



If its new and different, gardeners will want it . . .

David Hobson, In the Garden

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By David Hobson

Judging by the crowds at local garden centres, the season is fully underway — at last. Finally, a break in the rain, a few sunny days, and shopping carts are overflowing with plants, everyone eager for an early start.

Some people are shopping for early vegetables, others for bargains on flowering baskets — and there's always a sizable number looking for the latest and greatest in new plants. The new and immediate are factors that govern every part of the consumer world and gardeners are no different.

Each spring, new varieties appear and are eagerly sought. I'm fortunate to get a little advance information about what will be on the racks this spring, thanks to a visit to the Toronto Botanical Garden and an invitation to attend the Loblaw President's Choice media event where the company's vice president of floral and garden, Peter Cantley, presents a preview. With him were suppliers and developers of some new plants that will be available this spring.

For dahlia lovers, Reinoud Hagen of Fides BV, a plant breeding company based in de Lier, Netherlands, was proud to display PC® Dahlia Dahlinova Hypnotica® Cherish Pink, a new variety that didn't even have a name until President's Choice saw it and snatched it up as an exclusive.

It's a long flowering plant that branches well with large, bi-coloured flowers. For colour with impact, dahlias always stand out in the flower bed. Courtesy of the Fides folk, I was also reminded that the correct pronunciation is dah-lia, not day-lia as I heard it growing up. Live and learn, and I was there to learn.

One plant that I always find a place for in my garden is the daisy-like Osteospermum.

It has a drawback, though. Osteospermum is a nyctinastic plant — one that responds to darkness. As the sun goes down, its shift ends and it softly closes its petals. Now, after successful breeding by The Ball FloraPlant company operating out of Chicago, in partnership with Selecta, a breeding company based in Stuttgart, Germany, has produced a (repeat after me) non-nyctinastic osteospermum called Ballerina Double that stays awake all night, showing its flowers 24/7.

Manda Vuksanaj, a breeder with Ball FloraPlant, was even more thrilled to show us a real first he was especially proud of. White petunias have forever been paired with red geraniums in planters. Now the first black petunia in the world is on the market, appropriately named Black Velvet.

I could just detect a hint of purple in certain light, but it's black enough to create a startling contrast with those white geraniums and it will be a sure winner in a gothic themed garden.

Based in Rheinberg, Germany, with an office for North American business located in Ohio, the Dümmer Company was also on hand with a gorgeous display of its new series of Dragone Begonias. Sunset and Champagne are the new varieties and these plants are beauties.

I love begonias as they flower all summer in a shady area of the garden, rarely bothered by pests or

diseases. My older varieties have occasionally been troubled by mildew when there was insufficient air movement around them, but Diane Surette Cournoyer, general manager for Dümme Canada, informed us that these new Dragones are bred to be even more mildew resistant.

Another trouble-free plant is, of course, the ever popular geranium. Kent Carrell, event exhibitor for Syngenta from California, a global leader in genetic flower breeding, enthusiastically showed us a new geranium. It was bred by crossing zonal geraniums with the trailing ivy type to the deepest ever red geranium that will give that red and white front porch planter even more impact.

You would think I'd seen enough new plant introductions, but I couldn't leave the Toronto Botanical Garden without a stroll through the gardens where I saw for the first time, *Narcissus Trepolo*. It has an unusual orange stripe on the inner split petals of the corona (cup). Gotta have one of these, as well as the *Dragone* begonias and the non-nyctinastic *osteospermum* and the . . .

David Hobson gardens in Waterloo and is happy to answer garden questions, preferably by email: garden@gto.net. Reach him by mail c/o Etcetera, The Record, 160 King St. E. Kitchener, Ont. N2G 4E5

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