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Green Space: Hit a homer with new plants for 2011

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Like Major League Baseball, the plant world reveals its new stars in April. And like baseball, it will take a season to prove they're worth the raves.

This season's candidates for MVP (most valuable plant) often fit the container-gardening trend. They are compact with dozens of blooms that cover the leaves.

Superbells Coralberry is a new Proven Winner brand worth seeking. It is covered with bell-shaped blooms with burgundy throats. It blooms almost the entire season, a Hummingbird magnet.

Lizzano tomato will satisfy the container fans' love of sweet. It offers a low-growing, trailing habit covered with bright-red, cherry-size tomatoes that double as decorative. Keep picking, and the plant rewards you with more.

It took decades of work for plant scientists to come up with a black petunia. Black Velvet is the result. It makes a fantastic container plant sure to amaze your friends, a real game stopper on your patio. Designers can't wait to use them as contrast to bright-colored flowers. Look for them soon at Dumont's Seed Co. on 30th Street NW.

Baby boomers will appreciate Shock Wave Denim petunia, a blue stone-washed mini reminiscent of the jeans we never threw away. It starts lavender and beautifully ages to blue. It never gives up, blooming spring into late fall.

One for the garden is American Hero hosta. It's low-growing (12 inches) and spreads to 22 inches wide. Leaves are a variegated green with white stripe. They form a dense clump that divides well.

Every team needs its oddball, and Burpee has found one — the first all-white, full-size sunflower. This is another color changer, starting out a "creamy vanilla" progressing to pure white over time. Flower heads reach 4 to 8 inches diameter. It's called Coconut Ice due to the seed head. Yes, from a distance, it looks like a coconut.

Hydrangea always is popular. This season, we have Vanilla Strawberry. It begins with large, creamy-white flowers on red stems. As the season progresses, they gradually change to pink and then red, a triple-play blooming into the fall.

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