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Garden spice

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Gardeners have plenty of options to grow something different this year — with new plants from Asia and one that was discovered by happenstance.

The new choices were revealed recently at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale as hundreds of exhibitors at the Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition showed off new plants and products for 2008.

Here are six ideas to inject spice into your gardening. If you can't find them, ask your local garden center to order them from the sources listed.

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Red-eyed elephant ear

Agri-Starts in Apopka is known for introducing new forms of elephant ear. This year, they're offering a gem with the *Colocasia 'Elena'*, a plant discovered growing in an out-of-state nursery, brought back to Florida and cloned. Like most elephant ears, the plant features fleshy, thick green leaves that thrive in shady, wet corners with rich soil. But this one has something no other elephant ear can offer: a bright red dot in the middle of the chartreuse leaf. In the summer, with the right light, the red expands along the leaf veins. It grows in tight clumps about 3 feet tall, with new leaves unfolding throughout the rainy season. In the winter, it may die back somewhat, and clumps begin to decline after about two years.

Source: See www.agristarts.com, write info@agristarts.com or call 407-889-8055.

Braided beauty

The *Sansevieria cylindrica* 'Braids' has got to be one of the most interesting new houseplants in years. The braided plant is columnar, striking and unique. This is the first year it has been offered for sale in the United States. Originally from Thailand, it will stay around 2 feet tall, according to Torben Pedersen, owner of

Greenex United States, which is offering the plant. It is long-lasting, easy to care for and will thrive inside.

Source: See greenex.com, write to info@greenex.com or call 905-682-4769.

Plant with appeal

Red bananas are beautiful landscape plants and the Siam Ruby is no exception. Unlike other red bananas, the Siam Ruby reportedly can reach a towering 16 feet. But no one knows how big it will get here, or even if it will fruit, because it is so new to the United States. The best specimens have a deep maroon coloring on the tops and bottoms of the leaves. Like all bananas, it thrives in full sun with plenty of water and lots of fertilizer.

Source: See www.agristarts.com, write info@agristarts.com or call 407-889-8055.

Not a dreadlock rasta

Croton collectors have been known to go to ridiculous lengths to obtain a favorite variety, but few are as striking as the dreadlocks. A mature croton dreadlocks has hanging, braided foliage in vibrant yellow, orange and red. It does best in dappled sunlight, which allows for full color development, and will thrive with once-a-week watering. The dreadlocks is offered by Piccioni Farms in Homestead, which has almost 20 varieties of croton, including rare specimen plants with braided trunks.

Source: Call Piccioni Farms, which is open to the public, at 305-242-2055.

Some striking spikes

The *Sansevieria bacularis* 'Micado,' native to the Philippines, rises in dramatic, strong, tubular spikes from the ground. The spikes are delicately banded, like an iguana's tail. According to Torben Pedersen of Greenex, this plant is new to the United States. It will grow to 4 feet tall and thrive in South Florida's heat, rain and humidity. The striking plant can take full sun. Your local garden center can order the plant.

Source: See greenex.com, write to info@greenex.com or call 905-682-4769.

Better ground orchid

Most people don't think of orchids as ground plants, but maybe that's because they've never seen a spathoglottis. The spathoglottis grows in loose clumps and has loose clusters of lavender or white flowers on long stems. Foremost Co. of Miami is introducing the Sorbet line of spathoglottis. These plants are a wonderful improvement on the traditional ground orchid. They flower more frequently, with tighter, brighter clusters of flowers, and they come in mottled varieties of yellow, purple and white. According to Thomas Fennell, orchid division manager for Foremost Co., they thrive in partial shade or full sun, in well-drained potting soil with regular applications of a slow-release fertilizer.

Source: See www.foremostco.com or call 800-421-8986.

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Three more plants from the TPIE. Page 4F

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