5 new plants for the new year

By: Anne Braly
(Contact)

A new year means new plants for seed companies and nurseries. Sometimes it takes year to perfect new species of old favorites, such as petunias or lilacs, but the work pays off.

"We have customers coming in every year asking what's new or asking if we have it because they've seen it in a gardening publication," said Barn Nursery manager Sara Melton.

Experts work to create new plants for several reasons — primarily because they're looking for a certain trait, such as reblooming from year to year or making a better fit in the garden. Size does matter to gardeners who have smaller yards.

"Or they may just come up with a new color to attract more people," Melton said.

Here are five noteworthy plants to look for in 2011.

1 Black Velvet petunia: This is a true deep black petunia with bright green leaves. Try it in combination with Marguerite sweet potato vine.

2 AngelMist spreading angelonia: Also called summer snapdragon, Angelonia is one of the most durable and heat-tolerant of summer annuals. Colors include dark purple, light blue and white. They would be a perfect replacement for vincas or begonias at the front of a garden border.

3 Fireworks pennisetum: Very heat- and drought-tolerant, this is an updated version of the annual purple fountain grass that is a show-stopper in late summer and fall. Hot pink leaves are highlighted with a dark burgundy stripe down their centers. Burgundy-red foxtail flowers appear midsummer to fall. Try it surrounded by hot pink vincas or pentas.

4 Incrediball hydrangea: Giant, 12-inch pure white blooms against bright green leaves will be an eye-catcher in your yard. It grows no more than 3 feet tall and is very winter-hardy and disease-resistant.

5 Bloomerang purple lilac: Everyone's looking forward to this one, Melton said. Bloomerang is a reblooming compact plant. You can enjoy its intoxicating fragrance for months, not just a few weeks, like with traditional lilacs. At just 4 to 5 feet tall and wide, it will fit in any landscape.