

WHS PLANT NOTES OCTOBER 2012

Amsonia hubrichtii (Apocynaceae) Arkansas Blue Star, Thread Leaf Blue Star

Grown by Barbara Worl in Menlo Park:

Barbara has been growing this unusual perennial for about 8 or 9 years and has grown very fond of it. It makes a dense clump of rather erect stems about 2 to 3 ft tall and wide. The stems are covered with long, very narrow leaves creating a soft-textured, feathery effect. They bloom in late spring with terminal panicles of powder blue, starry flowers. During summer, its delicate, light green foliage is a nice companion for the summer blooms of its neighbors. Then, in fall, it becomes a billowy mound of bright yellow color often tinged with pumpkin orange. The color lasts a long time until the stems die to the ground for winter. It's long-lived and easy to grow in any decently drained soil with regular to moderate irrigation in sun to part shade. The best fall color develops in full sun and too much shade makes it flop. The consensus among those who grow it is that it should be cut back by half or at least a third after it blooms. The stems quickly regrow and the pruning promotes a nicely compact, upright mound—and eliminates reseeding. They also advise patience. It may look straggly for 2 or 3 years until it establishes and takes on its role in the landscape

Begonia 'Leprechaun' (Begoniaceae)

Grown by Judy Wong in Menlo Park:

This cute little dwarf begonia grows about 1 ft tall and wide. It is rhizomatous with leaves rising from their closely spaced nodes creating a dense, compact mass of foliage. Its leaves are chocolate green with chartreuse splotches between the veins. The leaf margins are toothed, slightly ruffled and edged with long “eyelashes”. It blooms sporadically with a few pale pink flowers in winter. It is said to be sturdy and easy to grow as a houseplant or as an outdoor container plant.

Gomphocarpus physocarpus (Apocynaceae) Balloon Plant Milkweed, Family Jewels Tree, Hairy Balls

Grown by Judy Wong:

This is a tall, slender milkweed that will grow 6 ft or taller and about 3 ft wide with long, narrow, light green foliage that Monarch caterpillars love. Small, white flowers in drooping clusters bloom in summer. They're not particularly showy but are very attractive to butterflies. The most striking

feature for gardeners is the balloon-like, lime-green seed pods 2 to 3 in. across and covered with soft bristles. They ripen to tan in autumn and split to release large numbers of silky-haired seeds to be wind dispersed. It's native to tropical southeastern Africa. In 2001 all African milkweeds were moved from *Asclepias* to *Gomphocarpus*. Only the New World milkweeds are still classified in *Asclepias*.

Parrotia persica (Hamamelidaceae) Persian Ironwood

Grown by Dick Dunmire in Los Altos: This tree is native to Northern Iran and the Caucasus. It has something to recommend it in every season. Dick's tree is glorious right now in exquisite autumn shades of yellow, orange, scarlet and purple. It has smooth gray bark that flakes on older branches to create a gray, tan, green and white mosaic that provides interest in winter. It flowers while the branches are bare. Clusters of red stamens in woolly, brown bracts are small but noticeable by dint of their numbers and bright color. The young spring leaves are reddish purple. Mature leaves are glossy rich green, broadly oval, about 5 in. long with undulating margins. It grows slowly to 15 to 30 ft tall and wide. Left untrained, it branches low and will develop multiple trunks with age. It accepts full sun or part shade and any soil, although fall color is said to be best in slightly acidic soils. Dick's has been very tough. It survives with only winter rain and is holding its own surrounded by giant bamboo.

Plectranthus argentatus (Lamiaceae) Silver Plectranthus, Silver Spurflower

Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose:

This Australian native is grown for its beautiful foliage. It's a fast growing, sub-shrub that gets to about 3 ft tall and 6 ft wide with an upright spreading habit. Its soft, textured leaves are about 5 in. long, 3 in. wide and grey-green covered with silvery fuzz. It blooms summer into fall with long, slender racemes of small, bluish white flowers. It's best with some afternoon shade or dappled sun but is fine in full sun or even dark shade. It's not fussy about soil and accepts regular to occasional irrigation. It's hardy and evergreen to about 25° F and may resprout from the base after going as low as 20° F.

Psidium cattleianum (Myrtaceae) Strawberry Guava

Grown by Katie Wong :

Strawberry guava is a native of Brazil. It has been available in California since about 1870 and has been a very popular fruit tree among homeowners

through all those many years—as much for its ornamental value as for its fruit which is sweeter and less musky than the tropical guava. For us, it usually grows as a multistem shrub about 8 to 10 ft tall and wide. It has very beautiful, reddish to golden brown, peeling bark. Young leaves are bronze aging to leathery, glossy, dark green. Its flowers are typical of the myrtle family with 5 white petals and a multitude of protruding stamens. It produces 1-in. round fruit that ripens from fall into winter becoming a nearly black, deep burgundy when fully ripe. They're good for jam, jelly, ice cream, drinks and desserts but are usually eaten out of hand after removing the leathery sepals at the bottom. There are a number of small, very hard seeds in the center that you might as well just swallow whole. They're easy to grow in any soil in full sun to part shade, pest and disease free, amenable to being hedged and hardy down to about 22° F. Regular irrigation is needed for proper fruit development and ripening. There is a variant that is a much larger, slightly less cold hardy plant with slightly larger, slightly sweeter, yellow fruit.

***Rosa* 'Soleil d'Or' (Rosaceae)**

Grown by Barbara Worl:

This rose was introduced in 1900 and was the breakthrough that introduced a whole new color range into modern roses. Hybrid Teas in all those shades of bright yellow, orange, apricot, salmon, copper and scarlet can trace their colors back to this rose. It was bred in France by Joseph Pernet-Ducher who wanted to breed deep yellow color into a repeat blooming rose. He managed to get a few viable seeds from a cross of the nearly sterile *R. foetida persiana*, a double yellow rose, with 'Antoine Ducher', a red-flowered Perpetual Hybrid. Although this cross certainly led to 'Soleil d'Or', authorities now believe that it didn't come from this first generation of seeds but was probably a chance F2 seedling. It blooms in spring and fall with large, very full, cupped flowers in rich orange-yellow often shaded with pink. They have a strong fragrance of orange juice. The shrub is very upright to about 4 ft tall. Unfortunately, high susceptibility to blackspot travelled along with the color genes. Barbara overlooks the diseased leaves out of appreciation for the rose's historical significance and hides them as much as possible with other plants.

***Salvia* 'Wendy's Wish' (Lamiaceae) Wendy's Wish Sage**

Grown by Barbara Worl:

'Wendy's Wish' is a terrific new sage that popped up in a garden in Australia in 2005 and has been available in the U. S. since 2009. It is a hybrid; but, since the garden's owner is a big fan of sages, there were many potential parents. Based on the large size and rich magenta color of the corolla, most experts suspect *S. buchananii* played a role, and the pinkish brown calyces may implicate *S. splendens*. It blooms like crazy from spring till frost on long, dark maroon stems that stand well above the beautiful, glossy foliage. It is evergreen, has a tidy, compact habit and Betsy says to expect it to grow about 5 ft tall. It's said to accept sun to part shade, average to moderate irrigation, temperatures down to 25°F and to perform exceptionally well in containers.

~Jackie Doda~

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