

The Best of New and Old California Native Perennials

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In this short paper, I would like to introduce or reacquaint the reader with a number of cultivars of Californian perennials and subshrubs that certainly deserve to be more widely propagated and grown. These beautiful Californians are riding the waves of interest in perennials and native plants. Most of these plants are also well matched to today's smaller gardens. This paper differs from the oral presentation in two ways: (1) Plants that were covered in the presentation and are not covered in this paper (*Lessingia filaginifolia* 'Silver Carpet', *Romneya* 'White Cloud', *Salvia spathacea* 'Pilitas', *Epilobium septentrionale* 'Select Mattole', *E. canum* 'Sierra Salmon', and *E.* 'Solidarity Pink') and (2) two older cultivars and one new selection that were not covered in detail in the presentation are included in this paper to clarify information regarding their origins (*Achillea millefolium* 'Island Pink', *Sisyrinchium bellum* 'San Simeon', and *Verbena lilacina* 'De La Mina').

***Achillea millefolium* 'Island Pink'**. 'Island Pink' was originally selected by Wayne Roderick from the top of the ridge above Prisoner's Harbor on Santa Cruz Island about 1976. The bright-green basal foliage is finely dissected and is pleasantly fragrant when crushed. The stiffly erect flowering stems rise to a height of 8 to 15 inches and carry a dense flat-topped cluster of tiny daisy-like flowers. Fresh flowers are a bright rosy-pink and age to a pale dusty pink over the course of several days. The plant is highly favored by insects, especially butterflies. Cut flowers and dried inflorescences are useful in arrangements. This plant can be propagated from seed, division, or from basal cuttings. Seed-grown plants must be rogued to maintain the desired characteristics of the cultivar.

***Artemisia californica* 'Montara'**. 'Montara' was selected, named, and introduced by Ray Walsh through his Wildwood Nursery in LaVerne in 1987. The plant was named 'Montara' since it was originally found on Montara Mountain in San Mateo County. Unlike all typical forms of California sagebrush, the habit of this plant is a dense low mound. The foliage is typical of the species: lush thread-like divisions of gray-green in the winter months and shorter nearly white during the dry season. The plant is best suited for dry landscapes and sites with well drained soils. It is easily propagated from cuttings of new vegetative shoots taken from late winter through spring.

***Aster chilensis* 'Point Saint George'**. The extreme northwest corner of coastal California in Del Norte County is the point of origin for this aggressive low-growing form of our native aster. This plant was originally collected in 1979 by Al Seneres of the East Bay Regional Parks Botanic Garden in Berkeley, though it was apparently named and introduced by Yerba Buena Nursery around 1994. 'Point Saint George' typically reaches 4 to 8 inches tall and spreads at an astonishing rate via underground runners. The spatulate dark-green shiny leaves are about 3 inches long and ½ inch wide. The flowers are a pale lavender color, have yellow centers and are freely produced on erect inflorescences that may reach 8 inches high. A light pruning at the end of the flowering season (November-December at our

garden) is suggested for best appearance. As noted above, this cultivar is particularly vigorous and should be used with caution. This plant is most readily propagated from division, and is also easily propagated from cuttings of basal shoots.

***Encelia californica* 'El Dorado'**. 'El Dorado' is easy to grow and dependable. This plant was selected from a planting at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (RSABG) by Dylan Hannon in 1996 for its bright-yellow flowers that are up to 3 inches across and was subsequently introduced by RSABG in 1998. The plant blooms profusely in spring and fall, with occasional flowers produced throughout the remainder of the year. Plants tolerate typical garden conditions, but will grow too lush if given excessive water and a rich soil. For best performance, plant this daisy in full sun. Established plants should be cut back very hard (to stubs about 4 inches long) in late fall or early winter. Expect the plant to reach 3 to 4 ft tall and to typically spread 5 to 8 ft wide. It can be grown for cut flowers. New plants are easily produced from cuttings of young vegetative growth in late winter and spring.

***Eriogonum umbellatum* 'Alturas Red'**. 'Alturas Red' is a striking 1990 introduction from Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery and is named for its geographic point of origin: Alturas, California. The plant has unusual foliage and floral characteristics. The spatulate leaves are dark-green (often nearly black) on their upper surface and have white undersides. The 4- to 6-inch stalked inflorescence carries a number of subsidiary ½-inch umbels of red buds that open to cream-yellow flowers that age a rich rusty brown. The growth habit of this plant is a compact hemisphere up to 6 inches high and 1 to 2 ft wide. 'Alturas Red' grows best in full sun and well drained soils. As with other *E. umbellatum* cultivars, this plant is grown from semihardwood cuttings. These cuttings consist of a long, bare internode topped by a terminal whorl-like grouping of leaves. Roots emerge at various points along the bare internode. Our experience at RSABG indicates that 'Alturas Red' is much slower growing than the other cultivars of *E. umbellatum*: 'Beartooth Pass', 'Lake Tahoe', and var. *polyanthum* 'Shasta Sulphur'.

***Fragaria chiloensis* 'Aulon'**. 'Aulon' is an especially handsome male selection of our native strawberry. The plant was selected and named by Brett Hall from an Indian abalone-shell midden at Laguna Beach, Santa Cruz County and was introduced by the University of California Arboretum, Santa Cruz in 1992. The name 'Aulon' is the Costanoan Indian word for abalone. This vigorous plant spreads by stolons to create a beautiful ground cover of glossy, dark-green, three-parted leaves. The petioles and stolons are dark red. Small clusters of 1-inch-wide, yellow-centered, white-petaled flowers are produced in limited quantity. The plant is easily propagated from the numerous plantlets along the stolons or by division of established plants.

***Lepechinia calycina* 'Rocky Point'**. 'Rocky Point' was originally named and collected by Al Seneres in 1988 from Rocky Point along the Big Sur coast of Monterey County. The plant had been growing in the East Bay Regional Parks Botanic Garden for several years prior to its introduction by California Flora Nursery in Fulton in 1991. This selection of pitcher sage is particularly satisfying as a garden plant. 'Rocky Point' is a low growing (to 3 ft tall and 5 ft wide), compact plant that has especially beautiful gray, soft-hairy, fragrant foliage. The leaves are produced at short intervals along the arching stems. The plants produce terminal inflorescences of showy white flowers that have a faint blush of lavender. 'Rocky

Point' is readily grown from soft vegetative cuttings taken in late winter or early spring, prior to flowering.

***Penstemon* 'Margarita BOP'**. 'Margarita BOP' is a wonderful recent introduction from Las Pilitas Nursery in Santa Margarita. It was selected and named by Bert Wilson in 1993, who considers it to be a hybrid between *P. heterophyllus* and *P. laetus*. The plant's name commemorates its origin as a chance seedling: at the nursery, behind the house, at the Bottom Of Porch. However, the plant has produced a number of seedlings at our garden and all of these are essentially identical to the parent plant, leading this author to surmise that 'Margarita BOP' is actually a clone of *P. heterophyllus*. In any event this is, without a doubt, the most durable plant and reliable bloomer of any seed strain or vegetatively reproduced clone of *P. heterophyllus* that I have encountered. It adapts equally well to both nursery and garden conditions. Unlike many of the Californian penstemons, this plant produces an abundance of branching stems that form a short dense 6 inch × 12 inch mound of gray-green foliage. A profusion of 8-inch inflorescences appear in mid-spring, when the plants are nearly obscured by the sky-blue flowers that have rosy-pink highlights. The plant continues to produce scattered flowering stems until cold weather sets in. 'Margarita BOP' is easily propagated from young vegetative cuttings taken from winter to early summer.

***Sisyrinchium bellum* 'San Simeon' (= *Sisyrinchium macounii* 'Alba')**. 'San Simeon' dates back to the early 1950s and, as such, it is one of the oldest vegetatively produced California native plant perennial cultivars that is still in cultivation. The original plant is said to have been collected by the noted California native plantswoman, Lester Rowntree, from near San Simeon in San Luis Obispo County. The plant subsequently made its way to Victor Reiter's La Rochette Nursery, where it was incorrectly identified, named, and introduced about 1956 as *S. macounii* 'Alba'. This incorrect name persists (or rather dominates) to this day, to the extent that I have never seen the plant sold with the correct name. The plants have the typical grass-like foliage and large white flowers. New plantlets are formed in the infrutescence that are easily detached and rooted.

***Verbena lilacina* 'De La Mina'**. 'De La Mina' is a 1998 introduction from Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. The plant was selected and named by Carol Bornstein, who had collected the original propagules from Canyon de la Mina on Cedros Island, Mexico. The plant has bright-green dissected foliage and fragrant lavender flowers that are produced year-round. This vigorous selection has a much denser growth habit, and darker flowers than the form(s) that is (are) currently in cultivation. It is easily propagated from soft cuttings at any time of the year.

THE SAGES:

***Salvia* 'Allen Chickering' (*S. clevelandii* × *S. leucophylla*)**. 'Allen Chickering' is the oldest widely grown perennial native to California. This hybrid was originally noted in about 1937 by Allen Chickering during a walk through the original Orange County site of Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden with the Garden's founder, Susanna Bixby Bryant. The plant was a seedling that had grown in a planting of *S. clevelandii* that had been originally collected on the east side of Palomar Mountain in San Diego County. The original hybrid plant was never vegetatively propagated,

though seeds were later collected from the same group of plants that generated the original hybrid individual, and a new plant was chosen and renamed 'Allen Chickering' about 1949. This individual plant was vegetatively propagated for the first time in 1955. Cuttings of new vegetative shoots root readily in spring and may be taken from late winter until the plant flowers.

***Salvia* 'Bee's Bliss' (*S. clevelandii*(?) × *S. sonomensis*).** 'Bee's Bliss' occurred as a chance seedling at the University of California Botanical Garden in Berkeley, where it was noted and distributed to several nurseries by Roger Raiche in about 1988-89. In 1992, the bee covered plant in the garden of noted *Salvia* expert Betsy Clebsch inspired artist Marcia Donahue and Clebsch to name the plant. 'Bee's Bliss' combines the large showy inflorescences of *S. clevelandii*, *S. leucophylla* and their hybrids, with the prostrate growth habit of *S. sonomensis*. The ample foliage is a pale gray-green. The foliage mat of this plant may reach 6 to 8 ft wide and may reach from 6 to 18 inches tall. The flowering stems are about 1 ft in length and carry several whorl-like aggregations of lavender-blue flowers. This plant is easily propagated from new vegetative shoots in late winter or early spring. Young plants in containers (and in the ground) are often subject to seasonal attacks of powdery mildew due to excess moisture and/or shade.

***Salvia* 'Desperado' (*S. apiana* × *S. leucophylla*).** This is a big sage, the largest yet of the named native clones. 'Desperado' was selected and named by this author and the plant was introduced by RSABG in 1998. The plant has been in the living collection at RSABG for many years. The lush white leaves closely resemble those of the white sage (*S. apiana*), but in this cultivar, they often turn bright colors (yellow, orange, or pink) before dropping. An individual leaf may reach up to 5 inches long and up to 1 inch wide. The large, well branched (up to 26 branches in a single inflorescence) flower spikes carry large whorls of big lavender-pink flowers (from *S. leucophylla*). The whorl-like assemblage of calyces may reach up to 2 inches across. An established mature plant may reach 15 ft wide and, when in flower, may reach 10 ft in height. Plants perform best in full sun and well drained soils. As with most of our native sages, this should be cut back fairly hard (between one-third and two-thirds of the season's growth should be removed — do not prune back into old wood) in late fall, prior to new growth. Young plants should be regularly pinched and lightly pruned to develop a good branching structure and dense growth habit, even if this means sacrificing the flowers for the first year. Hummingbirds like this plant. Propagate this selection from cuttings taken from lush new spring growth that is freely produced prior to flowering.

***Salvia* 'Mrs. Beard' (*S. mellifera* × *S. sonomensis*).** 'Mrs. Beard' originated as a chance seedling in the garden of Helen Mar Beard some time in the 1960s. She brought the plant to the University of California Botanical Garden in Berkeley, where it was planted on a sunny east facing slope in the California section. The plant was never formally accessioned as it was not a plant of wild origin. Over the years the plant was propagated and gained limited distribution in northern California. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the plant finally gained the cultivar name 'Mrs. Beard'. This vigorous plant is a prostrate to low, mounding groundcover and may reach 6 to 18 inches in height and may spread up to 10 ft wide. Occasionally the plants will root where the prostrate stems contact the soil. The upright inflorescences are typically 8 inches tall and produce many small pale-blue

flowers in whorl-like clusters. 'Mrs. Beard' is the longest lived and best performer in the widest array of garden conditions of the *S. sonomensis* selections and hybrids. New plants are easily grown from cuttings of soft vegetative shoots from late winter through early summer.

***Salvia* 'Poza Blue'**. 'Poza Blue' is rather similar in appearance to 'Allen Chickering'. The principal difference that I have observed is in its vigor and performance as a garden plant. This plant was selected, named, and introduced by Bert Wilson of Las Pilitas Nursery in 1989. It appeared as a chance seedling in a pile of old potting soil. Mature flowering plants will easily exceed 6 ft in height and 8 ft wide.

***Salvia spathacea* 'Powerline Pink'**. 'Powerline Pink' is an impressive giant form of the hummingbird sage. Immense does not begin to describe the huge 3- to 5-ft inflorescences that adorn the plants in spring. Well grown, vigorous plants have a tendency to rebloom in fall. This selection was made in 1993 by Bert Wilson of Las Pilitas Nursery of Santa Margarita in San Luis Obispo County. Unlike most of the hummingbird sages, this clone prefers to grow in full sun, even tolerating our extreme summer heat in inland southern California. Half of the plant's name is a mystery to me — it was collected along a powerline right-of-way, but I see nothing pink about it. The flowers are, in fact, a beautiful deep maroon-red. The inflorescence bracts and calyces are often colored complementary dark tones. Apple-green is the color of the textured-surfaced 5- to 6-inch leaves. All vegetative parts of the plant are covered with glandular hairs and carry a pleasing fruity fragrance. Plants may be grown from cuttings of vegetative shoots or from division. In any event, propagation of this extremely desirable form has been slow.

***Salvia* 'Vicki Romo' (*S. apiana* × *S. clevelandii*)**. 'Vicki Romo' was selected and named by this author from a chance seedling at RSABG and was introduced by RSABG in 1992. It was particularly appropriate to name this plant in honor of Victoria Romo, a deceased RSABG graduate student, who had been working (among many other projects) on molecular studies of native Californian *Salvia* cultivars. Her investigations conclusively determined the parentage of 'Allen Chickering', 'Aromas', 'Poza Blue', 'Santa Cruz Dark', and 'Whirly Blue' as F1 hybrids between *S. clevelandii* and *S. leucophylla*, with the exception of 'Allen Chickering' which is an F2 hybrid. 'Vicki Romo' must be grown in full hot sun for best performance. The winter and spring foliage of this selection is gray-green, and from late spring through fall it is nearly white. The large upright inflorescences of this plant may reach 3 to 5 ft in length and are often basally branched. The violet blue flowers are carried in large whorl-like clusters. When in bloom, a mature plant may reach 6 to 8 ft in height and 4 to 6 ft wide. Propagate this plant from cuttings taken from fresh new growth in late winter and early spring.

Epilobium

Although the genus *Zauschneria* has been reduced to synonymy under the genus *Epilobium* by a number of botanists, this group of plants is both botanically and horticulturally distinct from *Epilobium* to the extent that this author feels that they should be considered a separate genus. [Botanical Editor's note: The genus *Zauschneria* is synonymous with *Epilobium canum* and *E. septentrionale*]. The plants listed below all benefit from a hard pruning to short stubs in December. For the best appearance at flowering time (late summer and fall), the plants should also

be pinched back or lightly pruned in May or June. All of these plants are readily grown from soft cuttings of young vegetative shoots taken in spring to early summer.

***Epilobium* ‘Calistoga’.** ‘Calistoga’ was selected and named by Philip Van Soelen from material collected near Calistoga, Napa County, in 1994. This clone has the most distinctive foliage that I have ever seen in this genus — the broadly oval gray leaves are up to 2 inches long and up to 1 inch wide. The flowers are fairly typical of the genus, flaring red-orange trumpets, and are produced in few-flowered terminal clusters. At RSABG, we grow this plant with *Salvia* ‘Bee’s Bliss’ as the foliage of these two plants closely resemble each other such that most people perceive a single plant that produces radically different flowers in spring and fall.

***Epilobium canum* ‘Catalina’.** ‘Catalina’ was selected by Mike Evans from Middle Ranch Canyon on Santa Catalina Island in 1987. He later named it and the plant was introduced by Tree of Life Nursery in San Juan Capistrano in 1990. ‘Catalina’ is notable in many respects: it has beautiful, narrow, silver-gray leaves; brilliant orange-red large flowers; and a strongly upright growth habit. Plants that have not been cut back and have been allowed to lean/grow into surrounding plants may reach a height of 6 ft, whereas plants that have been cut to the ground every winter may reach heights from 1 to 3 ft tall.

***Epilobium* ‘Route 66’.** ‘Route 66’ was selected by this author from RSABG’s entry sign at the corner of Foothill Boulevard (the historic Route 66) and North College Avenue. The plant was named and introduced by Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in 1996. The most notable feature of this selection is its extreme abundance of orange-red flowers that are produced over the course of 2 months from late summer to early fall. The short, broad leaves of this cultivar are green. The plant may reach a height of 1 to 2 ft and may spread 2 to 4 ft wide. As with most of the taller (over 1 ft in height) selections, ‘Route 66’ benefits from light pinching/pruning in May-June that will result in more intertwined branches that will serve to hold the plant upright and together when it is covered with heavy blossoms several months later.

***Epilobium* ‘Summer Snow’.** ‘Summer Snow’ is a low-growing white-flowered plant that was selected from near Sugarloaf Mountain, southeast of Big Bear Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains by Walter Wisura in 1986. It was subsequently named by him and was introduced by Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in 1989. The plant has broad green leaves and will reach a height of 6 inches and creates a mat of foliage 2 to 3 ft across. ‘Summer Snow’ will perform best if given some afternoon shade when grown in the hot interior.

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