

Living - Home

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Horticulturist Dan Heims is an artist; his medium is coral bells

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By Susan Smith-Durisek - Contributing Garden Writer
From Sweden to Tasmania to Costa Rica to Hawaii, horticulturist Dan Heims has hunted new perennials and tropical plant species.

I ran into him at a Garden Writers Association meeting last year. He was characteristically delving into perennials for sale at a North Carolina arboretum.

On Oct 28, Heims will share some of his wealth of knowledge during a presentation at the Fayette County Cooperative Extension Service. If you're looking for encouragement and inspiration after our hot, dry summer, this lecture might provide you with some refreshing ideas.



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IF YOU GO

Garden Gems with Dan Heims

When: 7 p.m. October 28

Where: Fayette County Cooperative Extension Service, 1140 Red Mile Road

Call: (859) 257-5582

Cost: \$12 adults; \$10 master gardeners; \$5 students with ID

To learn more

Terra Nova Nurseries Inc.:
Terranovanurseries.com

Springhouse Gardens:
Springhousegardens.com

Book: *Heucheras and Heucherellas: Coral Bells and Foamy Bells* by Dan Heims and Grahame Ware. Timber Press. 208 pp. \$27.95.

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Heims, president of Terra Nova Nurseries in Canby, Ore., didn't really need to go far to find anything new. His breeding programs have brought more than 600 new plants into cultivation, with many international gold and silver medal winners among them.

"We're creating the best of the best," Heims said. "It's an art, but instead of using a paintbrush, I use different species."

His expertise has been featured on HGTV and in Britain on BBC. Articles about his work have appeared in USA Today, Forbes, Better Homes and Gardens, Sunset Magazine and Organic Gardening.

One of the most interesting perennial collections Heims has nurtured is a line of *Heuchera*; its close relative *Tiarella*, or foam flower; and their hybrid crosses, called heucherellas. The shining attribute of these North American natives is their wide assortment of brightly hued foliage.

Commonly called coral bells, *Heuchera* (pronounced HOY-ker-uh) is a traditional favorite for spring and early summer blooms of nodding little pink bells that line delicate stalks one to two feet high. The expanded range of leaf colors account for such delicious-sounding names as Peach Crisp, Sugar Plum and Root Beer.

These versatile plants can be combined to create a long-lived visual impact in a perennial bed with their foliage — some with ruffle-edged leaves and a tidy, rounded growth habit, others with veins and stems outlined in contrasting shade patterns.

"We're making a concerted effort to breed for gardens in the South, using native *Heuchera villosa* and *Americana* that are naturally adapted to hot, humid conditions," Heims said.

Along with Grahame Ware, Heims wrote the book on these delightful plants: *Heucheras and Heucherellas: Coral Bells and Foamy Bells*. In it you can find botanical history,

breeding information, a cultivar listing, growing tips, and even help in proper pronunciation.

Heims' photograph of Chocolate Ruffles, with its leaf margins tipped in hoarfrost, will convince you of its usefulness as a late-season sparkler.

Richard Weber, whose Springhouse Gardens nursery in northern Jessamine County is known for creating innovative and sustainable landscapes, has used Heims' introductions in many plantings.

"They are some of the showiest and most garden-worthy introductions available," Weber said.

Accolades this year prove his point: The landscape that Weber created for Ellen Budde's home in her Beaumont neighborhood won an award in the 2010 Lexington in Bloom contest for the front yard and a Design Merit Award from the Perennial Plant Association for the back. Weber used a foil of the deep-garnet *Heuchera* Midnight Rose, with its added zing of hot pink-flecked leaves, alongside the terra cotta Georgia Peach to create winning color contrast.

Weber called Heims "a real mover and shaker and incredible plant breeder whose introductions have invigorated the garden world."

The Garden Gems lecture, co-sponsored by Friends of The Arboretum and the Fayette County Master Gardener Association, is part of a series that brings horticultural programs to Central Kentucky.

Weber said Heims is an entertaining lecturer, and "If you want to find out what's on the horizon in the perennial world, you should plan to attend."

Reach master gardener Susan Smith-Durisek at durisek@aol.com.

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