

Heucherella 'Alabama Sunrise'

Meet a bright new perennial for shady areas

Jimmy Turner

AT A GLANCE

Latin name: *Heucherella* 'Alabama Sunrise'

Common name: Foamy Bells

Flowers: small white spikes in early spring

Foliage: colorful foliage, changes with the seasons

Mature height: 12" high by 20" wide

Hardiness: Zones 4 to 9

Soil: well-drained

Exposure: shade

Water usage: medium

Sources: local nurseries or mail order



Foliage of *Heucherella* 'Alabama Sunrise' in spring is gold with red veins.

If gardening in Texas isn't a big enough challenge, trying to shade garden in Texas is even more complicated. Our erratic climate and difficult soils limit the number of plants we have to choose from. Milder climates abound with shade-loving perennials, but here in Texas, I'm constantly on the lookout for other plants to add to our shade gardening palette.

If you have read any national garden magazine in the last 10 years, you have heard of *Heuchera* and *Tiarella*. The two have quickly become some of the most popular shade plants worldwide, but in our high heat, most of them just languish and shrink away to nothing over time. Through the miracle of plant breeding, however, some enterprising scientist crossed the two genera to create a whole new genus, *Heucherella*. This cross gave us a new group of plants with increased heat and humidity tolerance

— but still not always enough to reliably beat what Texas can throw at them. Then Terra Nova Nurseries of Oregon decided to begin the cross all over again, using *Heuchera villosa*, which is native to the hot and humid areas of the Eastern U.S. (Virginia to Arkansas and Mississippi). One of the first hybrids of this cross was *Heucherella* 'Alabama Sunrise', and the new genes from *H. villosa* really added heat tolerance. 'Alabama Sunrise' is one of the first of these plants to thrive in my trial gardens. In the last two years, it has constantly increased and been a good surprise.

Now that I've told you how tough it is, let me share with you how attractive 'Alabama Sunrise' is. This plant changes color with the seasons! Foliage in spring to mid-summer is gold with red veins, and it is deeply cut. In late summer, the leaves become green with red veins. In fall, the older foliage turns a glowing



shade of orange-pink. In early spring, small white flower spikes shoot up to 18 inches tall, but compared to the foliage, they are not especially showy. As plants mature, they form compact mounds of foliage that look as if they had been arranged.

This plant requires shade from direct sun in all but the coolest hours of the morning. It requires well-drained soil, and will appreciate an addition of organic matter. If you live on clay soil, try adding expanded shale to improve its drainage. Water regularly until plants become established.

Heucherella 'Alabama Sunrise' is perennial in Zones 4 through 9, and in most Texas winters, the foliage will continue to grow and be colorful. I like to use this plant spotted in shade areas under deciduous trees and in perennial borders. My favorite way to use it is in winter containers. The colorful winter foliage goes great with the autumn and winter colors of pansies and kale, and when spring comes, you can transplant it into a shade area.

You should be able to find *Heucherella* 'Alabama Sunrise' in local nurseries in 5-inch to 1-gallon containers this fall or next spring. Or you can buy from mail order sources.

You can see these plants at the Dallas Arboretum in the Trial Gardens and in the Palmer Fern Dell. ★

About the author: Jimmy Turner is senior director of gardens at the Dallas Arboretum. Visit www.dallasplanttrials.org for more information on his trials.

By the end of summer 'Alabama Sunrise' has green leaves with red veins.

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