

JANUARY 2000 PLANT FORUM NOTES

The slim pickings from the January meeting included the following:

Canistrum 'Apollo', *Cantua* 'Hot Pants', *Dipladenia X amoena*, *Erythrina X sykesii*, *Iresine herbstii*, *Lachenalia bulbifera*, *Rosa* 'Isabella Sprunt' (a sport of 'Safrano'), *Rosa* 'Lady Hillingdon'.

Bilbergia nutans 'Rubra' (Bromeliaceae). Paraguay. 'Rubra' is in reference to the dark reddish coloration of the leaves. Bob notes that "good light intensifies the dark color." This cultivar is a collector's item. It was grown from a shoot that was collected by Bob Wright in Paraguay. The plant growth habit and flowers are typical for this species. (Bob Wright)

Erythrina berteroana (Fabaceae). Coral Tree. Southern Mexico to Columbia. Rarely seen in our area, this showy 15 to 20 foot tree is apparently hardy here. The plant typically blooms around Christmas and has typical showy orange-red *Erythrina* flowers. Don notes that this plant produces beautiful seeds. He also recommends this tree as an easy plant to grow, as long as it is not over watered. (Don Nelson)

Iresine herbstii (Amaranthaceae). Beefsteak Plant, Beet Plant, Chicken Gizzard, Blood Leaf. Brazil. A striking, loud plant, grown for its outrageous colored foliage. The stems and main veins of the leaves are electric red-magenta. The rest of leaf is a dark maroon. Joan's plant was shown in flower. The individual white flowers are quite small and are carried in branched 4 to 6 inch feathery inflorescences. The flowers are unexpectedly delicate compared to the rest of the plant. Joan notes that the plant is easy to propagate from cuttings taken in fall. The plant can be grown in sun or semi-shade. This tropical plant does prefer regular watering and can grow quite large in our area (at least 6 feet or more in height and width in my Upland garden). Plants are often killed by frost. Cut the plant back fairly hard in late winter (after the chance of frost is past), and pinch it regularly during its active growing season to produce a less floppy plant. (Joan Seidel)

Salvia iodantha (Lamiaceae). Mexico. Another of the larger perennial/shrub sages from Mexico. This plant typically reaches 10 feet or more in height and will spread nearly as wide. The plant produces purplish inch long flowers in six-inch terminal inflorescences during the winter months. The plant is best grown along the coast in our region, where it will benefit from regular watering and higher levels of humidity. As with many of the tall Mexican species, this plant is best grown where it can be supported by substantial shrubs that the sage can grow through or be supported by. All of these tall growing Mexican sages are best grown where they can be protected from Santa Ana winds that can ruin these plants when they are in bud or in bloom. (Cathy Ratner)

Salvia melissodora (Lamiaceae). Mexico. Grape Soda Sage. Lagasca.

A most satisfying, nearly ever-blooming shrub/perennial that may reach about six feet in height and about four feet wide. The fragrant blue flowers smell like grape soda.

The plant was given to me in October (in full bloom) with the comment that it is nearly always in bloom. It has been in full bloom ever since, and shows no sign of stopping.

The individual flowers are about ½” long and are a nice mid-blue color. The terminal inflorescences are about 3 to 5 inches long. The flowers are not amongst the largest or the most beautiful in the genus, but they more than compensate for their shortcomings by their abundance! The small spatulate leaves have a rough surface and are reminiscent of *Salvia semiatrata*. I was told that the plant prefers full sun, though I am somewhat skeptical that it will endure full sun in the hot interior. I will give it some protection as the weather warms. As with most of the larger Mexican sages, this one does want a regular supply of water, and will wilt if it is drought stressed. Betsy Clebsch notes that heavy pruning of this plant should occur when it is actively growing. She recommends well drained soil for this species. Clebsch also says that this species is especially attractive to bees, butterflies and hummingbirds due to its profusion of flowers (nectar source) over a long season. (Bart O'Brien)

- B. O'B.