

# *Fine* Gardening

AT HOME IN THE GARDEN



**15** things to think about when designing a garden

The best shrubs for shady spots

28 big-leaved perennials

Ideas for year-round containers

Learn how to buy healthy plants

APRIL 2006 NO. 108  
[www.finegardening.com](http://www.finegardening.com)

\$5.99 (Canada \$7.99)



# Mid-Atlantic



## Big can be better

**B**ig-leaved perennials may not be for the faint of heart, but they always fit the bill when I'm looking to create dramatic visual impact in a garden. The saying "less is more" certainly applies to these bold beauties. I like to plant them in smaller spaces because their leaves can make a scene seem larger. On an economical note, giant leaves engulf space, which means fewer plants are needed. In the display gardens at our nursery, a mass of astilboides (*Astilboides tabularis*, syn. *Rodgersia tabularis*, USDA Hardiness Zones 5–7) is underplanted with fringed bergenia (*Bergenia ciliata*, Zones 5–8). I recently noticed our resident tree frog bathing in the center of the large astilboides leaves, which just shows that gardeners aren't the only ones that enjoy these dramatic perennials.

—Jerry Fritz is a garden designer and the owner of Jerry Fritz Garden Design in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

### Mukdenia makes a dynamite ground cover

**NAME:** *Mukdenia rossii* 'Crimson Fans'

**ZONES:** 4 to 9

**SIZE:** 12 to 16 inches tall and wide

**CONDITIONS:** Woodsy site with dappled shade; consistently moist soil

**DESCRIPTION:** This easy-to-grow but seldom-seen plant in the Mid-Atlantic states has attractive, glossy, fan-shaped leaves, which are accompanied by white, bell-shaped panicle flowers for several weeks in spring. Once flowering is complete, the green leaves turn a rich burgundy color

with reddish orange highlights on their margins. Plant this unusual gem as a ground cover under a grove of flowering shrubs like bottlebrush buckeye (*Aesculus parviflora*, Zones 5–9), which will send out its own display of white blooms in midsummer.



### Ornamental rhubarb is at home in beds and borders

**NAME:** *Rheum* 'Ace of Hearts'

**ZONES:** 3 to 9

**SIZE:** 4 to 5 feet tall and 3 to 4 feet wide

**CONDITIONS:** Part sun; deeply moist, but not waterlogged, soil

**DESCRIPTION:** Featuring upright, glossy, green leaves with burgundy undersides, the new growth of this ornamental rhubarb emerges dark red in spring. Once plants are established, airy spires of reddish pink flowers appear on 4- to 5-foot-high, sturdy stems. Leaves will turn yellow and go dormant in summer without adequate moisture. Try using 'Ace of Hearts' as a bold accent in beds and borders, weaving golden creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea', Zones 4–8) through its base and using golden ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Dart's Gold', Zones 3–7) as a backdrop.

### White skunk cabbage is no stinker in damp, shady sites

**NAME:** *Lysichiton camtschatcensis*

**ZONES:** 5 to 9

**SIZE:** 2 to 2½ feet tall and wide

**CONDITIONS:** Full shade; damp, boggy soil

**DESCRIPTION:** Plant white skunk cabbage along the margins of a stream or in a boggy area where it will remain moist. It boasts pointed, waxy spathes that mask spikes of tiny, green flowers, which have no offensive odor. Erupting from the base, the spathes are large, glossy, leathery, oblong leaves. Arrange plants in clumps with water forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*, Zones 5–9). Once established, white skunk cabbage sets deep roots and will flourish.

