

Piedmont Flora Yields Outstanding Ornamentals

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There is probably no one here today who is unaware that we are in the middle of an enormous tide of interest in our own native plants. Native plant conferences have sprung up like mushrooms throughout the eastern half of the continent; meetings of landscape architects, foresters, horticulturists—and even plant propagators—frequently devote large segments of their programs to natives and their uses in the landscape. Even politicians are jumping on the bandwagon—witness president Clinton's advisory to government agencies to emphasize native plants wherever they are appropriate. Not only do natives fit into the present trend to garden naturalistically, but they have always been a significant part of more formal landscapes and are eminently suitable for traditional and contemporary gardens. In short, the native plant industry, for whatever reasons, is a growth market, and we should all realize the potential for our industry inherent in this flood of interest.

This potential can feed on three relatively recent developments in the nursery industry:

1) The most aggressive retailers have caught on to a marketing strategy which has built such American industries as the fashion industry, the cosmetics industry, the entertainment industry, and the convenience food industry. That strategy is **novelty**. Americans like to be first with what's new, and at last our industry is recognizing this. You can see it in the trade journals, in the growth of the mail-order specialty nurseries, and in the product lines of our best retail garden centers—novelty sells.

2) Micropropagation is coming of age. We use it where it is most valuable—to build up numbers of a particular clone quickly, either for direct sale as a high value novelty or to create a stockblock for traditional propagation methods. We need to create better ways of funding the research that is needed before a new plant can be successfully and routinely propagated.

3) This brings me to the third development that has contributed to the great potential for new plant introductions—the plug industry. Plug producers can quickly capitalize on micropropagation to produce large numbers of easily transported flats of reliable small plants. These can be sent across the continent and grown to liner size, with woody plants, or salable containerized plants in the case of herbaceous introductions.

All this translates into the potential to radically decrease the time it takes to get a new introduction to a public ready to buy it. Instead of a lag time of 10 to 20 years; we can, with proper marketing and coordination, get a good plant out in quantity within 5 years. Of course we can also get a bad plant out as quickly.

Now, I want to say a little about where these novelties come from, using Mt. Cuba Center as an example. We are a developing public garden whose mission it is to bring the public to an appreciation of our native flora; particularly that of the Piedmont region. We do not sell plants, but a part of our research is the finding,

evaluation, and introduction of ornamentally or horticulturally superior forms of native plants. Our work to date has been to build up contacts throughout the Piedmont to work with us in discovering those plants; and to evaluate, under a variety of conditions, the performance of potential new introductions. We have emphasized that we do not want to introduce a plant which will later prove to be an inferior performer either in the nursery or in the garden. We are concerned that our introductions win the confidence and enthusiastic support of those who must propagate and distribute them. This is our answer to Denny Blew's question: "How do we know which are the really good plants?"

To date I believe we have been successful. We also work to create consumer demand that coincides with the appearance of the plant in catalogs and in retail centers. We do this through national periodicals aimed at consumers. This is how we act as advocates for good plants and for the nurseries that produce and sell them.

The following is a list of some of our introductions as examples of the process of discovery, evaluation, introduction, and publicity that I have outlined.

INTRODUCTIONS:

***Cornus sericea* 'Silver and Gold'**. (PHS Gold Medal winner). Originated as a sport of *C. sericea* 'Flaviramea' at Mt. Cuba, Greenville, Delaware. Leaves distinctively white variegated, other characteristics the same as 'Flaviramea'. Publicized as a replacement for variegated forms of *C. alba* in the hot and humid middle Atlantic region and southward. Cultivar registered in 1988.

***Aster novae-angliae* 'Purple Dome'**. Noted along Pennsylvania Route 100 below Allentown, Pennsylvania. Material provided to Mt. Cuba Center by Robert G. Seip of Lennilea Farm. 'Purple Dome' was publicized as the most compact form (18 inches tall × 36 inches wide) of the species.

***Aster laevis* 'Bluebird'**. Found in a private garden in Guilford, Connecticut, where it appeared as a volunteer seedling, this cultivar differs from the typical species in its freedom from mildew and other foliage diseases. It reaches 4 to 5 ft in height with gracefully arching stems bearing masses of 1-inch lavender-blue flowers with yellow centers. 'Bluebird' responds well to fertilization and good growing conditions, but is broadly tolerant of soil types and will grow in full sun or moderate shade.

***Heuchera americana* 'Garnet'**. Selected in 1984 from a variable group of colored-leaved *H. americana* growing at Mt. Cuba, Greenville, Delaware.

***Solidago sphacelata* 'Golden Fleece'**. Discovered in 1985 as a spontaneous seedling in a garden in Eden, North Carolina. It was evaluated under diverse conditions at Mt. Cuba Center and determined to be a low, compact form of the species suitable for groundcover use. Registered and distributed in 1989. Won the Internationale Stauden-Union's Award for an outstanding new plant in Switzerland in 1994.

***Leucothoe axillaris* 'Greensprite'**. A clone selected at Mt. Cuba in 1983. Evaluated for ease of propagation and for ability to quickly grow to salable size and quality under field nursery conditions. Registered in 1991 and publicized as a solid green leucothoe with narrow leaves with undulating edges and attenuated tips. Its

light-catching ability is spectacular and its stiffly arching stems give it a graceful and elegant character.

***Pachysandra procumbens* 'Forest Green'**. Originally obtained from the teaching garden at Pennsylvania State University in 1952. This clone has been heavily propagated by the introducer and distributed. Its "surface" as a groundcover is more smoothly undulating and the leaf whorls are larger and more regular than the five other clones it has been compared to. Leaf mottling is not as prominent as in the five other clones.

SOME PLANTS UNDER EVALUATION:

***Trillium grandiflorum* 'Quicksilver'**. Originated in the wild, in Northeastern Pennsylvania in 1958. It has been observed and evaluated in many sites for rapid increase. This clone has a doubling time of approximately 1 year. Ornamental qualities are the same as the species.

Chamaedaphne calyculata a selection for green winter foliage.

***Gillenia trifoliata* (syn. *Porteranthus trifoliatus*)** (pink form).

The mid morning session on Thursday was moderated by Robert Gouveia.