

Some nifty perennials for 2008

By Sarah Robertson
Columnist

New vegetable cultivars took center stage here two weeks ago, so this week we're focusing on some of the season's exciting new perennials.

What follows is a mere fraction of the literally hundreds of new and exciting plants available to gardeners in 2008. They're listed in no special order, and most should be available locally through your favorite nursery. Let the shopping begin!

New Perennials for 2008

Sedum Mr. Goodbud: Mr. Goodbud boasts extremely strong flower stem topped by large, 8 to 10 inch flower heads of vibrant, hot pink. This new hybrid is the result of years of breeding at Canby's Terra Nova Nurseries. This sedum has finally fixed the grow-up-and-flop problem that has long plagued the species standard bearer, Autumn Joy.

The ability to stay upright is great, but this compact cultivar — just 18 inches tall — is as beautiful as it is sturdy. Late summer brings large trusses of brilliant deep-rose flower heads. The color stays without fading for over 10 weeks. The smoky blue-green foliage is a wonderful accent and looks good in all seasons.

Plants thrive in full sun and just about any soil from sandy loam to heavy clay.

Sabiosa Ultra Violet: This particular cultivar produces perhaps the most vibrant blue-purple blooms of any species. The abundant two-inch blooms appear all summer and well into autumn atop stiff, 18- to 24-inch stems that need no staking. This is a fast-growing, easy-care perennial that blooms for weeks and attracts several species of butterfly. Cut flowers last up to a week in bouquets.

Plants are disease resistant, cold-hardy and tolerant of most soil types except those that are water-logged in winter. Incorporating plenty of sandy grit at planting time alleviates this problem.

Just eight inches tall when not in bloom, plants will spread to about two feet wide. Deadhead to accelerate the growth of new flower buds.

Phlox Peppermint Twist: The deep rose and white striped blossoms are a new look for this popular group. Very vigorous, the colorful blossoms are both fragrant and long-lasting.

This cultivar is also compact, growing just 16 inches tall by about 20 inches wide. Tolerant of cold winters, hot summers and attractive to butterflies, this a terrific choice for mid- to late summer color.

Most tall garden phlox are susceptible to mildew, even during one of our typically dry Western Oregon summers, and this one is probably no exception. Safer puts out a least-toxic fungicide that comes in a spray bottle — applied liberally at the first sign of blight and your plants should remain vigorous and continue blooming unchecked.

Although this cultivar was bred in Holland, did you know that most phlox species originated here in North America? Yes, phlox are as native as goldenrods and black-eyed Susan's. European hybridizers eventually took the wild versions back home and created the wonderful hybrids we enjoy today.

Any site with full sun and adequate drainage is fine for these perennials. Often sold (at this time of year, at any rate) as No. 1 size roots.

Gaillardia Frenzy: This Commotion series blanket flower looks like a miniature firecracker! Dozens of fluted petals—deep burgundy near the base, rich red in the middle and vivid yellow at the tip — surround the deep maroon-and-lime green central core.

This mounding perennial grows to about two feet in both height and width. 'Frenzy' does best with full sun, well-drained soil and moderate fertilizer. Deadhead to assure continued flushes of bloom throughout the season.

Great in borders or containers, and the flowers are excellent when used in bouquets.

Pennisetum alopecuroides Desert Plains: This is an excellent fountain grass with finely textured green foliage and five-inch tall, tan bottle brush plumes in the fall. But the real show starts in midsummer, when the grass tips begin to turn a deep red. The entire clump turns brilliant shades of orange, burgundy, amber and gold in the fall.

, providing an exceptional jolt of color in sunny or lightly shaded sites.

Expect this hardy grass to reach about four feet in height, with a roughly equal spread. Happy in just about any location with good drainage, 'Desert Plains' is a terrific focal point. This is a new grass that might initially be difficult to track down, but availability should increase with demand.



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