

WASHINGTON

gardener

The magazine for Washington, DC area gardening enthusiasts.

**Seed Starting
Basics**

**Elevated Edibles:
A Garden High**

**Cardozo's Butterfly
Garden of Change**

**A Living History
Farm**

**Temperate
Tropicals**

**Captivating
Coral Bells**

**An American Garden
in the Japanese-Style**

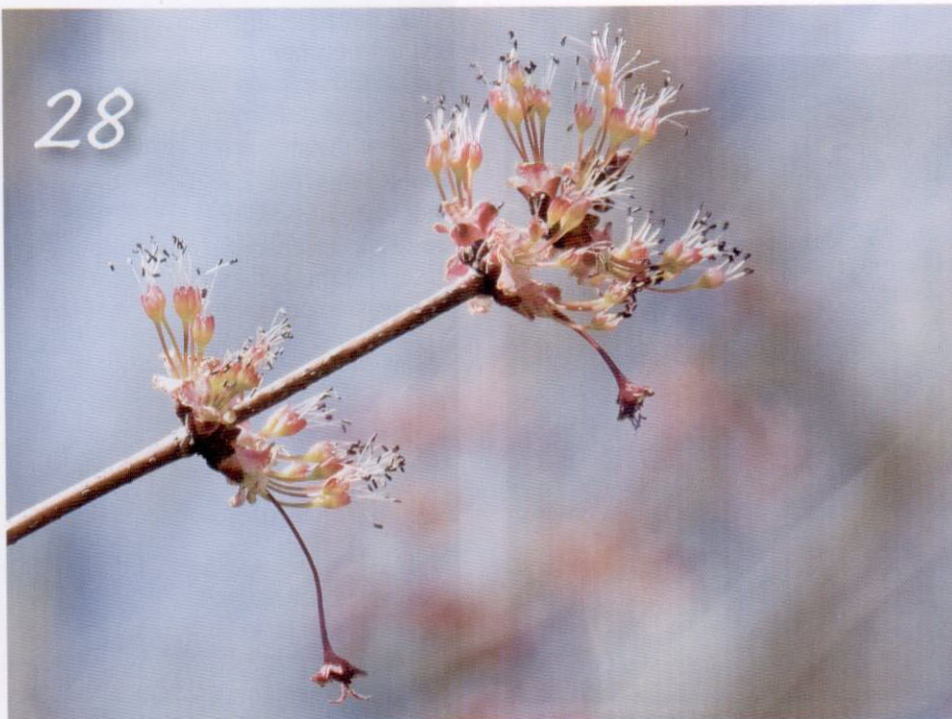
**Brookside's
Phil Normandy**

**16 Stunning Winners
of our 2nd Annual
Photo Contest**

**Indian Mock
Strawberry**

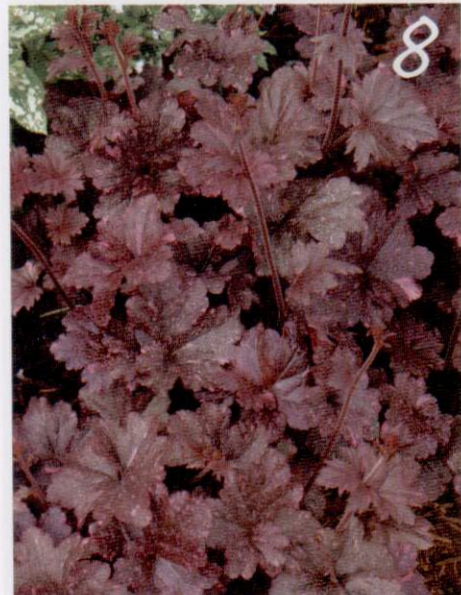
**No Yard? No Problem!
Patio, Rooftop, and
Balcony Gardens**

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Red maple (*Acer rubrum*) usually flowers in April and then leafs out. It does very well in a wide range of soil types — making it a good landscape tree choice. Photo by Ann Rohlfing.

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'Midnight Rose' heuchera. Photo courtesy of Terra Nova Nurseries, Inc., www.terravanurseries.com.

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Edibles can be easily grown in containers and placed on your balcony, patio, rooftop garden, wherever you have a sunny spot! © Giles Prett/Fotografix, from *Incredible Vegetables from Self-Watering Containers*.

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The Peter Burr House is one of West Virginia's most important historic treasures. Its story spans the period from early settlement, through the birth of our nation and the tragedy of the Civil War, to well into the 20th century. The Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission is creating a living history farm that will include the Peter Burr House, the oldest standing wood frame structure in West Virginia. The farm includes a 4-square garden planted with heirloom vegetables.

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The Virginia Palm Society's Spring Meeting and Plant Swap at Mango Mie's Caribbean Restaurant in Alexandria, VA. Photo by Joe Seamone.

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ON THE COVER

Karen Helfert's "Pink Tulips" won an Honorable Mention in the Small Wonders Category of the 2nd Annual Washington Gardener Photo Contest.



Captivating Coral Bells

by Kate Tyndall

'Stoplight' Heucherella

If you are a lover of fantastic foliage plants as I am, then you are undoubtedly a coral bell fan. If coral bells are new to you, then I am envious — you have untold delights waiting for you in the nursery aisles this spring.

Coral bells (*Heucheras*) and their bigeneric kin, Heucherellas — known by the charming moniker foamy bells in a nod to their mixed parentage of coral bell and foam flower (*Tiarella*) — are foliage plants of the first order. With scalloped or frilled leaves, elaborate veining and striking colors like plum, burgundy, chartreuse, peach, pink, silver, and black, heucheras give us the ability to add long lasting color to our gardens without trusting solely to the ephemeral grace of flowers.

This is not to say that coral bells are bereft of floral display. In late spring to early summer, heucheras and heucherellas bear masses of tiny bell or star-shaped white, pink, or bright coral flowers on wiry stems held well aloft of the foliage. The flowers are great butterfly magnets. Admittedly, there are a few hybrid heucheras that have insignificant flowers — simply nip them off. In any case, it is their stunning foliage that makes heucheras a must-have garden plant. Their flowers are merely icing on the cake.

North American natives, heucheras are often touted as shade plants, and Kate Tyndall is an avid gardener who assiduously works her townhouse plot on Capitol Hill. She is a gardening correspondent for the *News & Observer* in her home state of North Carolina, and other local publications.

turning to greenish-brown, and muting the striking patterns of the silver veined coral bells. There are other heucheras that can take a lot of sun as long as they are not left to dry out. 'Amethyst Myst,' a royal purple leafed coral bell with prominent purple veining and a hazy overlay of silvery gray, grows happily in full sun in my rock garden, as does the gold leafed foamy bell 'Stoplight.'

The best siting advice when it comes to heucheras and their kin is this: heed the instructions on the plant tag, but do not be afraid to move any coral bell that doesn't seem to be thriving in a particular location. Many of mine — and I have a lot of them — have been moved multiple times and lived to flaunt their colors. 'Amber Waves,' an achingly lovely heuchera whose honey-gold leaves sported a candy pink hue on their reverse, traveled the length and breadth of my shady garden bed as I searched for the right spot for its optimal home. Alas, it was the humidity that 'Amber Waves' disliked, a factor I could not mitigate and I had to bid that beauty adieu.

Humidity and poorly draining soil are the prime culprits in our area for heucheras that fail to thrive. Sticky soil can be amended to make a hospitable venue for coral bells, but humidity is a tougher problem. Look for heuchera

hybrids with yellow, orange, and red flowers. They will not welcome deep shade, which causes many of the dark leafed heucheras to become muddy looking, their glorious plums and burgundies

to wilt in our humid summers. Once established, they are drought tolerant.

Coral bells and their kin make nice plump plants in the garden. Most of the garden cultivars range in height from about 10 inches to 18 inches with a spread of one to two feet. These perennials make excellent ground covers and mix well with shrubs, grasses, and other perennials. They are troubled by few pests. Most heuchera deaths result from improper siting.

In our area, heucheras and heucherellas often persist throughout the winter, giving them a leading role in the winter garden. Colder temperatures will bring out orange and red colors in their foliage. I rely on heucheras for color in my rock garden in winter, where the bold plums, golds, and orange-red colors of their leaves provide stark contrast to the dried up blades of ornamental grasses, and combine beautifully with the purple foliage of *Euphorbia amygdaloides* 'Purpurea' and the late winter blooms of burgundy, yellow, and purple flowered hellebores.

These garden powerhouses also shine as container plants, either as the lead in a mixed container or a supporting player in a grouping of larger perennials and shrubs.

Let heucheras release your inner artist. Surround your pink peonies with silver-leafed, coral-flowered heucheras, shape a purple and silver garden using heucheras, artemisias, sedums, and silvery blue grasses, or spread a skirt of gold-foliaged heucheras beneath the graceful weeping branches of a purple leafed loropetalum. The combinations are endless, and with the stream of new heuchera cultivars on the market continuing unabated, gardeners have plenty of material to experiment with. Heucheras are certainly on my top 10 list of plants. Try them. I'll bet they make your top 10 as well.

For more information on coral bells and their near relations, read heuchera breeder Dan Heims' book (with Grahame Ware) **Heucheras and**

very well to heat and humidity, where hybrids of *H. sanguinea*, which hails from the southwest (these usually have coral or dark red flowers), are more

Heucheras & Heucherellas

Want to color your world? Take a look at this list of heucheras (with a few heucherellas tossed in) and start painting your garden.

- 'Amethyst Myst' is a deep, satisfying purple and a heuchera that I always have in my garden. Gorgeous color, excellent performance; takes a lot of sun without fading. White flowers.

- 'Mint Frost' is an absolutely stunning shade of mint green with silver highlights and red petioles. In winter, the leaves display a rosy red haze. Partial sun.

- 'Obsidian' is probably the blackest of the black-leaved heucheras, with smooth, glossy foliage. The flowers are insignificant, but who cares. Part sun.

- 'Midnight Rose' is a sport of 'Obsidian' that has hot pink polka dots on the black background of the leaves. 'Midnight Rose' was discovered at the Behnke Nurseries in Beltsville, MD, in a flat of 'Obsidian.' The dots fade in the fall, but reappear in the spring as new leaves emerge. They grow in prominence and brightness reaching their apogee in mid summer, then lighten to cream. Like its parent, the flowers are insignificant. Part sun.

- 'Velvet Night' is another absolutely mouth-watering shade of purple with a metallic overlay. The color is very saturated and has a velvety appearance. Full sun to part shade. For a different shade of purple, try 'Frosted Violet,' which makes a big clump of pinkish-purple foliage with spikes of light pink flowers. Part sun to light shade.

- 'Encore' is a medium-size French villosa cultivar in a rich, rosy pink color that picks up a silvery sheen as summer advances. White flowers. 'Encore' reportedly can take a lot of sun.

- 'Pistache' is another French bred villosa cultivar. 'Pistache' has bold chartreuse colored leaves that its breeder claims do not green out as some other chartreuse heucheras have been known to do. I'm going to give it a try simply for that fantastic color, which my garden has been missing ever since H. 'Lime Rickey,' a similarly hued heuchera, proved such a bust. 'Lime Rickey' couldn't take the heat, but with 'Pistache's' villosa breeding, that shouldn't be a problem. Now, if the color claim is true, wow! White flowers, should be able to take a lot of sun.

- 'Georgia Peach' is a big heuchera with that *H. villosa* breeding enabling it to withstand serious humidity. This beauty, pictured here, has peachy orange colored leaves with white veiling. Even as the color changes as the seasons progress from peach to rose to purple, the white veiling remains. White flowers. Part sun to light shade.



'Georgia Peach' Heuchera

- 'Silver Scrolls' is a medium-sized heuchera that has heavily silvered leaves. When the new leaves emerge in spring, they are flushed with burgundy, but by summer's end they are almost entirely silver with black

venation. Flowers heavily with pink tinged white blossoms. Part shade.

- 'Stoplight' is a foamy bell Heucherella (pictured at the start of this article) that has a bright patch of red in the center of each bright yellow leaf. It is similar in appearance to the heucherella 'Sunspot,' but 'Stoplight' is more vigorous, can take more sun, and has larger patches of red. However, if you want bright pink flowers, then go with 'Sunspot,' because 'Stoplight' has bottle brush spikes of white blooms. 'Stoplight' can take full sun and needs some sun to bring out its best color. Its foliage has a great mix of autumnal hues in the winter.

All heuchera/heucherella photos are courtesy of Terra Nova Nurseries, Inc., www.terranovanurseries.com.

Classified Ads

Let me show you the glorious splendor of the gardens in Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia. Allow me to share my love of these delightful areas with you by providing a guided tour of some of the most wonderful and educational gardens in our nation. Having lived all across this great nation of ours, I have experienced the many beautiful wonders of our nation's gardens.

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