

What's new and different in flowering shrubs

GREEN THUMBS UP

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As another gutter-gushing storm spreads across our region, record-breaking March rainfall threatens to drown our precious plants and delay the spring planting season. Flooded landscapes, basements, and dreary weather have taken their toll on South Shore residents but a promising forecast for the upcoming Easter weekend offers hope for warmth and sunshine that will soothe our spirits and help our super-saturated lawns and gardens recover from this month's moisture overload.

With the coming of spring, my passion for collecting new plants goes into overdrive and while the lingering collection of unplanted treasures should serve as a constant reminder that my landscape cannot possibly accommodate even one new acquisition, the need to explore and acquire the latest introductions deceives me into believing that somewhere and somehow I will find room in my overcrowded borders. A recent plant symposium piqued my interest in some of the new flowering shrubs and with a new garden in the works specifically intended for woody plants, my quest for the new and different seems justified, with the emphasis on plants that offer multiple seasons of interest including prolonged bloom, tinted foliage, or fruits to attract wildlife.

In recent years, I have found many of the Proven Winners selections, which include annuals, perennials, ornamental grasses and shrubs (www.provenwinners.com), to be worthy additions to my beds and borders. Several new shrubs have caught my attention including Deutzia

'Chardonnay Pearls' with clusters of buds that resemble pearls, opening to starry blossoms against a backdrop of lemon-lime leaves on a compact, 2 to 3-foot tall plant. I hope to track down this new Deutzia this spring and create a stunning combination by planting it with the powdery blue foliage of Fothergilla 'Blue Shadows' and the handsome purple-bronze tinted foliage of a compact ninebark, Physocarpus 'Summer Wine' (another PW selection). Kolkwitzia 'Dream Catcher' (beauty bush) could serve as an alternative (or maybe I'll be able to find both); gold foliage, tinted bronze at the tips, turns orange and red during the fall season. Pink flower clusters in spring attract hummingbirds. My new shrub border is partially shaded and these selections all tolerate lower light.

Gardening for nature, especially butterflies and hummingbirds, is a primary focus of many of my plantings. Several new cultivars of butterfly bushes, magnets for hummers as well as butterflies, have been added to my wish list. Of particular interest is a very compact cultivar, Buddleia 'Blue Chip', which attains a height of only 2-3 feet, ideal for containers or the middle of the border. Buddleia 'Miss Ruby' appears to bear unique, vivid magenta-tinted blooms against a backdrop of silvery leaves on 4 to 5 foot plants. Hummingbirds also adore the long-blooming, luscious blossoms of Rose of Sharon (Hibiscus syriacus) and several new cultivars have appeared in recent years. The Proven Winner Chiffon series feature a multitude of lavender, blue, or white flowers with extra petaloids in their centers while the Satin series boast a wide range of colorful blossoms with contrasting red centers. Since Rose of Sharon break dormancy somewhat later in the spring, these

plants may not be available until later in the season.

Most gardeners cannot resist growing multiple varieties of Hydrangeas. If only the gorgeous blue mophead hydrangeas (H. macrophylla) could perform as well for those of us who live in colder inland locales as they do for gardeners on Cape Cod. The advent of several new introductions like 'Endless Summer' that bloom on both old and new wood, has improved our opportunities for reaping those magnificent blue

blooms. Most recently, the Proven Winners Cityline series has come along, which offers multiple varieties with two-toned flowers and compact habits (only 12-36 inch plants), ideal for gardens and smaller landscapes plus their small stature should make them easier to protect from winter chills. Flower color will vary depending on the pH of the soil with alkaline soils producing pink-tinted blooms while acidic soils promote blue flowers.

The showy and hardy Pee Gee

Hydrangeas can be seen throughout South Shore landscapes during the latter half of the summer well into the fall with creamy white blossoms that fade to an appealing mauve pink. New introductions, including 'Limelight' with pistachio green panicles, offer superior foliage and prolific blooms. Hydrangea 'Pinky Winky' is even more unique with erect red stems and white flowers in mid to late summer. As the base of the flower heads turn deep pink, the tips continue to grow, producing new white blossoms that create a two-toned effect.

Snowball hydrangeas, with their massive white blooms have become increasingly popular due to their hardiness, adaptability and consistent bloom. North American natives, these hydrangeas bloom on new wood

allowing for major pruning each spring to promote compact plants and larger blooms. New to the market is H. 'Incrediball' with huge flowers a foot or more across that are produced on sturdier stems than their predecessor reducing their tendency to flop. Perhaps the most touted new hydrangea is 'Invincibelle Spirit'. A hot pink version of Hydrangea 'Annabelle', this snowball hydrangea reportedly blooms from early summer through fall. Adaptable to a wide range of soils in sun or part shade, I look forward to adding Invincibelle Spirit to my garden this year; \$1 of every sale of this hydrangea is donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation in support of other invincible spirits.

Many of these new shrubs should be readily available in the coming months at our local garden centers. The problem will be deciding just how many of these special beauties to add to the landscape.

Suzanne Mahler is an avid gardener, photographer and lecturer who has been developing the 1.5-acre property surrounding her home in Hanover for more than 30 years. Her weekly gardening column 'Green Thumbs Up' has appeared in Community Newspapers for more than a decade. She is a member of two local garden clubs, past President of the New England Daylily Society, an overseer for the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and is employed at two garden centers.



Hanover Mariner

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The new hydrangea is 'Invincible Sprit.' A hot pink version of Hydrangea 'Annabelle,' this snowball hydrangea reportedly blooms from early summer through fall. Adaptable to a wide range of soils in sun or part shade, One dollar of every sale of this hydrangea is donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation in support of other invincible sprits.