

New Plants and Garden Trends for 2021

BY HEATHER PRINCE

Another gardening year will be here before you know it. We've rounded up some ideas and plant picks to inspire you to look forward to a fresh start.

THE UNPRECEDENTED year that was 2020 changed how we lived as we navigated numerous pandemic-caused challenges, including how to work and attend school from home. More of us learned to cherish our outdoor spaces, grow our own food, and brighten our indoor spaces with colorful houseplants. We turned to social media for solutions to garden problems, to learn about new varieties, and to share our successes with others. What will we be doing in our gardens in the coming year? Here's what we anticipate after digging through industry trend reports and talking to garden experts around the country:

Access to gardening information and garden goods continue to grow online from a plant-of-the-month delivered to your door, to podcasts about garden history, to all the photos of happy houseplants decorating our feeds. The National Garden Bureau reports the Internet and social media as being the first stop for gardeners seeking information, especially those under 35. Independent garden centers, however, were also highly prized as reliable sources of help.

There is also a greater desire among people to connect with their outdoor spaces at home and rising interest in creating landscapes to share with pollinators and other wildlife. The Garden Media Group found that we want less lawn and more space for wildflowers, edibles, and trees. Pollinator gardens continue to be popular and the demand for native plants grows. The National Audubon Society reports increased participation in bird watching as we discovered how birds in-



Interest in gardening and growing our own food continues to grow by leaps and bounds.

habit our yards and considered what they needed to thrive.

Creating garden spaces for escape, whether it's a balcony or an acre, will be a priority. As we moved our businesses and educational activities outside last year, our outdoor spaces became sanctuaries for respite as well as a background for Zoom meetings. "The focus has shifted from creating spaces that will be used to entertain others to more intimate areas that offer a sense of seclusion and personal oasis," says Karen Chapman,

nationally renowned landscape designer and author based in Seattle, Washington. Blending indoor and outdoor spaces rose to new prominence as houseplants continue to be a roaring green wave.

As we look ahead to the 2021 growing season, we asked a selection of garden experts from across the country (see box on opposite page) to also recommend new plants worth seeking out to freshen our landscapes. Here they are, together with some that caught our eye while perusing for new introductions.

OUR GARDEN EXPERTS

Here are our the garden professionals from across the country who shared their new plant experiences with us:

Karen Chapman (Seattle, WA), author, speaker, and landscape designer

Noelle Johnson (Phoenix, AZ), landscape designer, speaker, and garden writer

Jessie Keith (Wilmington, DE), horticulturist and garden communicator

Nina Koziol (Palos Park, IL), garden writer, horticulturist, and educator

Helen Lawson (Atlanta, GA), freelance writer and marketing consultant to the green industry

Kelly Norris (Des Moines, IA), author, horticulturist, and former director of horticulture and education at the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden

Nan Sterman (San Diego, CA), garden designer, author, botanist, and award-winning garden communicator



'Bee's Knees' petunia



ColorBlaze® Royale Pineapple Brandy coleus



'Kelos® Candela Pink' celosia

Annuals & Tender Perennials

Hot-pink candlelike flowers light up this All-America Selections (AAS) winner. **'Kelos® Candela Pink' celosia** (*Celosia spicata* 'Kelos® Candela Pink') dazzles in containers or beds with its showy plumes of bright flowers. Happy in full sun to part shade and drought tolerant, expect it to reach about 30 inches high and wide. Zones 10–11. Beekenkamp Plants.

Treasure Island™ Makatea sweet potato vine (*Ipomoea batatas* '17-527' PPAF) combines both heart-shaped, chartreuse cascading foliage and features a white-fleshed, edible tuber harvestable at the

end of the season. It prefers full sun, evenly moist soil, and reaches about 12 to 14 inches high and wide, making it a perfect choice for a small container. Zones 10–12. Concept Plants.

Add drama with two new, quick-growing mangaves (intergeneric crosses of *Manfreda* and *Agave*) that offer fabulous succulent foliage in a compact size. ×*Mangave* **'Black Magic'** features dark purple, curved, toothed foliage and grows about 12 inches high and 24 inches wide in full sun. ×*Mangave* **'Frosted Elegance'** is a silver-leaved version. "Either one will up your container gardening game in 2021 and beyond," says Kelly Norris, "and they're fairly easy to overwinter if you live north of Zone 8." Zones 9–11. Walters Gardens.

Considered the best yellow petunia, **'Bee's Knees'** (*Petunia* ×*hybrida* 'Bee's



'Black Magic' mangave

Knees') softly mounds and trails with vivid yellow flowers bordered in white. At about 10 inches high and 20 inches tall, this top-performing petunia is a beautiful addition to containers in full sun. Zones 10–11. Ball Horticultural Company.

Fabulous bright yellow to chartreuse leaves with burgundy accents makes **ColorBlaze® Royale Pineapple Brandy™ coleus** (*Solenostemon scutellarioides* Colorblaze® Royale Pineapple Brandy™) a standout for sun or shade. This series is bred to handle heat and humidity and bloom very late if at all. Add it in a shady corner for impact or let it sizzle in a sun-



'Profusion Red Yellow Bicolor' zinnia

ny container. It grows 20 to 30 inches high by 12 to 16 inches wide. Zones 10–11. Proven Winners.

For non-stop lilac flowers, try **Meteor Shower® verbena** (*Verbena bonariensis* 'INVEBPUTOW'). "Shorter than the species, this is perfect for containers or the front of the border. Although listed as an annual, it is perennial in my Zone 7 garden. Exceptionally deer, rabbit, and drought tolerant," Chapman reports. This verbena thrives in full to part sun and reaches about 30 inches high and 12 inches wide. Zones 7–11. Proven Winners.

Compact **'Profusion Red Yellow Bicolor' zinnia** (*Zinnia* hybrid 'Profusion Red Yellow Bicolor') is a 2021 AAS winner with flowers that change from an eye-popping red-and-gold combo to soft apricot, salmon, and dusty rose. It will thrive in full to part sun and reaches 8 to 12 inches high and wide. Suited for beds and containers. Zones 9–11. Sakata Seed Corporation.

Perennials

'Crested Surf' Japanese painted fern (*Athyrium niponicum* 'Crested Surf') features burgundy fronds with silver-frosted edges. Nina Koziol finds "this one is a stunner—each frond tip has double crests making it truly ornamental and a lovely contrast against chartreuse-leaved hostas." At 20 inches high and about 30 inches wide, this fern thrives in part to full shade in average

to moist sites—and it's deer-resistant. Zones 3–8. Proven Winners.

'Gold Kobold' basket of gold (*Alyssum saxatile* 'Gold Kobold') is a compact evergreen that grows to just under 5 inches tall and produces mounds of bright yellow flowers from early to late spring and reblooms in autumn. Great for rock gardens and attracting pollinators. Zones 3–9. Jelitto Perennial Seeds.



'Gold Kobold' basket of gold

'Jurassic Gold' wood fern (*Dryopteris wallichiana* 'Jurassic Gold') emerges vivid orange and matures to lime green. "For cool summer climates, this tough and deer-proof fern will light up all the dark corners of the shade garden," says Norris. Plants grow 18 to 24 inches high and about 16 inches wide in part to full shade. Zones 5–9. Concept Plants.



'Jurassic Gold' wood fern

Desert Flamenco® redflower false yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*) features elegant gray-green foliage that sends up waterfalls of showy pinkish-orange tubular flowers. Noelle Johnson says, "This flowering succulent is very cold tolerant and thrives in temps over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The flowers attract hummingbirds as well." It grows best in full sun and reaches 30 by 30 inches. Zones 5–10. Mountain States Nursery.

New perennial hibiscus selections offer saturated color and more compact forms. **Summerific® 'Evening Rose' hibiscus** (*Hibiscus* hybrid 'Summerific® 'Evening Rose') features near-black foliage and 8-inch, hot-pink flowers. Happiest in moist soils in full sun to part shade,



Desert Flamenco® redflower false yucca



Pretty Parasols coneflower

it reaches about 4 feet high and wide. Zones 4–9. Proven Winners.

Pretty Parasols coneflower (*Echinacea* 'JS Engelje') is garnering awards for its bicolor pink-and-white petals, multiple flowers per stem, and long bloom time. Norris says it represents “a new color combination in coneflowers *and* on taller stems befitting of its natural grace. A head-turning new selection that will actually integrate into the garden without feeling too short and compact.” It thrives in full sun to part shade and reaches 30 inches tall and wide. Zones 4–9. Plantipp BV.



Rock 'N Low 'Boogie Woogie' sedum

Rock 'N Low™ 'Boogie Woogie' sedum (*Sedum* hybrid 'Rock 'N Low™ 'Boogie Woogie') shines with variegated cream-and-green foliage and bright yellow flowers. It forms a tidy mound in full sun and well-drained soils, reaching 6 to 8 inches



'Golden Sunset' Indian grass

high and 16 to 18 inches wide. Zones 3–9. Walters Gardens/Proven Winners.

From Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, **'Golden Sunset' Indian grass** (*Sorghastrum nutans* 'Golden Sunset') is “a native alternative to 'Karl Foerster' feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis xacutiflora*),” says Norris. “Rigidly upright and resplendent with golden plumes in autumn, it’s also cold hardy and deer proof.” This tough prairie grass does best in full sun and exhibits excellent drought tolerance, reaching 5 feet high and 2 to 3 feet wide. Zones 4–9. Emerald Coast.

Edibles

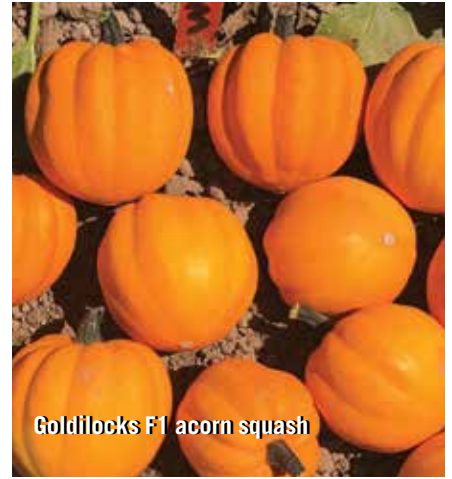
Dress up your veggie patch with red-purple **'Redarling' brussels sprouts**. It tolerates cool nights and gives a high yield of colorful, mild-flavored sprouts on 30-inch plants. Zones 0–0. Syngenta.

For a fun new, compact hot pepper perfect for containers, try **Pot-a-peño F1 jalapeno pepper**. Plentiful fruits have the traditional spiciness and are earlier to mature but hang below the plant for easy picking in a hanging basket. Zones 0–0. PanAmerican Seed.

AAS winner **Goldilocks F1 acorn squash** is an easy-to-grow, high-yielder

with bright orange skin. Four-inch fruits have a rich nutty flavor and are also beautifully ornamental. Zones 0–0. Earthwork Seeds/Osborne Quality Seeds.

A companion to Berried Treasure® Red, **Berried Treasure® Pink strawberry** offers pretty semi-double, pink flowers and small, sweet fruits all season on compact, everbearing plants. Zones 4–9. Proven Winners.



Goldilocks F1 acorn squash



Berried Treasure® Pink strawberry

'Apple Yellow' F1 tomato F1 delivers. Nan Serman says, “The plants grew huge and incredibly vigorous. Production started early with smallish fruits—grape-sized but apple shaped, with square shoulders. The flesh is firm, golden, and absolutely delicious. In my area, we have enormous issues with tomato viruses



'Green Light' F1 cucumber

and fungal diseases, yet 'Apple Yellow' seemed to resist whatever attacked everything else." Zones 0-0. Gana Seed Company.

If you prefer larger, slicing tomatoes, Jessie Keith suggests trying '**GinFiz' Fr tomato**, a highly disease-resistant, yellow-and-red-bicolored heirloom. "It has the five traits that I look for in a tomato: sweet full flavor, beauty, vigor, excellent disease resistance, and good yields," says Keith. Zones 0-0. Johnny's Selected Seeds.

Cuke lovers will have to try '**Green Light' Fr cucumber**, which Keith says, "bears small, crisp, sweet, seedless cucumbers in as little as 42 days from seed. Each vine can yield up to 40 cucumbers!" Zones 0-0. Known-You Seed Co., Ltd.

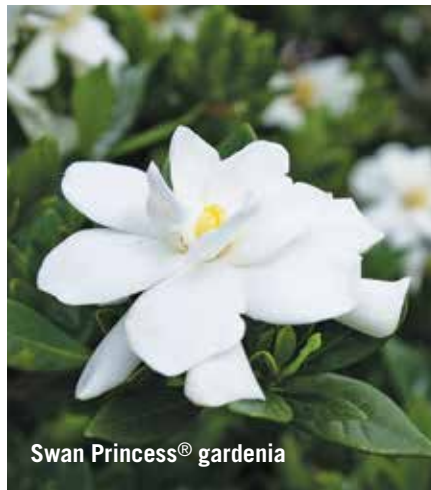
Shrubs & Trees

Loaded with electric blue flowers beginning in late summer, '**Sapphire Surf bluebeard** (*Caryopteris xclandonensis*) charms with soft silvery foliage. "The sheer number of fuzzy blue flowers had every pollinator visiting our garden this summer," says Chapman, who adds it is also rabbit-, deer-, and drought-tolerant. Reaching 2 feet wide and 3 feet tall, this bluebeard does best in full sun. Zones 5-9. First Editions.

Cool climates and gardenias don't usually go together, but **Swan Princess® gardenia** (*Gardenia jasminoides* '4KIMYMJor' PP#29,857) is an exception. Helen Lawson says, "It's my favorite because of the charming double, and, of course, fragrant flowers that rebloom throughout the summer on a very compact and tidy evergreen shrub.



'Sapphire Surf' bluebeard



Swan Princess® gardenia

It's from a series of gardenias selected to be hardy into Zone 6b, so if you thought you couldn't grow gardenias in your area, you might be pleasantly surprised." At 2½ to 3 feet high and wide, it's easy to tuck into beds or containers. Zones 6b-9. Gardener's Confidence® Collection.

Finally, there's a refined seven-son flower and it's getting rave reviews. **Tianshan® seven-son flower** (*Heptacodium miconioides*) is a more compact cultivar of a tree that typically grows 15 to 25 feet tall. "My top new introduction of the year," says Chapman. "This selection is truly out-



Tianshan seven-son flower



Montana Moss® Chinese juniper

standing. Deer resistant, drought tolerant, interesting bark, fragrant blooms, colorful calyces and brilliant fall color. Every garden should have one.” Koziol agrees, adding, “The trusses of flowers buzz with pollinators when they bloom in late September.” At 8 to 12 feet high and 5 to 7 feet wide, Tianshan® fits tidily into smaller gardens. Zones 5–9. First Editions.

Compact, fine-textured **Gem Box® ink-berry holly** (*Ilex glabra* ‘SMNIGAB17’) is a great boxwood alternative. “I especially love the burgundy tips on the new growth and its tidy habit,” says Chapman. “Great for edging borders but also




Perfecto Mundo® Double Pink azalea

good for containers. Came through our wet and snowy winters in Seattle without a hiccup.” It reaches 3 feet tall and wide, keeping a tidy, round shape, and thrives in part to full sun. Zones 5–9. Proven Winners.

For a soft, elegant evergreen, look for **Montana Moss® Chinese juniper** (*Juniperus chinensis* ‘SMNJCHM’). Chapman notes, “This one caught my eye for the delicious shade of seafoam green and unusual texture.” Happiest in a hot, dry, sunny site, this juniper will slowly reach 4 feet high and 6 feet wide. Zones 4–9. Proven Winners.

Reblooming **Perfecto Mundo® Double Pink azalea** (*Rhododendron* ‘NCRX3’) dazzles with double pink flowers. “The flowers are so full and ruffled, you might mistake it for a rose bush,” says Lawson. “With its extended rebloom, you’ll have flowers for months instead of weeks.” Reaching 3 feet high and wide in part to full sun, this azalea is suited as a foundation plant or in beds. Zones 6B–9. Proven Winners.

Funny Face™ rose (*Rosa* ‘BAIface’) offers a softer, more open-petaled pink flower. Norris says, “I don’t grow many roses for a host of reasons. But for naturalistic gardens, this wilder-looking flower fits right in on a low-growing plant that mingles readily with perennials without looking too out of place.” Full sun is best for this compact hardy rose that reaches 3 feet high and wide. Zones 4–9. Easy Elegance.

All of these plants and more will be available in the coming season, so be sure to look for them and try a few in your garden. You might just find new favorites. 

Heather Prince is associate editor of The American Gardener.



Funny Face™ rose