

WHS Plant Notes for November 2015

Aster sp. (Asteraceae)

Grown by Barbara Worl in Menlo Park:

Barbara brought a beautiful aster that she bought years ago from Canyon Creek Nursery in Oroville. It has no name other than 'late flowering species'. It's a vigorous grower that forms a thicket of stems up to 9 or 10 ft tall in Barbara's garden. About the top third of each stem is a branched spray that's loaded with dainty, lavender-blue, daisy-like flowers from November into December. These late bloomers are much appreciated nectar sources for beneficial insects.

Chaenorhinum oreganifolium 'Summer Skies' (Plantaginaceae) Dwarf Snapdragon

Grown by Nancy Schramm in Gilroy:

Nancy grew this charming little perennial from seeds she got from NARGS about 7 years ago. It's native to areas around the the Mediterranean Sea, especially in the vicinity of Turkey, where it grows in scree and dry rocky places. It makes an evergreen, spreading mat under 12 in. tall with small, dark green leaves that look like oregano. For most of the year, from spring to frost, masses of lovely little violet flowers with a little white in the throat float just above the foliage. In a container it will spill 12 to 18 in. over the rim. It wants sun to light shade and moderate watering and requires fast draining soil. It's said to be hardy to at least 10°F.

Eucomis comosa var. *comosa* (Hyacinthaceae) Pineapple Lily

Grown by Judy Wong in Menlo Park:

These impressive bulbs are native to the Eastern Cape of South Africa which is a summer rainfall region. In spring and summer, they grow a fountain-like, basal rosette of thick, strap-shaped leaves with wavy margins. Each rosette can be 1-1/2 to 2 ft wide. In late summer or fall, it puts up a sturdy 1- to 2-ft-tall flowering stem that can bear up to a hundred small star-shaped flowers in a dense, cylindrical arrangement that's topped by a tuft of leaf-like bracts. They may be in bloom for up to 8 weeks. There are many cultivars of this bulb with leaves variously shaded, streaked or spotted with purple or maroon. The flowers are usually white but may include greenish, pink or purple tints. The purplish seeds that follow are also ornamental. They are said to be easy to grow preferring part sun to bright shade and needing well draining soil. Give them regular irrigation while in growth and keep them on the dry side during their winter dormancy.

Ficus carica 'Deanna' (Moraceae) Deanna Fig

Grown by Katie Wong in San Jose:

Edible figs probably started out in Western Asia and then people spread them throughout the Mediterranean area. There is evidence of their cultivation dating back at least 7000 years. So it's not surprising that there is a huge number of varieties out there. Katie's fig was developed in the breeding program at UC Davis in Riverside. It bears large, pale green fruits that ripen to yellow or greenish yellow in fall. Katie thinks their color keeps the birds from noticing that they're ripe which means more fruit for her. Inside, the flesh is amber just under the skin and shades to strawberry at the center. They are juicy with a sweet, delicate flavor. Some tasters reported detecting a mild melon flavor. Katie keeps it to a manageable size by cutting it back really hard in winter. Figs love our warm, dry mediterranean climate but deep watering every week or two is recommended for good growth and fruiting.

Pavonia missionum (Malvaceae) Red Mallow

Grown by Leslie Dean in Mountain View:

Leslie picked up this great-looking shrub during a recent trip to Sierra Azul Nursery in Watsonville. It was the flower color, soft red nudging into orange, that first attracted her. The flowers are like small hibiscus about 1-1/2 in. across. They bloom liberally from late winter through summer. The shrub is loosely upright with dark green foliage and grows to about 4 to 6 ft tall and not quite as wide. It's native to Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay where it's often found growing along rivers. It's remarkably undemanding, accepting full to part sun, average irrigation or just once every 3 to 4 weeks, and most any soil though it's reported to prefer heavier ones. It will survive brief periods when the temperature dips into the high teens. There is a long list of butterflies that love it as a nectar source.

Polyxena ensifolia (syn. *Lachenalia ensifolia*) (Hyacinthaceae)

Grown by Judy Wong in Menlo Park:

These tiny bulbous plants are native to the drier areas of the Western Cape of South Africa where they grow in seasonally moist, sandy or clay soils. They bloom in fall with a dense mound of mildly fragrant, starry flowers nestled between 2 broad, strap-shaped leaves. Their flower color ranges from white to soft pinkish mauve. Their small size makes them more suited for containers than open ground. They like being crowded and will offset fairly freely. Give them full sun and a dry summer dormancy. Protect them from hard frosts and keep winter rain off the flowers to prevent botrytis.

Rosa 'Soleil d'Or' (Rosaceae)

Grown by Barbara Worl in Menlo Park:

This rose was introduced in 1900 and was the breakthrough that introduced a whole new color range into modern roses. Hybrid Teas in all those shades of bright yellow, orange, apricot, salmon, copper and scarlet can trace their colors back to this rose. It was bred in France by Joseph Pernet-Ducher who invested nearly 20 years in an effort to breed deep yellow color into a repeat blooming rose. He managed to get a single pod with a few viable seeds from a cross of the nearly sterile *R. foetida persiana*, a double yellow rose, with 'Antoine Ducher', a red-flowered Perpetual Hybrid. Although this cross certainly led to 'Soleil d'Or', authorities now believe that it didn't come from this first generation of seeds but was probably a chance F2 seedling. It blooms in spring and fall with large, very full, cupped flowers in rich orange-yellow often shaded with pink. They have a fragrance of grapefruit or orange juice. The shrub is very upright to about 4 ft tall. Unfortunately, high susceptibility to blackspot travelled along with the color genes. Its lack of vigor and failure to reliably rebloom make it a rose for collectors who appreciate its history contribution to the development of modern roses.

Salvia leucantha 'White Velour' (Lamiaceae) White Velour Mexican Bush Sage

Grown by Pat Knight in Los Altos Hills:

This is a new variant of Mexican bush sage with inflorescences that are entirely pure white. Pat says it's like having a ghost in her garden. From late summer to frost, the shrub is covered by fuzzy, snowy white spires that cannot help but be the focus of attention. It appeared as a chance seedling in a private garden in South Africa and is in every other way like the Mexican bush sage that's so familiar to us.

***Trichostema* 'Midnight Magic'** (Lamiaceae) Hybrid Blue Curls

Grown by Pat Knight in Los Altos Hills:

This recently introduced hybrid is the result of a cross by Patrick Worley at Suncrest Nursery. It crosses *T. purpusii*, a Mexican species with bright rose-pink flowers that's thought to be extinct in the wild, and *T. lanatum*, our notoriously fussy woolly blue curls that every native plant enthusiast tries to grow over and over again. The hybrid is easy and adaptable. It's fine in full sun to light shade and accepts moderate to occasional irrigation in any reasonably well-draining soil. It's said to be hardy to about 25°F. It grows moderately fast to make a 3 to 5 ft compact, rounded shrub with lightly fragrant foliage. It blooms in showy spikes of pinkish-purple flowers with long curved stamens from late spring till frost. Hummingbirds and many different types of butterflies and bees visit them. I also have this plant and will continue to grow it for its own lovely qualities but I know that I will also continue to try to find that one elusive spot where a woolly blue curls will be happy.

Jackie Doda