

MAY 2000 PLANT FORUM NOTES

Our May meeting at Descanso Gardens did not yield as many forum table plants as one would have hoped! Thank you's to all that brought plants to the May meeting! In addition to the plants discussed below the following plants were shown: *Alstroemeria* – hybrid, *Antirrhinum majus*, *Dichelostemma ida-maia*, *Gladiolus colvillei*(?), *Kigelia africana* (this was shown as *K. pinnata*), *Nemesia caerulea* ‘Blue Bird’ (this was shown as *N. fruticans* ‘Blue Bird’), *Romneya coulteri*, *Rosa* ‘Paradise’, *Salvia clevelandii* ‘Winifred Gilman’, *Semiaquilegia ecalcarata* (shown incorrectly as *S. esculenta*), *Sisyrinchium macrocephalum*, and *Tulbaghia violacea* ‘Alba’.

Clarkia unguiculata (Onagraceae). California to the Rocky Mountains. Elegant Clarkia, Farewell-to-Spring. A deceptively fragile looking late spring blooming annual that may overwhelm your garden. Plants may be from 4 inches to 4 feet tall depending upon garden conditions. Flowers may be single, semi-double, or fully double. Flower color varies from pure white through various shades of salmon, orange, pink and magenta. Best grown in full sun. A delightful plant – just keep an eye on it! (J. Seidel)

Dichelostemma x venustum ‘Pink Diamond’, (Alliaceae). California. Pink Diamond Firecracker Flower. This naturally occurring “hybrid species” is the result of hybridization between *Dichelostemma ida-maia* and either *Dichelostemma congestum* OR *Dichelostemma multiflora*. The cultivar ‘Pink Diamond’ was likely selected by Wayne Roderick, Director Emeritus of the Regional Parks Botanic Garden in Berkeley. This plant is now produced by the thousands via tissue culture in the Netherlands. This winter growing cormous plant flowers in the spring. Each corm typically produces two long floppy leaves that are about ¼ to ½ inch wide and up to 12 inches long. (they are not attractive). The rosy-pink flowers are quite showy. They are held in loose clusters atop an 8 to 12 inch stalk. Each tubular flower is about 1 ½ inch long and is a bit over ¼ inch wide. The tips of the perianth segments strongly curve backward (in the manner of a turk’s cap lily). The plant requires ample water during its growing season and should be kept cool and dry during its summer dormancy. (B. O’Brien)

Eriogonum ovalifolium var. *vineum*, (Polygonaceae). California. Cushion Buckwheat. This choice rock garden plant is quite rare in nature. It inhabits the carbonate substrates on the north side of the San Bernardino Mountains. This area is under intense mining pressure. The plant forms a 3 to 6 inch high mat of densely packed 1 to 3 inch wide rosettes of silver-grey foliage. These mats may reach a foot or so across. The individual leaves are spatula-shaped and may be up to an inch long and up to ½ inch across. The 1 to 2 inch ball of tightly packed flowers is held aloft by a 1 to 4 inch long stalk. Fresh individual flowers are off-white to light tan in color and darken with increasing age

to pink and then to dark red. Plants resent overhead watering during the heat of the summer: the foliage may rot. Other than this, the plants are surprisingly easy to grow in a drought tolerant garden. These plants have a taproot and should not be transplanted. (B. O'Brien)

Kigelia africana (Bignoniaceae). Tropical Africa. Sausage Tree. (Shown as *K. pinnata*, an older name for this species.) Although it was the unusual sausage-like fruits that were shown at our meeting, this large tree (reaching 40 feet high in the wild) has equally striking flowers. An individual dark maroon flower is 4 inches long and 4 inches wide. A single inflorescence can be up to 6 feet long! The flowers are pollinated by bats and are followed by the woody sausage-like fruits that give the plant its common name. The fruits are not edible and contain large seeds. A single fruit can be up to 1 ½ foot long and may weigh up to 8 pounds. This species is quite variable in nature – so much so that a number of different species were described. The compound leaves can reach nearly 1 ½ feet in length and are composed of numerous 3 inch leaflets. Joan Citron noted that fruits resulting from unpollinated flowers are much smaller than those of pollinated flowers. (The fruits shown were apparently from an unpollinated flower.) An uncommon tree in our area, this specimen is growing at the Mildred Mathias Botanical Garden at UCLA. (J. Jaeger)

Rhododendron catawbiense, (Ericaceae). Eastern U. S. Catawba Rhododendron, Mountain Rosebay. We don't often see such perfect Rhododendron specimens brought to the forum table! This well grown specimen had large trusses of pink flowers and dark green leathery leaves (without the salt-burned leaf edges that are often seen in southern California!). It was noted that this mature specimen is large, as I recall the grower stated that the plant was nearly 10 feet tall. The plant is growing in the Pasadena area and the grower wrote that she uses pure coarse Canadian peat moss and vermiculite and that her garden has filtered sunlight. This experience should give hope to transplanted, rhododendron-starved Northerners. (Anon.)

Salvia 'Carl Nielson', (Lamiaceae). Garden Hybrid. Carl Nielson Sage. I have to say that this plant has the most beautiful inflorescences of all the Californian native sages. Nothing else even comes close. This new hybrid was named about two months ago by Ron Gass of Mountain States Nursery near Phoenix, Arizona. Year old plants at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden have reached 3 feet tall and 4 to 5 feet wide. It appears that the plant will likely not grow much larger. The plant was selected as a seedling in the Nielson Garden in Tucson, Arizona where a number of California sages were in cultivation. From the look of the plant, I would guess that the parentage is *Salvia clevelandii* X *Salvia mohavensis* – though there have been no detailed studies to confirm this. The plant seems to require excellent drainage (we have lost several plants due to root rots). Now, as to those spectacular blooms: They are a deep violet-blue and are carried in whorl-like clusters up to 2 ½ inches thick. Before the flowers emerge, the dense clusters of calyces are dark purple (as the flowers open, the calyces fade a bit and are not quite so striking). A typical inflorescence is unbranched and is made up of 2 to 4 "whorls" (technically these, and most of our other native salvias are, are interrupted spikes) of flowers. Occasionally, branched inflorescences appear. The side branches are nearly always composed of 1 or 2 "whorls." Each individual flower is 1 inch long, with the

“face” of the flower $\frac{3}{4}$ inch by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. The rough-surfaced, sage-green leaves are $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches long and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide. All parts of this plant carry a pungent fragrance that is loved by many and despised by few. The only criticism that I have of this plant thus far is that the internodes are too long in relation to the leaves (the plant doesn’t appear to have enough foliage!). With flowers like these, who needs leaves! (B. O’Brien)

- B. O’Brien.