

A FEW NEW & UNUSUAL PLANTS!

*Even Mercer's horticulture
manager didn't know about these!*

by JANA PIRTLE

MERCER BOTANIC GARDEN *Horticultural Manager*
(*Jana Pirtle photos*)

Patented plants currently dominate the nursery industry. It's understandable why. They're just so cool! They also often come with a higher price.

As much as I ohh and ahh over these plants, as a horticulture manager for a non-profit, necessity dictates a more frugal approach in finding plants to grow. Thank goodness for seed companies. With the lower price of seed, I could justify trying a few plants that I have never grown before. And I was pleasantly surprised this year!



PETUNIA EXSARTA

is my favorite annual this year. It is the only petunia pollinated by hummingbirds. It is a rare and endangered petunia endemic to the mountains of southern Brazil, where it grows in cracks and crevices near the mouths of caves. In these conditions, the plants are protected from direct sunlight and rainfall. I

have no idea how it will deal with the heat, but it has already gotten quite warm in our greenhouses and this little red petunia has shown no sign of quitting!

CHINESE FOXGLOVE
(*Rehmannia elata*)

is a heat tolerant plant and also takes more sun than the Digitalis Foxglove. In fact, it can take full sun! It has pretty tubular pink flowers that keep coming for about three months or so.



CRASPEDIA or BILLY BUTTONS

is a perennial from Australia. The flowers look like tiny yellow tennis balls that sit atop silvery, grass like foliage. These are just starting to bloom for us. Everything that I've read about Craspedia say that they are heat and drought tolerant.

I would agree with heat tolerant, but our Craspedia don't appreciate getting even just a bit dry; they wilt dramatically. Perhaps they are more drought tolerant planted in the ground.

CHOCOLATE COSMOS
(*Cosmos atrosanguineus*)

is a beautiful deep dark red cosmos. Chocolate cosmos love the heat and need full sun. They are hardy only to zone 9, so those in zone 8 will want to provide winter protection.

The flowers are supposed to smell like chocolate, but my nose detects nothing.

