



Posted on Fri, Feb. 03, 2012

## Trade show gives home gardeners a glimpse of vibrant things to come

### Trade show for the garden industry gives home gardeners a glimpse of the vibrant things to come.

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Special to The Star

The spotlight in garden shops this year is on color — including easy, long-lasting blooms, bright, healthy vegetables and great native plants.

If you dream in color, your dreams are about to come true: This year's garden is going to be splashed with every color in the rainbow.

"Color is the magic word" for new plant introductions these days, according to Michael Dirr, a trend-spotter who was among hundreds of professionals swapping ideas and observations in January at the annual National Green Centre trade show for the garden industry in Overland Park. Dirr is the author of garden reference books and is an influential specialist in woody plants, especially hydrangeas and viburnums.

The emphasis on color applies to plants of all kinds: annual and perennial flowers, trees and shrubs. Gardeners can count on new introductions of adaptable, long-blooming plants for flower beds and pots, and of hard-working native plants that attract butterflies and birds. But color doesn't trump everything. Vegetable gardening is big and getting bigger.

Hybridizers, wholesale growers and garden-shop owners aren't just talking about trends these days. They're making sure gardening remains relevant in a busy world. Gardening is not just a hobby, but a lifestyle. Plants make your home look attractive, express your environmental awareness and provide fresh food for your table.

Garden professionals and home gardeners are eager to get their hands on new plants. Many quickly caught on to prolifically blooming calibrachos, which look like tiny petunias. There are 257 patented cultivars of them, says Chris Berg, director of marketing for EuroAmerican Propagators, one of the largest wholesale suppliers in the country.

Cherry Star from Proven Winners is "the hit of the year," Berg says. Cherry Star stands out for its snappy pink and yellow variegated flowers, heat tolerance and nonstop bloom. Calibrachos can be planted in flower beds, but they're at their best in flower pots and hanging baskets.

In a lively panel discussion about new plants, Berg also showed off the compact, trailing Vogue mandevilla vines, which are recommended for hanging baskets and containers. He described Supertunia White Russian as "an artsy plant that goes with anything."

Justin Hancock, the online editor of Better Homes and Gardens magazine and an enthusiastic gardener himself, picked Angelonia as one of his favorite annual flowers. He particularly likes the Archangel series from Proven Winners.

"I've never had bad luck with it," Hancock says. "Archangel has more flowers than any other Angelonia, it tolerates drought or deluge and it smells like sugar cookies."

Hancock's short list of favorite colorful and tough new plants includes native Baptisia Cherries Jubilee and coneflower Southern Belle. He grew the sturdy and showy chartreuse coleus Wasabi last year and declared it "great in sun or shade." The new Boost series of high-nutrition vegetables from Burpee Home Gardens "really caught our attention" when he tested them last summer, before their official introduction this year, he says.