Heuchera - Coral Bells or Alum Root (Saxifragaceae)

**Heuchera** is a showy foliage perennial with a radiating tight clump of green, purple, or marbled foliage. Coral Bells also has diminutive, fine-textured flowers on thin stalks rising high above the foliage.

**FEATURES**

**Form**
- small herbaceous semi-evergreen perennial
- basal foliage matures at about 1’ tall x 1.5’ wide, while the thin wispy inflorescences are up to 2.5’ tall
- radiating clump growth habit

**Culture**
- full sun to full shade
- usually performs best in moist, rich, well-drained soils in partial shade; however, some of the purple-leaved forms will develop outstanding color and mottling in full sun to partial sun if given constant, even irrigation in summer in well-drained, organically-enriched soils (otherwise, leaf scorch and plant dieback will occur)
- propagated primarily by crown division, but also by seeds or tissue culture
- Saxifrage Family, with few disease or pest problems
- abundantly available in containers, with a recent explosion of purple-leaved cultivars
- mulching helps prevent winter frost heave of the shallow crowns that surface with age
- optimally, division of plant crowns should occur once every 3 yrs., with the woody central portions discarded and the younger peripheral shoots replanted with their crowns well covered in soil and mulch
- simple, having 3-5 shallow lobes on the widely ovate leaves, about 3” wide and long, with crenate to dentate margins
- pubescent blades are borne on long petioles (mostly of basal crown origin)
- semi-evergreen foliage traditionally has been light green, dark green, or bronzed purplish-red, sometimes with a subtle silvery mottling
- recently, cultivars have been introduced whose foliage background color is green, bronze, plum, or purple, with patterns that are veined, marbled, mottled, or edged with dark purple, gray, or silver

**Flowers**
- white, pink, salmon, coral, or red bell-shaped miniature flowers are scattered on pedicels over the upper half of thin peduncles reaching up to 2.5’ tall, well above the foliage, usually in June and sporadically thereafter

**Fruits**
- ornamentally insignificant (if not deadheaded)

**Function**
- edgings, foundations, borders, beds, group plantings, naturalized areas, or as a non-traditional groundcover; marbled foliage variants are especially useful in areas with high shade or dappled shade

**Texture**
- medium texture
- thick density of basal foliage, but open density of the wispy flowering stalks

**Assets**
- attractive semi-evergreen foliage (many green, purple, bronzed, and marbled types exist)
- fine-textured small flowers on long peduncles

**Liabilities**
- frost heave and dieback may occur with age, due to surfacing crowns that are exposed in harsh winters
- for the non-green foliage forms, leaf scorch and leaf bleaching may occur if placed in hot, dry, full sun

**Habitat**
- zones 3 (or 4) to 9, depending upon species, hybrid, or cultivar
- species are native to various regions of the U.S., but most modern cultivars are of hybrid or tissue culture origin

**SELECTIONS**

**Alternates**
- perennials known for their interesting foliage (Athyrium, Cyclamen, Hosta, Polystichum, Pulmonaria, etc.)
- perennials with very fine-textured flowers (Aristolbe, Convallaria majalis, Brunnera macrophylla, Polemonium caeruleum, etc.)

**Variants**
- many species, hybrids, and tissue culture derived cultivars exist, selected primarily for foliage display or floral color

- **Heuchera americana 'Dale' (‘Dale’s Strain’) -** green-blue foliage is heavily marbled in silver, sometimes planted densely and used as a groundcover

- **Heuchera americana 'Garnet' -** emerging foliage is bright garnet, changing to green with bronzed veins all summer, then reverting to an intense garnet center with a green margin all winter, also planted densely and used as a groundcover

- **Heuchera micrantha 'Palace Purple' -** the emerging deep crimson-purple foliage slowly bronzes throughout the summer, with relatively insignificant creamy flowers; best placed in full sun with adequate moisture for summer-long intense purplish color, as plants placed in shade will fade to a brownish bronze; the cultivar to which all others are compared, and 1991 Perennial Plant of the Year

- **Heuchera sanguinea 'Chatterbox' -** rose-pink flowers bloom above the green foliage primarily in June, and sporadically throughout the summer

- **Heuchera sanguinea 'Frosty' -** dark red flowers tower over the white- to frosty-green foliage

- Recently, a number of purple- or plum-foliaged forms for shady sites have been introduced that have veined or marbled "variegation" that can be either silver, gray, or dark purple; these are basically variations on the same theme:
  - *H. americana* 'Chocolate Veil', 'Persian Carpet', 'Ruby Veil', and 'Velvet Knight'
  - **Heuchera Cascade Dawn', 'Pewter Veil', 'Plum Pudding', 'Purple Sails', and ‘Regal Robe'**