

MARCH 2001 PLANT FORUM NOTES

Thank you to all that brought plants to the March meeting – it was a good showing, but I know there are many more worthy plants to display!!! Everyone is encouraged to bring in plants to share with the group. Remember that you do get one free “exhibitor’s ticket” for the plant raffle if you bring in one or more plants for discussion at the forum table.

In addition to the plants discussed below the following plants were shown: *Aechmea orlandiana* ‘Rainbow’, *Agathis robusta*, *Asparagus retrofractus*, *Chamelaucium uncinatum*, *Corokia cotoneaster*, *Doryanthes palmeri*, *Dymondia margaretae*, *Erythrina x sykesii*, *Geranium x cantabrigiense* ‘Biokovo’ – white, *Justicia adhatodoides*, *Justicia leonardii*, *Justicia rizzinii*, *Lachenalia mutabilis*, *Scadoxus multiflorus*, *Sedum pachyphyllum*, *Sparaxis* ‘Ruby Princess’, *Tulipa saxatilis* (*T. bakeri*) ‘Lilac Wonder’, *Veltheimia bracteata*, and *Vriesea* ‘Sunspot’ X *Vriesea* ‘Sunshine’.

The identity of the following plants was not completely ascertained: *Aloespp.*, *Begonia sp.*, *Dendrobium kingianum?*, and *Phormium sp.*

Note: The *Bidens* sp. (with rosy-purple flowers) that was shown at the December meeting has since been identified as *Bidens aequisquama* from Mexico.

Helleborus foetidus, (Ranunculaceae). Western and Southern Europe. Stinking Hellebore. This evergreen perennial is particularly well suited for Southern California gardens. The dark green to blackish foliage is finely cut into long linear segments. The cane like stems grow for a year or two before crowning themselves in late winter with a panicle of showy, nodding, 1/2 inch long green flowers. The flower petals are sometimes edged or flushed with red-brown. The blooming cane subsequently dies, but new shoots are generally produced from the base of the plant. Large clumps may reach 3 feet tall and may spread to 4 feet or more across. The inflorescence shown was cut two weeks prior to its showing at our meeting. Elizabeth noted that the plant is in its third year and is 2 feet tall and 2 feet wide. She also stated that this plant first bloomed in its second year from seed. Her plants thrive on rainwater alone and are self-seeding in an area with intense sun for 3 months of the year and shade for the other 9 months. (E. Stromme)

Geranium ‘Rozanne’, (Geraniaceae). Garden Hybrid. Rozanne Geranium. A new blue-flowered hybrid from Blooms of Bressingham, England. Bob says that he has been growing this plant for two years and that it is doing quite well. (B. Smaus)

Melianthus major, (Melianthaceae). South Africa. Honey Bush. Simply the best coarse-textured blue-gray foliage plant around! The large pinnately compound leaves have

deeply serrated margins. Unpruned plants can quickly get out of hand and often appear as rank as the bruised foliage smells. Each year, cut the plant to short stubs in late winter immediately prior to new growth. Such pruning will eliminate most if not all flower stalks (not a problem for this gardener). Terminal flower stalks will reach from 2 to 3 feet long with the top foot or so composed of inch-long, brown-red flowers. Honey bush requires fairly regular watering to look its best, and prefers full sun to bright, light shade. It may perform better in richer, heavier soils. The plant is considered poisonous – but with a smell like that, who would dare eat it! (J. Citron)

Muhlenbergia dumosa, (Poaceae). Arizona, Mexico. Bamboo Muhly. A most striking and beautiful giant grass – there isn't any other plant quite like it. This clumping grass may reach up to 8 feet tall and has an equal to slightly greater spread. With pruning and thinning, the plant can be kept much smaller. The new thin stems are initially erect but soon arch over in a cascade of light feathery foliage. The individual leaves are pale green, 1/8 inch wide and are up to 2 1/2 inches long. Similar to many bamboo species, new leaves are produced on the old stems of the bamboo muhly every year. Gardeners in our region have been successful cutting this plant back in late winter, early spring, or in summer. Bamboo muhly loves the sun and heat, though it may be grown in bright, light shade. It is quite flexible about its water needs – when water is plentiful it grows lushly and lustily, in drought conditions it is frugal and conservative – and it is always attractive. Flower spikes are freely produced in late fall and resemble short tufts of leaves. After flowering the spikes turn brown and are considered objectionable by some people. Seedlings are rarely to never seen in our gardens. (J. Citron)

Passiflora actinia, (Passifloraceae). Organ Mountains of Southern Brazil. Ray Passion Flower. This species has attractive white-petaled, fragrant flowers that have particularly showy blue and white-banded corona filaments. Flowers are produced over a long period – from spring to summer. The small, yellow, roundish fruits are edible and taste like grapes. This vine will reach from 15 to 20 feet tall and should be grown in full sun. It was noted that this species is hardy to 24 degrees Fahrenheit. (J. Ochoa)

Senna (Cassia) purpusii, (Fabaceae). Baja California, Mexico. In its hot, dry, desert habitat, this plant is typically a low shrub from 1 to 3 feet tall with a slightly wider spread. In cultivation it tends to be larger (up to 4 feet or more) and much wider (up to 8 feet wide). The plant has dark fissured bark. The attractive leathery leaves are composed of 4 or 6 oval-shaped blue-gray leaflets. The pretty inch-wide golden yellow flowers (often veined with dark brown) are produced in few flowered terminal or axillary clusters. The plant is from the central portion of the Baja peninsula, where the plants are subjected to very irregular summer and winter rainfall patterns. Like many other plants from this region, this rainfall pattern enables this senna to tolerant water at any time of the year in our gardens. The limiting factor for growing this plant (and many others from the Viscaino desert) appears to be the combination of either cold weather and excessive moisture or hot weather and excessive moisture. These conditions can be mitigated in garden situations by well drained soils and by planting in warmer microclimates. (J. Citron)

- B. O'B.