



Patio exclamation point: Black Velvet petunia in a container with Euphorbia.

season's darlings happen to be black. Novelty is just one of the virtues this color offers gardeners.

WHY BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

In nature, the color black does not recede into the background.

"Black plants are popular in our area because they give good color and are used by landscape designers for impact," says Pat Gillette, senior manager, Wheat's Landscape, Vienna, Va.

Yet black is not a show-stealer. An excellent color for contrast, "black can really help another color, like orange or pale pink, pop out in the landscape," says Amy Stewart, a contributing editor to *Fine Gardening* and author of *Wicked Plants: The Weed That Killed Lincoln's Mother and Other Botanical Atrocities* (Algonquin Books, 2009).

Stewart's book covers deadly botanicals." But as I was researching, I did find that people

are really interested in black plants, even if the only thing that's 'wicked' about them is the

The new black

Black and near-black plants take center stage in outdoor landscapes

By DAWN KLINGENSMITH
CTW Features

Having a "black thumb" takes on a whole new meaning this gardening season.

That's because black and near-black plants are gaining in popularity – so much so that the new Black Velvet petunia, unveiled last spring, has been dubbed the most talked-about plant in 2011.

Ball Horticultural Co. claims its Black Velvet is the first all-black petunia, and has been aggressively promoting the fashionable novelty. "Everybody wants to be the first on their block with a hot new plant," says Ball's Bill Calkins. "Like a little black dress or a black leather jacket, black goes with everything," he enthuses on a YouTube video, talking up the merits of the petunia as "part of a fun, awesome mixed basket."

A few years ago, chartreuse plants that seemed to glow from within enjoyed their star turn as the must-have color among serious gardeners. This

color," she says.

"These plants do not have to look like the Addams Family garden – not that there's anything wrong with that!" Stewart adds.

In fact, black looks modern and sophisti-



Drama queen: 'Ebony Knight' black mondo grass works well as an accent plant in a border or in a container.



Stand up and shout: the bright contrast of 'Tropicana Black' canna blossoms and foliage.

cated, especially in urban and balcony gardens, Stewart says.

Some dark-as-night flowers – like black pansies, Black Barlow columbines, Black Gamecock irises and Queen of the Night tulips – actually blossom a deep, dark purple or wine color.

Other black beauties include shrubs and trees, like the Black Lace elderberry, which “looks a little bit like a Japanese Maple with its fine, lacy foliage,” Stewart says. “It produces beautiful sprays of pink flowers in spring, and the combination of the pink against the black leaves is really extraordinary.”

Equally striking is the Tropicanna Black canna, an exotic-looking spiked plant that produces bright scarlet or orange flowers.

Black Mondo Grass is “low-growing clump grass used as ground cover, in rock gardens or as a border, or just for added interest because of its unique color,” Gillette says.

Plant it around the edges of containers or beds to frame and accent your other plants, Stewart suggests.

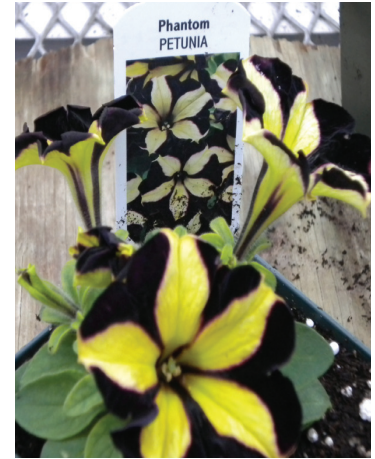
Just because a plant is black does not mean it shuns the sun like a vampire, Stewart warns: “Some of them need full sun in order to really turn black. Be sure to read the plant labels, and give them a spot that will really allow their darkness to come through.”



Black and white: ‘Moonlight’ coral bells make a dramatic statement in a garden border.



Pretty in pink: This is Pinstripe petunia.



Yellow at heart: This is Phantom petunia.

Get in on the season’s hottest new color

By LORI QUALLS
Midland Daily News

Local gardeners can get in on the hot new color of the spring season.

At least two area nurseries, Vennix Greenhouse in Essexville and Abele Greenhouse and Garden Center in Saginaw, are offering three varieties of black petunias.

Black Velvet petunia is an all-black petunia that (surprise!) looks like velvet, said Diane Vennix, owner of the Essexville nursery. She said the standard-sized petunia looks good in a hanging basket or planted in the ground.

The other varieties are Pinstripe (pink thin stripes on black) and Phantom (yellow stripes on black).

Vennix said people are taken aback when they first see the black flowers. “They can’t believe they’re a black petunia,” she said, adding she plans to plant them in her garden bed. “They see the stripe and think that’s so cool.”

Matt Bouvy, manager at Abele, 3500 Wadsworth Road, said the petunias are prime for containers on the porch and recommends planting them with white flowers for contrast.

He said his store has a lot of new plants, including lobularia, and lots



Back in black: Black Velvet petunia looks like a velvet flower.

of new colors available within the same plant families they have had in the past.

Mandevilla, considered an annual in northern climes, is new this year at Vennix’s store at 1175 Ridge Road. The plant comes in yellows, reds, pinks. She said it is especially pretty on trellises, and people buy them for each side of their garages and let them train on over.