying a loropetalum, which is a well-known bush in southern states but only marginally resistant to the mid-Atlantic climate. *Loropetalum chinense* is hardy to zone seven and grows to the size of a tree at 15 feet. However, since the introduction of compact cultivars and the advent of global warming, I have convinced myself to try the most recent introduction, *Loropetalum chinense* 'Chang Nian Hong'. This cultivar grows six feet high and wide, produces intense dark red flowers in early spring, and maintains a very dark burgundy foliage color throughout the year. As a member of the witch hazel family, the flowers are strap-like, for which Monrovia, a wholesale grower, has named the cultivar Ever Red Sunset™ Fringe Flower. You also may find these sold as Ever Red™ Loropetalum in the Glowing Horizons™ series of the Gardener's Confidence® Collection, grown by McCorkle Nurseries in Georgia. There are other cultivars with flower colors in shades of red and pink, but this is the first with the darkest red flowers.

My few annuals did just as well as my tropicals this past summer. Having just caught onto the container craze, I am especially interested in a new annual that would look great in small containers, either on the deck or in the sunroom. The Proven Winners® Rockapulco™ series

of double impatiens (*Impatiens walleriana*) are diminutive, floriferous impatiens that only grow to a foot and are covered with ruffled flowers, much like miniature rosebuds. Perfect for the shade and heat, Appleblossom, Dark Orange, Orchid, Purple, Red, Rose, and White can be grown alone in pots or as fillers and bedding plants in the garden.



LEFT: 'All the Rage' Easy Elegance (*Rosa*) from Bailey Nurseries. **MIDDLE:** Proven Winners® Oso Easy™ 'Fragrant Spreader' (*Rosa*) **RIGHT:** 'My Girl' (*Rosa*) from Bailey Nurseries.

Of course I still need to have perennials in my garden. One of my favorites is blanket flower (*Gaillardia*), which my grandmother grew in Milwaukee. Every summer, the foot-high green mounds would bloom a mixture of orange, yellow, and red daisy-like flowers. Drought resistant and pest free, these low maintenance simple perennials are a staple in any garden. This year, Novalis®, a horticulture trade consortium of growers, has introduced two exclusives under their Plants That Work® program: 'Frenzy' and 'Tizzy' of the *Gaillardia* Commotion™ Series. Unlike the blanket flower my grandmother knew, these cultivars have fluted-instead of flat-petals, creating a semi-doubled effect. Frenzy's flowers are deep burgundy near the base of the petals fading to a rich red with flutes tipped in yellow. Tizzy has deep russet red buds that open to blossoms ranging from red to rosy terra cotta, outlined with a hint of yellow. Both will grow even bigger at two feet by two feet in full sun.



I also like small shrubs. Once established, they can be drought tolerant and require minimal care. I have several hypericums in full sun that bloom yellow flowers in the summer, resulting in small berries in the fall. I never thought twice about the berries until I read about the Novalis® Mystical™ Series. The Mystical™ Series of Hypericums have been bred to produce large "fruit" or "berries" for cutting and placing in arrangements. Like rose hips, hypericum berries are roundish, long lasting, and excellent for fall arrangements. This year, gardeners can grow Hypericum 'Mystical Red Star'™ for red berries; Hypericum 'Mystical Orange'™ for orange berries; Hypericum 'Mystical Beauty'™ for salmon pink berries; and Hypericum 'Mystical Sweetheart'™ for white berries. Not only do you have a green shrub with summer flowers, you get ornamental berries to decorate your home with in the fall.



A new shrub rose from Spring Meadow Nursery, a wholesale grower of Proven Winners® ColorChoice® shrubs, offers similar benefits. The Oso Easy™ Rose Series is "designed for home gardeners that are on the run and just want their landscape to look nice." Known as groundcover roses, Oso Easy™ Roses only grow one to three feet high and bloom all summer long in full sun. These are extremely disease resistant shrub roses that do not need to be sprayed (hence for gardeners on the run who don't have time to spray). Currently there are three blossom colors: Oso Easy™ Peachy Cream, double blossoms that emerge peach and transform to cream; Oso Easy™ Paprika, red-orange single blooms with a bright yellow center; and Oso Easy™ Fragrant Spreader, a bush that spreads more than

Hypericum, 'Mystical Sweetheart' (top),
'Mystical Red Star' (bottom) from Novalis.

the other two with fragrant single pink flowers.

Not to be outdone, Bailey Nurseries, a wholesale operation in Minnesota known for its roses, introduced a two-year guarantee on its line of groundcover roses "to take the fear out of growing roses." This type of guarantee is a first in the industry. Apparently staff thought people were not buying roses because of the perception that roses are too difficult to grow. But fear not, beginning in 2008, homeowners who purchase and plant an Easy Elegance® rose will enjoy "spectacular color and season-long blooms" guaranteed. If the plant does not thrive for two years, Bailey Nurseries will refund the purchase price. The Easy Elegance® line has over 20 different types of roses with three new introductions for 2008: All the Rage Easy Elegance® (tight coral buds that burst into apricot colored blooms with luminous yellow centers); My Girl Easy Elegance® (deep pink petals); and Super Hero Easy Elegance® (red blooms, hybrid tea shape but easy to grow). With nothing to lose, gardeners will surely find something to like among so many roses.

These plants should be at your local garden center this spring and summer. If you can't find them right away, either ask the manager to order them for you or look on the internet for a mail order catalog. You can also contact the wholesale nurseries listed below and ask for a media representative or look on their web site to find out where these plants are being sold in the retail stores. As always, let us know how it goes, I would love to hear your experience in growing these new plants.



ABOVE: *Hypericum* 'Tahitian Flame' from Terra Nova Nurseries, Inc.

Peggy Riccio is a Contributing Editor for ChesapeakeHome.

CONTACTS:

(Wholesalers with info on local retailers)

Bailey Nurseries: baileynurseries.com or 800-829-8898

Ernst Benary: benary.com or 815-895-6705

Gardener's Confidence Collection: gardenersconfidence.com

Hines Horticulture: hineshort.com

Monrovia: monrovia.com

Novalis: novalis.com or 888-845-1988

Proven Winners: provenwinners.com or 877-865-5818

Spring Meadow Nursery: springmeadownursery.com or 800-633-8859

Terra Nova Nurseries, Inc.: terranovanurseries.com or 800-215-9450

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