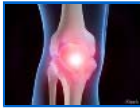


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## Plant of the month: Flowering maple

By **KATHY HUBER**, Garden Editor  
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June 1, 2010, 5:37PM



Ball Horticultural Co.

Flowering maple (Abutilon) 'Bella'

Hibiscus may be the hotties of the summer garden. But **flowering maple**, another member of the mallow family, deserves to share the spotlight.

Native to the tropics of South and Central America, flowering maple (*Abutilon spp.*) was a parlor favorite during the Victorian era. Today, you're more likely to find it in a porch or patio pot and in the garden.

Hybridizing has taken this old-fashioned mallow to another level, giving us considerable options in heights and colors.

Older 5- to 8-foot varieties are now joined by those in the 2- to 3-foot range, all ideal in part shade. The lower-growing Bella series is especially attractive. Dwarf types also are attractive in hanging baskets.

While the maplelike foliage influenced its common name, flowering maple, the blooms have led some to call it Chinese lantern. The graceful, drooping branches produce charming, bell-shaped 1 1/2- to 4-inch blooms in ivory, yellow, pink, orange, salmon and rose. The elegant, often veined, nodding flowers have fuzzy stamens that dangle beneath the petals like clappers in a bell. It's a spring-frost bloomer that finishes off the growing season with heavy flowers in fall. Flowering maples are typically root hardy in the garden, but I was amazed mine suffered so little freeze damage this past winter.

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