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PLANT OF THE WEEK

In the dark days of winter, the yellow- and gold-marked leaves of the Aucuba plant can brighten the landscape

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TOMORROW IN YOU
'American Idol' returns Tuesday, with a new judge, Kara DioGuardi (left). In You & Arts & Entertainment



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Comfort COMES TO THE garden



The hot new plants of 2009 will warm your heart and fill your plate

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The mailbox provides a much-needed splash of color during these dull, gray days of winter — the gardening catalogs are arriving.

From the abundant vegetables on the cover of John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds to the "Incrediball" hydrangea on the cover of Wayside Gardens' spring catalog, there is plenty to inspire the cooped-up gardener.

But with the catalogs come questions: What to choose for the 2009 garden? What will be the hot new must-haves? Where are the sure-fire successes? What are the breakthrough varieties?

"I think we will all be going back in time," said Tait Saderholm, a sales representative for Homestead Growers in Davidsorsville.

"We want the hydrangeas like Grandma had. We want the comfort of herbs and vegetables that we are familiar with. We see this every time the economy takes a turn."

Even the names of new varieties sound like comfort food.

"I love the names, 'Mac 'n' Cheese' and 'Tomato Soup,'" said Carrie Engel, retail manager at Valley View Farms in Cockeysville, referring to two new scrumptious echinacea. "Maybe it's because I'm on another New Year-inspired diet."

Breeders and garden-center managers expect this food theme to take off, predicting that the sale of vegetable seeds and plants might equal or — as they have in Europe — exceed the sale of flowering plants this year.

"We are seeing lots of interest in edible plants crossing over into the ornamental garden," said Engel, "like lettuces being used as a border plant."

Saderholm says generally the same thing. "Even if it is in a window box, people are going to be growing heirlooms and herbs."

The doleful economy is reflected in the continued popularity of native plants and those with considerable drought tolerance, such as the award-winning new gaillardia, "Tizzy," and the super petunia, "Vista Silverberry." Gardeners aren't in any mood to risk their gardening dollars, and these plants can also make you feel See **GARDEN**, page 2



Hot: plants include Echinacea "Tomato Soup" (above), Phlox Peppermint Twist (top left) and Begonia "Curly Fireflash" (top right).

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home & garden

Finding comfort in the hot plants of 2009

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righteous.

But if the garden can be comforting, it apparently can also be sexy. Dan Heim of Terra Nova Nurseries, a breeding and a wholesaling business in Canby, Ore., talks lovingly of a new tropical begonia, "Curly Fireflush," with its velvety leaves fringed with red hairs and its white blossoms.

"It is so seductive. If a plant can be sexy, this is a sexy plant," he said.

Scott Kunst, owner of Old House Gardens in Ann Arbor, Mich., which sells heirloom plants, speaks the same way about his dark, ruffly dahlia "Prince Noir."

"It is a dusky, jewel-toned, moody color. It is lush and romantic and it blooms its heart out for you," he said.

Even the way gardeners are displaying their plants reflects a change in how they feel about them, said Susan Inglehart, who will grow more than 100 varieties of annuals, vegetables and herbs in her Glyndon greenhouses and offer them for sale through susansannuals.com. She has a client base of about 200 — people who place orders in February and pick up their plants in May.

"It used to be two mixed pots on either side of the door," she said. Each would feature the traditional container-plant combination of "thriller, filler and spiller," she added.

"Now, a lot of people seem to like the idea of pots with one kind of plant in them. It is a very pure idea, like worshipping the plants for what they are instead of what they say to each other," she said.

There is whimsy and humor, too, for the garden for 2009. Jackson & Perkins, a nursery in Hodges, S.C., has introduced a new floribunda rose, "Kimberlina."

Disease-resistant and low-maintenance, "it is perfect for the Gen-X'ers who are just getting into gardening and don't want anything they have to fuss with," said Debbie Zary, Jackson & Perkins' marketing manager.

And what fairy princess lent her name to this heavy-blooming pink beauty?

None. It is the name of an exit off California state Route 99, close to where the rose was born.

"We've always wanted to do that," Zary said.

garden shopping list

Here's a list of must-haves for the garden in 2009: annuals, perennials, shrubs, bulbs and vegetables. Check with a garden center near you. However, some are available only through mail order.

● **Phlox "Peppermint Twist."** This short, compact summer phlox with a showy head has excellent mildew resistance. Available through numerous catalogs, including White Flower Farm, whiteflowerfarm.com, 800-503-9824.

● **Rudbeckia "Cherry Brandy."** This bright-red version of the familiar black-eyed Susan is an annual from seed that may winter over in Zone 7. Exclusively from Thompson & Morgan, tmseeds.com, 800-274-7333.

● **Petunia "Vista Silverberry."** One of the best drought-tolerant petunias on the market, this is a vigorous spreader, growing to 3 feet wide. From Proven Winners, provenwinners.com, 877-865-5818.

● **Diervilla "Cool Splash."** This variegated northern bush honeysuckle is perfect for lighting up a shady area and for mass plantings. From Novalis, novalis.com, 888-845-1988.

● **Buddleia "Lo & Behold Blue Chip."** This breakthrough shrub is a true dwarf and a nice alternative to its much larger cousin. From Proven Winners Color Choice, colorchoiceplants.com.

● **Hydrangea "All Summer Beauty."** This variety has more flowers over a longer period of time than its popular cousin, "Endless Summer." Homestead Gardens, davidsonville.com, homesteadgardens.com, 800-300-5631



Diervilla "Cool Splash" lights up a shady area.



Echinacea "Mac 'n' Cheese" refuses to fade. Right, Hellebore "Mellow Yellow" is another must-have plant.



● **Echinacea "Tomato Soup" and "Mac 'n' Cheese."** These new varieties, deep red and bright yellow, hold their color longer, refusing to fade. Terra Nova Nurseries, terranovanurseries.com, 800-215-9450.

● **Floribunda rose "Kimberlina."** This new, light-pink variety is low-maintenance and disease-resistant, with abundant flowers. Perfect for massing or singly in a mixed-perennial bed. Jackson & Perkins, jacksonandperkins.com, 800-292-4769.

● **Hellebore "Mellow Yellow."** Yellow is one of the most challenging colors to breed in hellebores. This variety also produces the occasional apricot surprise. Another hellebore, "London Fog," offers blooms in a kind of slate gray. Terra Nova Nurseries, terranovanurseries.com, 800-215-9450.

● **Gaillardia "Tizzy."** This variety is extremely drought- and heat-tolerant and is a good example of the bright, new colors available in this heavy bloomer. Available through a variety of catalogs,

including Plant Delights Nursery, plantdelights.com, 919-772-4794.

● **Begonia "Curly Fireflush."** This disease-resistant newcomer has very dramatic foliage, with velvet-green leaves edged with red hairs. Terra Nova Nurseries, terranovanurseries.com, 800-215-9450.

● **Dahlia "Prince Noir."** This dark, ruffly blossom has a pinkish underside and it will give a tired garden a dramatic spark in the fall. Old House Gardens, oldhousegardens.com, 734-995-1486.

● **Tomato, "Sweet Seedless Hybrid."** The first tomato without seeds, this variety has plenty of flavor and meat. Seeds or plants available. Burpee, burpee.com, 800-333-5808.

● **Lettuce.** The Cooks Garden offers "Year Round Lettuce Collection," six different lettuces that will provide salads for all seasons. Cookegarden.com, 800-457-9703. John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds also offers an abundant variety of traditional and exotic salad greens. Kitchengardenseeds.com, 860-567-6086.

online See pictures of new plants for 2009 at baltimoresun.com/gardening