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Find bold new hues beyond the paint aisle

By **PENNY CARNATHAN** | The Tampa Tribune

Published: May 1, 2009

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The best bet for finding unusual and Florida-friendly plants is at local independent nurseries. And like other small businesses these days, they need all the shoppers they can get.

But occasionally, you hit the big box down the street for light bulbs and AC filters, and before you know it, you're wandering through the garden department. It can't be helped. Large gatherings of plants are not easily ignored.

At Home Depot, the signature line is Viva!, which three years ago introduced the popular SunPatiens - impatiens for shade-deprived gardens. They can take quite a bit of sun, though not eight hours on a withering May day in Tampa. They do hold up well through the summer, though, if they get just a half-day of sun.

New colors this year are compact magenta, compact rose coral and variegated white.

Also new this year are three plants that should thrive in steamy gardens, says Viva! spokeswoman Lisa Heredia. Big Red and Lily Looks should be available through the next couple of weeks at area Home Depots, though you should call ahead if you're making a special trip.

Henna Coleus has already left Tampa, but it's still available at some Sarasota Home Depot stores, Heredia says. And it may reappear in the fall, when garden centers bring back the spring "winners."

Penny Carnathan

ASIATIC LILY 'LILY LOOKS'

A perennial for sunny spaces, Viva! promises this Asiatic lily will deliver "buds and more buds." It gets about 2 feet tall and is hardy to 20 degrees.

'HENNA' COLEUS

Vivid chartreuse and copper-colored foliage - the underside is deep burgundy - becomes even more intense the hotter it gets, says Heredia. Grow this annual in sun or shade; it gets up to 2 feet tall with a 16-inch spread.

'BIG RED' GERANIUM

This Tex-Mex geranium was bred to take the heat, Heredia says. "It has a deep, blood-red color and really big leaves. It's a beefy plant." Best yet, the blossoms can take a pounding from our best summer storms. "They're shatter-resistant."

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