

WHS Plant Notes for September 2015

Crithmum maritimum (Apiaceae) Sea Fennel, Rock Samphire

Grown by Leslie Dean in Mountain View: Sea fennel is a trailing perennial that makes a 1- to 2-ft-tall, billowy mat of narrow, succulent, blue-green leaves. In summer it's covered with tiny, pale yellowish or greenish flowers in showy compound umbels. It has a long history of use for medicine, cosmetics and food. It is experiencing a bit of a culinary rediscovery as inventive chefs experiment with interesting new or, in this case, old ingredients. The leaves have a flavor that's described as slightly salty and hot spicy or piquant. As with many other leaf vegetables, the flavor is best before it flowers. They're used raw in salads, cooked as a vegetable side dish or pickled and served as a condiment. It's also dried, ground and used as a seasoning. Sea fennel is native to the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea where it grows in rock crevices and on sandy beaches within the reach of salt water spray. It's also found on the coasts of England, Ireland and northern Europe, probably carried there by sailors who ate it to prevent scurvy. In nature, it's very rarely found growing far from the sea but is remarkably adaptable in cultivation as long as the soil is kept on the dry side. Leslie's plants are happy in her alkaline clay soil. They get water every two weeks plus some from the neighbor's runoff. It took a hit from last winter's frosts but bounced back well.

Fuchsia microphylla (Onagraceae) Small-Leafed Fuchsia

Grown by Marianne Mueller in Palo Alto: This delicate looking fuchsia is native to cool woodlands in Mexico and through Central America to Panama. It grows into a graceful 3- to 4-ft-tall mound of tiny, dark green foliage on reddish stems. A profusion of tiny tubular flowers with a frill of petals at the mouth dangle along the stems at the leaf axils almost all year long. It is a variable species. The flowers can be found in several forms and any color from white through pink to dark red. Marianne's are red. The black fruits are edible and said to be juicy but bland. Its delicate look is deceptive. It takes full sun to light shade and is reported to be hardy to about 25°F.

Proboscidea parviflora (Martyneaceae) Pink-Flowered Devil's Claw

Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose: This species of devil's claw is native to the southwestern deserts, centered primarily in Arizona and northern Mexico. There are a few scattered populations in California deserts. Their locations are known to be near abandoned Native American settlements. It is an annual that sprawls like a pumpkin plant and grows about 8 ft wide and 3 ft high with more or less heart-shaped, clammy, sticky leaves. In summer, during the desert heat, it blooms with beautiful, bell-shaped flowers about 1 in. wide. They are pink or pink and white with magenta blotches and have a wide, bright yellow nectar guide for their pollinator bees. It's the seed pods give the devil's claws their name. They ripen in the fall and hang on the branches like large bean pods or

okra with a curved hook that can be as much as 15 in. long. When it dries, the hook splits in half and becomes the perfect structure to hook onto animal's hooves or fur and people's ankles or hiking boots and disperse the seeds over long distances. Each plant may produce 50 or more pods with about 40 seeds per pod. The pods are cooked and eaten as a vegetable by several Native American tribes in the US and Mexico and the dried seeds are also eaten. When the green pod is dried, it becomes a beautiful flat black color. Native tribes use narrow strips of the dried pods to create beautiful black designs in their basketry. This devil's claw is easy to grow in the garden. It will grow in any soil and tolerate regular weekly soaking.

***Tithonia rotundifolia* 'Torch' (Asteraceae) Mexican Sunflower**

Grown by Barbara Worl in Menlo Park: This is the very first orange-flowered plant that Barbara has ever had in her garden. It was a good one to start with. It's an easy, fast-growing annual that's native from Mexico into Central America. It usually grows about 4 to 6 ft tall and half as wide with velvety, dark green leaves. Barbara's is about 8 ft tall. The flowers resemble single dahlias. They're 3 to 4 in. across with bright orange-red ray flowers surrounding orange-yellow disk flowers that are irresistible to butterflies, bees and hummingbirds. They're good cut flowers as long as you handle the stems gently. They bloom from mid-summer till frost. They're easy to grow from seeds and will probably self sow once you've grown them. They love heat and sun, accept regular irrigation or being a little on the dry side and deer don't eat them.

Ted's Garden

Grown by Ted Kipping in San Francisco: Ted brought a few of the things blooming in his cool, often foggy, ever blooming garden. There was a red/green-flowering hybrid *Anigozanthos*, Kangaroo Paw, that he keeps because it has 7 ft tall flowering stems all year long even though he's not particularly crazy about the color of those flowers. Next was a lovely *Cuphea* that grows about 6 ft tall with inch-long, bright red tubular flowers arrayed along the stem. He brought his unique, unnamed, bi-color *Anemone x hybrida* that has burgundy petals with pale margins. There was a flower spike of *Aechmea gamosepala*, Matchstick Bromeliad, packed with small round purple flowers just peeking out of tubular, bright pink bracts and sort of resembling small purple and pink kitchen matches. He showed a stem from a beautiful variegated *Corokia cotoneaster* that is currently 7 to 8 ft tall. There were pink and red forms of *Hesperantha (Schizostylis) coccinea*, Cape Lily or River Lily. It's an iris relative from southern Africa where it can be found growing alongside streams in the Drakensberg Mountains. It's 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 once said the white ones have never survived well for him. Cape Lilies are perfect next to

a pond in moist, humus-rich soil and full sun. And he had a shoot from one of his many *Abutilon* hybrids. While most of his flowering maples grow 14 to 20 ft. tall and provide a privacy screen for his garden, the yellow-flowered one he brought this night grows only about 7 ft tall and has a weeping habit. Suncrest is propagating some of Ted's flowering maples and will be putting them in the market sometime soon.

Jackie Doda