



Heuchera

Coral Bells – Alum Root – Fairy Flowers

By Norm Phillips, UC Master Gardener

Heucheras are among the most desirable of the smaller growing plants. There are many varieties available today. Of these *Heuchera sanguinea* is the most often seen. The plants are compact, bushy and grow in tufts, the flower stem growing 1½ or 2 feet high.



Coral Bells is a member of the saxifrage family and is native to New Mexico and Arizona. It is an herbaceous, evergreen perennial that forms clumps to 16 inches across but less than 8 inches in height. Its leaves are about 2 inches across, rounded, toothed or scalloped, and born on 4-inch long petioles. In spring, coral bells produces 18-inch tall, open panicles bearing an array of dainty, bell shaped flowers.

The *sanguinea* species produces red flowers, although breeders have extended the normal red flower to pink, coral and white forms. Plants remain in bloom until early summer. *H. americana* is most noted for its foliage. Most hybrids are combinations of *H. sanguinea* and *H. americana*.

Heucheras can be used in rock gardens or as border plants in flower beds, but they are a natural and superb performer in containers. Combination plantings with Coral Bells gives the designer varying leaf shape and colors, growth habits to provide height, fullness and a draping effect over the edge of the container.

GROWING CONDITIONS

Heucheras do best in moist, rich, organic amended soils. While they are somewhat drought tolerant, attention to a consistent watering schedule will give better performance.

Partial shade rather than dense shade is best for intense leaf color, plant growth and flowers. Our valley requires shade during the hot summer months and finding just the right amount for the specific variety of Heuchera requires some trials and lots of advice from growers.

Although the plants grow for a long time in one place, the larger plants tend to grow weak. These should be removed, divided and replanted every 2-3 years. Be sure to replenish the site with fresh compost.

PESTS

When winters are mild, mealy bugs can attack the base and stems. Forcefully wash plants with water and a mild detergent or insecticidal soap on a regular basis. This will dislodge and discourage the mealybugs. Diseases can occur with poor air circulation from over population or from planting new plants too deeply and over watering. Space plants to prevent overcrowding by following planting directions. Plant crowns higher and allow for fast drainage.

PROPAGATION

Divide the mature plants in the fall. Replant the young, vigorous divisions and dispose of the old, woody stems. Coral Bells can be propagated with leaf cuttings. Take healthy mature leaves with a short segment of the petiole; dip in rooting powder, place in sterile media (mixture of peat moss and perlite), and use a clear polyethylene cover to keep the humidity high. Seeds can be sown in late winter if a greenhouse or other growing structures are available.

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