

# INSIDE & OUT

E | THE PLAIN DEALER HOME AND GARDEN NEWS AT CLEVELAND.COM/INSIDEOUT



BALL HORTICULTURAL CO.  
New for spring, the 'Black Velvet' petunia is touted as being the first true black petunia, though it has hints of purple.

The debut of an onyx-hued petunia shows how dark flowers are bringing elegance and intrigue to the garden

ROXANNE WASHINGTON  
*Plain Dealer Reporter*

**Y**ou don't often hear about the dark side of gardening, but it exists. ¶ Petunias crowned with onyx petals. Orchids festooned with purplish-brown foliage. Fritillaries that flirt with dark-purple shades. ¶ Dark flowers and foliage live in the shadows of sunflowers, red roses and similarly colorful, potently popular botanicals. Dark gardening botanicals are numerous but, for the most part, are a curiosity. ¶ Yet there are some who regard somber-shaded plants as beautiful and unique.

"I've never known a gardener who is blasé about black," Larry Rettig writes on Dave's Garden website ([tinyurl.com/darkflower](http://tinyurl.com/darkflower)). "That color in a flower has always intrigued some gardeners and repulsed others."

Rettig's article is in reference to 'Black Velvet,' a new petunia that's expected to get tons of attention this spring. 'Black Velvet' is described as true black, and it's touted as a breeding breakthrough because it's the first of its kind.

Rettig writes: "When 'Black Velvet' bursts onto the garden scene in 2011, there are bound to be both accolades and brickbats. For the time being,

the accolades have it by a long shot.

"Last summer, 'Black Velvet' was the star of the Greenhouse Grower's Association Evening of Excellence. It earned two awards that evening: Industry's Choice and Reader's Choice," he adds.

"It's the world's only black petunia, and everybody always wants to look at it closely to be sure [of the color]," says Bill Calkins, business manager of independent garden centers for Ball Horticultural Co., which introduced 'Black Velvet.' "This plant was bred for very many years to make it true black."

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## Black beauties



TIMBER PRESS

The 'Serpentine Night' giant stream orchid is said to be one of the few orchids grown for its striking dark foliage rather than its exotic flowers.



BALL HORTICULTURAL CO.

The black 'Phantom' petunia has a yellow sunburst in the center.



TIMBER PRESS

Emerging in late winter, the arrow-shaped leaves of 'Brazen Hussy' lesser celandine are deep black with an oily sheen of blue when in direct sunlight.

### Full House

JULIE E. WASHINGTON



The future here, and on your wall

**B**efore I get to my regularly scheduled column, I want to thank all of you who offered good wishes following my introduction week as the new Plain Dealer homes editor.

I wrote a getting-to-know-you piece with a hopefully amusing story about my life as a pet lover and homeowner. You wrote back with congratulations and advice.

Responding to my confession that I felt pressure to be more like Martha Stewart, David Novak Brunswick told me to chill.

"There are enough Martha Stewart wannabes in this world," Novak e-mailed. "Please keep it simple, easy and most of all, fun. Remember every Martha Stewart fan out there, there are many more like me who have neither the time nor the ambition nor the money to follow this 'what your house should look like' goddess."

No danger there, David.

I'm still figuring out this job, but I'm not as confused as one commenter on [cleveland.com](http://cleveland.com). "Why does a region with virtually no new home construction need a new homes editor? No word: newspapers are losing money and going out of business," harrumphed someone who signed his message, appropriately, "Squirrlyly."

And many of you sent warnings to keep my tile palm tree, a memento of a recent Florida trip, away from my cats. In a bit of serendipity, a D'Abby entry that ran the same day as my column told of a cat who went to feline heaven after falling on a palm.

Never fear, my palm has been moved to my fireplace mantel, which is too high for my tubby to reach.

I enjoyed a hilarious phone chat with Linda Anton of Shaker Heights, who passed on her tips for fine living. Seton collects "guys" — workmen you can count on to handle electrical, plumbing, roofing, driveways and so on.

"If I need a new guy for something else, I'll get him from one of my guys," she explained. "People are always asking if they can borrow one of my guys."

SEE FULL

### IN&OUT



#### Gentle reminder

(\$89, [etsy.com](http://etsy.com))

There's no mistaking the message here. This 16-inch recycled felt applique pillow was signed by Alexandra Ferguson, made from 100 percent post-consumer recycled water bottles. Other pillows by the designer are embroidered with "Be nice or leave," "Go to the gym," and more gentle reminders/reprimands. Go to the website and type Alexandra Ferguson in the search field.

The In&Out compilation of items includes the most interesting and innovative product finds on the home and garden front. **More on E2**

Deck and patio experts offering guidance at show

ROXANNE WASHINGTON FYI

#### AERIAL VIEW

Mentor's bird count

### INSIDE

Reader response requested

cardboard glasses around the house to indulge in this trend, according to interior designer Christopher Grubb.

Grubb, based in Beverly Hills, Calif., has used 3-D marble, mosaic and stone tiles for clients who don't want just the same old thing. The tiles have raised geometric patterns; to my uneducated eye, the circular ones make a wall look as if it's infested with incredibly symmetrical pimples.

Grubb believes in the power of an extra dimension.

"It's an exciting punch to add to a room," he said. "You just want to go and touch it — ooooh."

These tiles can be used as a kitchen backsplash, on the face of an outdoor barbecue, in a bathroom or in a water feature. But they need to be used sparingly, Grubb cautioned — two walls of a room, not all four.

Good, because I was beginning to imagine my 3-D-tiled living room pulsating like a scene out of "Avatar."

If you'd like to try this cutting-edge trend, go to glasstilestore.com, where the tiles start at \$15 a square foot. The website homeexpo.com also lists other sources of 3-D tiles.

Personally, I prefer my walls smooth, but Grubb convinced me that maybe this idea isn't as silly as it first sounded. If you must have the most forward-looking house on the block, 3-D tiles are definitely the key to the future — weird glasses not included.

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# BLACK

FROM E1

## Dark-hued plants add intrigue to garden

'Black Velvet' is true black, but when horticulturists and garden writers refer to plants as "black," they use the word as an umbrella term for the darkest plants in horticulture. Many have foliage and flowers that are deep tones of purple, red and bronze.

Still, the question arises: Who would want black petunias — or any somber-colored flowers, for that matter — in their garden? As it turns out, there is a demand.

"The number of Google hits [for black plants] is huge," says Calkins.

In the plant world, he adds, dark is regarded as modern, sophisticated and alluring, if not edgy.

For the spring launch of 'Black Velvet' petunias, Ball Horticultural plays up that feeling of sophistication with the campaign slogan "Black goes with everything;" it's the flower equivalent of a little black dress.

The campaign also includes the petunias 'Phantom,' which are black with a gold star pattern, and 'Pinstripe,' with deep-purple blooms striped with pink.

This spring, Proven Winners, a brand of plants sold at garden centers across the country, introduces Superbells 'Blackberry Punch,' a low-growing, compact calibrachoa hybrid with black and purple petals.

Dark botanicals intrigue gar-

den writer Paul Bonine. Owner of Xera Plants Inc., a wholesaler in Oregon, Bonine wrote "Black Plants — 75 Striking Choices for the Garden (Timber Press, \$14.95).

The compact book uses color photographs to catalog flowers and foliage with mysterious and alluring monikers. 'Sorbet Black Delight' is described as a pure black viola. 'Serpentine Night' giant stream orchid is said to be one of few orchids grown for its chocolate-colored leaves and stems.

With all due respect to Gertrude Stein, a rose isn't just a rose when it's a 'Louis XIV' rose, crowned with velvety, dark red petals.

Bonine is accustomed to the strange looks he gets in conversations about dark plants.

"It's counterintuitive," he says. "It's not the first thing you think of with gardening. But as people learn more about dark plants, they begin to appreciate them.

Garden centers, particularly mass-market retailers, aren't overrun with dark flowers and dark foliage, but there is much interest, say gardening authors and bloggers who keep an eye on the plants.

British garden writer Karen Platt has released the fourth edition of her book "Black Magic & Purple Passion," which catalogs more than 650 dark plants that weren't listed in previous editions. Platt's book is available on her website, [karenplatt.co.uk/](http://karenplatt.co.uk/) contact.

She puts it this way: "I had to come up with a way of defining black plants as, at that time over 10 years ago, no one knew what they were. This seemed the best definition to encompass the color without attracting the doubting

Thomas saying, 'Black plants don't exist.' It is not about the blackest, but the beauty of dark plants. Some people get hooked on the 'blackness' thinking it is funereal and morbid. But they come to appreciate [black plants] once they see what's available."

If your interest in black plants has been piqued, you're probably wondering what the best way to garden with them is.

The advice is to start slow, with container gardening. Select a white or light-colored container and fill it with a combination of black plants and lively

shades. The black with bright colors pop ever.

In the fall, dark foliage striking combined with yellow and gold.

It's also best, when dark black flowers (and in the ground, to play bright companion plants.

Use dark botanicals and plant them in shade.

Grown in the shade, they will look dull and might

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