


George Weigel: Gardening's 10 best new items

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By **GEORGE WEIGEL**

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Gardening season kicks into high gear over the next few weeks. Ten of this spring's most interesting new items to help get the deed done are:

1. Black petunias

Is the world ready for black flowers? We'll find out with the debut of 'Black Velvet,' a petunia variety that blooms jet black. [Ashcombe Farm and Greenhouses](#) in Monroe Twp. has some on display and is expecting them and two black-striped cousins — "Phantom" and "Pinstripe" — to be big sellers. "I ordered twice as many as I had planned," says co-owner Deb Laudig.



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Plant after Mother's Day. (Also at [Highland Gardens](#) in Lower Allen Twp. and all [Stauffers of Kissel Hill](#) garden centers.)

2. Pink blueberries

The season's other color curiosity is blueberries that ripen pink instead of blue. Does that make them "pinkberries?" Highland Gardens is carrying baby "Pink Lemonade" versions for \$6 and 2-foot "Pink-a-Blu" types for \$25. The taste is very sweet— almost like fruit punch.

"They're sure to start conversations amongst gardeners and blueberry lovers," says Highland Gardens Manager Erica Shaffer.

3. Elevated garden beds

For gardeners without a garden, Stauffer's of Kissel Hill has sturdy, rot-resistant, cedar raised planters that fit together without tools and bring gardens up to waist level. They're perfect for patios and for folks who have a hard time bending over.

Two sizes: 16-by-32-inches for \$110 and 24-by-48-inches for \$150. (Highland Gardens also is carrying a similar pair of slightly different sizes.)

4. City Pickers Garden Kit

Also for the patio, this 2-by-2-foot square plastic planter box sits on the ground and holds 6 to 8

inches of soil — enough to grow a mini vegetable garden without digging any holes. Just add water every few days to a tube, and the reservoir underneath waters the roots from the bottom up. \$40 at Stauffers.

5. Floating filter and fountain

Here's a clever four-in-one, plug-and-go unit for the water garden that serves as a filter, aerator, fountain and set of lights all at once. What you see is a round, foot-wide disc that floats on the water and shoots a spray up to 6-feet high through an attached nozzle. Underneath is a pump, UV clarifier and filter pad that controls bacteria while powering the spray.

The nozzle also has four LED lights to illuminate the water plume at night. \$119 at [Lowe's home centers](#).

6. Rain barrels galore

At last, retailers are offering a variety of choices for capturing rainwater from your downspouts and storing it for use in the garden. Highland Gardens has an intriguing new rain barrel with a diverter connection that automatically sends water down the spout when the barrel fills. (Earth-Minded Rain Station, \$130.)

Highland, Stauffer's and [Home Depot](#) also have sleek, urn-shaped models with planters on top so you can make your rain barrel bloom (\$150).

7. Free garden plots

This offer comes from [Ames True Temper](#) in Hampden Twp., which is building a 2-acre, fenced-in community garden next to its headquarters at 465 Railroad Ave., and offering free use of 150 raised-bed gardens there. The gardens also include free use of tools and free water.

Penn-Cumberland Garden Club is helping with reservations. To sign up, contact Francesca McNichol at 717-795-9585 or iimagine27@aol.com or Amy Hatfield at 717-766-8927 or amyhat@verizon.net.

8. Eco-friendly plant markers

Wisconsin-based CobraHead LLC, best known for its curved-tip weeding tool, has a new line of BioMarker plant markers made out of recycled plastic and ground corn cobs. They come with weatherproof labels that you can run through a laser printer or write plant names on with a grease pencil.

Available in three colors. Priced 15 for \$30, online at www.cobrahead.com.

9. Grow bags

These green polypropylene bags come in assorted sizes and allow you to grow edibles on a patio or anywhere you've got space but don't want to dig up ground. Just add soil to the bag, plant, water and harvest. At the end of the season, dump the soil. The bags fold up for compact winter storage and reuse next year. \$9 at Ashcombe.

10. Gardener's Hollow Leg

Think of this as a soft, 5-gallon bucket that's strapped to your waist. The Gardener's Hollow Leg is made out of recycled polyester and attaches by belt to create a hands-free, carry-along repository for weeds, prunings, gutter cleanings, etc. It clips on and off to empty, has a sturdy ring at the top to help keep it open and even has a pocket for your cell phone. Priced at \$30 online,