



Brian's Funky New Faves



Petunia '*Sophistica Antique Shades*'

*Ball Horticultural Products Photo



Dianthus '*Pop Star*'

*Skagit Gardens Photo



Achillea '*Strawberry Seduction*'

* Skagit Gardens Photo



Pennisetum glaucum '*Jade Princess*'

*Ball Horticultural Products Photo

For those who love the funkiest and the newest of the new, 2010 is a bonus year for exciting new plants. The past couple of years have been rather tame when it came to wild and exciting

varieties, but this year will more than make up for the lack of drama. There are so many trend-changing plants this year I'm only going to pick the top 10 - the other 90 will just have to wait.

The newest millet, *Pennisetum glaucum* 'Jade Princess,' will bring all the others back into popularity. I spotted this one at the new plant display in Ohio. What a stunner! Short, fat and adorable, its foliage is a hot lime that creates a vibrant accent and it only grows up to 1m (3.3') tall.

What really caught my eye, however, was its huge 20cm (8") flower spikes that look for all the world like giant fuzzy dark brown bulrushes.

A natural in containers, it's equally at home in garden beds or blended in with cannas and other heat-loving summer showpieces. This one is a must-have.

The new dianthus Star Series and the Scent First(tm) Series are strange duckies. We start them from plugs in late summer. They grow quickly in the summer heat with beautiful blue foliage that is much more open than the older, more traditional varieties.

By the way, they start to flower almost immediately. Well, this is the strange part - they just keep on flowering. We put them in unheated cold frames for winter and they continued to develop new buds and kept flowering all winter. At one point they were frozen solid for weeks, and the double flowers stayed on. When they thawed out, they kept on flowering through the summer. I was so intrigued that last winter I planted them outside with winter pansies to see how they fared in snow and rain. I guess we'll know by spring.

Dianthus 'Pop Star,' (Zone 4) a deep pink, and D. 'Starlette' (Zone 4), a rich double wine, are my two favourites. The new Scent First(tm) varieties (Zone 6) have slightly longer stems with highly perfumed double flowers in deep red, dark pink and soft pink. Great for containers, rockeries and perennial borders, but keep them close to the patio to enjoy the perfume.

Speaking of non-traditional perennials, the new Seduction(tm) Series of achilleas (Zone 4) deserves praise. And boy does the name fit. In colours of strawberry, pink, peach and gold this is the first real basil-branching, compact variety that blooms almost continually from June until heavy frost.

Its foliage is a silvery-green that blends beautifully not only with the flower colour but also with other companion plantings.

These new achilleas belong anywhere in a sunny garden or container. I highly recommend this fabulous new series.

One of the many challenges the floriculture industry faces today is the engagement of younger people. These new petunia colours come to the rescue. At a recent horticultural show in Portland, these new colours were on display. I asked a group of young ladies nearby what they thought of these new colours. "Love them," they said. When I asked them why, they all said, "Because they're not an old lady's petunia." To clarify, for them anyone over 40 is old! Apart from the insult, good on the Pan American breeders for developing not only cool new colours, but also great names.

Petunia 'Sophistica Antique Shades,' P. 'Sophistica Lime Bicolour' and Proven Winners' P. Pretty Much Picasso(tm) (a hot pink with lime edging) capture those young psyches. These new colours will result in new combinations that catch the attention of the next generation of gardeners. And that's a good thing.

To see the rest of Brian's picks, check out your local newsstand.

(Read the rest of this article in the [January/February 2010 \(West Coast & Southern BC\)](#) or [January/February 2010 \(Prairies & Northern BC\)](#) Issue of Gardens West.)