

# PERENNIAL THOUGHTS

by Pam Duthie

Do you have plants in your garden that didn't live up to your expectations last year? Are you looking for some exciting new performers to add to your landscape? I'd like to share some of the stand-out perennials I discovered as I visited gardens and nurseries and traveled throughout much of the Northeast and Midwest in 2000.

An outing to Stephanie Cohen's "Shortwood Gardens" in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, left me lusting for Coralbells [*Heuchera* spp.]. Most of the plants in this collector's garden bloom between June and August. I was especially taken with *Heuchera* x 'Petite Pearl Fairy', *Heuchera* x 'Monet', *Heuchera* x 'Splish Splash' and *Dianthus* x 'Spotti'. New *Geranium* x 'Rozanne' is another wonderful "Blooms of Bressingham" introduction. It blooms in early summer and is very popular in the East. Unfortunately, it was sold out at Milaeger's Gardens, the only Midwest nursery where I could find it.

While lecturing at Waterloo Gardens in Devon, Pennsylvania, I was presented with *Hemerocallis* 'Rosy Returns', a repeat-blooming, salmon-coral daylily from 'Happy Returns' breeder Daryl Apps.

After returning from England in late June and searching without success for *Aconitum cammarum* 'Bressingham Spire' (a stockier, non-flopping monkshood which blooms from June into July), I found instead *Campanula* 'Samantha', a

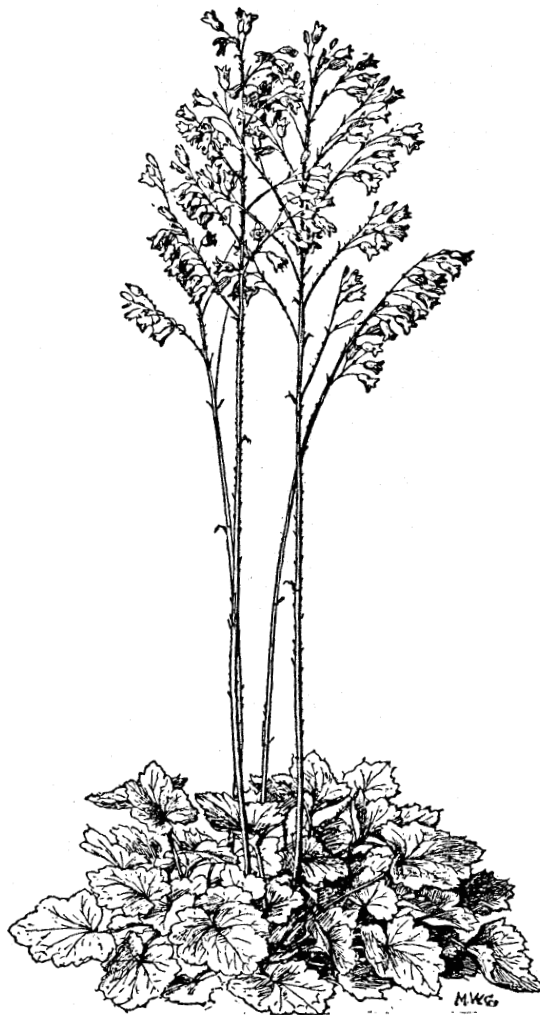
creeping bellflower selection. I was also taken with *Phlox paniculata* 'Spitfire' (bright salmon) and *P. p.* 'Laura', which is purple with white splashed petals. I saw both of these at The Planter's Palette

Palette and The Natural Garden (TWG Editor: See TNG's ad at back for contact information).

Long-blooming Tiarellas [foamflower] are a new passion. Look for *Tiarella* 'Cygnet' and *T.* 'Iron Butterfly' to bloom from May to August, and maybe longer. Dan Heims, who tissue-cultures these plants at his Terra Nova Nursery near Portland, Oregon, is at it again with wild new introductions like *Heuchera* 'Amber Waves' and purple-foliaged *Heucherella* (a cross between coralbells and foamflowers) 'Burnished Bronze'. Wholesale nurseries in the Midwest are growing these new cultivars now, and they should be available to us in 2001. You also can order them by mail from Shady Oaks Nursery in Waseca, Minnesota.

And finally, I predict the green-leafed *Stachys*, a medicinal herb often used as a poultice, will grow in popularity as they become more readily available. *Stachys macrantha* 'Superba' is probably the most showy with rosy purple spikes, and my favorite is a dainty, pink floriferous *Stachys monieri* available at Heronswood Nursery in Kingston, Washington. *Stachys* (betonics) are being trialed at the Chicago Botanic Garden and are best seen in June when the flower display is at its peak.

Coming back from the Perennial Plant Association Symposium always has me running to my nearest catalogue to see if I can immediately get perennials I



*Heuchera sanguinea*

nursery in Winfield, Illinois. Thanks to my client Terry Hickey, I also became reacquainted with *Hemerocallis* 'Cherry Cheeks', which has large rosy-red blossoms and is available at The Planter's



*Coreopsis lanceolata*

have seen for the first time. This year's trip to Toronto was no different. First of all, I was surprised to find that Ontario is no colder than the Chicago area—most Toronto gardens can grow our zone 5 plants, and many are successfully growing plants that are hardy to zone 6!

Just as in our late summer gardens, ornamental grasses, butterfly bush [*Buddleia*], coneflowers [*Echinacea*], black-eyed Susan [Rudbeckias], and Joe-Pye Weed [*Eupatorium purpureum*] were putting on quite a show in Toronto. What was unusual was seeing *Helianthus salicifolius* [the more drought-tolerant 7-8 foot willowleaf sunflower] and many new-to-me false sunflowers: *Heliopsis* 'Midwest Dream', *Heliopsis* 'Bressingham Doubloon', and the variegated *Heliopsis* 'Lorraine Sunshine'.

At the Mason-Hogue Nursery display gardens in Toronto, I saw an outstanding double, fringed Shasta daisy, *Leucanthemum x superbum* 'Phyllis Smith'. Its fresh white flowers bloom in

August. This clean-foliaged beauty stands about 2 feet tall with flowers 3-4 inches across—and absolutely no flopping! In this garden I also saw some hostas with outstanding flowers: *H.* 'Betsy King' was the most floriferous with 'Frosted Jade' and 'Lemon Lime' still very showy. Owner Marjorie Mason-Hogue gave an excellent lecture on "Annuals as Companion Plants for Perennial Gardens". I think that once people get over the "bedding out mentality" of displaying only annuals in a bed or border we will be able to better use all the plants in our palette, as Marjorie recommends.

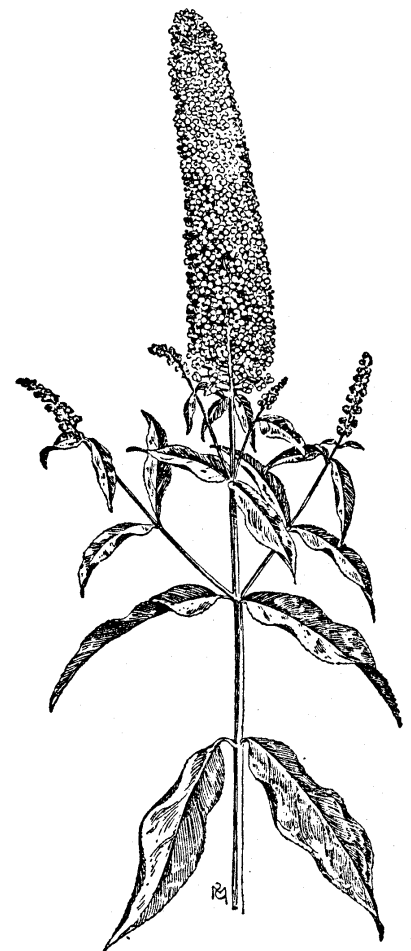
I'll be looking for the following "new and underused" perennials introduced at the Perennial Plant Association meeting: *Coreopsis rosea* 'Sweet Dreams' (pink tickseed) blooms from June to the end of September; *Perovskia atriplicifolia* 'Little Spire' is a dwarf Russian sage; *Stachys minima* is a tiny pink betony in bloom all summer; *Epimedium grandiflorum* 'Purple Pixie'; *Nepeta* 'Pool Bank', a taller, non-flopping catmint, and the springtime blooming *Phlox divaricata* 'Blue Moon'.

I recently heard about a new purple switch grass [*Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah'] that gets its burgundy red foliage color starting in June! (It is available from Ambergate Gardens in Waconia, Minnesota.) This grass should be a good replacement for the annual *Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum', which is beautiful but not hardy.

A visit to Sweet Grass Gardens located on The Six Nations of the Grand River reservation, just outside of Toronto, encourages a gardener to "take

a part of history home". This native American owned and operated native-plant nursery was highly educational in terms of demonstrating plants used for medicine, nutrition, ceremonies and fiber/dyes. *Parthenium integrifolium* (wild quinine) and *Agastache foeniculum* (anise hyssop) are two plants that deserve to be more often used in gardens. A native shrub often used in Ontario, *Cephalanthus occidentalis* [buttonbush], was both showy and unusual in flower form.

I always have my eyes open for "new-to-me" evergreens and shrubs, especially ones with colored foliage. For junipers, I like *Juniperus virginiana* 'Blue Arrow',



*Buddleia davidii*

which is an improved 'Skyrocket'. I've been looking all over for *Thuja occidentalis* 'Gold-Tip' ['Gold Tip' arborvitae]. I was immediately attracted to *Thuja occidentalis* 'Brandon' because of its bright green color.

Deciduous plants with good color foliage that I particularly like to use in landscape designs include: *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood' (Japanese maple 'Bloodgood'); *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' ('Forest Pansy' redbud); *Cotinus coggyria* 'Royal Purple' ('Royal Purple' purple smoke bush); *Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Luteus' (golden ninebark 'Luteus'); *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' (giant dogwood 'Variegata'); *Cornus alternifolia* 'Variegata' (pagoda dogwood 'Variegata'); *Aralia elata* 'Variegata' (angelica tree 'Variegata'); and *Salix repens* (creeping willow). A beautiful specimen of the very tropical-looking variegated *Aralia elata* can be seen in the display gardens at Rich's Foxwillow Pines Nursery in Woodstock, Illinois.

And finally, my attention was drawn to a butterfly bush not widely used in our area. *Buddleia nanhoensis* 'Nanho Blue' blooms from July to October. I loved this 3-5 foot tall bush with its huge, soft

blue panicles and soft gray foliage.

I am still thrilled with the new AARS 2000 rose 'Knockout', which is available at The Natural Garden in St. Charles, Illinois. This very hardy, cherry red flowered shrub rose with the cleanest foliage bloomed non-stop in my garden since early June. It's still blooming in November as I write this with new buds



*Cotinus coggyria*

coming along! This rose was introduced by William Radler, formerly of Boerner Botanical Gardens, Hales Corners, Wisconsin. Mr. Radler is now the consulting rosarian at the Chicago Botanic Garden. I will be looking for another new introduction from him called *Rosa* 'Carefree Sunshine'—a much-needed hardy yellow rose.

Here's to trying and finding new plants, but I haven't any room left in my garden. That's one reason why I started

my landscape design business fifteen years ago!

Of course, I will have to start a new garden to incorporate the latest plants on my "lust list" or just squeeze them in. It just never ends, does it?



**Pam Duthie** is the author of "Continuous Bloom: A Month By Month Guide to Nonstop Color in the Perennial Garden", published in 2000 by Ball Publishing, Batavia, Illinois. Ms. Duthie is also a popular garden lecturer and landscape designer, working as The Gifted Gardener, Northbrook, Illinois. She can be reached at (847) 272-4386.

Ms. Duthie will offer seminars this May and June on "Caring for Your Perennial Garden". This is a great opportunity to improve your gardening skills and take a peek at Pam's garden. You will learn how to maximize perennial bloom, dead-head, weed, amend soil and more. Call the above phone for costs and dates.

**More From 4-H Student Ed Murphy. Good Job!**

"Hi, Rommy: I just wanted to let you know that the Illinois delegation of 4H returned home from Virginia. The entire delegation of seven people won awards at the National Junior Horticulture Conference. One kid from JoDaviess County won 'Grand National' recognition for his presentation on hydroponics. My plant identification group won second in the country. We were really proud. We are off to National Club Congress, so I will write you when I get back. Horticulture is alive and well and living among young people everywhere! Hope to see you soon." —Ed Murphy, Woodstock, Illinois



*Cephalanthus occidentalis*