

## **Observations from the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station Trial Gardens<sup>©</sup>**

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### **SUMMARY**

The Louisiana State University Agricultural Center's Hammond Research Station is the Center of Excellence for the Louisiana Green industry. As such, we strive to provide the most relevant and beneficial research and programming aimed to help the industry grow. Our mission is to enhance production efficiency and landscape sustainability through research, extension, and educational outreach - as well as to evaluate and promote specialty crops for the nursery, landscape, and garden center industries in Louisiana. The station houses research efforts into environmental nursery production, sustainable landscape practices, landscape entomology, and landscape horticulture. Most notably, the Hammond Research Station is home to the Hammond Trial Gardens, which were featured on the International Plant Propagators Society Southern Region tour and brochure. The Hammond Trial Gardens occupy approximately 40 acres and house well over 1000 different plant varieties, trials and demonstrations, annually. Plant trials range from seasonal bedding plants to ornamental shrubs and trees to edibles.

### **THE GARDENS**

The most prominent garden at the Hammond Research Station is the Allen D. Owings Sun Garden (Fig. 1), which houses the majority of the bedding plant trials throughout the year. This garden is often the highlight of the station and the first garden observed when entering the property. Aside from seasonal color trials, many root hardy tropical and perennial landscape plants are trialed in the Sun Garden. Moreover, this is the location

of many of our sustainable landscape demonstration gardens, including edible landscaping, pollinator gardens, and rain gardens.

The second most popular garden within the Hammond Trial Gardens is the Margie Yates Jenkins Azalea Garden (Fig 2.). Established in 2006, the Margie Y. Jenkins Azalea Garden houses the majority of our understory trials and many of our flowering shrub collections. This garden was initially designed around many of the historically important shrubs and small trees that thrived in the Louisiana nursery and landscape industry throughout the years. In addition to the heritage plantings, a great deal of our azalea trials and collections are located within the Margie Jenkins Azalea Garden.

The Piney Woods garden (Fig. 3) is the largest garden at the Hammond Research Station. The Piney Woods Garden is the home for many of our long term displays and demonstrations, as well as serving as a repository for many of the woody ornamental collections that have relevance to the industry.

## **UNDERUSED PLANT MATERIALS**

Much of the plant material we trial at the Hammond Research Station is or has been associated with the nursery and landscape trade throughout the Southeastern United States. However, there are many plants that perform fantastically in our trials that do not have the recognition or receive the exposure that they deserve. These plants thrive in our Louisiana landscapes and would have a positive impact if assimilated into the trade. None of the plant varieties listed here were developed at the LSU AgCenter Hammond Trial Gardens; instead these are plants we have collected from amazing breeders and plant experts throughout the Southeast U.S. We believe they deserve more consideration for use in landscapes.

*Aloysia virgata* – Known by the common name sweet almond verbena. Root hardy tropical shrub with sandpaper-like silver leaves. This is a large shrub that will grow upwards of 2.4 m (8 ft.) tall. The flowering panicles give off fantastic fragrance and are irresistible to pollinators. This should be grown in full sun. (Fig. 4)

***Camellia* ‘Snow Blizzard’** – This is a cross between *Camellia pitardii* and *C. fraterna*, and is one of our favorite camellia hybrids at the Hammond Research Station. These shrubs are evergreen and can grow quite large with numerous small spicy-scented white flowers covering their branches. (Fig. 5)

***Camellia* ‘Tiny Princess’** – Like ‘Snow Blizzard’ this is a hybrid of *C. fraterna*. Small blooms cover the branches of this camellia; however, these have a delicate pink color instead of white. This camellia has an open spreading habit with a slight weeping form to its branches resulting from the weight of its numerous blooms. (Fig. 6)

***Camellia edithae*** – This fantastic camellia species features pink double blooms. It will grow approximately 1.8 m (6 ft.) tall. This is one of the latest blooming camellias in the garden, with bloom time in late spring. (Fig. 7)

***Camellia fraterna*** – A few older specimens of this camellia are currently on display in our Azalea Garden. An abundance of small white blooms make this as a stunning camellia. The bark develops an orange hue and the branches can develop a weeping habit. (Fig. 8)

***Cestrum* x ‘Orange Peel’** – This is one of the best cestrums at the Hammond Research Station. A hybrid of *Cestrum diurnum* and *C. nocturnum*, this large tropical shrub will take the heat and can quickly grow to 1.2 – 2.4 m (4-8 ft.) tall by 0.9-1.5 m (3-5 ft.) wide, making it an ideal background planting. Dark green, deer-resistant narrow leaves provide good contrast for the numerous golden yellow/light orange tubular blooms. Best planted in full sun with good drainage. Begins blooming in late spring until first frost. *Cestrum* is easily propagated by cuttings. This selection can be a deciduous shrub in warmer parts of Zones 8 and 9, but may die back to the roots during cold winters of Zone 8. (Fig. 9)

***Gardenia jasminoides* ‘Martha Turnbull’** – This heavily flowering gardenia was collected from Rosedown Plantation in St. Francisville, Louisiana. The single blooms are shaped like a pinwheel and are approximately 7.6 cm (3 in.) in diameter. The blooms last from early spring through the summer and result in orange hips during the winter. This is a great, quick growing, profuse flowering gardenia that provides plenty of the classic gardenia fragrance. (Fig. 10)

*Gardenia jasminoides* ‘**Variiegata**’ – This fantastic gardenia exhibits large slender variegated leaves that stand out more than the fragrant double bloomed flowers. Grown in part shade, this gardenia makes a show-stopping, bright addition to the landscape. (Fig. 11)

*Lantana X* ‘**Grandpa’s Pumpkin Patch**’ - Vibrant flower clusters in shades of orange and dark yellow bloom from spring to frost. This is a large lantana that makes an excellent background planting, growing 1.2-1.5 m (4-5 ft.) tall by 1.2-1.5 m (4-5 ft.) wide. Excellent butterfly attractant. Propagated by cuttings. Reliable perennial in Zones 8 and 9. (Fig. 12)

*Magnolia* ‘**Anilou**’ – One of the best of the yellow magnolia hybrids at the Hammond Research Station, this tree has long-lasting bright yellow blooms that start in late spring. This deciduous magnolia also exhibits a columnar form and fits perfectly in the landscape. (Fig. 13)

*Magnolia* ‘**Butterflies**’ – This hybrid magnolia is a deciduous flowering magnolia that has buttery yellow flowers which hold their color throughout the bloom period. The tree is pyramidal shaped and performs well throughout the Gulf South. The tree reaches 20 feet tall and blooms in late spring. (Fig. 14)

*Magnolia* ‘**Jon Jon**’ – This hybrid deciduous magnolia flowers somewhat later after many other deciduous magnolias and usually after danger of freezes. Incorporating this variety into landscapes keeps deciduous magnolia blooms longer into the spring. The thick blooms are a cream white with a hint of purple on the underside of the petioles. It has grown to a height of 6.1 m (20 ft.) at the Hammond Research Station.

(Fig. 15)

*Pentas lanceolata* ‘**Nova**’ – This 1999 Georgia Gold Medal Winner is reportedly one of the hardiest and most vigorous pentas varieties. Grows to 0.9 m (3 ft.) tall by 0.6 m (2 ft.) wide in full sun. Large clusters of 7.6-10.2 cm (3-4 in.) rose-pink, star-shaped flowers appear atop dark green leaves from late spring through fall. Like most pentas, this plant is an excellent butterfly attractant. It is easily propagated by cuttings and can be pruned periodically to control growth. ‘Nova’ can be perennial in warmer regions of Zone 9. (Fig. 16)

***Prunus mume* ‘Fragrant Snow’ and ‘Peggy Clarke’** - Flowering apricots are a completely underutilized small to medium size ornamental trees in the landscape! These trees provide amazing late winter color and fantastic fragrance that permeates the gardens. ‘Fragrant Snow’ is a white blooming variety and ‘Peggy Clarke’ has pink blooms. (Fig. 17A ‘Fragrant Snow’ and Fig. 17B ‘Peggy Clarke’)

***Rhododendron* ‘Red Luster’** - This is a striking, evergreen azalea that has wonderful variegated foliage and dense showy pinkish red blooms. The variegation is often in the form of light cream-colored margins. (Fig. 18)

***Rhododendron* x ‘Koromo Shikibu’** – With its long, narrow petals, this lavender colored indica azalea is a fantastic specimen that has been around for quite some time. ‘Koromo Shikibu’ is sometimes called a “spider” azalea, and has a sweet subtle fragrance. It has been described as a hybrid of *R. macrosepalum*, but true parentage is unclear. (Fig. 19)

***Rostrinucula dependens*** – Often referred to as “Weeping False Buddleia,” this deciduous shrub is a member of the mint family. This shrub does not die back to the ground in our climate and maintains its form and structure year after year. The weeping habit of unusual purple flowers on white racemes give it very unique look. It does best when grown in part sun and will grow to approximately 1.5-1.8 m (5-6 ft.) tall. This is a very unique and underutilized plant that should be featured more in southern landscapes. (Fig. 20)

***Salvia farinacea* ‘Rebel Child’**– This is a chance hybrid between ‘Henry Duelberg’ and ‘Cedar Hill’. It can reach 0.6-0.9 m (2-3 ft.) tall and is a vigorous bloomer from spring through first frost. The bloom is bluer than ‘Henry Duelberg’, and it is an excellent pollinator attractor. ‘Rebel Child’ is one of the toughest salvias you can grow and is a perennial in our climate. Like most salvias, ‘Rebel Child’ prefers full sun. It is easily propagated by cuttings. (Fig. 21)



Figure 1. The LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station, Allen D. Owings Sun Garden bedding plant trials.



Figure 2. The LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station, Margie Yates Jenkins Azalea Garden.



Figure 3. The LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station, Piney Woods Garden.



Figure 4. *Aloysia virgate*.



Figure 5. *Camellia* 'Snow Blizzard'.



Figure 6. *Camellia* 'Tiny Princess'.



Figure 7. *Camellia edithae*.



Figure 8. *Camellia fraternal*.



Figure 9. *Cestrum* x 'Orange Peel'.



Figure 10. *Gardenia jasminoides* 'Martha Turnbull'.



Figure 11. *Gardenia jasminoides* 'Variegata'.



Figure 12. *Lantana* X 'Grandpa's Pumpkin Patch'.



Figure 13. *Magnolia* 'Anilou'.



Figure 14. *Magnolia* 'Butterflies'.



Figure 15. **Magnolia 'Jon Jon'**.



Figure 16. *Pentas lanceolata* 'Nova'.



Figure 17A. *Prunus mume* 'Fragrant Snow'.



Figure 17B. *Prunus mume* 'Peggy Clarke'.



Figure 18. *Rhododendron* 'Red Luster'.



Figure 19. *Rhododendron* x 'Koromo Shikibu'.



Figure 20. *Rostrinucula dependens*.



Figure 21. *Salvia farinacea* 'Rebel Child'.