

# Gardening

## Yard art, special plants can spruce up summer

The spring planting rush is over and it's a perfect time to fine-tune the garden. If an area doesn't look quite right — a plant is not performing, there's need for a splash of color or there are holes to be plugged, don't sit around all summer letting it bug you. Get out there and fix it.

Independent garden centers open year-around get new plant material weekly, so there is plenty from which to choose.



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Sometimes a good piece of yard art — be it a statue, a colorful container or possibly an arbor or lattice work — is the piece de

resistance that turns the landscape from so-so to fantastic. Summertime is sale time for garden art and a great time to treasure hunt.

Now is also a good time to think about starting a plant collection or two. By now you should have a good idea what works and what doesn't in your landscape and if a plant excels, why not look for new varieties and create a masterpiece?

My hot-button plant this year is *Nepeta*, commonly called catmint. This sun-lover thrives in the drought-tolerant border I'm developing at the edge of my wild flower field. The border mix, adapted from the pre-planned Cold Hardy Mediterranean Garden design featured in the High Country Gardens catalog, [www.highcountrygardens.com](http://www.highcountrygardens.com), is dominated by blue and purple flowers along with silver foliage.

*Calamintha grandiflora* cultivars, also called large-flowered calamint, the kissing cousins of catmint, are also on my wish list.

The flower colors range from purples and blues to very light pink and white. Heights vary from 4 feet to just 12 inches, depending on the variety. Catmints are hardy souls, thriving in frosty Zone 4, when given average, well-drained soil. Bloom times vary, beginning in early spring and when cut back promptly, again in early fall. Some varieties reseed and should be deadheaded after blooming. A haircut, cutting back by half, also will promote compact growth and help prevent flopping.

Bees, butterflies and hummingbirds find catmints attractive, but bunnies and deer leave them alone. That's a huge plus in my garden.

Of the many varieties available, "Walker's Low," which rises 18 to 24 inches and was selected by the Perennial Plant Association as their Plant of Year for 2007, was tapped as "the best of the bunch" by perennial guru Allan Armitage.

### Timely tip

Water-wise plants are not drought-tolerant until their roots become established, so keep the soil around their root balls moderately moist the first season in the ground.

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Check out her blog at [www.greatgardensecrets.com](http://www.greatgardensecrets.com).



Proven Winners

"Blue Ice" is a dwarf catmint that is covered in lavender-tinged white blooms all summer.