

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 6-04-03) , ©2005

As a garden writer I sometimes get to try out new plants for free. Terra Nova Nurseries sent me a dozen plants for shade gardening. The plants arrived in an Express Mail box. Each plant was in a one-inch plastic pot. I'm pampering these babies, grouped in two larger pots in the shade. I probably should have potted them individually into four-inch pots so they could grow good roots and foliage before putting them into my garden. But this is my year to try a few new adventures in gardening so I decided to try two quite large pots stuffed with these tantalizing shade-loving plants. In the fall or early next spring I'll transplant them into garden beds.

One of my favorite plants is Tiarella. This plant is often called "foam flower" and is usually clumping with tall spikey flowers. Some Tiarella run like strawberries. The three varieties I received were: 'Jeepers Creepers,' 'Spring Symphony' and 'Iron Butterfly.' Jeepers is called Creepers because it does just that. The tag says, "bold, large, well marked foliage, creeping (not running) habit and large flowers." Spring Symphony has very full pink flowers and has "compact foliage painted with black along the mid-rib, with 'astounding' flowers." Iron Butterfly has "large, fragrant flowers, striking, immense, contrasting, cut foliage and beautiful plant form." Many Tiarella bloom only once but Iron Butterfly will rebloom. Terra Nova recommends pairing it with Hosta. All three plants have striking foliage with black painted centers.

Pulmonaria are perfect plants for shade. Their common name is "Bethlehem Sage." The three varieties I received are: 'Silver Streamers,' 'Moonshine' and 'May Bouquet.' Silver Streamers has ruffled-edged leaves of silver. The tag says it "has a look that no other Pulmonaria has shown to date. Combine with dark leaved Heuchera for a lovely effect." Moonshine has leaves of silver-white with a thin edge of dark green. I can hardly wait to see the promised ice-blue flowers of this plant. May Bouquet has green leaves with white dots and will be covered with "masses and masses of huge pink flowers" changing to blue.

Tellima, Farfugium and Tricyrtis were next to go into the pots. Tellima grandiflora 'Forest Frost' commonly called Frosted Fringecups has "bronzy, quilted leaves in the fall and large, fringed, chartreuse flowers in spring which fade to pink." Tellima will tolerate shade and drought. This variety has silver variegation with purple streaks. Farfugium japonicum 'Crested Leopard' has shiny green leaves with yellow dots. The plant's yellow flowers are noted for attracting butterflies. Last year I discovered Tricyrtis known as "toad lily." The variety I received is 'Empress' and is predicted to have "darkly purple-spotted flowers in August and September."

Last but not least out of the box were: a Viola, two Heuchera and one Hosta. Viola 'Mars' has bright purple veins in the center of the dark green leaves. The tag says the leaves are "outasight." Heuchera 'Cathedral Windows' is aptly named. The leaves are almost transparent. The tag says, "a communion in your garden." Chocolate Lace's leaves are shiny and literally the color of a Hershey's chocolate bar. The flowers are described as, "strawberry-sugar dusted." Hosta 'Diana Remembered' will have four-inch blooms and clean white edges. It's a sport of 'Seventh Heaven.'

All of these plants will thrive here in the Northwest. I'll try to give an update on their growth and health at the end of summer. If you'd like to see photos and read more about these plants visit Terra Nova's website at www.terravanurseries.com. Terra Nova varieties are carried by many of our local nurseries so you might want to find some for your own garden. I'm too cautious to order plants by mail and also find everything I've ever wanted or needed at our local nurseries and at garden club and Master Gardener plant sales, but thought I'd try my luck with these freebies. I'll let you know how things turn out.

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