

WHS Plant Notes for May 2015

Acca (Feijoa) sellowiana (Myrtaceae) Pineapple Guava

Grown by Nancy Schramm in Gilroy: This is a large, evergreen shrub that's native to the region where Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay come together. In the garden, it's slow growing to about 15 ft tall and wide or to about 16 to 25 ft if it's trained up as a small specimen tree. It can also be espaliered or used as a hedge or screen. It blooms late spring into early summer. The flowers are very showy with a dense brush of long, bright red stamens tipped with yellow pollen and surrounded by 4 to 6 white petals that are tinged pink inside. Birds and squirrels are attracted to and eat the petals. This isn't harmful and may contribute to pollination although bees are the main pollinators. The fruit ripens 3 to 4 months after flowering. They are noticeably fragrant even before they ripen. The flavor is a complex mix of pineapple and guava or strawberry with a little hint of mint. Our climate—cool winters and moderate summers—is perfect for pineapple guava. It's best in full sun but tolerates some shade, is not fussy about soil, is very pest and disease resistant and is hardy to about 20° F. It is known to survive and look good with no supplemental irrigation during our dry season but regular deep irrigation is needed for quality fruit production. If you want to try this beautiful, versatile shrub and the fruit is important to you, check the CA Rare Fruit Growers website for advise on cultivar selection and harvesting and storing the fruit.

Cotinus coggygia 'Royal Purple' (Anacardiaceae) Royal Purple Smokebush

Grown by Pat Knight in Los Altos Hills: Smokebush is native across southern Europe and into central China where it grows on dry, rocky hillsides and open forests. 'Royal Purple' was selected at a nursery in Holland, was introduced into the US in 1953 and has become the most popular of all the purple-leaved cultivars. Its fresh, spring leaves are maroon red. Through summer, they deepen to dark, wine purple with a thin pinkish red edge. Fall color is variable. It's usually rich red-purple but some years it also takes on shades of yellow and orange. It blooms in late spring with tiny, inconspicuous, yellow flowers in terminal panicles. The purplish pink "smoke" that hovers over the shrub in summer is the flowers' pedicels that continue to grow and branch creating a beautiful, airy tangle that becomes an effective seed dispersal system. Smokebush grows at a moderate to slow pace, eventually maturing to 10 to 15 ft tall and wide. It grows well in a wide variety of soils, including clay, and established plants are happiest given infrequent, deep irrigation. It tolerates light shade, but full sun brings out the best leaf color. Shrubs can be pruned hard—as in cut almost to the ground—during dormancy to promote bigger more intensely colored foliage. Pat has used the technique and confirmed that it really does work.

Liriodendron tulipifera 'Aureomarginatum' (Magnoliaceae) Variegated Tulip Tree

Grown by Pat Knight in Los Altos Hills: Pat and Colin did their research and knew this was the tree they wanted. But it took a few years before they finally managed to find one and it was a small starter whip. This cultivar is the variegated form of the beautiful,

stately tulip trees that are a fairly common sight in the forests of much of the eastern US where they are known to reach 190 ft tall, although 70 to 100 ft is far more common. They are instantly recognizable by their distinctive leaf shape with the nearly squared off apex and their equally distinctive cup-shaped, greenish-yellow flowers with orange markings at the base. This cultivar was introduced in 1986 by Monrovia under the trade name of Majestic Beauty. Its leaves emerge with a wide, irregular margin of bright, creamy white with a splash of fresh green in the center. By summer, the colors soften to dark green and chartreuse and then turn yellow to golden yellow in autumn. The leaves are held on long, slender petioles allowing them to flutter with every breeze. Pat's tree is sited so that it is a beautiful focal point against a background of oak trees. So far the little whip has been growing about 5 to 6 ft a year and is now a legitimate small tree. On average, it can be expected to reach 40 ft by 10 years and then mature to 70 ft. So far Pat's tree has been immune to the aphid or scale infestations that have been plaguing the species trees in our area.

Morchella esculenta (Morchellaceae) Yellow Morel Mushroom

Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose: Morels prefer to grow in alkaline soils and can be found in forests, old orchards, gardens and sometimes in recently burned areas. They're said to be especially fond of dead elms. They are among the most highly prized and sought after wild mushrooms. Some Europeans used to set fire to their forested land hoping to induce the growth of morels. They have a more or less cone shaped cap that's honeycombed with pits and ridges. They can be almost 3 in. across and 4 to 5 in. tall but frustratingly hard to see against forest duff. They must be cooked to be safely eaten. A nutritional analysis shows that they are about 34% high-quality protein, are loaded with minerals and only about 2% fat. Morel-like mushrooms have been coming up in Katie's garden every spring for the past 5 or 6 years but her husband won't let her eat them out of a sensible concern that they might not be morels. I'm betting that some morel-loving Western Hort members have been willing to help sort out their ID.

Petunia 'Kermit Baby' (Solanaceae) Kermit Baby Petunia

Grown by Judy Wong in Menlo Park: This is one of the 4 new additions to the Crazytunia series of petunias. The collection is bred by the German breeder Westhoff and selected for unique flower colors and patterns. They have a compact, mounding habit and will bloom from April into September or October. Kermit Baby's flowers are soft pink with a pale lime green margin and cream throat. It was one of our Hot Plant Picks (donated by Emerisa Gardens) for this year's San Francisco Flower and Garden Show.

Jackie Doda