

WHS Plant Notes for January 2014

Acmella oleracea (Asteraceae) Eyeball Plant, Toothache Plant

Grown by Katy Wong in San Jose: This unusual little perennial is thought to have originated in the Peruvian or Brazilian Amazon but is now widely cultivated, especially in Asia and Africa. It is a mound of attractive, glossy, dark green leaves 12 to 18 in. tall and wide. Its blossoms are compact, round flowerheads to $\frac{3}{4}$ in. across with only disk florets. Tiny maroon florets bloom from the center of the disk and mature to yellow creating a yellow eyeball with a red iris. They are held above the foliage on dark purplish stems. It's very easy to grow in full sun with regular waterings and makes an excellent container plant. There are many other reasons for its widespread cultivation. Its leaves are used for seasoning and are eaten raw in salads and as cooked greens. As one of its common names indicates, chewing the leaves and especially the flowers numbs the mouth for a while and eases toothaches. It has a long history of use in traditional medicine to treat a long list of conditions.

Camellia japonica 'Miss Charleston' (Theaceae)

Grown by Virginia Kean in Redwood City: Yes, 'Miss Charleston' was named to honor Charleston, SC. It was introduced to the trade by a South Carolina nurseryman in 1963 and was one of the most popular camellia cultivars for many, many years. The flowers can range from a loose peony form to semi-double and are beautiful, deep scarlet red. Virginia's are lightly variegated with occasional white streaking. It has been in bloom for about 3 weeks now and probably will continue through March. She's growing it in a container where it has a graceful, arching habit. Set free in the ground it can slowly grow to be a small tree. It has proven to be a tough, easily grown selection.

Capparis spinosa var. *inermis* (Capparidaceae) Caper, Caperbush

Grown by Nancy Schramm in Gilroy: Nancy had a tub crammed with baby caper plants that she started from seeds. She says using very fresh seeds is the key to success with capers. Drying them for storage induces a dormancy that can be hard to break, but a very high percentage of fresh seeds from ripe pods will germinate in about 2 weeks. The seedlings have weak, thready roots so Nancy lets them grow quite a bit before potting them up. It's reported that seed-grown plants can take up to 4 years before they flower. It flowers profusely from May into September and the pickled or salted buds are a necessity in traditional Mediterranean cooking. It is perfectly adapted to our climate and only needs a hot, sunny spot that's safe from being overwatered to thrive here.

Coreopsis gigantea (Asteraceae) Giant Coreopsis

Grown by Ted Kipping in San Francisco: You'll see this plant growing on the Channel Islands and along our coast from San Diego County up to around San Luis Obispo County. Its curious form is easily recognized, even at highway speeds. It has a thick main trunk with short, stout branches that are topped by shaggy mops of lacy, bright green foliage. From late winter into spring masses of 3-in.-wide, yellow daisies bloom above the foliage. The leaves die with summer drought and hang on the plant until new ones grow with the fall rains. Ted's plant has grown into an impressive 6- to 7-ft specimen. Ted also brought a cluster of rose-pink and chartreuse, narrowly bell-shaped flowers and the opened seed pods crowded with bright orange-red seeds from a *Bomarea edulis* (Alstoemeriaceae) that he collected at 10k ft somewhere in Meso-America. Its twining stems grow to about 8 ft tall from tuberous roots and, from about May through December, terminate with a large, open, somewhat pendant umbel of up to 25 striking flowers. And Ted brought *Fuchsia paniculata* (Onagraceae). These are gorgeous plants that bloom with huge panicles packed with small, bright pink buds and flowers. They usually grow about 14 ft tall, but somewhere in Mexico he found and collected starting material for one that grows to 25 ft tall and 30 ft wide. And he brought *Salvia karwinskii* (Lamiaceae) a winter-blooming salvia with spires of red blooms

in dark red calyces. In the garden it usually grows about 6 to 8 ft tall. A seedling from Ted's plant has grown to 15 ft.

***Crassula ovata* 'Christmas Cheer'** (Crassulaceae) Christmas Cheer Jade Plant

Grown by Dick Dunmire in Los Altos: Jade plant is native to South Africa. It is an outstanding container plant indoors or out and is hardy enough that many of us can plant it in the landscape. It's fine in light shade to full sun with protection from very hot sun, and it prefers to be kept on the dry side, especially in winter. It's covered with clusters of small, starry flowers through the winter. The flowers of 'Christmas Cheer' are a very showy shade of rosy pink.

Euphorbia californica (Euphorbiaceae)

Grown by Judy Wong in Menlo Park: This is an open, often tortuously branched, desert shrub that's native to Baja and to the mainland along the east side of the Gulf of California. It can grow to about 6 ft tall with small, rounded leaves on long, very slender petioles. Small, yellowish-green flowers with their interesting euphorbia structure bloom sporadically through the year. Judy was advised to 'grow it hard', giving it the sunniest, hottest site possible and letting it go dry between waterings.

Iris germanica (Iridaceae) German Iris

Grown by Roberta Barnes in Los Altos: Roberta has irises in full, gorgeous bloom right now. They are reblooming, or remontant, bearded irises that bloom as usual in spring and then will complete another cycle of growth and bloom in the same year, usually in late summer or fall. The suite of genes that control this trait has always been passing around among bearded irises, so there has always been some percentage of rebloomers in the population. However, for the past 15 or so years, hybridizers have been selecting and registering rebloomers with great enthusiasm. Expression of the trait is genetically controlled but is also very dependent on climate and care. Our mild climate gives us a head start. Beyond that, sources advise making sure they get watered during summer, deadheading their spent flowers and feeding them before and after their spring bloom and again in September. Roberta brought two beautiful samples. 'Autumn Wine' grows about 25 in. tall with large, ruffled blossoms with wine red standards and velvety, deep burgundy falls. She has lost the name of the other one, a pure white beauty with delicate, blue-purple veining and edges. It's very similar to 'Autumn Circus'.

***Leucadendron* x 'Wilson's Wonder'** (Proteaceae) Conebush

Grown by Pat Knight in Los Altos Hills: Leucadendrons are dioecious, evergreen shrubs native to South Africa. 'Wilson's Wonder' is a male offspring from a *L. salignum* x *laureolum* cross made in New Zealand. It's a bushy, compact grower to about 4 ft. high x 6 ft. wide with leathery, medium green leaves and bronzy-red stems. In winter and into early spring, the stems terminate in showy, creamy-yellow bracts that surround a cone-like cluster of small, yellow flowers. The bracts usually develop an orange-red blush as they age and Pat says hers is just starting to blush. This cultivar is especially easy and trouble-free if given well-drained, lean soil in a sunny location. It's hardy to at least 20°F.

Quercus macrocarpa (Fagaceae) Bur Oak

Shown by Abby Garner: Abby's mother returned from a trip to Missouri with bur oak acorns. Bur oak is deciduous, in the white oak group and grows natively in a large swath in the middle of the US where it sometimes reaches massive size and bears the largest acorns of any North American oak. They are about 1½ in. long and have caps with a curly fringe that cover about ¾ or more of their length. Mary Kaye said that one is growing in the Redwood Grove next to Shoup Park in Los Altos.

~Jackie Doda~ Resources: *Am. Hort. Soc. A-Z Encyclopedia, Botanica, California Native Plants for the Garden, Flora, The New Book of Salvias, Sunset Western Garden Book*, and many websites.

