



Bear Creek Press

'Lettuce Get On With Spring!'

Volume 13, Issue 1

March 2014

Lettuce Hope For Spring

So, how was your winter? We seemed to have paid the price for the last two barely-there winters with wind-whipping, tear-freezing, ice-crunching, snow-blowing, ear-nipping weather. As this is being written, it is yet again a homebound day of icy roads and a high of about twenty degrees. In other words, a perfect day to think about lettuce. In the great world of edibles, there is nothing as easy and satisfying as growing your own lettuce.

Even in this cold there are flats of various sized plants in the light rooms and the greenhouses at the Bear. In two winks of the eye, it will be time for these starts to be in fertile soil and, two winks later, in a salad bowl. And there is nothing as satisfying as a fresh-from-the-garden-to-the-plate lettuce salad. With a homemade dressing or a drizzle of specialty olive oil or balsamic, you have a meal.

We like them all: Green Forest Romaine, Ruby Sky Leaf, Skyphos Red Butterhead, Red Rosie Romaine, Sylvesta Butterhead, Cherokee Summer Crisp, Pannisse Green Oakleaf, Freckles Romaine, Mottistone Red Crisp, Simpsons Curled, Red Cross Butterhead. Just reading through the names makes my mouth water. This is such a small sampling of available types. A trip through a seed catalog offers a field of flavors.

Johnny's Select Seeds offers choices that consume pages of their catalog. They thoughtfully suggest spring, summer and fall varieties, lettuce that will grow well in different climates and at specific times of year. We tried Cherokee, Red Rosie and Skyphos in an unheated greenhouse this winter. After indoor temperatures that repeatedly dipped to the mid teens, we are still eating fresh lettuce from a fall planting.

After we sweep away the last of the snow and begin to enjoy the sounds of robins, phoebes and the peepers we will look for you to share the warm glow of spring once again. Happy Gardening!

New Shade Loving Perennials

There are so many new perennials at the Bear this spring you will have to visit to see them all. Here are a few of our favorite selections. The new ferns are usually at the end of the newsletter. This year, however, they hired an agent who negotiated top billing. These two ferns deserve it.

Golden Mist Wood Fern. From the temperate regions of Asia comes this delightful relative of the Autumn Fern. The new fronds emerge a golden color on a fern that grows under two feet tall. Like many hardy ferns, the wood ferns enjoy shade to part shade conditions, tolerating more sun if treated to more constantly moist conditions. Sounds like a perfect plant for under that leaky faucet.

Dixie Wood Fern. This towering fern grows up to four feet tall. Evidently it is a naturally occurring hybrid between a wood fern and Wilt Chamberlin. An East Coast native, the Dixie Wood Fern is semi evergreen and is one of the hardy ferns that will tolerate a dry, shady location.

Green Panda Hardy Ginger. Hardy Gingers are one of the world's shade garden delights. There is a native species, a glossy leaf European type and many Asian varieties. The common name is derived from the ginger scent of the large glossy leaf. The beautiful black and white flower doesn't really look like a panda but the name is a neat marketing idea. The flowers are born at soil level and are perfect for those shade gardeners who love to lie in the mulch to enjoy their flowers.

Lilafee Epimedium. The barrenwort is a plant made for the Ozarks. Shade tolerant, drought tolerant and deer resistant traits practically make this plant a required addition to the woodland environs. Lilafee, however, simply can't make up its mind. The foliage emerges a bronze red color in the spring, turns green through the summer and back to bronze in the fall. It would evidently be a compatible choice for indecisive gardeners. In the mid to late spring delicate long-spurred amethyst flowers hang above the foliage.

Variegated Solomon's Seal. For the extremely patient plantsperson we offer this classic favorite. Polygonatum, or Solomon's Seal, is an attractive woodland perennial that is stout and long lived. The variegated form has single gracefully arched stems cloaked with four inch round leaves edged with a band of white. The term "floral display" is not a phrase that can be used with this plant. Small white, bell-shaped, lightly fragrant flowers hang neatly tucked under the leaves. Now for the patient gardener part. Well worth the wait, Solomon's Seal will form a very handsome colony in its own time. Don't be in a hurry; enjoy this plants' spread over time.

Naomi Japanese Forest Grass. The golden variegated form of Hakone Grass is the easiest way to illuminate a shade garden. One might think this grass requires an electrical outlet, but it really shines on its own. Forming a cascading clump between one and two feet tall, Forest Grass spreads slowly into a handsome specimen. Naomi is particularly attractive in the fall as the foliage takes on red highlights. (Cont.)

New Sun Loving Perennials

Yellow False Indigo. It is fairly confusing to have a yellow form of a plant named Indigo, but that's just the way things are in the plant world. Yellow Baptisia is a cousin of the blue false indigo and, although considered a native, could have been snuck into the Midwest in a Johnny Appleseed style.

Nonetheless it is a stunning and tough plant that stands two feet tall with spires of flower clusters held above the foliage in mid spring. Even though it seems perfect, it has been tinkered with as described in the next paragraph.

Decadence Lemon Meringue False Indigo. For every fabulous plant there is a hybridizer willing to try to make a better fabulous plant. Lemon meringue is a perfect example. Standing taller and growing more vigorously than the Yellow Indigo, this hybrid is admittedly a stronger grower. It's name is also considerably more silly. But if you like Baptisias, this will be fun to grow. Can we still call it by its colloquial name, "Ole Rattlebox", named for its mature seed pods with seeds rattling inside?

Cheyenne Spirit Coneflower. A few years ago they came out with a series of red and orange bred coneflowers. I guess they turned out to be inbred. After a couple of years in the garden they looked just like all the other pink coneflowers. Finally they have offered a seed grown multicolor coneflower mix. We tried a few last year and were impressed with the colors. So this year you get to try them. Don't you love being a gardening guinea pig?

Mercury Rising Coreopsis. Oh, my. There is finally a hardy red Coreopsis. This old fashioned form of Tickseed has been on everyone's wish list for a long while. Two inch dark red flowers are held over mounds of bright green foliage all summer. Plants are compact, growing to about eighteen inches tall. This will surely be a popular new Coreopsis.

Route 66 Threadleaf Coreopsis. New colors of Threadleaf Coreopsis are rare, making Route 66 a rare exception. Discovered in Pennsylvania, this form features two inch flowers on a two foot tall plant. The yellow flowers have a red center which, as the season progresses, bleeds out to become the dominant color.

Delicate foliage give the Threadleaf Coreopsis its name, making everyone happy with this unique plant with a unique flower.

Riding Hood Delft Blue Beard Tongue. Our favorite native, Penstemon, is now available in a new series, the Riding Hoods.

A long blooming and drought tolerant prairie plant has been improved to be even more long blooming, compact and floriferous. Delft Blue Beard Tongue is a gorgeous shade of rich blue, the color you would expect on the (Cont.)

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Shade Lovers continued-

Pear Crisp Coral Bells. Oh, no! A brand new Coral Bells introduction! How will we ever keep up? Pear crisp is a diminutive new Heuchera with a distinct look. Finely dissected leaves with multiple points form a tight mound of bright chartreuse foliage. Provide a bit of morning sun for brightest color.

Clusters of airy ivory colored flowers stand above the foliage to complete the Bells. Can you resist adding this to your collection?

Hollywood Coral Bells. For those of you who like to see more flowers than foliage on your Coral Bells, have we got a Heuchera for you. Dense spikes of coral red flowers make this one of the showiest Coral Bells ever. This one has leaves, too. Ruffled purple foliage with the famous Heuchera veining are the perfect backdrop to the full flowers. Hollywood is considered a rebloomer making this one a complete cinematic show.

Solar Eclipse Foamy Bells. By combining the best attributes of Coral Bells and Foam Flower, the breeders at Terra

Nova Nurseries have created the dazzling Heucherella family. Solar Eclipse is a new addition to this group, showy in both its foliage and flowers. Growing to about ten inches tall, the dense mound of leaves is outstanding. Scalloped dark maroon leaves are edged with a bright lime green. Tight clusters of white flowers stand out against the colorful background in early spring. This Foamy Bell will work overtime in both the garden or container.

Sun Lovers Continued-

cape of an armored knight. Growing to two feet tall, this Penstemon is versatile, equally happy in the ground or a mixed container. It is a certified friend of hummingbirds and butterflies .

Ultra Violet Autumn Sage. Another great Salvia will be gracing our greenhouses and your garden this year. Ultra Violet, a hybrid discovered in Colorado, is thought to be a naturally occurring cross instigated by a hummingbird. Those sneaky hummers! A long bloom period and drought resistance are just two of its attributes. We also have to assume that future hummingbirds will

like it, if not for the flowers, then merely out of solidarity. But we are excited about the color. Reds are typical in an Autumn Sage; the idea of violet just makes us swoon.

Fire Spinner Ice Plant. We always enjoyed the Hardy Ice Plant with its dense succulent foliage. The color is nice, too; it comes in yellow, yellow or yellow. Now, however, from Plant Select, comes a new Ice Plant. Fire Spinner has the same dense mat of bright green foliage. But the flowers are to live for: orange petals with a hot pink ring and a white eye pop right off the leaves. These low growing ground covers are weed suppressing and drought tolerant.

Cherry Tart Stonecrop. This pretty little Sedum has a red halo on every leaf. A low growing, compact spreading plant, Cherry Tart has a tidy habit and dense foliage. Full sun brings out the red color which hangs on the plant through fall. Large clusters of pink flowers are produced in the fall. An outstanding new stonecrop that looks good in the garden or a container.

To be continued in next issue...



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