



Annuals and Perennials to Try in 2010

Every spring, we gardeners can't wait to get to independent garden centers to discover the new, unique or improved varieties of annuals and perennials they have found for us. Here are some I can't wait to try.

Annuals



Ageratums are one of the few annuals with a truly blue flower, and **Patina Blue Ageratum** is no exception. Give plants a spot that receives at least four hours of direct sunlight and fertilize regularly, and they will reward you with a mass of blue, puffy flowers all summer long. Patina Blue grows just 10-12 inches tall so it's ideal for the front of border or in containers.

Amaranthus 'Autumn Palette' adds height, texture and movement to the summer and fall garden. Growing quickly up to 4 feet tall, it blooms in beige and cream-colored feathery spikes that gently sway with the slightest breeze. Plant some extra so you will have plenty to cut for floral arrangements.

Two geraniums to try in 2010 are **Geranium 'Graffiti Fire'** and **'Caliente Orange'**. Graffiti Fire is a zonal geranium that blooms endlessly all summer with single, scarlet flowers. Zonal geraniums have bands of dark color in their leaves. They grow 12 to 18 inches tall with an upright, bushy form just right for containers or near the front of a sunny garden.

Caliente Orange is an ivy geranium. Its iridescent orange flowers glow over dark green foliage. Ivy geraniums have a trailing habit – use them to spill over the edge of large containers, in hanging baskets or as a groundcover. Ivy-types appreciate a little protection from the hot afternoon sun.

I am especially excited about **Amberboa muricata**, commonly called knapweed. They offer a spectacular summer-long display of cornflower-like, purple-mauve blooms hovering over tall, 32-inch stems. Plant these in full sun. They are at their best when planted in mass not just for the jolt of color, but also so there are plenty to use for cut flowers.

Shady landscapes can also be filled with bountiful blooms if you plant impatiens. This year, try either **Fanciful Dreamsicle** or **Sweetheart Impatiens**. Dreamsicle Mix shows off its semi-double flowers in shades of pinks, corals and white. Sweetheart Mix is another fancy-flowered variety that blooms in a blend of pink, lavender, mauve and white. Both stay compact forming a mound of foliage 10 to 12 inches tall.

We've all loved the bright blue blooms of Lobelia but were sometimes disappointed when they languished in the heat of summer. Now we have the Techno Heat series that

have been bred to withstand the hottest temperatures while continuing to bloom nonstop. This year, **Lobelia ‘Techno Heat Violet’** has been added to the series.

Lobelia prefers rich, moist soil in full sun or partial shade. Topping out at 10 inches tall, it is perfect for edging the front of the border or a container.

Perennials

Eryngium ‘Big Blue’ is a gorgeous new variety of sea holly. Like other sea hollies, Big Blue enjoys a spot in full sun with well-drained soil. Big Blue has iridescent blue flowers that sit atop 30-inch, blue stems and silvery thistle-like foliage. They bloom for an extended period from mid to late summer. Big Blue cannot be described as cute, but add a few to your garden this year and their unique drama will not fail to impress.

There are two new heucherellas this year. Striking bright yellow foliage with dark red centers is the reason you should plant **Golden Zebra Heucherella**. Although you should grow this for its foliage, white flower spikes appear in late spring.



Heucherella ‘Sweet Tea’ has coppery orange leaves with a large cinnamon-colored blotch in their centers. And colors darken with the heat and humidity of summer and then brighten again with fall’s cooler temperatures! Creamy white flowers bloom in late spring.

Heucherellas are ideal as groundcovers in a partly shaded border, at the feet of shrubs, or to add a punch of color to containers. They are easy to grow and deer tend to leave them alone!

An elegant new lavender is available this season. **Silver Edge Lavender** has light violet-blue spikes over beautiful, fragrant, green foliage edged in silver. Growing 3 feet tall and 2 feet wide, it is a fine choice for the middle of a sunny border. Partner it with other low-maintenance perennials that don’t mind drier conditions and sit back and enjoy summer!

Pardon My Purple Bee Balm is sure to find a place in the sunny part of my garden. ‘Pardon My Purple’ is petite in stature – not even a foot tall – but still produces flowers as large as its taller siblings. Vibrant dark purple flowers bloom in mid to late summer atop sturdy stems and glossy, dark green foliage resistant to powdery mildew.

Maybe I will plant it near **Phlox ‘Lord Clayton’**. This new phlox offers a unique color combination of cherry red flowers and purple foliage. The foliage begins deep, eggplant purple with lime green streaking and then turns greenish-purple as the season progresses. Lord Clayton grows up to 4 feet tall, is resistant to powdery mildew, and butterflies love it.

Stachys ‘Pink Cotton Candy sports tidy mounds of green foliage that serve as a backdrop for delightful, soft pink flowers that rise up to 2 feet tall. It is easy to grow in average soil in full sun – just deadhead to prolong blooming. Discovered by Richard Hawke of the Chicago Botanic Garden, this is one of my must-haves.



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