



Coral bells –They Keep Getting Better and Better

Just when we think plant breeders will tire of the genus *Heuchera*, they surprise us with a whole new crop of beauties we want to include in our shade borders. Here are some of the best new varieties of *Heuchera* recently introduced.

Bella Notte

Translated *beautiful night* in Italian, this one might replace Obsidian at the top of my favorite dark-foliaged perennials list. In addition to its lush, very dark purple foliage, Bella Notte sports very pretty candy pink flowers on dark red stems that bloom a long time - from late spring to early fall. It grows 9 inches tall and 15 inches wide. Imagine Bella Notte in front of a medium-sized hosta with large gold leaves.

Big Top Gold

Ruffled edges expose the rose-toned undersides of the green leaves brushed with orange. New foliage emerges orangey-red adding to the cavalcade of color. Reddish stems and flower buds open to cream flowers in early summer. It grows about a foot tall and up to 18 inches wide. Big Top Gold is reported to have the largest leaves and blooms of all coralbells.

Carnival Watermelon

Named for its bronze-green foliage and rose-toned bottoms, Carnival Watermelon grows about a foot tall and wide. The carnival of color continues throughout the season as new leaves begin peach-pink. Picture Carnival Watermelon partnered with an autumn fern.

Cherry Cola



Cherry Cola may not be as new as the rest of these coral bells, but it may be the most unique. Gently lobed, reddish brown leaves form a low mound perfect for edging the front of a border. Rusty red flowers, nearly matching the foliage, appear in late spring and early summer. Cherry Cola would be a beautiful choice in a container garden with yellow-flowering and chartreuse-foliaged companions. I am not a fan of the drink, but I love this *Heuchera*!

Galaxy

Similar to the popular Midnight Rose but with larger leaves, the foliage emerges bright red in spring and darkens to dark red as they mature. Pink spots become more prominent as the season progresses. White flowers bloom in early summer, but grow this *Heuchera* for the foliage, not the flowers. The plant grows up to a foot tall and wide. Galaxy would be beautiful planted beside a Japanese painted fern.

Lava Lamp

Masses of large, slightly lobed, coppery violet leaves with deep purple beneath make this *Heuchera* a showstopper. New leaves unfurl more violet than copper and then deepen as

they age. It vigorously grows up to 16 inches tall and 28 inches wide. Small cream flowers rise above the foliage on deep purple stems in early summer.

Growing Coral Bells

Many newer varieties of coral bells have increased tolerance of the high heat and humidity of our northern Illinois summers. They are easy to grow if planted in amended garden soil with good drainage.

They are best situated in part shade, but will tolerate more sun if they are given supplemental water. Remove flower stems after coral bells have finished blooming to direct their energy into making more leaves.

Coral bells are excellent neighbors in the shade garden. They are lovely planted with hostas, ferns, and sedges. They also are effective when used to edge a pathway or contribute color to container gardens.

Next time you visit your independent garden center, take a look at the Heuchera bench. They keep getting better and better!



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