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Top trends for the garden this summer

By Jacqueline Louie, Calgary Herald April 9, 2010

What are some of the newest, hottest garden trends in 2010? John Duncan, greenhouse manager at Greengate Garden Centres, offers several suggestions on how you can add zing to your yard and garden this spring:

Duncan's a fan of core fibre, a soil additive made from ground-up coconut husks -- a by-product of the coconut industry -- as a greener alternative to peat moss, which is very slow to renew itself. Peat bogs are being depleted at an alarming rate, he says.

"The really great part, is that (core fibre) has very high aeration porosity -- it holds a lot of air pockets. It also holds a lot of water at the same time, which is very good for most plants. Lots of air promotes root growth," Duncan explains. In addition, core fibre decomposes more slowly than peat moss does.

Duncan also has a number of suggestions for new plants that are new this year.

Among his top picks for new annuals, is the *Petunia* Pretty Much Picasso -- "a velvety purple flower with lime green edging."

Duncan also recommends a few new ornamental grasses that grow as annuals in the Calgary area (they are not hardy in this zone). Sea Oats *Chasmanthium latifolium* (cultivar, River Mist) looks like a short-growing variegated bamboo with white and green stripes. "It has beautiful plume-shaped flowers that bloom from late summer to fall."

Another new grass is *Pennisetum* (cultivar, *Fireworks*). "This is a beautiful fluorescent pink grass. It's quite a beautiful little guy."

Fireworks does not flower here since the growing season is not long enough, "but with an ornamental grass it's all about the foliage anyway," Duncan says.

A perennial that's creating a lot of excitement is Echinacea (cultivar, Hot Papaya) -- a double flowered Echinacea with bright orange blooms.

Another perennial that Duncan recommends is *Ligularia* (cultivar, Osiris Cafe Noir).

"The best part about it, is that it comes out a deep purple and turns a beautiful bronze to olive green by the time the summer is done." Mid-summer, the plant get a bright yellow daisy-like flower.

Duncan also recommends an Oriental poppy perennial (cultivar, Heartbeat). "It's huge flowered red Oriental poppy that is a rebloomer. So instead of having just one set of flowers in mid-to late spring, you get flowers through the whole summer. They are huge, blood-red flowers."

Finally, one of the hottest, most important trends in 2010 is sustainable gardening. It's having the right plants for the right areas of your yard, where you are growing for the conditions, and working hand-in-hand with nature. "That's the most important thing," Duncan says.

Greengate Garden Centres is the presenting sponsor of the Calgary Horticultural Society Garden Show.

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Highlights: Petunia, Pennisetum, Fireworks