



May 2010

## Plants of the Month

### Redbud, Eastern Redbud

Plant guru Michael Dirr calls redbud “one of our most beautiful native trees.” Before it leafs out in spring, purple-pink sweetpea-shaped blooms hug the branches tightly, creating flashy whips of color. After rain, the fuchsia blooms blaze even brighter against wet black bark. This 20-30 foot tree is terrific planted with native dogwoods. In fall, the heart-shaped leaves turn yellow-green, sometimes a very good yellow. Adaptable to sun or part shade as long as the soil is well drained, redbuds need vigor to stay healthy. Avoid stress from drought or soggy soil, which can lead to Verticillium or canker disease.



### Brunnera, Siberian bugloss

*Brunnera macrophylla*

In April and May, the delicate blue flowers of Brunnera rise above clumps of coarse heart-shaped leaves like bouquets of forget-me-nots. One of the few true blue perennials, Brunnera reaches 12-18” in height and likes part to full shade. It prefers good organic soil and moderate moisture but tolerates some drought, although prolonged drought may brown leaf margins. It will seed itself in a reasonable way, and any extra plants are easily removed or shared with a friend. After blooming, it maintains a good appearance for the summer and does not require spring clean-up.



**Do you have a plant or insect pest question? Call the Home and Garden Information Center 1-800-342-2507**

## Ninebark 'Diablo'

*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Diablo'

'Diablo' is one of the few medium shrubs with purple foliage—but when its white or pinkish flower clusters arrive in spring, wow, they really pop against the rich purple leaves. A native shrub relatively unknown in the U.S., ninebark has been popular in Europe. Boasting year-round interest, it has reddish fruits in fall and, in winter, peeling papery bark. At 5-10' high and as wide, this deciduous shrub accepts most soils and tolerates dry soil, however 'Diablo' must have full sun to hold its color. A candidate for replacing purple-leaved barberry which is invasive in our forests. Severe pruning thickens it up.



## Mayapple

*Podophyllum peltatum*

As American as apple pie” says Allan Armitage, plant expert. This woodland perennial spreads by rhizomes to form neat colonies of green umbrellas in the spring. Mature plants bloom with small nodding white flowers like lily of the valley, which rise above the foliage. These are followed by a single round yellowish fruit the size of a small plum—the May “apple”—which can be toxic. Mayapple makes a sturdy native ground cover about 1-1 ½ feet high for shady areas. It does go dormant in summer, so is best in natural areas or with a successive planting. It prefers a moist soil. Drought and sun hasten dormancy.

