

WHS Plant Notes for April 2013

Chamelaucium X 'Lady Stephanie' (Myrtaceae) Geraldton Waxflower

Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose: Members of this genus are native to the dry summer region of southwestern Australia. 'Lady Stephanie' appeared as a chance seedling in a nursery and is believed to be a hybrid of *C. uncinatum* and *C. floriferum*. In nature, both of these species are found in sandy, coastal soils. 'Lady Stephanie' is an evergreen shrub that can grow 6 to 7 ft tall and wide. Its stems are densely foliaged with needle-like leaves about 1.5 in. long and pungently fragrant when crushed. It blooms from early spring into summer in showy clusters of small, light pink flowers that age to deep pink. They're similar to tea tree flowers. They're good for cut arrangements and will last at least a week in a vase. Keeping it alive for an extended time in the garden is challenging. It prefers sun or part shade and is very drought tolerant once it's established. It can handle only light frosts. Excellent drainage is non-negotiable. It can be grown in containers but, even there, a potting mix formulated for cactus and succulents would be a good choice.

Dendrobium speciosum (Orchidaceae) Rock Orchid, Rock Lily

Grown by Dick Dunmire in Los Altos: This is a spectacular, evergreen orchid that's widespread along the east coast of Australia and grows on rocks and tree branches. It makes huge, spreading clumps of pseudo-bulbs that can grow to 3 ft with 2 to 5 leathery, dark green leaves to 10 in. long. They usually bloom late winter into spring developing impressive 2 ft long inflorescences that can be crowded with over 100 white to deep yellow blooms in a sort of foxtail effect. The flowers on Dick's plant are a beautiful snow white. They are very fragrant during the day with a scent usually described as spicy or musky. This is a robust, undemanding orchid that can handle temperatures that dip into the 20s. You should probably grow it in a pot with orchid bark but it could be interesting to try it on a rock. Plants can take 10 to 12 years to reach blooming size, which makes it an orchid for the patient devotee or one willing to pay the price for an older plant.

Fagus sylvatica 'Purpurea' (Fagaceae) Copper Beech, Purple Beech

Grown by Dick Dunmire: The European beech is native throughout Europe to the Caucasus. Copper beeches are purple-leaved mutants that have cropped up many times in different parts of Europe. There are references to them as early as 1488. It's a beautiful, long-lived specimen tree that, depending on conditions, may grow 60 to 100 ft or more. It has a low-branching, round-headed, oval canopy and a smooth, silvery-gray trunk. The leaves are glossy with wavy margins. They emerge reddish bronze in spring, mature to dark purple by summer, and turn coppery in fall. The leaves on juvenile growth turn golden brown in fall and stay on the tree through winter. This trait has helped make it popular for hedges. Since shearing stimulates production of juvenile growth, the hedges never go deciduous—they just shift colors. Copper beech prefers full sun and any moist soil with very good drainage.



***Dendrobium speciosum*, Rock Orchid, Rock Lily**

Photo: Margaret Morgan of Sydney, Australia;
sites.google.com/site/monocotyledon/nativeorchids

Margaret notes: Not local to my region [in Australia], this orchid comes from a little further north. This is the first year that neither the insects nor the possums got the flowers! This photo might be a little misleading. The flowers are small—only about 2cm in width. Very delicate.

Lobelia excelsa (Campanulaceae) Chilean Lobelia, Devil's Tobacco

Grown by Ted Kipping in San Francisco: Ted showed this lobelia last month but with the name *L. tupa*. When Ted realized the mistake, the plant notes had already gone out. Both species are native to the same habitats in Central Chile and their ranges overlap with *L. tupa* extending farther south and *L. excelsa* a little farther north. Their cultural needs and hardiness will be similar. *L. excelsa* grows quickly to 6 ft tall, or taller if given regular irrigation in fertile soil. If neglected, it will become very gangly and leggy. Its stems are clothed in long, oval, mid-green leaves. It blooms from spring to fall with dozens of orange-red, 3-in.-long flowers on leafy spikes to 10 in. long.

Pelargonium x hortorum 'Carmel' (Geraniaceae)

Grown by Judy Wong in Menlo Park: Zonal pelargoniums are complex hybrids that can involve several South African species, but primarily *P. inquinans* and *P. zonale*. They are tough, colorful garden plants and most of us live in Sunset zones where they grow very well. They like warm, dry days and cool nights, sun to part shade, well-drained soil and moderate irrigation. 'Carmel' has large trusses of lovely, 1 in. wide, single, white flowers with a thin, deep pink edge that bleeds a bit into the white. Its leaves are light green with a darker border. It's an old cultivar that was a sport of 'Alice of Vincennes' that has a paler petal edge. It was introduced by William Schmidt, an important local nurseryman who had a special interest in pelargoniums and fuchsias, and who was one of our founders.



Pelargonium x hortorum 'Carmel'
Photo: Jill Black, labellcats.se/us.htm

Polygonatum odoratum 'Variegatum' (Ruscaceae) Striped Solomon's Seal

Grown by Judy Wong: This is one the best perennials for shady gardens. It is native to areas of Europe and Asia. In spring, it puts up 2- to 3 ft-tall graceful, arching stems lined on both sides with pretty soft green and oval leaves that are about 4 in. long. The young stems are tinged with maroon. In this cultivar, the leaf margins are variegated with white markings that streak back from the leaf tips. In spring, pairs of white bells with a subtle, lily-like fragrance dangle from the leaf axils. They are followed by berries that ripen blue-black in fall. Its leaves turn bright yellow in fall before the stems die to the ground for winter. They spread slowly by rhizomes just below the soil and under good conditions will become a 3 ft wide colony in about five years. It is very, very easy to grow. It accepts part shade to full, dense shade and prefers moist, woodland soil, but accepts anything from dry-ish to wet.

Vestia foetida (Solanaceae) Chilean Box Thorn

Grown by Judy Wong: This is a very interesting evergreen shrub from the foothills of the Andes and the coast of Central Chile where it's usually found growing in moist thickets. It's reported to be uncommon in the wild. It grows about 6 to 8 ft tall and wide with erect stems covered with glossy, dark green leaves that are reported to have a bit of an unpleasant odor when they're bruised. Pretty yellow flowers hang from the stems from spring to late summer. They're about 1.5 in. long and tubular, with short, flaring lobes and protruding stamens. It is said to tolerate full sun and some dryness, but it will be much happier with at least moderate irrigation and protection from hot sun. It should be hardy well into the mid-20s.

~Jackie Doda~

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