

WHS Plant Notes for February 2012

Crassula streyi (Crassulaceae)

Grown by Dick Dunmire in Los Altos:

In nature, this rare succulent grows only in a couple of preserves on the east coast of South Africa, always in shade and near water, usually in humus-rich pockets of soil on sandstone cliff faces, and occasionally on the forest floor in leaf litter. It's a relatively slow grower that can grow about a foot tall but is more likely to sprawl and spread as the stems root where they contact soil. Its oval leaves are glossy, dark green above and bright wine-red below. These contrasting colors are at their best in shade. In sun, the colors pale and the plant is less vigorous overall. In some forms, the upper leaf surfaces have attractive white spots along the veins. Like most other crassulas, its leaves have specialized pores that absorb moisture from the leaf surface taking advantage of dew and fog as water sources. In other plants, these pores expel excess water but crassulas seem to have reversed their function. Dick's plant was flowering with an airy spray of small, starry, white flowers. He has found it very easy to grow given fast drainage and protection from frost. It is happiest in shade and will even do well in deep shade, which should make it a good houseplant choice.

Helleborus niger 'White Magic' (Ranunculaceae) Christmas Rose

Grown by Betsy Clebsch in La Honda:

This is hellebore season. Betsy brought a collection from her garden that included this beautiful cultivar selected by a New Zealand nurseryman and originally thought to be a hybrid with *H. orientalis*. It is a particularly beautiful form of *H. niger* with larger, pure white flowers to 3 in. across on long stems that hold them well above its leathery foliage. They become tinged with pink as they age. Their long bloom season lasts from early winter into spring. Christmas rose is native to Europe and grows well for us given supplemental irrigation, decent drainage and shade to dappled shade. Like other hellebores, it prefers the slight alkalinity of our soils. Betsy's collection included a green-flowered hellebore, an *H. x sternii*, and a selection with very dark purple flowers. Hellebores have been the subjects of extensive hybridization efforts in recent years with a phenomenal number of new introductions as a result. Some of the best were featured in the January 2007 and 2008 issues of *Pacific Horticulture*.

Lilium 'Scheherazade' (Liliaceae)

Grown by Barbara Worl in Menlo Park:

Barbara brought the skeletal remains of this very impressive lily. It's an Orienpet hybrid (Oriental x Trumpet) and an inductee into the North American Lily Society's Hall of Fame. It puts up remarkably sturdy, 4- to 7-ft-tall stems that begin blooming in June and may continue until well into fall. The flowers are burgundy with gold edging that widens and fades to white as the flower ages. They are large, 8 to 10 in. across, with recurved tepals and a mild fragrance. They're easy to grow in full sun to part shade with regular irrigation. Barbara has been growing it about 10 years now and it has naturalized beautifully among her roses.

Magnolia maudiae, syn. *Michelia maudiae* (Magnoliaceae)

Grown by Daxin Liu in Mountain View:

This exceptional magnolia is native to evergreen, broad-leaved forests across a wide area of southern China. It has been widely cultivated in China but is a relatively recent introduction to US gardens. Daxin got his plant about 5 years ago from Cistus Nursery up in the Portland area and it's blooming now for the first time. The flowers are snow white, nicely fragrant, and about 6 in. across with 9 broad tepals. They bloom prolifically all along the stems at the leaf axils. The leaves are glossy, dark green and 5 to 7 in. long. In gardens, it will probably grow 20 to 30 ft tall. It takes full sun to part shade; prefers well-drained, humus-rich soil; and will need regular irrigation during our dry season. It's said to be hardy to 15°F.

Montanoa grandiflora (Asteraceae) Daisy Tree

Grown by Dick Dunmire:

This is a large shrub from cool forests of southern Mexico. It grows quickly to 12 to 15 ft tall and wide with large, deeply lobed leaves creating an excellent, tropical-looking, privacy screen. It usually comes into bloom around Thanksgiving covering itself with sprays of yellow-centered, white daisies with a strong vanilla fragrance. Dick brought us some of the interesting, lime green seed heads that decorate the shrub through winter. They are equally fragrant but with a resinous scent that reminds Dick of *Tagetes lemmonii*. After flowering, it can be cut back hard and still be big enough to provide total privacy by summer. It's at its best with full sun, cool temperatures, and moderate summer irrigation. Early frosts may damage the flowers but the plant is hardy to about 20° F.

Polygonum multiflorum, syn. *Fallopia multiflora* (Polygonaceae) Fo Ti

Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose:

This plant reminds us to be careful what we bring home and set free. Katie bought it from the Sasos' nursery several years ago. It is native to central and southern China and has long been used in folk medicine to treat almost anything that could plague a person from graying hair to impotence to cancer. It's a perennial vine that grows from large, woody tubers, the source of the active ingredient. The little plant escaped its 4 in. pot and, in the intervening years, has invaded more than half her garden.

Sarcococca hookeriana (Buxaceae) Sweet Box, Christmas Box

Grown by Katie Wong:

This is a quietly beautiful, evergreen shrub. It is rhizomatous, developing a compact clump of upright, somewhat arching stems. The leaves are lance-shaped, glossy, dark green and about 3 to 4 in. long. It slowly grows to about 5 ft tall and 6 ft wide. It's monoecious and blooms in winter with clusters of small, creamy white flowers at the leaf axils. They're very fragrant with their sweet scent carrying some distance even on winter days. The fruits are black berries. It is native to cool, moist forests in the Himalayan region. It looks best grown in cool, deep to partial shade with regular moisture in well-drained, fertile soil; but it will tolerate dry shade and, with enough water, full sun. It's said to be deer resistant.

~Jackie Doda~

Resources: *Am. Hort. Soc. A-Z Encyclopedia*, *Botanica*, *Flora*, *Sunset Western Garden Book*, and many websites.