

**Yard and Garden - 03-10-2012 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant**

I'm thrilled. The experts selected one of my favorites as the best for 2012. I have always had an affinity for blue flowers and variegated foliage. In past years, I have featured in my column different plants that either produce blue flowers or have variegated foliage. Last week, a news bulletin from the Perennial Plant Association arrived in my mailbox. The bulletin revealed its selection for the *2012 Perennial Plant of the Year™*. As I said earlier, its choice has been a favorite of mine for several years. Before I share with you the good news about this exciting plant and why I think you should grow it in your yard, I first wish to introduce the Perennial Plant Association.

The Perennial Plant Association, (PPA) is a trade association of members from the United States, Canada and ten other countries. Membership in the PPA includes growers, retailers, educators, garden writers, and members of landscape related industries. This organization is dedicated to the improvement of the herbaceous plant industry by providing education to enhance the production, promotion and utilization of perennial plants. PPA selects only those perennials that are suitable for a wide range of climate types, exhibit low maintenance and have multi-seasonal interest.

I am excited to announce that this year's PPA selection is *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost'. Sometimes this plant is called Siberian bugloss, heartleaf brunnera or false forget-me-not.



The flowers closely resemble those of the annual forget-me-not, *Myosotis scorpioides*, explaining perhaps why brunnera is sometimes called false forget-me-not. The leaves of 'Jack Frost' are heart shaped and intricately detailed with a crackle-like finish. Though the leaves are dark green, they have a heavily frosted overlay allowing only the green veins to be visible, creating a dazzling

For several years, when I have been asked what perennial plant would I recommend to grow in the landscape, *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost' has been one at the top of my list. This plant is a real showstopper, and it grows wonderfully well in central Nebraska. Its beauty is two-fold. In early-to-mid-spring, bright, delicate clusters of sky blue flowers are gracefully held above its shimmering foliage.



variegated look.

‘Jack Frost’ grows only twelve to fifteen inches in height and spreads to about twenty inches. It makes an excellent ground cover or does well in containers. It is intolerant of drought conditions and should be grown in a shaded area. Morning sun is acceptable as long as the soil remains moist. It fits along the front of a shade border. ‘Jack Frost’ is an excellent companion plant to hostas, coral-bells, bleeding heart and painted fern. Since deer and slugs do not bother brunnera, it can also make a nice alternative to hostas. Caution: If grown in the sun and under dry conditions, it will easily exhibit leaf scorch.

Nearly five years ago, Rita and I received this cultivar of brunnera as a gift and planted it in our landscape. With each passing year, it becomes more beautiful. Our original plant now reaches a diameter of at least twenty inches. We found it to be so attractive that over the past couple years we have purchased more ‘Jack Frosts’ for the yard.

Cultural care is minimal. Cut back the old foliage in the spring rather than in the fall. It will help to protect the crown during the winter. Winter mulch is also recommended. *Brunnera macrophylla*, including the cultivar, ‘Jack Frost’, can be root divided. Spring is the best time to divide.

This spring, we plan to divide our original plant for the first time. Since ‘Jack Frost’ is an early spring flowering perennial, I plan to wait to divide until after the plant blooms. If divided too early, I would sacrifice those beautiful sky blue flowers—the color I love so well. Thanks PPA for selecting my choice.