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April 7, 2010 at 10:35 am, by [Justin W. Hancock](#)| | [More](#)

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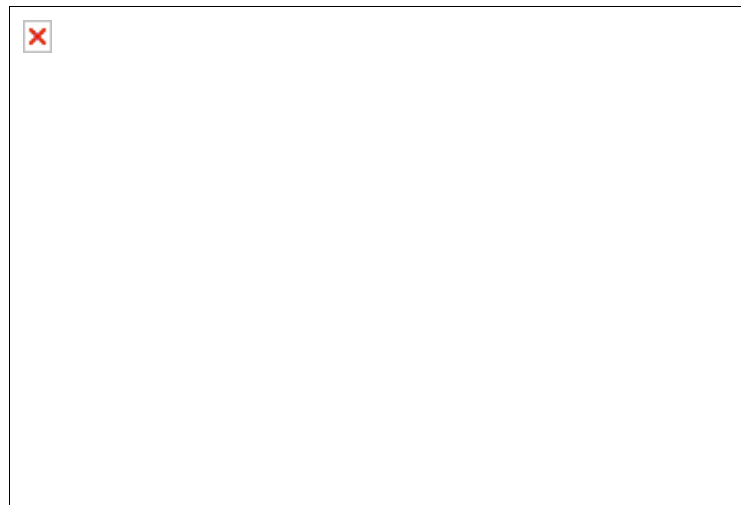
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Looking for a surefire

winner for your shade garden? Try [hellebore](#). Hellebore is a long-lived perennial that couldn't be easier to care for. In late winter or early spring it bursts into bloom, showing off cup-shaped flowers in shades of purple, pink, white, cream, and chartreuse. And it looks good for weeks — in fact, the ones in the Better Homes and Gardens® Test Garden are still looking great today.

In many areas, hellebore foliage is evergreen (in Zones 5 and colder the leaves can get a little ratty over the snowy season) so you can use it to give your garden a little structure in winter.

Best of all, though, it's resistant to deer, rabbits, and other critters that may want to eat it because it's very poisonous.

Though hellebores prefer moist, well-drained soil rich in organic matter, they tolerate drought pretty well once established so they can be a good choice for planting under maples or other trees.

Categories: [Garden](#), [Plants](#) | Tags: [Hellebore](#), [Plant of the Day](#)

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Plant of the Day: Gaillardia

March 17, 2010 at 7:22 am, by [Justin W. Hancock](#)

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Gaillardia 'Mesa Yellow'

If you're struggling with what to plant in a hot, sunny spot in your yard, try gaillardia. This easy-care perennial is simple to grow as long as it has at least 6 hours of direct light per day and well-drained soil (amend clay soils with organic matter before planting to increase drainage).

Why do I think [gaillardia](#) is great?

- It has a long bloom season—all summer and through autumn if you remove the spent blossoms.
- It attracts large numbers of butterflies.
- It's a wonderful cut flower.
- It offers blooms in a range of festive summer shades including yellow (['Mesa Yellow'](#), a new variety for 2010 is shown here), orange, red, and combinations of the three.
- It holds up really well to drought.
- Its small size makes it easy to tuck in the landscape. You can even incorporate it into your container gardens.
- It is relatively deer and rabbit resistant.

Categories: [Garden](#), [Plants](#) | Tags: [flower](#), [perennial](#)
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[Cool New Plant](#)

March 10, 2010 at 7:20 am, by [Justin W. Hancock](#)

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Love the look of sweet potato vines in your container gardens or planting beds but hate the way they can grow out of control? Try the new Illusion series! (Wow...that sounded like an infomercial on TV, didn't it?!)

[Illusion Emerald Lace](#), shown here, offers chartreuse foliage that looks good from spring to fall. But better yet, it has a tidy mounding habit — for me, it got about a foot tall and 4 feet wide.

Like other sweet potato vines, it thrives in hot weather and is a fun pick for those containers that get blasted by the hot summer sun.

If chartreuse isn't your thing, it has a sister, Illusion Midnight lace. Midnight offers the same big but polite mounding habit, but with burgundy-purple foliage that really accentuates red, pink, and white flowers. I grew it with red lantana, for example, and it was a knockout combo.

Both varieties should be readily available at garden centers this spring.

Categories: [Better Homes & Gardens](#), [Garden](#), [Plants](#) | Tags: [Annual](#), [Foliage](#)
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Hot New Plant

March 3, 2010 at 7:16 am, by [Justin W. Hancock](#)

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Pretty Much Picasso petunia

One of the things I love best about spring is that every year plant breeders release [new varieties](#) to nurseries and garden centers. I always get caught up in the excitement of it. In fact, I think it's even more exciting than the Academy Awards!

One of this year's most distinctive new varieties is actually a petunia. Called [Pretty Much Picasso](#), it has lovely purple flowers with a startling lime-green edge. From the [Proven Winners](#) company, this plant performs like a new petunia variety should — it produces lots of flowers, you don't need to pinch it to keep it from getting leggy, and it's perfect for containers, window boxes, and hanging baskets.

I was able to trial the plant last year in my garden. It grew about 2 feet wide and trailed over the sides of the planter box I grew it in. I put it with white flowers — [Snow Princess sweet alyssum](#) and [Intensia White](#) phlox. According to my garden guests, the combo was definitely a winner.

Categories: [Garden](#), [Plants](#) | Tags: [New Variety](#)
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[Grow Your Own Food](#)

February 24, 2010 at 7:12 am, by [Justin W. Hancock](#)

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I was asked to speak at the [Omaha Lawn, Flower and Patio Show](#) last weekend and one of the topics I covered was incorporating edible plants into the landscape. Growing your own food is one of the hottest trends in gardening right now — and it may be easier than you think to use plants that offer you homegrown produce.

For example, if you have a deck try growing one of your favorite fruit trees like [apple](#), [peach](#), or [pear](#), as an [espalier](#) your deck rail. (Don't worry — [espalier](#) looks hard, but it's actually quite easy!)

Or put up a trellis or arbor and use it for a vine crop such as [blackberry](#), [cucumber](#), [squash](#), [pumpkins](#), and even hardy kiwi. **Bonus:** It's more attractive than growing your vegetables on the ground, and you'll find they are easier to harvest!

Treat low-growing perennial fruits and herbs, such as [strawberries](#), [thyme](#), or dwarf oregano as a groundcover.

Try your favorite plants in containers, too. [Eggplant](#), for example, has gorgeous blooms (shown here), as well as attractive fruits. Many [chili peppers](#) look outstanding when grown in a pot. (I have a tepin pepper, for example, in a pot that was so pretty I brought it in for the winter as a houseplant.)

Categories: [Garden](#) | Tags: [Fruits](#), [Herbs](#), [Vegetables](#)

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