

## WHS Plant Notes for April 2012

### ***Conophytum bilobum*** (Aizoaceae) Cone Plant, Rabbit Ears

Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose:

Katie's cute little succulent is native to western South Africa where it grows in porous soil and gets some rain in winter. The above ground part is actually a fused pair of fleshy leaves that are separated at the top of the plant. Robust plants can be about 2 ½ in. tall and 1 in. thick. The separated lobes are about ⅓ of the plant's height. They're roughly triangular and there's a small gap between them where a single flower will emerge in autumn. The flowers are large, up to 2 in. across, with scores of bright yellow, narrow petals. Winter is their season to bulk up for summer dormancy. When the weather warms in spring, they start making new leaves inside the old ones. As the new ones grow, the old ones serve as a protective cover and are consumed for nutrients and water until just the shriveled, dry skin remains around the base of the new plant. It will bloom in autumn and repeat the process. People who grow Conophytums say they are very easy and that *C. bilobum* is the easiest of all. They need fast draining soil and either full sun or, especially in summer, bright shade. They're said to be hardy to about 28° F. Water them in fall and winter after the old leaves have dried and then leave them alone except for light mistings in summer.

### ***Delphinium spp.*** (Ranunculaceae)

Grown by Sally Casey in San Jose:

Sally brought a couple of native larkspurs that she grew from seeds she collected locally. Naturally, she has a collecting permit. Both of her larkspurs are winter-growing, spring-blooming, summer-dormant perennials that grow from tuberous roots. They want little or no water during their summer dormancy. ***D. nudicaule*** (Canyon or Red Larkspur) is usually found growing on rocky north or east slopes near streams or springs. They were blooming beautifully at Pacchetti Ranch this week, but the best display I've seen in our area was on the slope across from the platform overlooking the waterfall at Castle Rock. Their orangish-red, tubular flowers bloom on slender, upright stems up to 2 ft tall. They're held well away from the stem on long, thin pedicels. Mature stems can have up to 30 flowers. Unlike most larkspurs, which are bee pollinated, these flowers are adapted for hummingbird pollination. The flowers never open as widely as other larkspurs and the lower sepals aren't expanded to provide the bees a landing platform. Red larkspur is worth growing just for its basal leaves. They're a nice blue-grey-green with a tinge of maroon around the margins and a creamy white dot where the rounded lobes meet each other. In spite of their preference for rocky, well-drained soil, they will grow well in clay soil. ***D. patens*** (Spreading or Zigzag Larkspur) is usually found in grasslands or at their margins in shady or open areas. It blooms with about 25 or more stunning, deep blue flowers on 1- to 2-ft tall stems. All parts of larkspurs are very toxic, so deer and gophers leave them alone.

### ***Rosa 'Rubens'*** (Rosaceae)

Grown by Virginia Kean in Redwood City:

'Rubens' has been one of the most pest- and disease-free roses in Virginia's collection. The rose curculio beetle even leaves it alone. It is an Old Tea rose, hybridized in France

by Moreau-Robert and introduced in 1859. Virginia's is about 5 ft tall and wide with graceful, arching stems. Its blossoms are about 3 ½ in. across, very fragrant and fully double with lightly ruffled, creamy white petals blushed with pearl pink. They nod in the typical fashion of Old Teas and are usually solitary or in clusters of 2 or 3. They bloom on new wood and new shoots from second year wood and rebloom in flushes for 10 months of the year. In fact, Virginia has shown us 'Rubens' once before, and that was in November. Tea roses grow well for us. They thrive in our climate and our clay soil.

***Salvia heldreichiana*** (Lamiaceae)

Grown by Richard Tiede in east San Jose:

Richard had a terrific, rarely cultivated sage. It is a hardy, evergreen shrub that's endemic to Turkey. In Richard's garden it has grown into a 3-ft mound with fragrant, grey-green foliage. From spring through summer, it's covered with large, bright bluish-purple flowers blooming in whorls along branched stems. It has been reported to grow well in full sun or part shade and to be happy in clay soil and as a container plant. Suncrest Nursery includes it on their list of plants with significant drought tolerance. Richard's has never set seeds, which could be due to any of several factors. Sterile hybrid is not the only choice. Fortunately, cuttings work very well and are easy.

***Wisteria floribunda cvs*** (Fabaceae) Japanese Wisteria

Grown by Nancy Schramm in Gilroy:

Japanese wisteria usually has longer leaves and longer flower clusters than the more frequently planted Chinese wisteria. It also blooms for a longer time as the flowers usually open in sequence from the raceme's base to its tip instead of opening all at once as Chinese wisteria does. It's easy to grow in full sun with moderate water and will probably never need fertilizer in our clay soil. It's a long-lived, vigorous, heavy vine so the hard part is supporting its weight and keeping it pruned within some reasonable bounds. Nancy brought a couple of beautiful cultivars. ***W. f. 'Big Johnny'*** is an old cultivar that's growing at Filoli. It blooms with large, purple flowers in clusters up to 18 in. long. ***W. f. 'Violacea Plena'*** is also an old cultivar, dating back to the late 1800's. Its flowers are double and deep violet blue on 10- to 16-in.-long racemes. The doubled blossoms give a beautiful, fluffy look to the flower clusters. They have a nice, light fragrance. The foliage of 'Violacea Plena' is said to be the most likely of the wisterias to develop good, yellow autumn color.

~Jackie Doda~

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