

The Perennial Plant of the Year, New to the Market Showcase & an Easy Challenge





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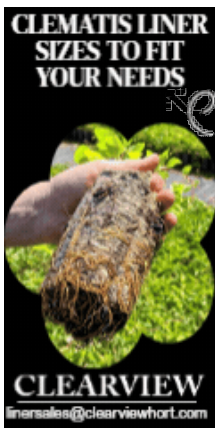
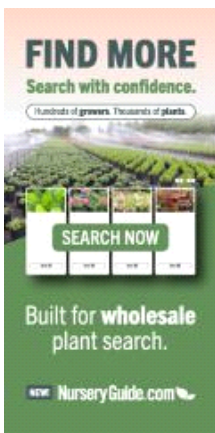
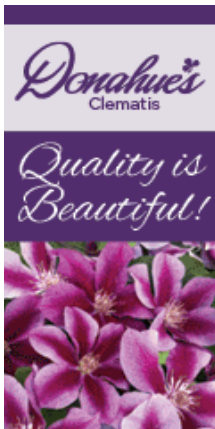
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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

What's Happening Here?
The 2027 PPOY
New to the Market Showcase
New Showcase, Part 2
Upcoming PPA Webinars
The Answer is ...



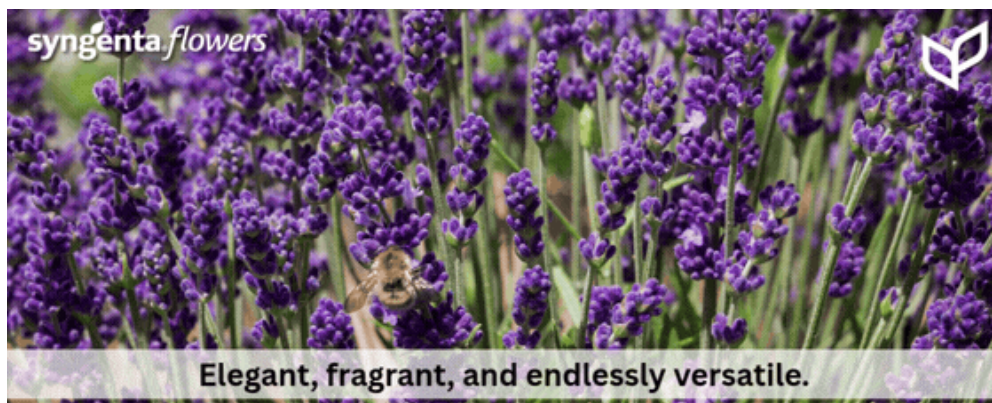
What's Happening Here?

I'm hoping this week's challenge isn't as much of a challenge, but more of a celebration. If you know what's in this picture, you'll likely agree:





I'm hoping the vast majority of the subscribers already know what's feeding on the asclepias. Having said that, I imagine there are several readers who haven't come across this wonderful creature. How about I leave it at that for now and simply ask, "What's happening here?"



The 2027 Perennial Plants of the Year

Each year the [Perennial Plant Association](#) (PPA) selects a plant to be the Perennial Plant of the Year (PPOY). They've been selecting a PPOY ever since 1990 when *Phlox stolonifera* was their first selection. It's been amazing to observe how impactful many of their selections have been. The PPOY selections often become industry staples, best sellers in their category (genus) and other cultivars within these categories also tend to benefit (uptick in popularity and sales), as well. Learn more about this program and see all of the selections going all the way back to 1990 (I'll bet many of you weren't even born when the program started) [HERE](#).

The PPA announced the 2027 Perennial Plant of the Year at its Annual Perennial Symposium in East Lansing, Michigan, late last month. Although there was no percussion at the event, please allow me to ask for it now: "May I have a drumroll, please?" (Imagine you're hearing a dramatic drumroll for a few seconds.)

The winner of the prestigious 2027 PPA Perennial of the Year goes to ...

... none other than the fabulous ironwood, [Vernonia Summer Swan Song](#).



Credit: Richard Hawke.

This award-winning variety is the result of the breeding efforts of Dr. Jim Ault (Chicago Botanic Garden). Summer Swan Song originated from a cross between *Vernonia lettermannii* and *V. angustifolia* Plum Peachy.

Summer Swan Song is a fall flowering perennial with an incredibly long six-week bloom time beginning in early September. The attractive deep purple flowers cover the entire plant top to bottom and are very attractive to pollinators, like butterflies (especially Monarchs) and bees. The clumps reach 36-in. tall by 40-in. wide at maturity. Cold hardy to USDA Hardiness Zone 4.



New to the Market Showcase

One of the presentations at the PPA Symposium last month was a "New to the Market Showcase" where nearly one dozen plant companies were each given five minutes to talk about what new and exciting introductions they have. There were so many I couldn't possibly share them all here, but I did select several that stood out to me during the presentation.

Baptisia Sunny Morning



Sunny Morning from [Plants Nouveau](#) was selected for its dramatic appearance. It produces tons of vibrant lemon-yellow flowers held on charcoal-gray tinted stems, which are both nicely displayed above the medium to dark green foliage. It grows 3.5-ft. tall by 5-ft. wide and blooms for three weeks in the early summer. Hardy to Zone 4. (It's worthwhile noting that Baptisia Sunny Morning was bred by Dr Jim Ault, who also bred the 2027 Perennial Plant of the Year discussed above.)

Schizachyrium Free Spirit Comet



Credit: Hortech, Inc.

Free Spirit Comet from **Darwin Perennials** forms strictly upright clumps, provides a uniquely narrow habit and produces finely textured sky-blue foliage. The plant's coloration begins to change in the late summer as the entire clump flushes hues of ruby red, purple and green from the base. It grows 36- to 42-in. tall and is hardy to Zone 4.

Hyssopus Nectar Ninja



Nectar Ninja from **Proven Winners** is a great long-season blooming and incredibly fragrant perennial. It produces loads of lavender-blue flowers on a nicely rounded habit. It grows 20- to 24-in. tall by 34 to 38 in. across. Nectar Ninja is drought tolerant once established and makes a great replacement for lavenders. This Zone-4 hyssop is great for attracting pollinators while keeping critters away.

Echinacea Revelation Monarch



Revelation Monarch from [Terra Nova Nurseries](#) isn't your typical new echinacea that's more often than not dwarf in recent years. On the contrary, Revelation Monarch is a vigorous and tall (up to 30 in.) variety. It's bred to be a tough and sturdy landscape plant, and was selected for its huge 5-in. flowers. The flowers are well scented and great at attracting pollinators, hummingbirds and even finches into the landscape. Hardy to Zone 4.



New Variety Showcase, Part 2

There were so many great perennial introductions featured in the presentation, I can't help myself—I just have to show you a few more of them!

Lewisia Sunset Glow



Pacific Plug & Liner featured Lewisia Sunset Glow as one of their new introductions. Sunset Glow from Concept Plants is an amazing new lewisia from tissue culture. It blooms for several weeks from late spring and into the early summer months, and again from early fall through frost. Sunset Glow covers itself with intense red star-shaped flowers. It's a small plant (only reaching a height of 4 to 6 in.), but don't let its size fool you—Sunset Glow is a great eye-catching plant in small containers, rock gardens and in alpine plantings. Hardy to Zone 4.

Nepeta Serene Wild Orchid



Serene Wild Orchid belongs to a new collection of catmints from **Dümmen Orange**. Wild Orchid has an upright growing habit reaching an impressive 18- to 24-in. tall. It offers new bright pink flowers to the nepeta world and it blooms throughout the entire season. Like other nepetas, Serene Wild Orchid attracts pollinators and hummingbirds into the garden. Hardy to Zone 4.

Hosta Bloodline



Photo Credits: Doug Ruff.

This is not an AI generated image. **DeVroomen Garden Products** shared this impressive new red hosta called Bloodline. The long, dark green foliage takes on some deep burgundy-red colorations for much of the season that intensifies with cool night temperatures and some direct sun. If the foliage wasn't enough to draw you in, just wait until you see the light purple flowers on red scapes that form in the late summer. It forms very attractive clumps reaching 14-in. tall and 24 in. across. Hardy to Zone 3.

Panicum Dream Catcher Lightning Bolt



Emerald Coast Growers featured a new panicum. Dream Catcher Lightning Bolt is another great development from the work of Dave Mackenzie (Hortech). Lightning Bolt has a very impressive, majestic upright habit that creates a great formal visual structure in the landscape. It reaches over 6-ft. tall and is cold hardy to Zone 4.

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Upcoming PPA Webinars

If you liked the new perennials I shared with you above, you'll have an opportunity to see them for yourself. In just a couple of weeks, PPA is bringing the in-person presentation I attended to you in a webinar format. You'll have a chance to see all the great new and noteworthy varieties from:

- Plants Nouveau, LLC
- Walters Gardens
- Terra Nova Nurseries
- Pacific Plug & Liner
- Darwin Perennials
- Dümmer Orange
- DeVroomen Garden Products
- Emerald Coast Growers
- Hortech
- PanAmerican Seed

Come learn about these introductions, their unique traits and how they can be used in today's landscapes and garden centers.

WHEN: August 25, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central

PRICE: \$40.00

REGISTRATION: [2026 New to the Market Review](#)

PPOY Plants from Concept to Garden

In September, the PPA is hosting a webinar titled, "PPOY Plants from Concept to Garden." In this presentation, breeders Brent Horvath and Justin Lombardoni will share the story behind the 2026 and 2027 Perennial Plants of the Year (PPOY). They'll highlight their breeding goals, development processes and discuss how each plant fits into their broader work. Next, Richard Hawke of the Chicago Botanic Garden will share highlights from the landscape trials at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Finally, Preston Montague will demonstrate how these perennials can be used in landscape designs.

This session connects breeding, evaluation and design to provide you a complete picture of how exceptional plants move from concept to landscape.

WHEN: September 26, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. Eastern/Noon Central

PRICE: \$40.00

REGISTRATION: [PPOY Plants from Concept to Garden](#)

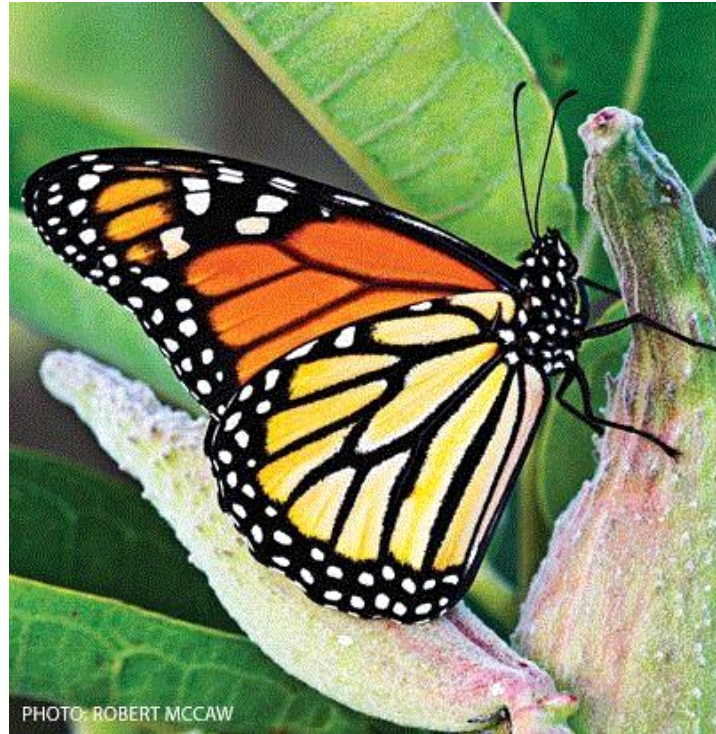
The Answer is ...



Sometimes I take for granted how simple a diagnostic challenge can be. These challenges often involve a little skill and require asking a few questions before the answer can be narrowed down. In other instances, the ability to answer a challenge is pretty black and white (black, white and yellow, in this instance) and largely based on a person's past experiences or observations. That's likely the case here. You've either seen this firsthand or read about it and absolutely know what

you're looking at or you're unaware of what incredible creature lies before you.

These diagnostic challenges usually show something that adversely affects plants. Although that's also true in this case, the larva or caterpillar before you is none other than that of the Monarch butterfly.



With Monarch butterfly populations on the decline, I always get excited when I see Monarch butterflies and their caterpillars. In addition to the various types of asclepias I have planted in my landscape, I have a field with quite a collection of wild asclepias growing to support Monarch butterflies.

If you'd like to learn more about Monarch butterflies, their lifecycles and their incredible yearly migration, I encourage you to read [9 months to live: Inside the Monarch Butterfly's "Super Generation"](#).

My email is paul@pace49.com if you have any comments, article suggestions or if you'd just like to say hello.

Best regards,

Paul

Paul Pilon

Editor-at-Large—*Perennial Pulse*

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