
SEPTEMBER 2005 PLANT FORUM NOTES

Thanks to all of you who brought in plants to the September Plant Forum. There were some really wonderful flowers on display, giving evidence of some very pretty gardens in spite of the searing heat that made the previous weeks so difficult for us humans. Remember that if you bring in one or more plants for the Forum, you get one free “exhibitor’s ticket” for the plant raffle. And we are sure to have a great raffle this month!

In addition to the plants discussed below, the following plants, described in the Society’s *Selected Plants for Southern California Gardens*, were shown: *Boweia volubilis*, *Globba winitii*, *Haemanthus coccineus*, *Monstera deliciosa*, *Plectranthus ecklonii*, *Stigmaphyllon littorale*, *Tecoma stans* and *Tillandsia secunda*.

There was an especially nice selection of orchids this month. Those shown included: *Cattleya Rapture*, *Stanhopea* flowers, an intergeneric hybrid (parentage unknown) grown outdoors in summer, and a *Brassavola* noted as being “bullet-proof” and grown outdoors all year.

The following plants, not discussed in the Society’s *Selected Plants for Southern California Gardens*, were also shown: *Anthurium* (no species or cultivar name given), *Dryopteris pedata*, *Hydrangea* ‘Shooting Star’ and a *Plectranthus*, brought in for identification, but whose identity remained a mystery.

X *Chitalpa tashkentensis* (Bignoniaceae). This genus is currently comprised of two selections from the crossing of *Chitalpa bignonioides* with *Chilopsis linearis*. The selection ‘Morning Cloud’ has white flowers with dark red veins on the throat. The other selection, ‘Pink Dawn’, has pale pink flowers with darker veins in the throat. These are fast-growing, deciduous trees that take frost, do well in full sun and heat, and are drought tolerant once established. They have thus been deemed to be excellent street trees and both selections are beginning to appear curbside all over Los Angeles County. The trees do not do well by the coast, and it remains to be seen if the rapid growth for which they are known will cause problems, given the long intervals between prunings that is typical for street trees, and the heavy winds that sometimes hit the county. (Jim Jaeger)

Crinum xanthophyllum ‘Golden Thai’. (Amaryllidaceae). Golden Leaf Crinum. Origin Unknown. This is a new introduction from Gary Hammer. The plant appears to be small compared to our more typical crinums, having fairly erect leaves about 12 to 15 inches long. Its distinguishing characteristic is the bright, clear yellow of the older leaves. Gary says that the flowers are white, and that the plant needs full, hot sun for the leaf color to be at its best. The plant would appear to need regular watering, and its frost tolerance is unknown. Various sites on the world wide web indicate that the plant was discovered on Fiji, perhaps around 1971, but its actual source is unknown. The plant apparently doesn’t bloom that much, and one site suggested acid soil. Though Gary has indicated a cultivar name for this plant, it appears to be identical to the species. (Gary Hammer)

Crithmum maritimum (Apiaceae). Rock Samphire, Sea Fennel. Coastal areas of Europe, Mediterranean and Britain. An evergreen perennial to 2 feet high with 1/2 inch long, fleshy leaves. It blooms with an umbel of chartreuse flowers. The plant takes full sun to light shade in well drained, alkaline or saline soil. It often grows on seaside cliffs and tolerates salt spray. It can prove difficult to grow away from the coast. Young leaves can be eaten or pickled. The plant is highly scented, and an oil extracted from it is used for perfume. (Cathy Ratner)

Cucurbita moschata ‘Lunga di Napoli’ (brought in as *C. maxima* ‘Luna di Napoli’). Cucurbitaceae. Winter Squash. United States to South America. This is but one of many selections of winter squashes available to the adventurous vegetable grower. This particular selection produced a great 50 pound squash shaped somewhat like a barbell. The plant was grown in full sun, on a very strong arbor, so that the fruit hung vertically rather than lying on the ground.

This was such a superb specimen that further examination seemed warranted. So when it was time to cut it up, measurements and pictures were taken (see below). The rounded (seed holding) end measured 31 inches in circumference - one inch more than the length. The "waist" was a mere 22 inches in circumference. Ralph cut the squash using a clean pruning saw. Upon examination of the flesh, it appeared to be two-toned bright orange, leading the observers to postulate that it would be a "spaghetti" squash, with flesh that would break apart in long strings when cooked. It was, and it was delicious. Seeds are available from Daylight Farms, P.O. Box 218, Half Moon Bay, CA 94019 (phone 650-726-4980). (Ralph & Barbara Crane)

Nerine sarniensis hybrid. (Amaryllidaceae). South Africa. This was a lovely hybrid with the glistening sheen on the corolla that makes these flowers so special. The plants are dormant and leafless in summer. It used to be gospel that bulbs of this genus were to be kept absolutely dry when dormant. This has now been modified, and occasional summer water is recommended. Starting regular watering early in fall apparently triggered this plant to bloom much earlier than the typical bloom period of November -December. (Dick Kohlschreiber)

Pedilanthus bracteatus. (Euphorbiaceae). Candellila. Sonora, Mexico. A succulent shrub to 10' high with cylindrical green stems to 3/4 inch in diameter and ovate leaves to 4 inches long and 1 1/2 inches wide. The leaves are mainly at the ends of the stems. It blooms with green cyathia in bracts that are tinged with red. The stems are usually erect, but occasional arching stems will touch the ground and root, permitting the plant to extend over large areas. The plant takes full sun and is somewhat drought tolerant. It is probably frost sensitive. (Wendy Bowman)

Pelargonium cotyledonis. (Geraniaceae). Old Man Live Forever. Island of St Helena. This is one of many pelargoniums that form thickened, water-storing stems. However, perhaps because it comes from an island rather than the African desert, it is only slightly caudiciform. The plant does well in partial shade inland. It tends to go dormant in winter, when it normally will lose its leaves, but it can be watered all year providing it has excellent drainage, in which case it will be evergreen. It is best grown in a pot to protect it from frost and winter rains. (Barbara & Ralph Crane)

Rhodophiala bifida. (Amaryllidaceae). Argentina, Uruguay. This is a bulbous perennial that typically blooms in fall while leafless. The example shown, however, already had leaves 2 to 3 inches high. There are usually 2 or more, 2 inch long, dark red trumpet-shaped flowers on a 4 to 12 inch high stalk. The linear leaves are 6 to 15 inches long. The plant is dormant and deciduous in summer and can be kept dry or given occasional water. It needs regular watering when growing. It seems to do well in sun or partial shade. (Dick Kohlschreiber)

Ricinus communis. (Euphorbiaceae). Castor Bean. Africa, and naturalized throughout the tropics. This can be a weedy annual or a shrub to 15 feet high and wide in the Los Angeles area. The peltate leaves can be up to 24 inches across on stalks to 12 inches long, though they are usually much smaller when the plant is growing wild. They are either green or maroon, with 5 to 11 lobes that have serrated edges. The plant blooms in summer with a terminal inflorescence, 6 to 18 inches long, of red or yellow flowers, followed by seed pods about an inch in diameter that can be smooth or have soft spines. The seeds, or beans, are sometimes used for necklaces. They are also highly poisonous, containing two lethal chemicals. Ingestion of the leaves is also not a good idea. Oil from the seeds has multiple industrial and medicinal uses. The plant used to grow all over in the waste spaces of Los Angeles County, but is rarely seen now. It is definitely drought tolerant, taking full sun and doing quite well with no supplemental water. There are several named cultivars of this species, selected for leaf, flower or pod color as well as for plant size. (Eileen Fiumara)

- Edited by Joan Citron