

These plants have personality

IN BLOOM

This year's garden picks are breeds of their own

Tara Nolan

Just as many factors determine today's fashion trends, great effort goes into deciding which hot new plant varieties will make it onto garden centre shelves or into a seed catalogue.

Not only are aesthetics key, but a plant must also prove it will perform well in a home gardener's plot. Everything from disease resistance to hardiness is considered. Trial gardens throughout North America play host to interesting new breeds that will eventually make their way to retail.

Here are a few new plants, from ornamental flowers and foliage to unconventional edibles that a nursery or garden centre near you may showcase this season.

Ornamental blooms

The Perennial Plant Association (perennialplant.org) named Japanese anemone "Honorine Jobert" as the Perennial Plant of the Year. What's great about this plant — besides its stunning white flowers — is that it blooms from late summer to



Climbing Phoenix nasturtiums do triple duty in the garden: They're edible, attract pollinators and trap bad bugs. RENEE'S GARDEN

mid fall. With a little planning, your garden can be in bloom from spring until the snow flies. Try to choose plants with bloom times from early spring to late fall. A plant tag will reveal all the information you need.

For container gardening, the Supertunia Pink Star Charm petunia hybrid from Proven Winners (provenwinners.com) does

not require deadheading like a traditional petunia. I tested this new-for-2016 introduction last year and this vigorous bloomer was producing flowers well into the fall.

Similarly, the "Holy Moly" calibrachoa superbells, which are bright yellow and fuchsia, are fairly low maintenance and should bloom all season long.

And this is pretty cool: Nova Scotia-based garden writer Niki Jabbour, author of *The Year-Round Vegetable Gardener*, had a daylily named after her by mail-order company Harbour Breezes (harbourbreezes.ca). "Niki Jabbour" has gorgeous peach blooms with splashes of burgundy and pretty ruffled petals.

Fabulous foliage

When planning your garden, keep in mind, you don't have to focus on just blooms. Shop for plants with interesting foliage that will complement any flower in the garden — or in your pots.

You could also go full-on foliage and create a lovely mosaic of leafy specimens. The new Heucherella "Metallic Madness" from

the PC Lawn & Garden lineup has leaves that start out a soft burgundy colour and lighten to a metallic grey-pewter hue. Flip a leaf over and its pinky underside is just as interesting.

Also keep an eye out for "Curly Fries," with its narrow, stiff, wavy leaves, which the American Hosta Growers Society chose as the 2016 Hosta of the Year.

Another great shade garden choice is "Regal Red," a new Japanese painted fern offered by Sheridan Nurseries, whose reddish foliage is sure to stand out.

Seeds to sow

Nasturtiums are fabulous triple-duty plants to have in a garden. Not only are both the leaves and flowers edible (toss them in summer salads for visual interest), they attract beneficial pollinators. Furthermore — and this is where the "triple" comes in — they can act as trap crops for bad bugs like aphids. The "Climbing Phoenix," a new variety introduced by Renee's Garden this year, has unique, pinwheel-shaped flowers in a variety of hues. And, you never know what colour you're going to get from "Dancing Ballerinas," a new type of California poppy that's also a bee magnet.

The delicate, butter-yellow blooms of Xanthos cosmos, available from Stokes Seeds, will also attract pollinators, as will the vibrant, multi-coloured Carousel Zinnias available from Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds.

SPRING CLEANING

10 tidying-up tips and techniques for a fresh start



Tools like a wet mop simplify cleaning tasks. CONTRIBUTED

Spring cleaning season is upon us. For some, the annual ritual will be a pleasure, a reminder that it's time to get ready to tackle reno ideas you've been dreaming up over the winter.

For the rest of us, it's a tedious — but necessary — chore. After all, houses that have had doors and windows closed for six months are bound to be dusty, and in need of a good ventilation. Windows will be smeared. Outdoor dirt will have made its way into closets, front hallways and mudrooms, where it's made friends with dust-bunnies and mislaid mittens.

Tackle spring cleaning head on and clear the way for your renovation plans or just for a fresh start. Here, then, are 10 techniques and tips to make the process as painless as possible.

1. Plan to do the work over several evenings or a couple of weekends. If you try to accomplish everything at once, you're more likely to give some tasks short shrift. Play music while

you labour. Reward yourself for finishing each room with a walk in the park, or a visit to a local coffee shop with a pal or cleaning partner.

2. Decluttering is an essential step to spring cleaning. There are any number of books that posit decluttering as a spiritual practice that leads to greater self-actualization. Here's a shorter version of all of them: You have too much stuff. Get rid of some of it.

3. Nothing says spring like sunlight pouring through sparkling glass. So do yourself a favour and wash all windows, inside and out. If windows don't open indoors for cleaning, invest in a professional service to do exteriors — unless you're handy with a ladder.

For superior results, wipe off soapy water with a squeegee dipped in a vinegar and water solution, and eliminate streaks with balled up sheets of newspaper.

4. Always start at the top of each room. In the kitchen, for example, dust the ceiling or vacuum with a soft brush attachment. Dust light fixtures — don't forget the light bulbs. Then clean the tops of cabinets and appliances. Wipe walls with a soft cloth on a pole, or a Swiffer wand. Spot-clean greasy marks on walls with a mild detergent solution. Once every three years, wash all the walls. Wipe down cabinets. If you have a stone countertop that requires sealing annually, this is a good time to do it. Clean out crumbs from cutlery drawers, toasters and breadboxes.

5. Don't forget the hidden places where dirt sneakily inserts itself. Move appliances away from walls and vacuum and wash floors behind them. Clean the fridge fan coils, and the filters on the overhead exhaust. Even the dishwasher could probably do with a cleaning, using a specialty product,

which gets dropped in a washing cycle to remove hard water, odours, and mineral deposits. There's also a formula to remove the musty smell front-load washers sometimes get.

6. Consolidate tools and cleaning materials in one place. Storage systems have typically been unlovely. But with a bit of research, you can find companies with decor-friendly units that can fit stylishly into just about any room in the house.

7. Stick to the basics when it comes to cleaning solutions. Vinegar and water work just fine for many jobs (Use one part vinegar to five parts water). Just don't use it on a granite or marble surface. A half-cup of baking soda mixed with a couple of gallons of water makes a good cleaner, especially for surfaces that have soapy scum. You can also try one of the many "green" cleaners on the market.

8. Wash blinds — especially those in the kitchen and bathroom. Vacuum and/or steam other window treatments. Like area rugs, the latter should only need professional cleaning every five years or so.

9. Switch out seasonal bedding. Wash, dry and store all winter bedding, using lavender or cedar chips to discourage moths. Remove mattress covers for washing and while they are off, vacuum the mattress thoroughly with a crevice attachment.

10. Simple tools are often the most effective. Consider a mop with removable, reusable pads, and an on-board container you can fill with the cleaning solution of your choice. It's safe for all floors including hardwood, vinyl, laminate and tile. A control handle on a mop lets users to easily switch between tile, vinyl, stone, and sealed hardwood and laminate cleaning options. **VICKY SANDERSON**