



Brunnera, Jack Frost: The 2012 Plant of the Year
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ALEXANDRIA, Minn. (12/27/2011) —Although the gardening season has come to a close, it is always the right time to peruse new plant catalogs, and consider the possibilities for next spring's garden beds. Winter is a time for garden dreaming, and planning; and many organizations that perform garden trials publish their findings at year's end to help gardeners choose plants to include in their garden plans. The Perennial Plant Association has announced the 2012 plant of the year: *Brunnera macrophylla*: "Jack Frost", also known as false forget-me-not or Siberian bugloss. This is the third year in a row that a blue, spring blooming flower has been selected! (and I love blue in my garden!) The 2010 plant of the year was *Baptisia Australis* (False blue indigo), a deep blue/purple, tall spring bloomer, and the 2011 plant of the year was *Amsonia Hubrichtii* (Arkansas blue star), a light blue, shrub-like spring bloomer. This year's selection is a smaller plant, growing 12" tall and about 18" wide. The delicate, 5-petaled, blue flowers emerge in clusters above the foliage. Hardy to zone 3 (which is good news for west central Minnesotans), "Jack Frost" is not fussy about soil type, tolerates cold snaps without damage, and is unappealing to our native deer population.

"Jack Frost" prefers a shady site, and is the perfect companion for plants such as: Hostas, Ferns, Pulmonaria and Hellebores and Huechera. The flowers appear in early spring, but the silver/white foliage with dark green veining provides texture and contrast for the rest of the season. The rounded, heart shaped leaves are upright and showy, and light up the dark spaces in your woodland garden. Brunnera has always been a popular shade plant because of its minimal maintenance requirements (they are disease and insect resistant), its thrifty nature (it does not require heavy fertilization), and its long lasting spring blooms. It spreads slowly, so you don't have to worry about it taking over your shady bed.

- Plant Brunnera in the spring, in a shady site, mulch to keep roots cool, and keep well watered.
- If you do not want Brunnera to self seed, dead head spent blooms. (Since Brunnera are cultivated varieties, the seed will not produce true to the parent plant.)
- Remove any leaves that are damaged during the growing season. Don't cut back in the fall, instead, carefully remove dead leaves in the spring as new growth emerges.
- Divide plant every 3-5 years to reinvigorate growth and maintain plant health.

Brunnera can be used in woodland gardens and in shady borders. They also make great ground covers, and can be used as filler in container plantings. (Overwintering perennials in containers is ill advised. To keep them through the winter, plant them in the ground in early September.) Try using the foliage in your floral arrangements during the summer, you won't be disappointed.

For more information about Perennial Plant of the Year winners, and to learn more about growing perennials, visit the Perennial Plant Association website at: <http://www.perennialplant.org>.

Here's wishing you a happy and prosperous New Year! May all your garden dreams be bright!

Let us love winter, for it is the spring of genius. ~Pietro Aretino

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