

## WHS Plant Notes for January 2013



*Frankenia thymifolia*

Photo: florademadrid.blogspot.com

### *Frankenia thymifolia* (Frankeniaceae) Sea Heath

Grown by Nancy Schramm in Gilroy: Nancy went collecting in Betsy Clebsch's garden in La Honda last year and was very happy to find this wonderful ground cover growing there. Ed Carman, expert plantsman, one of our founders and Nancy's father, had grown it, but it had disappeared somehow from the nursery. It is a sub-shrub native to southern Spain and northern Africa where it grows in tough saline soils. It makes a fine-textured mat of creeping stems densely foliated with small leaves with rolled margins. The overall impression is that of creeping thyme. It's a small-scale ground cover spreading

about 1 to 2 ft. The stems will root as they grow and can build on themselves to eventually reach 6 to 8 in. high. It blooms in summer with small, rose-pink, 5-petaled flowers. It is evergreen and the foliage will often develop a reddish tint in cold weather. Betsy has been growing it for 20 years. It has special meaning for her as it was given to her by the founders of Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery. She has it in full sun in the fenced area of her garden where it receives some water during our dry season and tolerates some light foot traffic. It self sows for her but is not in any way invasive about it.



*Leucojum vernum*

Photo: lepidoptera.butterflyhouse.com.au

### *Leucojum vernum* (Amaryllidaceae) Spring Snowflake

(photo) Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose: This sweet, little bulb is native to damp woods and meadows of Central Europe where it often blooms in huge sweeps just as the snow begins to melt. It has become naturalized in many other regions. It has dark green, narrow, strap-shaped leaves about 8-10" tall. The flower scapes grow a little taller and bear one or sometimes two nodding, white bells a little less than an inch wide. Each tepal has a bright green dot at its tip. They have a nice scent similar to violets, which, I assume, accounts for their genus name, which translates to "white violet." They bloom winter into spring. The foliage will yellow and die by summer and, of course, should not be cut back before that.

They accept any soil including clay, prefer partial to bright shade, and need adequate moisture during growth and bloom. They will tolerate drier soil during dormancy but it shouldn't dry out completely. Clumps expand by offsets and will thrive and bloom for many years left undisturbed, or they can be lifted, divided and immediately replanted about 4" deep in autumn. All parts are poisonous, which means deer, gophers and rodents leave them alone. The bad news is that they're adapted for a climate with a definite cold season. In most of our gardens, they're more likely to just dwindle away instead of naturalizing. But *L. aestivum* is said to tolerate our mild climate and is very similar. It grows a little taller and has 3 to 5 flowers per stem.



*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*

Drawing: commons.wikimedia.com

### *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* (Araceae) ZZ Plant, Money Plant

(photo) Grown by Dick Dunmire in Los Altos: Dick's plant had a single, lonely leaf but he brought it to share what he called its saga of grit and determination. This leaf had been sticking out from the pot at an awkward angle, so he cut it off and stuck it into a dry vase instead of the trash. Months passed before someone pointed out that it was growing roots. It took another month or two for Dick to get around to at least putting some water in the vase. After more months passed and it continued to live and grow roots, Dick finally decided to give it some soil too. His story is illustrative of why ZZ plant has built a solid reputation as an easy, nearly unkillable houseplant. It is native to grasslands and forests in eastern Africa from Kenya to South Africa, primarily in Zanzibar and Tanzania. It was first described about one hundred years ago, and had kicked around as a collector's plant until Dutch nurseries began making it widely available in 1996. Its good looks and easy care made it a very popular houseplant in almost no time.

It grows with an upright, arching habit. What appear to be leafy stems are actually compound leaves growing from underground tuberous rhizomes. They're usually divided into six to eight pairs of very glossy, dark green leaflets. It's a slow grower indoors but can eventually reach three or four feet tall. It will tolerate very low light and long periods without water; however, it's going to be its best in bright light and well-drained soil that's allowed to dry out a bit between waterings. The tubers rot when the soil is kept too wet. Give it a little dilute fertilizer once in a while, a lukewarm shower when it gets dusty, and a winter rest with reduced water. It seems to be totally pest free. Its name refers to its resemblance to the *Zamia* cycads, but it is an aroid with the characteristic spathe and spadix inflorescence. It has some very interesting, un-aroid features though. First, there are the dicot-like, pinnately divided leaves. Next, it can make new plants from dropped leaflets. The leaflets will grow roots and a little tuber, which will then sprout a new compound leaf. This can take up to a year. And, it's the only aroid known to respond to drought stress by turning on a metabolic pathway called Crassulacean Acid Metabolism (CAM). This adaptation is most commonly seen in cacti and succulents. It enables a plant to conserve water by taking up and chemically storing CO<sub>2</sub> during the relatively cool, humid, nighttime hours and then releasing it for photosynthesis during the day with the stomata closed.

~Jackie Doda~

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