

> BLOOMS AND GREENS

Plants with purpose and personality

These ornamental flowers and unconventional edibles will look good in your garden

TARA NOLAN
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

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.

Outstanding 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 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.



The Perpetua blueberry is supposed to bear fruit twice during the growing season.



The delicate, butter-yellow blooms of Xanthos cosmos attracts pollinators.

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 speci-

mens. 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 Carrousel Zinnias available from Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds.



The Climbing Phoenix are fabulous triple-duty plants to have in a garden.

Interesting edibles

Various types of fruit seem to have become more common at the garden centre. Patio varieties, such as the BrazelBerries line are especially popular because they are both a lovely ornamental pick and fruit-bearing.

The "Pink Icing" blueberry bush was the star of 2015 with its foliage that changed from pink to green to a lovely shade of turquoise in the winter. This year's introduction is called "Perpetua," probably because the plant is supposed to bear fruit not once, but twice, during the growing season.

PC Lawn & Garden has some interesting introductions to its line of edibles. Ever heard of a framberry or a pineberry? They will be part of a three-pack with their strawberry cousin this season. Framberries resemble strawberries, but apparently they taste more like a raspberry. And pineberries are quite unusual-looking. They resemble strawberries, but they are white with red seeds and apparently taste like pineapple.

If you're into summer salads, consider growing a variety of lettuces. "Red Deer Tongue" is an heirloom cutting lettuce available through Renee's Garden. This also happens to be the Year of the Carrot, according to the National Garden Bureau. Opt for a colour other than orange, such as the new Yellowbunch variety from Johnny's Selected Seeds.



If you're into summer salads, consider growing a Red Deer Tongue lettuce.

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> CLEAN UP

Spring is nature's way of telling us to tidy up

Sweep up those dust bunnies and wipe away the dirt you've ignored all winter

VICKY SANDERSON
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Spring cleaning season is upon us. For some, the annual ritual will be a pleasure, a reminder that another long, dark winter has drawn to a close.

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 mud rooms, where it's made friends with dust-bunnies and mislaid mittens.

Rather than delay the inevitable, it's best to tackle spring cleaning head-on.

Here are 10 techniques and tips to make it 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 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 count-



Sweeping behind appliances and washing windows on the outside and in are just a couple of tasks that differentiate spring cleaning from your regular cleaning routine.

ertop 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. A mop with removable, reusable pads, and an on-board container, like Rubbermaid's Reveal, can be filled with a cleaning solution of your choice. It's safe for all floors including hardwood, vinyl, laminate and tile. Other models, like Black & Decker's 2-n-1 Steam Mop, only need water to kill 99.9 per cent of germs. A control on the handle lets users easily switch between tile, vinyl, stone, and sealed hardwood and laminate cleaning options.