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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

HEUCHERAS: A WIDE RANGE OF COLORS IN  
A HARDY, LOW-CARE PLANT  
Laurie Brown

Heucheras make excellent edging plants, or plant in groups of odd numbers to echo the color of neighboring flowers. They are versatile plants that ask for little and give a lot.

Once, the only heuchera in gardens was green-leaved *Heuchera sanguinea*, also called Coral Bells. 'Palace Purple', a purple leaved cultivar appeared in England, and took the gardening world by storm. The race-which shows no sign of slowing down- was on to breed fancy leafed heucheras. Now you can get heucheras in a wide range of colors: green, purple, green or purple with silver netting, lime, gold, coral, red, butterscotch, and even dark purple with pink dots. Leaves come large, small, ruffled, hairy or smooth. Some have wonderful autumn color.

Heucheras are easy to grow. They are very hardy- mostly zone 4, some hardier- and need little care. They need a well drained soil or they will rot in winter and prefer a moist, humus-rich soil that is neutral or slightly alkaline. That being said, they grow very well in my silty soil and some are happy on a rocky hillside! They are evergreen, but in spring the old leaves should be trimmed off before the new start pushing through them. Divide every three years and remove any old, woody sections which produce smaller leaves. Replant the divisions 12" apart, planting them lower in the soil than before. If you want more plants than you can get by division, heucheras are easy from stem or leaf cuttings.

These North American plants will usually have the best leaf color in sun/part sun. While they will grow in almost full shade, the purple leaf types turn a dingy khaki and the gold types get murky. They will bloom more freely in full sun. The only ones I've found to benefit from shade are the lime/chartreuse types, which sometimes burn in full sun.

The old fashioned Coral Bells have red flowers that attract hummingbirds, but most of the new  
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hybrids have white flowers. One exception I've found is 'Mocha Mint', which has bright pink flowers. All of them attract bees and most are rebloomers.

The number of varieties is huge. Most are excellent and you can select whichever one looks prettiest. The only one I've found to disappoint is 'Amber Waves', the original gold/butterscotch variety. It is slow to grow; it's offspring, like 'Peach Melba', are much more vigorous and healthy.

*Laurie Brown is owner of of North Star Farm and teaches classes in plant propagation for University of Idaho Master Gardeners in Bonner County. She has been involved with the Bonner County Master Gardener Program since 1996.*

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