



*Pennisetum 'Fireworks'*

## Brian's Funky New Faves

 By Brian Minter

For those who love the funkier 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.

Proven Winner *Euphorbia* 'Diamond Frost'® and its new competitor, *E.* 'Silver Fog' from the Dummen folks are both great garden additions. But I have to say the new soft burgundy foliage of *E.* 'Breathless Blush' is something quite special. You not only



*Pennisetum glaucum 'Jade Princess'*



*E. 'Breathless Blush'*

get the white floral accent all summer, but you also get the contrasting dark foliage kicks it up several notches. It's a great new addition to the tender perennial euphorbia family.



*Dianthus 'Pop Star'*

The new dianthus Star Series and the Scent First™ 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



PHOTOS COURTESY SIKAGIT GARDENS

*Dianthus 'Starlette'*

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™ 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™ Series of



*Achillea 'Strawberry Seduction'*

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



*A. 'Sunny Seduction'*



*A. 'Saucy Seduction'*



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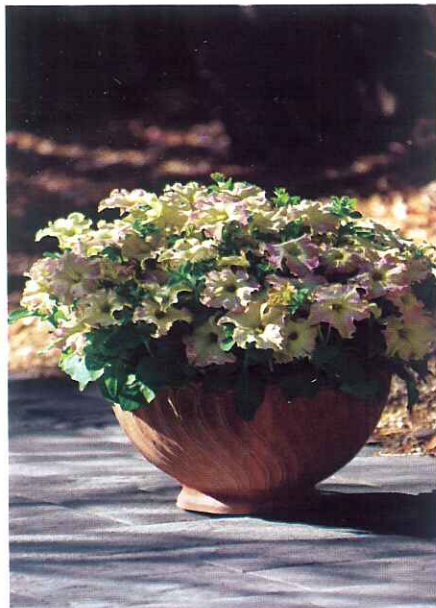
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*Petunia Supertunia® Pretty Much Picasso™*



*Petunia 'Sophistica Antique Shades'*

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™* (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.



*Lobularia Snow Princess™*,  
*Pelargonium zonale Daredevil® Snow*  
& *Nemesia fruticans Bluebird*

Speaking of good things, the top attention getter for 2010 is the lobularia hybrid (alyssum), *Snow Princess™*. This is the first alyssum you can use by itself or in combination with other sun or shade loving plants.

Trialed in full sun and partial shade with equally great results, I like the fact it can go out early because of its cool temperature tolerance and can hang in until the very end. Its delightful soft perfume is another attraction. I see this variety as a wonderful addition to containers and baskets. Its tolerance to such a variety of conditions has to be a huge bonus.



*Hypericum 'Mystical™ Red Star'*

A very welcome addition to our shrub gardens this year is a series of new hypericums from Novalis that will bring new colour and life to our late summer and fall gardens.

This Zone 5 shrub only grows 40x40cm (16x16") but it has masses of tiny yellow flowers. What's so special about this *Mystical™* Series of hypericums is its amazing berries that form in mid-summer and hold well into heavy frosts. *Hypericum* berries have long been a florist's dream for accents in bouquets. Now for the first time, we can grow them as colourful sun-loving shrubs.



*Hypericum 'Mystical™ Black'*

I love the coral berried ones, but the black, green and red varieties also make their own statements. This innovative new plant will go really well with grasses.

Perhaps one of the most innovative new grasses to arrive on the scene this year is a dazzling cousin to the amazing purple fountain grass. *Pennisetum 'Fireworks'* (page 34) is a fabulous red and pink striped variety

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with the traditional "bunny tail" plumes all summer long.

Our personal relationship with this grass did not start off well. We tried it four years ago fresh from the breeder, but something went wrong because it did not grow. The plants sat in pots for two summers and did virtually squat.

Apparently it had some slow genes out-of-the-gate. I've since been assured that this problem has been overcome. We have some in our greenhouse growing now, and in three weeks there's been more growth on the new ones than we got in three years on the old ones.

Now I'm hot on this new grass. I believe it deserves a second chance this year to impress you as well.

I'm surprised at the recent surge in popularity of Korean lilacs. The demand for this very hardy Zone 3, compact (1-1.5m or 3.3-5') lilac has been overwhelming. Its flowers may be small, but there are lots of them, and their perfume radiates throughout the garden. This year's new kid on the block not only provides the first blooms in early or late May, depending on your location, *Syringa 'Bloomerang'*® also puts on a second show and more fragrance again in mid-summer.

One of its parents, *Syringa 'Josee'*, does this, but not consistently. 'Bloomerang'® is beautiful, fragrant and consistently blooms twice. It needs sun and good drainage and even tolerates rainy West Coast weather while retaining attractive foliage and blooms.



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*Syringa 'Bloomerang'*®

I see a future for it in containers too, especially with other colourful conifers, evergreen grasses and interesting perennials. It will be the hottie for 2010.

Love sun-dried tomatoes?

Expensive aren't they? Tomato Tommacio will change that.

This amazing new variety from Israel produces small cherry-type tomatoes that can be sun-dried or simply popped into the microwave.

Tommaccio adds a whole new element to our tomato garden. Once dried, we can use them year round. Preserved in oils, they're especially yummy in pasta dishes.

These are my top ten picks for funky new quality additions to our 2010 gardens. Don't miss out!\*



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*Tommaccio tomato shown above on the plant and below after it has been dried.*



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