

My Monet® (*Weigela florida* 'Verweig') has variegation that changes depending on light exposure — whiter in shade and pinker in full sun.

Thoroughly modern

Formerly a faded favorite, **WEIGELA** has bounced back with colorful foliage and reblooming selections

By Elizabeth Petersen

The old-fashioned, blousy look of weigela was always a traditional favorite in cottage gardens. The charming, trumpet-shaped flowers attract hummingbirds in late spring and early summer, when the hardy shrub produces corymbs of rosy pink flowers.

Despite these positive attributes, however, the spring-blooming landscape shrub waned in popularity for a time, as more exciting, smaller plants swept the market.

Weigela was still grown and it still sold — particularly in the upper Midwest due to cold hardiness in USDA Zones 4 to 9. However, it acquired a ▶



Weigela 'Lemon Ice' blooms much earlier than other cultivars — in late April and May — and lightly reblooms all summer through fall.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VAN ESSEN NURSERY

Plain Jane reputation. Yes, it had pretty blooms, but it didn't stand out in parts of the country where a wider plant palette could grow.

"Weigela bloomed in the spring and remained an uninteresting, green mass for the remainder of the gardening season," said Shannon Springer, public relations and marketing specialist at Spring Meadow Nursery in Grand Haven, Mich.

Since that time, several things have changed in weigela's favor. In the last two decades, new forms have debuted from worldwide breeding programs. These improved varieties are enjoying increased popularity, and the sales to match.

"Weigelas are definitely reliable sellers," said Ken McVicker, sales manager at Vane Essen Nursery Co., a grower of quality branded flowering shrubs in Lebanon, Ore. According to McVicker,

weigelas have moved up over the past few years into the top third of sellers at the nursery.

Dramatic foliage extends the seasons of interest

The big breakthrough in weigelas was the introduction of Wine & Roses® weigela (*Weigela florida* 'Alexandra') about 15 years ago.

Part of the Proven Winners® ColorChoice shrub line, Wine & Roses was the most exciting new variety to hit the market in years. Its name came from its deep, burgundy-purple foliage (the color of wine) and its vivid, deep pink flowers (the color of roses). The purple foliage helps it hold its own in the landscape, even after spring flowers have faded.

"Suddenly, it was worth giving coveted gardening space to weigela,"



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The Sonic Bloom™ series of reblooming weigelas burst with color in May and continue blooming in waves until frost. PHOTO COURTESY OF PROVEN WINNERS

Springer said.

Wine & Roses established itself quickly as a season-long ornamental plant with excellent commercial value. Even out of bloom, the attractive, colorful foliage produces sales.

Other exciting, new forms of weigela have expanded its appeal geographically. The newest versions of these hardy shrubs have greater curb appeal and boast bright, colorful foliage for three-season interest. Leaf colors include bright yellow, copper, burgundy and nearly black. There's also an assortment of variegated forms.

They come in compact sizes to fit smaller landscapes and produce blooms earlier. Perhaps most exciting of all are the longer bloom times.

Reblooming weigelas with great foliage and compact habits — what could be better?

Older varieties are still specified in some commercial work, according to McVicker, but many of the newer varieties — with compact habits, multi-colored and variegated foliage, reblooming and earlier blooming — are definitely changing the landscape.

These aren't your grandma's weigelas anymore.

It's no wonder weigelas sell by the millions. Besides producing volumes of blooms, they thrive in many soil types, take extreme cold and have no serious pest problems. They are easy to propagate, easy to grow and present well in containers. With plenty of sun, the plants produce loads of flowers. Some newer forms even take part-shade.

From Proven Winners

After the breakthrough introduction of Wine & Roses, new Proven Winners weigela varieties have combined great foliage with more compact plants, Springer said.

The wine collection now includes three more selections. All have the same deep, dark foliage color and pink spring flowers, but they range in size from just 10 inches to five feet, so they can be used as anything from a ground-cover to a specimen plant.

Unlike full-size Wine & Roses, Midnight Wine® (*Weigela florida* 'Elvera') has a dwarf, mounded habit. It grows only 8–10 inches tall and twice ▶

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▲ THOROUGHLY MODERN WEIGELA



There's no mistaking where 'Wine & Roses' got its name from; its deep purple foliage is the color of a fine Burgundy, accented with a profusion of rosy blooms. PHOTO COURTESY OF PROVEN WINNERS

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as wide, and needs no pruning. This makes it an excellent, tidy choice for the front of a border or edging a perennial bed. It also makes a great accent plant or a dramatic mass planting.

Spilled Wine™ (*Weigela florida* 'Bokraspiwi') has dark red, wavy leaves and a broad, spreading habit. Its hot pink-magenta flowers are similar to those of Wine & Roses, but the plant only reaches 18–24 inches tall and 2–3 feet wide. The dark foliage has an attractive wavy margin and will not fade to green like some older selections, so it is a good choice for adding color to mass plantings.

Fine Wine® (*Weigela florida* 'Bramwell') has a compact habit of about 2–3 feet tall and wide.

While Wine & Roses continues to be one of the best-selling plants in the whole line of Proven Winners ColorChoice shrubs, other new introductions continue the modern weigela trend.

Ghost™ (*Weigela florida* 'Carlton') produces a very different effect in the garden. Its unusually pale, iridescent buttercream foliage that produces a striking contrast with dark red flowers.

For fans of variegated foliage on very compact plants, selections in the dwarf My Monet® Proven Winners

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series offer unique variegation and very low growth that makes them useful groundcovers.

My Monet (*Weigela florida* 'Verweig') was the first dwarf, variegated weigela. The breakthrough plant has cream, pink and green variegation, grows 10–16 inches tall, and is great in mass plantings. Pretty pink flowers bloom in spring, and colorful foliage provides interest all season long. Depending on light exposure, the variegation changes from whiter shades in less sun to pinker shades in full sun.

My Monet 'Sunset' (*Weigela florida* 'Sunset') offers different foliage color: gold that turns red in fall. Grown primarily for the colorful foliage, it occasionally produces soft, rosy pink flowers.

The latest, most exciting new addition is the arrival of reblooming weigelas. The Sonic Bloom™ series is "easily the biggest thing to happen to weigela since Wine & Roses," Springer said. Introduced by Proven Winners, Sonic Bloom weigelas burst with color — red, pink or pearl — in May and continue blooming in waves until frost. This series of reblooming weigelas hit garden centers this spring.

From Bailey Nurseries

Two weigela introductions from the First Editions® line from Bailey Nurseries arrived at garden centers last spring. Both provide great garden color and are exceptionally easy to grow.

"Weigela is a good example of an old-fashioned flowering shrub that is enjoying a resurgence of interest," said Natalia Hamill, brand and business development manager at Bailey Nurseries.

"As a genus, weigela is getting a lot of attention from breeders and plant introduction companies, so there's a lot of chatter in the trade about the new introductions," she said.

Flowering shrubs as a category are seeing an upswing in interest, Hamill said. Flowering shrubs with more compact habits generate a lot of interest, since they are better suited to smaller gardens.

Shining Sensation™ Weigela ▶



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Burgundy Fire weigela is also known as “Wings of Fire” because of its leaves which start the season with a faint flush of pink color, then acquire red tones in the summer, turning a deep red wine hue in the fall. PHOTO COURTESY OF BALL HORTICULTURAL CO.

(*Weigela florida* ‘Bokrashine’), which reaches 5–6 feet tall and 3–4 feet wide, gets its name from the plant’s shiny burgundy leaves. The unique, polished foliage serves as a beautiful backdrop for an abundant show of pink, funnel-shaped flowers in May and June. Then, the foliage adds rich color to the garden the rest of the season. Shining Sensation also features graceful arching stems that make it an interesting border plant.

Smaller still, Rainbow Sensation™ weigela (*Weigela florida* ‘Kolmagira’) reaches only 3–4 feet tall and wide. It boasts vibrant, lemony-green variegated foliage that can brighten any area of the landscape before and after it blooms. Its leaves are highlighted by compact clusters of soft pink flowers in May.

Perfect in a large container or in the garden, Rainbow Sensation is hardy and requires minimal care. After the profusion of flowers fades, the variegat-

ed foliage tinged with splashes of pink provides a bright spot in the garden, spring through fall.

From LCN Selections

Van Essen Nursery is the exclusive Oregon grower of Weigela Lemon Ice™ (*Weigela florida* ‘Lemiczam’), a 2012 selection from LCN, the patent arm of Lake County Nursery in Perry, Ohio. Lemon Ice produces lemon-yellow flowers, blooms in late April and May — much earlier than other cultivars — and lightly reblooms all summer through fall. Young stems are red, which provides a nice contrast to the green leaves during summer.

From HGTV Home Plant Collection

Burgundy Fire weigela, a new variety from Ball Horticultural Company, is coming out in the new HGTV Home Plant Collection this year. In addition, HGTV has two more reblooming weige-

las, one with red flowers and another with pink, coming soon.

“Get ready for this genus to continue to gain popularity with consumers and landscape trade alike,” said Sarah Hayes of Agricola Management Group, the exclusive licensee for the HGTV Home Plant Collection.

Burgundy Fire claims great foliage. New growth is bronze, and during the growing season the green leaves darken, taking on hues of red until the display peaks in fall. Red stems accent the mounded upright shrub, which grows 3–4 feet tall and wide. Spring blooms are fuchsia and the plant sporadically reblooms. ☺

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