Growing Heuchera (Coral Bells) and x Heucherella (Foamy Bells)

**Latin Name Pronunciation:** hew-ker-uh/ hew’ker-el-uh

Panicles of pendant, bell-shaped flowers appear to float above the ground on long, thin stems. In shades of pink, red, white, green, and purple, the flowers are beloved of hummingbirds and lovely in arrangements. Many varieties are grown mainly for their foliage; recent hybridizing efforts have expanded the available leaf colors from shades of green to silver, chartreuse, orange, and nearly black.

We include x Heucherella here, which is a cross between Heuchera and Tiarella.

**Please note:** So plants may properly establish before winter, we recommend early fall planting of Heuchera in colder zones (Zones 5 and lower).

**Light/Watering:** These compact plants flower well in full sun to part shade in the North, but need at least afternoon shade in warmer climates. Varieties with vividly colored foliage are best grown in light shade to prevent bleaching. Plants are shallow-rooted and may need regular watering, an inch a week, if there is no rain.

**Fertilizer/Soil and pH:** Fertile soils rich with organic matter will keep these plants at their best, but good drainage is essential, especially in winter. A pH close to neutral or above is ideal. Side-dress with compost in the spring, or apply a slow-release fertilizer.

**Pests/Diseases:** Few pests are serious enough to mention; as for diseases, occasionally powdery mildew will appear on the foliage as white or gray patches. Spray with wettable sulfur or other remedy labeled for powdery mildew.

**Companions:** Both Coral Bells and Foamy Bells are lovely with Ferns, Hosta, Tiarella, Campanulas, Alchemilla, Phlox divaricata and Pulmonaria. Those with silver foliage are especially attractive with blue Hosta, and try playing the more dramatically colored forms against the foliage of woody plants in the border.

**Pruning:** Shear off old top growth after flowering in late summer to expose fresh foliage. Remove dead leaves over the growing season to keep the lovely foliage looking vibrant.

**Reflowering:** Remove old flower spikes at the base of the plant to encourage a longer season of bloom.

**Dividing/Transplanting:** Old clumps may need to be divided in spring every three years. Fall division or transplanting is not recommended as these shallow-rooted plants need a full growing season to become established before winter.

**End-of-Season Care:** Plants may be heaved out of the ground during freeze-thaw cycles in winter; mulch with salt marsh hay or evergreen boughs in late fall. Make certain the planting area has well-
drained soil that does not stay overly wet in winter or plants will perish. Do not prune back; remove dead leaves in the spring.

**Calendar of Care - Heuchera and x Heucherella**

**Early Spring:** Apply a light application of balanced or slow-release fertilizer or side-dress with compost and organic amendments. Remove dead leaves as needed and water well if it is unseasonably dry, as plants prefer evenly moist soil. Plant, transplant or divide now. If crowns have been raised up above ground level, add soil rich in humus up to the base of the crowns.

**Late Spring:** Remove old flower spikes regularly. Watch for powdery mildew and treat if serious; if spotty, simply remove infected leaves. Supplement rainfall with irrigation if needed.

**Summer:** Groom plants by removing yellow or dead leaves. If foliage has burned or is looking tattered, shear off top growth to expose fresh foliage.

**Fall:** After the ground is frozen, mulch to protect plants from heaving out of the soil in winter. Do not cut back at this time.