

WHS Plant Notes for September 2014

Amorphophallus konjac (Araceae) Devil's Tongue, Voodoo Lily

Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose:

This interesting, tuberous aroid is native to areas of southeastern Asia. It blooms in spring with a large, ruffled, shiny maroon, purple, to purple-brown spathe up to 3 ft tall holding a taller purple spadix. Including its petiole that's about 2 ft tall, the entire inflorescence can reach about 6 ft putting its special aroma of rotting meat closer to our noses. After flowering, there's a rest period until summer when the tuber produces a single, intricate leaf that's dissected into many leaflets. Its size depends on the size of the tuber, but it can be up to 6 ft tall and across resembling a small tree. By late summer or fall, the leaf dies and the tuber goes dormant. During dormancy, it needs to be kept dry until growth begins again. During growth, it wants constant moisture and part sun to bright shade. The leaf is very frost tender but the tuber is said to be hardy in USDA zone 6 if left in soil. The tubers can grow very large, up to a foot in diameter. They're popular in some Asian cuisines and are used in some weight loss preparations.

Epilobium 'Summer Snow' (Onagraceae) Summer Snow California Fuchsia

Grown by Jackie Doda in Mountain View:

'Summer Snow' was selected in the San Bernardino Mountains and named by Walter Wisura, who was the plant curator at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden. The garden introduced it to the trade in 1989 and it is generally recognized as the best of the white-flowered *zauschnerias*. It has a low, spreading habit, growing about 4 to 6 in. high and 2 to 3 ft wide with stems that will root as they grow. The leaves are pale gray-green and large by *zauschneria* standards. It blooms in late summer with pure white, trumpet shaped flowers about 1.5 in. long. Hummingbirds like them as much as they do the red-orange ones. It's fine with only occasional watering and appreciates some afternoon shade if grown away from the coast. It has been very well-behaved for me; never spreading aggressively or seeding around. It's on the availability list for the CNPS plant sale on Oct. 18 at Hidden Villa Ranch.

Gladiolus carmineus (Iridaceae) Cliff Gladiolus and

Haemanthus albiflos (Amaryllidaceae) Paint Brush, Shaving Brush

Grown by Judy Wong in Menlo Park: Both of these plants are native to South Africa.

The gladiolus is native to a small area of the southwestern coast of Western Cape Province, a winter rainfall area. They grow within sight of the ocean on rocky, sandstone cliffs, often with their corms wedged into narrow crevices in the cliff's face. Winter rain brings on growth of long, slender leaves which are usually gone long before the flowers come into bloom in late summer to fall. There are typically 4 or 5 funnel-shaped flowers on a spike. Judy's were a beautiful soft pink but their color can range from pale pink to nearly red. The lower 3 tepals, and sometimes the upper ones as well, have a white streak up the middle surrounded by a halo of dark red-pink. This gladiolus requires full sun, excellent drainage, plenty of water in winter and none during its rest period. Bill Kurtz gave her the ***Haemanthus albiflos*** a few years ago. It has grown and bloomed reliably for her and produced offsets that she has

shared with us. Check the October 2011 plant notes on our website for a previous write up.

Plectranthus amboinicus (Lamiaceae) Cuban Oregano, Mexican Mint, etc. etc.

Grown by Lee Read in Los Altos:

This is an evergreen, semi-prostrate, spreading perennial that's probably native to southern Africa but has naturalized and been cultivated around the globe. Its thick, velvety, gray-green leaves have a very strong fragrance and flavor halfway between thyme and oregano that's led many cultures to use it in their cooking. It also has had many uses in traditional medicine. There are several very pretty variegated selections that are grown as ornamentals. They grow about 1 to 2 ft high and a bit wider, accept sun to light shade and need only moderate to occasional irrigation. San Marcos Growers reports that it's hardy into the 20's.

Ted's Garden

Grown by Ted Kipping in San Francisco:

As always, Ted had many good things to share. There was a flowering spike of ***Aechmea gamosepala***, Matchstick Bromeliad, packed with tubular pink bracts tipped with small, purple, cupped flowers that caused someone to think of small purple and pink kitchen matches. There was an unnamed, 2-toned ***Anemone*** with burgundy petals with a lighter margin that drew audible oohs. There was a ***Lepechinia hastata*** (Lamiaceae), Baja Pitcher Sage or Pakaha. It's reported either to be native to southern Baja and introduced and naturalized in Hawaii or vice versa. It's a large, shrubby perennial that tops out at around 4 ft tall and a little wider with large, softly felted, very fragrant, arrowhead shaped leaves. It blooms August into October with relatively small (for a lepechinia) magenta flowers on open, branched spires to a ft long.

Hummingbirds love them. It grows fast, accepts full to part sun and average to moderate irrigation, but is fussy about drainage. Next came pink and red forms of ***Hesperantha (Schizostylis) coccinea***, Cape Lily or River Lily. It's an iris relative from southern Africa and one of my favorite non-native bulbs. They grow 1.5 to 2 ft tall, form clumps to 3 ft wide and flower profusely from September to frost, often producing up to 14 starry, 2-in.-wide flowers per stem. There are many cultivars and color forms, all in hues from white to pink to red. Ted said white ones have never survived well for him. Perfect next to a pond, it wants moist, humus-rich soil and full sun. And finally, there was ***Veratrum fimbriatum*** (Melanthiaceae) Fringed Corn Lily. This is a rare California endemic that's restricted to shady, wet places on the Mendocino Sonoma coast. It would be worth growing just for the beautiful clumps of broad, lance shaped, pleated leaves. But it also blooms with delicate, white flowers densely set on a branched inflorescence. The tepal margins are very finely and deeply fringed like the worst frizzy hair day you've ever had. But the effect is beautiful here.

Jackie Doda

Resources: *Am. Hort. Soc. A-Z Encyclopedia, Botanica, California Native Plants for the Garden, Flora, Sunset Western Garden Book*, and many websites. **WHS Plant Notes for September 2014**

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