



# A bumper crop of new outdoor products for spring

By ED HUTCHISON  
Special to the Record-Eagle

Spring 2002 once again brings a bumper crop of new plants, tools and equipment from giants in the lawn and garden industry as well as lesser-known companies.

Roses get better every year, as do fertilizers and tools. Every year brings a couple of exceptional new products along the lines of "it's about time" or, "Why didn't I think of that?"

Here's a look at just a few of the new items. Most are available locally at garden centers, nurseries and home centers:

**"Whimsical Loop Border:"** Edging a bed has long been a challenge. Do you add an edge to keep weeds and grass out, or leave it natural? Here is a visual answer to the question. A new series of borders from Easy Gardener (800-327-9462) provides a wonderful touch to defining beds. The Loop Border — one in a series — has a rich metal finish with copper and glass butterfly accents. Its one-piece construction can be set at different heights giving homeowners the opportunity to create unique designs. Also available: An arch border. These borders do not keep out weeds and grass from beds but they sure dress up the bed.

**"EdgeGuard:"** This is the name

of a new spreader from The Scotts Company (800-543-8873, www.scotts.com). It differs from the zillion of other spreaders on the market by its shield that blocks fertilizer and other products from one side of the swath. The shield also keeps fertilizer from spreading backward onto the user. Activated by a switch on the handle, the device adjusts the flow rate automatically to ensure even application. It can be deactivated to provide a full-spread spectrum.

**"EdgeALL:"** Here's your chance to get ready for the county fair and it's tough-guy-rings-the-bell midway attraction. The EdgeALL is a no-nonsense, 13-pound grunt tool that uses its hefty weight and sharp blade to cut through soil in preparation for a variety of tasks, such as: Installing low-voltage wiring, underground fence wire, shallow drip watering systems, plumbing lines, laying walks and stepping stones and a variety of other grounds projects that require a narrow cut. When burying cable, it leaves narrow slits in the lawn that are easily tamped into place leaving no scars. V & B Manufacturing Company (800-443-1987, www.vbmf.com).

**"Preen for Lawns:"** A most unusual product from the company that brought us season-lawn weed control by merely sprinkling its product (Preen) in beds. This new product combines fertilizer and post- and pre-emergent her-

bicides. It is the first product to do that. The result: Feed your lawn and kill what broadleaf weeds are present now, as well as those that will try to sprout weeks later. It uses two well-known and proven herbicides — "Team" and "Confront." The fertilizer part is high-tech. It reacts to various weather and moisture conditions and releases nutrients for controlled feeding up to 16 months. Lebanon Seaboard Corporation (800-532-0090, www.preen.com).

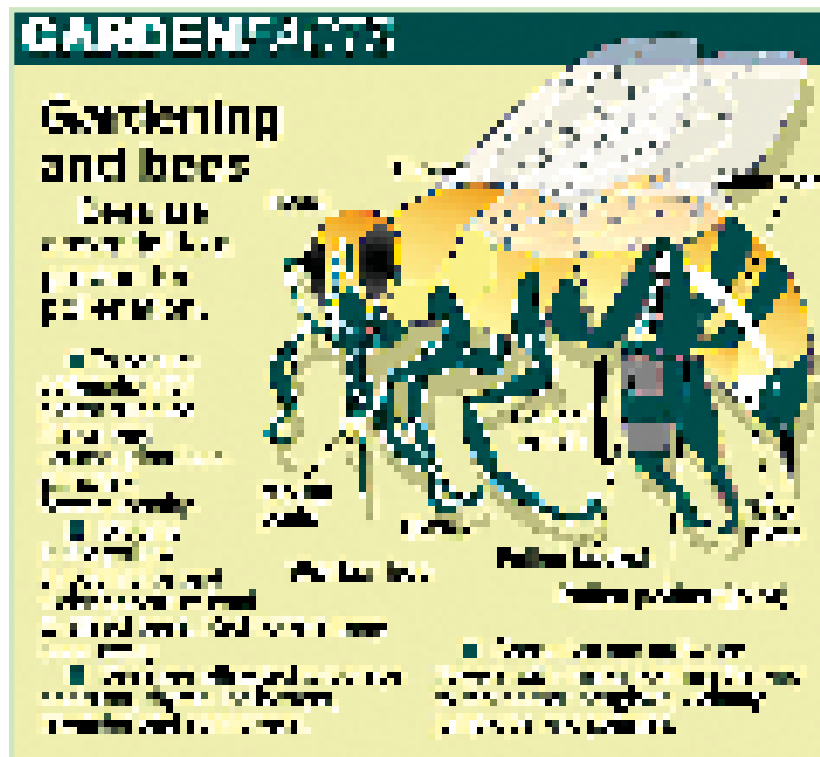
**"Love & Peace:"** Only two rose varieties won the coveted All-America Selections designation for 2002 and this variety is one of them. Parents are the very famous "Peace" rose and an unknown seedling. "Love & Peace" is a hybrid tea type with high-centered, spiral formed blooms that open on individual stems, making them ideal for cutting. Flowers are golden yellow with pink edges and open to about five inches across. The fragrance is a sweet, fruity scent. The bush grows about four feet tall and not quite as wide. Foliage is a glossy, dark green. All-America Rose Selections, Inc. (www.rose.org).

**"Hot Beds:"** Developed in England, these are raised planters designed to encourage plant growth by keeping the soil warm. The dark panels capture and retain the sun's warmth, making them ideal for early — and late-season — growing efforts. Each

nine-foot-square bed can be set up in minutes and several can be joined together to form a common bed. The sides are made from recycled plastic and the manufacturer claims they will last for many years. Gardener's Supply Co. (800-955-3370, www.gardeners.com).

**"Carefree Tire:"** If you love your wheelbarrow but hate its tire — because it often goes flat — then this pricey tire may be for you. At about \$45, you'll experience a tire that is always ready to roll — literally. Through a process called centrifugal casting, hundreds of thousands of air cells are trapped in a matrix of a very tough polymer elastomer. The result is a tire with the same properties of an air-filled tire, but without the air and without the flats. It is available in three different tread patterns and two choices of hub length. It can also be found on some wheelbarrow models. The tire is offered under several trade names, including "Carefree," "True Temper," "Everhard" and "Never Flat." Carefree Tire LLC (323-249-2968, www.carefreetire.com).

**Branded potting soil:** Someone has finally done it — branded dirt and is selling it for a lot of money. At first blush, that is what The Scotts Co. appears to be doing but in fact, the products it markets under its name and Miracle-Gro are really outstanding. Too many containers and too many lawns get off to a bad start and never recov-



er because the soil chosen to start seeds or sustain plants is simply unfriendly. The soil mixes Scotts offers are pricey but probably worth the investment given the strong plant results tests demonstrate they provide. Look for Scotts Enriched Lawn Soil, Enriched Miracle-Gro Potting Mix and Miracle-Gro Moisture Control Potting Mix. The Scotts Co. (800-543-8873, www.scotts.com).

**"Mantis Electric Tiller:"** Mantis pretty much started, and still owns, the mini-tiller market. Most homeowners can get by just fine

with a mini-tiller as opposed to a big, ornery machine. The electric model has many of the worthwhile features found on its benchmark gas-powered tiller. Among its features: Curved tines that cut through soil and hard soil with ease. Granted, they don't cut as quickly as do large, gas-powered units that cost upwards of \$1,000, but they do the work and do it well. Attachments for edging, aerating and other maintenance tasks are available. Mantis (800-366-6268, mantisgardentools.com).

## Watch for distress signals from plants

By ED HUTCHISON  
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Plants are gracious in that they let us know when something is wrong. Often, though, the gentle complaint comes along after some damage has been done.

Signals seem to fall into one of three general categories:

**Thirst:** Mechanical damage and presence of pests. Annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees can all exhibit one or more of these signals.

The tricky part is being attuned to them and taking action. The season for annuals is so short that it can be over before the problem is identified and for woody trees and shrubs there often is some damage to contend with. Here are some things to look for:

■ **Thirst:** The obvious sign among annuals and perennials — but especially annuals — is wilted foliage. This is especially pronounced early in the season before the plants have established a root system extensive enough to search for moisture beyond the immediacy of the planting hole. It is also a challenge throughout the season for plants in containers. What amazes many gardeners is plants look just fine in the morning and by late afternoon when they come home from work, it's a different story. What was robust and fresh is now a mass of wilted lettuce, or so it seems.

The best defense against this is to mulch newly planted areas with a two- or three-inch blanket of shredded bark, cypress mulch or a similar material. This holds true for annual and perennial plantings; a ring of mulch around new trees and shrubs helps them as well. The mulch will hold in moisture and maintain a healthy soil temperature. Add mulch on top of container plantings to reduce loss of moisture. Container plantings dry out more quickly than

those in the ground because the soil mass is exposed to air on all sides.

Be especially vigilant to a new planting's need for moisture on hot or breezy days. As the season progresses, a plant is better able to fend for itself but will likely still need supplemental watering throughout the season. Container

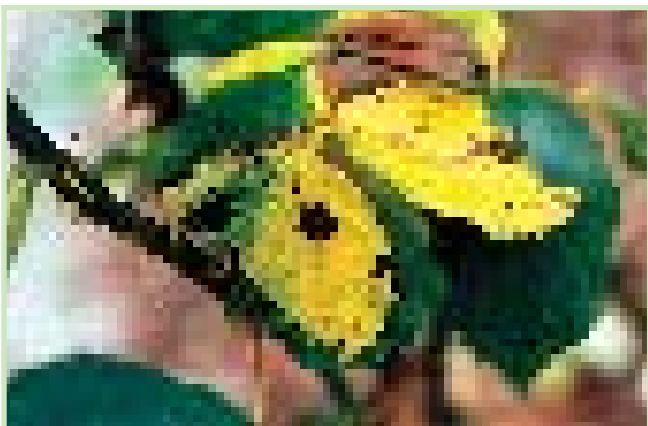


Photo by Ed Hutchison

**Blackspot on roses can be devastating to the bush. The presence of the telltale spot on foliage is a signal that there's too much moisture at foliage level.**

plantings need checking every day or so.

■ **Mechanical:** String trimmers may seem to be a heaven-sent tool for maintaining a tidy landscape, but they are tough on the trunks of trees and shrubs that happen to be in the way of the spinning nylon cord. A few whacks against the trunk of an established plant probably won't hurt it but many more than a few starts to tear away bark and that exposes the plant to potential problems that bark keeps out — namely, insects and disease.

Three effective remedies to this: Use hand shears instead of a string trimmer, surround the trunk with a protective plastic sleeve or mulch around the tree or shrub so there is no need to trim up close.

Another common mechanical problem is girdling of a tree trunk by ties that had been installed to steady the tree during its first few years in the ground. Tree staking is mostly a very good thing, but if the rubber or other soft ties are

kept in place without checking more than one growing season, the tree will start growing around them. Several years of this and the tie begins cutting into the trunk. The damage may be more cosmetic than not but there is still a good chance the girdling will cut off an otherwise free flow of sap up and down the tree. Again, tree ties are a good thing — but check that the ties are not cutting into the branches or trunks.

■ **Pests:** Damage from insects is usually easier to see and correct than that caused by disease. Most insects are big enough to see on the plant and most of them are obvious in their feeding habits — be it sucking or chewing.

Tender growth and leaves show the damage almost immediately. Insecticides are available to handle most garden pests and as always, read and heed label instructions.

Disease is a little trickier. By the time it is obvious, that part of the plant is a goner. This is especially true with popular annuals and perennials, among them: Zinnias, asters, hollyhocks, tall phlox and several others.

Each is susceptible to mildew. Mildew hits roses as well; but their archenemy is black spot. Mildew is less a problem in most parts of the country. Diseases like rust, mildew and blackspot can be made worse



Photo by Ed Hutchison

**Tree ties left in place too long can permanently damage a tree.**

by overhead watering, since the splashing spreads disease spores.

One way to keep these diseases in check — especially when it comes to blackspot on roses — is to irrigate at ground level, plant bushes apart sufficiently so there is plenty of air flow and be constantly on guard for disease outbreaks. If it occurs, remove and destroy the infected foliage and spray the entire plant with an fungicide labeled for the problem and the plant.

**Ed Hutchison is a freelance writer and gardener from Midland, MI.**

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