

JAN RIGGENBACH

New coleus varieties — barely recognizable as the bedding plants popular in Victorian times — seem to just keep getting bigger, bolder and stronger.

Wasabi is one of the newest kids on the block. A vigorous, upright variety that can grow 3 feet tall, it has serrated chartreuse leaves that don't fade even if planted in full sun.



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You can hardly go wrong with partners for Wasabi. I think a vigorous bright red coleus called Redhead, best grown in partial shade, makes a particularly striking choice. Wasabi also mixes well with almost any blooming annual. Blue salvia plants or purple petunias, for example, make fine partners.

Every garden can use some chartreuse plants to make dark colors “pop.” New multi-seed pellets take advantage of this color combination. Choices include Fuseables Chocolate Symphony, a balanced mix of chartreuse and chocolate-colored coleus varieties in one pellet, and Fuseables Under the Sun, a blend of crimson, gold and chartreuse coleus varieties. Best in partial shade, these blended mixtures grow up to 28 inches tall and are perfect in hanging baskets or patio containers.

Of course, you don't have to depend on ready-made combos. It's great fun to check out the coleus display in a garden center, then mix and match your own combinations. The colors are all gorgeous: Plum with splashes of pink, burgundy with yellow centers, yellow with red flecks, and dark red with a yellow outline are just a few of the fun foliage choices available. Choose plants with leaves that are smooth or frilly, big or little, plain or deeply-cut.

While many newer coleus varieties can take full sun, this annual is still most valued for adding bright color to shady gardens—color that

comes not from flowers but from foliage that is as showy as any blossoms, without any wait. If you're looking for a coleus for sun, the best candidates tend to be plants with thick leaves and dark colors.

Most coleus varieties eventually flower, some much later than others. I prefer those that don't readily bloom because the flowers detract from the pretty foliage. To keep the plants looking their best, I try to pinch off any flowers as soon as they form.

If you select a coleus plant that grows bigger than you expected, no problem. Just pinch off the growing tips as needed to keep your plant any size and shape you desire.

Pests and diseases are seldom a problem with coleus. The plants love heat and look great all summer, until fall frost. If you can't bear to lose your favorite varieties, plan to bring in your plants or take cuttings to grow indoors. Coleus varieties make great houseplants if grown in a sunny window.

Contact the writer: www.midwestgardening.com



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Wasabi coleus is vigorous and upright, with serrated chartreuse leaves that won't fade even in full sun.

