

Southern Living[®]

MAY 2009

Capture The Magic Hydrangeas Set the Stage

**JEWEL BOX
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**We'll Show
You How They
Did It**

**OUR BEST
BURGERS**

**Serve 'em Up
Southern
Style**

P.134



*Elegant
& easy*

8 New Plants You'll Love To Grow



Eight Great Plants You Gotta Grow!

When your yard puts you to sleep faster than C-SPAN, our garden editors' top picks are a shot of espresso. BY STEVE BENDER,

PHOTOGRAPHY RALPH ANDERSON

Come right in, readers. Sit down. Relax. My name is Dr. Steve, and I've read your charts. I know what ails your gardens.

Excuse my candor, but many of your plants start off ordinary and progress to tedious. On the International Boredom Scale, they rank just below the life of a highway toll collector.

Don't cry! Here, have a tissue. Dr. Steve has the cure: eight fantastic, easy plants he and his *Southern Living* colleagues grew last year. We guarantee these winners will give your gardens more bang than you'd hear at a reunion of *The Sopranos*.

1. 'Mini Penny' French Hydrangea Unlike most hydrangeas, this one blooms on both old and new growth. So if winter freezes the flower-buds or your oafish husband cuts them off, it'll bloom anyway and continue through summer. Acid soil gives you powder blue flowers; alkaline soil turns them pink. 'Mini Penny' is compact, slowly growing 3 to 4 feet tall and wide—perfect for small gardens and containers.

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS: Prefers full morning sun and light afternoon shade. Provide moist, well-drained, fertile soil. Trim off old blooms to keep new ones coming. Avoid caffeine if your excitement grows extreme.

➤ turn to page 70



2. Torch Blanket Flowers The new 'Torch Yellow' and 'Torch Red Ember' blanket flowers bloom nonstop even when the mercury tops that on Mercury. In fact, Jimmy Turner, director of horticultural research at the Dallas Arboretum, gives these annuals his coveted "FlameProof" award. Fully double flowers appear from spring until frost atop 24-inch-tall plants. Butterflies and hummingbirds love them.

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS: Full sun and well-drained soil. Established plants need little water or fertilizer. Plant in sweeps for an awesome show.

3. 'Purple Pixie' Loropetalum This shrub combines showy pink flowers in spring with deep burgundy evergreen foliage and a pronounced weeping form. As a ground cover, it reaches 1 to 2 feet high and 4 to 5 feet wide. A 1-gallon plant placed in a 24-inch-tall pot will completely hide the pot in just a couple of years. It's a star player in our *Southern Living Plant Collection*.

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS: Full sun or light shade and acid, well-drained soil. Tolerates drought, has few pests, grows quickly, and needs little pruning. Can you say "carefree"? I thought so.



4. 'After Midnight' Coneflower With apologies to Eric Clapton, 'After Midnight' lets it all hang down. It's a dazzling new hybrid coneflower developed by Saul Nurseries in Atlanta. Slightly curled, deep magenta petals encircle fragrant, blackish-red cones atop 18-inch-tall plants.

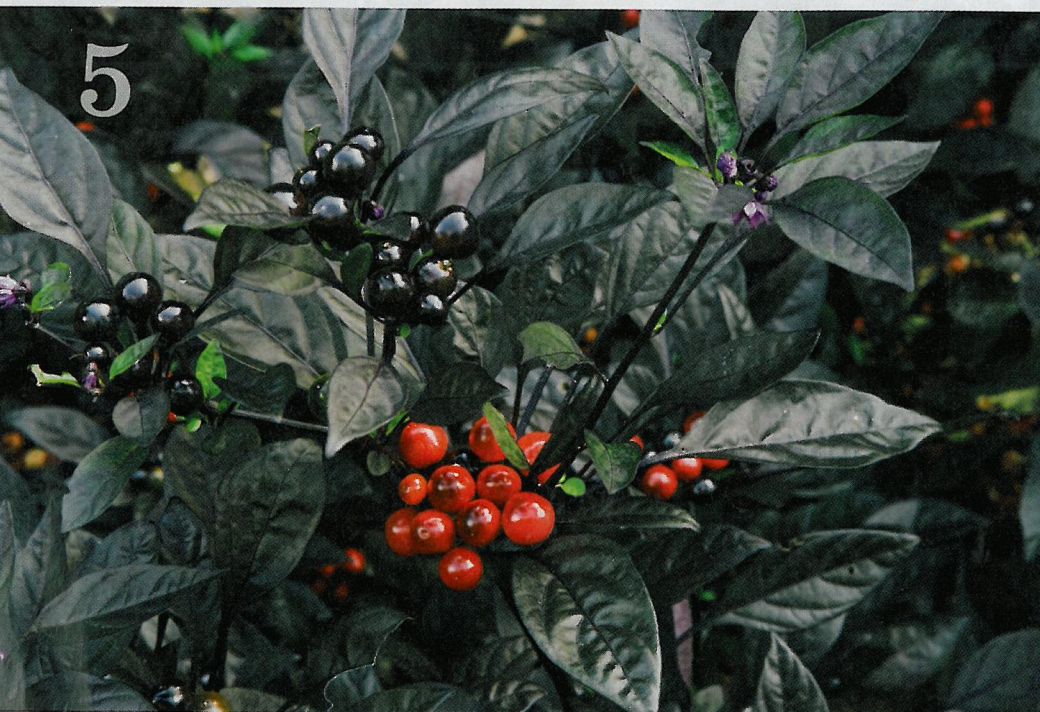
PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS: Full sun and well-drained soil. Remove spent flowers. Don't plant this gaudy perennial under your bedroom window, or the glow will keep you up all night.

➔ turn to page 72

5. 'Black Pearl' Ornamental Pepper

Sorry, Johnny Depp. This 'Black Pearl' is a blessing, not a curse. Named for its nearly black foliage and pearl-shaped peppers that change from black to bright red, it laughs at drought and sparkles like treasure from spring to fall. Arrghh!

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS: Full sun, well-drained soil. Do not eat the peppers unless licensed to swallow fire.



6. 'Micro-Tom' Tomato

Meet the world's smallest tomato, bred at the University of Florida. It's nearly prostrate, growing 5 to 8 inches tall, and has tasty, red, 1-inch fruit. Try it in hanging baskets and window boxes. If you can't find plants, order seeds from Tomato Growers Supply Company (www.tomatogrowers.com) or Totally Tomatoes (www.totallytomato.com).

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS: Full sun and moist, well-drained soil. Feed with a liquid 20-20-20 fertilizer every two weeks. Rent military drones to protect ripe fruit from hungry mockingbirds.



8. 'Admiral Semmes' Deciduous Azalea

This hybrid from South Alabama really floats my boat. Fragrant armadas of yellow blossoms anchor its branches in spring. It grows 10 to 12 feet tall and loves our Southern climate.

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS: Full or partial sun with acid, moist, well-drained soil containing lots of organic matter. Forgive folks who call it "honeysuckle." They mean well. They really do. ●



7. 'Henna' Coleus

I'm head over heels for 'Henna.' Dense and uniform, it needs little pinching and tops out at 24 inches tall. Beautiful serrated foliage is chartreuse and copper above and deep burgundy underneath. Excellent bedding plant; great in pots.

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS: Full sun gives the brightest colors. Provide moist, fertile, well-drained soil. Feed every three weeks with a liquid 20-20-20 fertilizer. When frost finally kills it in fall, come and cry on Dr. Steve's shoulder. There, there, it's okay.