

THE VANCOUVER SUN

Petunia perfection

If you're looking for a flower that screams summer, this is your answer

Vancouver Sun May 7, 2011

What is the quintessential flower of summer?

The rose is an obvious first thought, but the petunia is more often than not the flower we see most throughout summer -tumbling out of hanging baskets, overflowing from window boxes and scrambling freely through flower beds and borders.

A lot of intense hybridizing has been done with this plant over the last few decades.

The result is that we have all sorts of new colours and series of petunias.

Wave petunias have been around since the 1990s, when they were introduced by Ball Horticultural, of Chicago, as great ground cover plants with exceptionally vigorous root systems.

Today, there are at least five categories of Wave petunias -Shock, Tidal Wave, Easy Wave, Original Wave and Double Wave.

Original Wave petunias are said to be ideal for planting out in the garden while the others perform best in hanging baskets and containers.

Tidal Wave has the largest flowers. Shock Wave has the smallest flowers and Easy Wave is an inexhaustible spreader.

Supertunias were also introduced in the 1990s as a superfloriferous group of hybrids with non-stop flowering in a wide range of colours and habit.

Today they are mostly marketed under the Proven Winners label.

Top sellers include the Bubblegum and Silverberry series.

They are fantastic in hanging baskets and containers since they grow only 15 to 25 cm (six to 10 inches) high but can trail up to 90 cm (three feet).

There are a few that have the ability to mound 60 cm high and stretch the same length. Calibrachoa, a.k.a. Million Bells, were bred as an alternative to petunias but with the same elegant flower.

Many of these hybrids are considered "self-cleaning," which means there is no need to deadhead faded flowers; they simply drop to the ground when they are done.

But the most exciting development in petunias over the last couple of years has been the introduction of new black petunias -'Black Velvet', 'Pinstripe' and 'Phantom'.

All you need to know about petunias is that they love sunshine and love to be fertilized.

Some expert growers even go as far as to say you cannot over fertilize petunias and it is worth feeding them with 20-20-20 liquid fertilizer virtually every time they are watered.

Try an assortment of varieties this summer in your garden and see which ones perform best.

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