

WHS Plant Notes for February 2014

Helleborus spp. (Ranunculaceae)

Grown by Ted Kipping in San Francisco:

Hellebores have great looking foliage all year and beautiful flowers for many weeks from winter into spring. They grow well for us preferring alkaline soil with decent drainage and needing only moderate irrigation and morning sun or all day light shade. Ted brought a wonderful bouquet that included *H. argutifolius* with its sharply toothed, leathery leaflets and a large cluster of pale green flowers; *H. niger* with dark green leaves and white flowers; *H. purpurascens* with its unique large blooms flushed with purple, pink and slate gray; and a hybrid with flowers beautifully speckled with pink. Ted also brought more samples of his one-of-a-kind volunteer abutilons that many of us always divvy up and take away to propagate.

Magnolia delavayi (Magnoliaceae) Delavay Magnolia, Chinese Evergreen Magnolia

Grown by Dick Dunmire in Los Altos:

This magnolia, a native of southern China, grows into a small tree or huge shrub about 30 ft tall. It's usually multi-trunked with a beautiful, domed, low canopy of impressive, gray-green, hard leathery leaves up to 14 in. long and 8 in. wide. It has large, cupped, creamy white blossoms in summer. Each flower opens and falls apart within 24 hours. Dick jokingly said it seemed like 10 minutes and our speaker added that they usually begin to open at nightfall. You really will get to see and enjoy its flowers, but you'll grow it for its outstanding foliage and form. Give it full sun to part shade and regular irrigation in any soil. Dick also brought a couple of euphorbias (Euphorbiaceae). They're both western Mediterranean natives with silvery, blue-green leaves that spiral up the stems giving them that "Donkey Tail look". From winter into spring, their stems terminate with chartreuse-yellow bracts and flowers that take on red hues as they age. *E. myrsinites*, Myrtle Spurge, is a sprawling 8 in. tall by 18 in. wide clump with nearly triangular leaves. *E. rigida*, Silver Spurge, is a 3-ft-tall by 4-ft-wide mound of upright stems with narrow, pointed leaves. Both are easy to grow in any soil in full sun with occasional irrigation.

Magnolia maudiae (Magnoliaceae)

Grown by Daxin Liu in Mountain View:

This exceptional, evergreen magnolia is native to forests across a wide area of southern China. It's widely cultivated in China but is a relatively recent introduction to US gardens. Its flowers are large, about 6 in. across, with 9 broad, snow white tepals and have a wonderful fragrance of lilies. A member of the michelia group, it blooms prolifically all along the stems at the leaf axils. The leaves are glossy, bluish green and about 6 in. long. In gardens, it will probably grow about 20 ft tall. It takes full sun to part shade; prefers humus-rich, well-drained soil; needs regular irrigation during our dry season and is reported to be hardy to 15°F. Thanks to Sean Hogan of Cistus Nursery, they were planted as street trees in a Portland community and were a local sensation the first year they bloomed.

Paphiopedilum vietnamense (Orchidaceae)

Grown by Chen-Hao Hsu:

This striking slipper orchid is found natively only in a very small area of North Vietnam where it grows mostly as a lithophyte on shady, vertical, limestone cliffs. It was just introduced to the rest of the world in 1998. The flower is about 4 or 5 in. across. Its pouch is purple and the petals and sepal are white flushed with purple-pink. Its held very erect on a stem about 8 in. tall. The foliage is distinctive. There are 3 to 5 thick, leathery leaves about 8 in. long and 3 in. wide. They're pale, gray-green with sharply contrasting dark green mottling. The undersides are red-purple. People report that this new introduction seems easy to grow and bloom. Chen-Hao also brought a clump of *Epidendrum magnoliae*, Greenfly Orchid. It's a miniature, epiphytic orchid that's native from Florida into North Carolina, through the Gulf states into

Louisiana and then skips over to Mexico. It prefers to grow on the Southern Live Oak, Southern Magnolia and Bald Cypress where it's usually hidden among resurrection ferns, bromeliads and mosses. It has grass-like leaves, and blooms May through October with small, lime-green flowers that are intensely fragrant at night. He also showed *Camellia hunanica* that he picked up at Nuccio's in Altadena. It blooms with fragrant, white, single blossoms that last a week or two.

***Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Mozart'** (Lamiaceae) Mozart Rosemary

Shown by Roberta Barnes and growing in the Master Gardeners' water-wise demonstration garden in Palo Alto located at the Eleanor Pardee Community Gardens at 851 Center Dr.

'Mozart' is an especially fine rosemary cultivar selected by Ed Carman, outstanding nurseryman, plantsman, a WHS founder, and Nancy Schramm's dad. It's named for the street his nursery was on in Los Gatos. It makes a dense, compact mound about 4 ft tall and 5 ft wide and blooms heavily through winter and spring with the deepest blue flowers of any rosemary. Roberta also brought a sample of *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* 'Scarlet Sprite' (Proteaceae) with its soft needle-like leaves and showy clusters of rose-pink flowers. It's a dense, mounding shrub growing about 4 or 5 ft tall and 8 ft wide. And she showed a branch of *Acacia boormanii* (Fabaceae), an erect, multi-trunked shrub with tiny, lemon-yellow puff ball flowers set against slender, gray-green leaves. All three are performing beautifully in full sun and clay soil, with little supplemental irrigation, and without pesticides.

***Salvia gesneriiflora* 'Mole Poblano'** and **'Tequila'** (Lamiaceae)

Grown by Richard Tiede in San Jose:

This salvia species is native to Mexico's Sierra Madre Occidental. Richard's cultivars are Huntington Garden introductions derived from seeds collected in Jalisco. They both bloom with long spikes of large, brilliant orange-red flowers. 'Tequila' has nearly black flower stems and calyces while 'Mole Poblano' stems and calyces are bronze and its flowers are a little lighter in color. They both have very long bloom seasons that extend through winter and spring. Richard said 'Mole Poblano' starts a bit earlier than 'Tequila'. These are very large salvias. Specimens to 25 ft tall have been recorded in their native range, but they are considerably smaller in the garden. Richard's plants have grown about 7 to 8 ft tall. Most gardeners prune them hard in early summer to keep them in bounds. They prefer full sun but will bloom in some shade, are not fussy about soil, will need irrigation during our dry season, and are said to be hardy into the low 20s F.

Veltheimia bracteata (Hyacinthaceae) Forest Lily, Cape Lily, Sand Onion

Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose:

Forest lily is native to forests and coastal scrub in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. It blooms late winter into spring. Drooping, tubular flowers bloom in a dense cluster atop a stem up to 2 ft tall, looking similar to a red hot poker inflorescence. The flowers are usually some shade of pink and each flower cluster lasts about a month. The overlapping, papery seed capsules that follow are also very attractive. Forest lily has very handsome, broadly strap-shaped leaves over a ft long. They're shiny, dark green with wavy margins and rise fountain-like from the bulb. The leaves may be briefly deciduous in summer and you'll be sorry to see them go, unlike the leaves of so many other bulbs that you can't wait to see die. It's very easy to grow in bright shade with excellent drainage and will tolerate light frosts. It makes a great container plant.

~Jackie Doda~

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