

Plant Curiosities from Log House Plants®

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BACKGROUND

A little background about Log House Plants and how we started. We were in our senior year of college —1974— when we found our place in the woods east of Cottage Grove on Dorena Lake. It was a beautiful farm on Rat Creek with a back forty, a donkey, and a log house built in 1929. We started our first greenhouse, naming our wholesale nursery Log House Plants and then our retail bookstore on Main Street, called The Bookmine, in Cottage Grove. We were 24 years old. Rat Creek is a wonderful place to be.

Over the last 30 years our business has flourished. We grow 2500 taxa of annuals, perennials, vegetables, and herbs for the fine independent nurseries of the Northwest plus a few premiere nurseries in California. We love the hunt for new plants and hybridizing. We listen carefully to demand, and we follow our own interests. We are encouraged by our clientele to be creative.

Last fall, for the first time, a few Log House world exclusive offerings were available to discriminating gardeners throughout the U.S.A. and Canada through a new plant liner program called Plant Curiosities™.

OUR SELECTION

I'd like to set the stage by showing you a few of the "normal" selections that we, as a wholesaler, offer to our retail accounts. Many of our selections are also exclusively Log House selections.

Some of Our 2004 "Normal Favorites".

Nicotiana mutabilis. Amazing 5 ft display of small dangling white flowers, which turn pale then deep pink. This is one plant, with many colors of flowers all at once. The word "mutabilis" means changeable and you do get that yesterday, today, and tomorrow feeling. In Oregon this plant blooms from June to November, sometimes even to Christmas! It can be grown in the sun or shade and is a short-lived perennial, treated as an annual, though it often overwinters if not waterlogged.

***Fuchsia* 'Neon Tricolor'**. This is the perfect name for this new stunning upright!

***Schizopetalon walkerii* 'Milkyway Postage Stamp'**. This is an exquisite though whimsy little annual with fragrant spectacular rectangular snowflake flowers.

***Amaranthus cruentus* 'Hot Biscuit' (syn. *A. paniculatus* 'Hot Biscuit')**. I love brown flowers and this 4½ ft amaranthus grows a good supply of impressive orange-brown spikes that last well as cutflowers. This amaranthus combines beautifully with the rich paper-bag-brown-colored new decorative sweet potato 'Princess Caroline Bronze'. Originally found in J.C. Ralston's garden, the Princess Caroline series is bred for compactness, so if you have had a time keeping your lime foliage sweet potato 'Margarita' tame in containers, try the 'Princess Caroline Light Green'. And also in this series is a purple counterpart to 'Blackie'.

***Mirabilis jalapa* 'Limelight'**. Another new favorite is this four o'clock, *M. jalapa* 'Limelight' — look at its luminous yellow-green variegated foliage that sets off the bright rose flowers; it grows 2 ft tall.

Another four o'clock, *M. jalapa* 'Red Glow' does glow! Masses of vibrant scarlet flowers each with this darker star open in the evening and early morning, giving off a delicate perfume. I love 'Custard and Cream', our new four o'clock that grows white, cream, and shades of yellow flowers all at the same time!

***Gomphocarpus physocarpus* (syn. *Asclepias physocarpa*).** Here is a 5 ft tall milkweed that blooms cream white clusters all summer and creates these wonderful thorny balls of seeds that last on the plant all fall until they become wishes. This milkweed has narrow leaves. This plant needs frost-free winter storage.

***Solanum mammosum* 'When Pigs Fly'.** This exotic tropical shrub bears purple flowers, but its real attraction are the clusters of plump berries shaped curiously like snouty baby pigs. Atop long, waving purple stems the yellow-orange fruits resemble a flock of chubby little piglets sailing through the sky, making a colorful and entertaining addition to cutflower arrangements. 'When Pigs Fly' grows up to 4 ft tall with deeply lobed leaves that have spikes on their undersides. A tender tropical in our Zone 7, will winter outside in warmer climates.

***Lobelia erinus* 'Periwinkle Blue'.** Our friend Scott Trees hybridized this free-flowering lobelia from two distant lobelia species. It is the first vegetative lobelia that is truly heat tolerant. It has stunning dark blue flowers with white eye.

***Amaranthus gangeticus*.** We're excited that elephant head *A. gangeticus* is now available in a pure green version. Use as a 3-ft background plant. The spike holds well on the plant for weeks.

***Hibiscus trionum* 'Simply Love'.** Combined with French vanilla marigold. Strong color blooms until October, is a nice combination.

***Helianthus annuus* 'Magic Roundabout'.** Fantastic new branching 5 ft sunflower. Our joy is responding to demand, finding new exciting selections and "following our bliss".

Non-water-Guzzlers in Our Catalogue.

For example, a few years ago during the worst drought in 70 years we added a few non-water-guzzlers to our wholesale availability list.

***Urtica dioica* 'Stinging Metal'.** This plant was inspired by tax initiatives in Oregon. 'Stinging Metal' is an encrusted rigid upright plant with blended thorns. It is a rustic addition and a soil amendment for the border.

***Lupinus* 'New Generation'.** For sure, this is no scam! One of the most successful plants, "New Generation" has densely-packed, brilliantly-colored 3-ft floral spikes and sturdy, disease-resistant constitution, and is a far cry from the aphid-ridden cultivars of old. No staking necessary. A dazzling array of colors and bicolors, ranging from cream, yellow, and peach to pale pink, light scarlet, blood red, and shades of blue and white. 'New Generation' received the highest award from the Queen of England 2 years ago, the Vetch Award, and through the years over 13 gold medals from the Royal Horticulture Society. Log House is the exclusive grower in the United States.

Beside retail nurseries in Oregon and Washington, we grow for Jackson & Perkins, who are known for their roses and also ship perennials nationally. Every year for the last 8 years our plant selections have been in the top 10 products list for the

company. Two years ago our lupine “New Generation Hybrids” made the cover of their perennial catalogue; 7.4 million copies of this catalogue were mailed.

***Delphinium* ‘New Heights’.** And also our new dwarf delphinium that we named and premiered worldwide in Oregon made the cover — *D.* ‘New Heights’!

‘New Heights’ is a fabulous evolution of the famous giant English delphiniums — they are the world’s first dwarf! Instead of 6–8 ft tall they grow 3 to 4 ft. They bloom the first year in the same expansive and exquisite range of floret and bee colors including iridescent purples, turquoise, dark, sky and light blues, mauve, roses, pinks, chocolate, whites, and creams. All English delphiniums have outstanding winter hardiness, vigor and strength of cane and bloom in early summer and again in the fall. There is a proper way to grow them, and we inform gardeners through handouts distributed by our accounts and on our website. Through the years we’ve grown over 90 crosses sourced from members of the British Delphinium Society.

We tell gardeners to keep an eye out for slugs eating the emerging canes each year. Aside from waterlogged positions, slugs do the most damage.

Vegetables are a Many Splendored Category.

We love pursuing the cornucopia of new introductions available each year. This bowl is filled with cluster or truss tomato cultivars.

Even the tomatoes are talking about it! It is miraculous that you can start with this and be harvesting just 6 weeks later purple cauliflower ‘Graffiti’ (*Brassica oleracea* Italica Group ‘Graffiti’) — a flashy new F1 hybrid that pretty much stays this color when cooked and can be planted in spring or fall.

And vegetables can work as cutflowers! *Brassica* ‘Corgy Sunrise’ and ‘Corgy Sunset’, are cabbages that grow 18 inches tall with small 4-inch colorful rosette heads that can be used like long-stemmed roses. Starts should be planted in June through July. Just plant tight and strip the bottom leaves off three times during the season. These brassicas are popular in Europe already, but just now available in the U.S.A.

***Zea mays* ‘Japonica’.** Speaking of unusual uses of vegetables, here’s a favorite of ours — *Zea mays* ‘Japonica’, striped corn. In the garden, in combination pots or as filler in cutflower arrangements, this is a spectacular plant.

***Cichorium intybus* ‘Tauro’ (syn. *Chicory* ‘Tauro’).** Another beautiful color combination is chicory ‘Tauro’ Large, creamy yellow heads have variegated, pastel leaves, which are pale pink and green-veined with pink speckles.

***Fragaria vesca* ‘Golden Alexandria’.** We grow heirloom, day-length-neutral, traditional, decorative strawberries, and even this rare everbearing alpine with startling lime green foliage and rich sweet flavor.

***Cucumis melo* ‘Prescott Fond Blanc’.** A favorite of French market growers, this unique, puffy-looking melon is strikingly beautiful. The 4- to 9-lb fruits are ribbed and warty with a rich, fragrant, salmon-orange flesh. It has a high sugar content. Watermelon ‘Sorbet Swirl’ has mouth-watering multicolor pastel swirls of red and yellow flesh grow on vigorous vines.

***Pumpkin* ‘Kakai’.** Eye-catching, striped fruits! Good pie pumpkin. It also produces excellent seeds for roasting; Austrian variety.

Believe It or Not Veggies. This is a new category for us!

Scorpiurus. We're even playing with *Scorpiurus* cultivars from which you harvest edible pods shaped like caterpillars, worms, and snails. Play tricks on your family by sticking them in salads.

***Solanum melongena* 'Purple Wonder'.** Try our introduction, eggplant 'Purple Wonder'! You'll have a successive harvest if you grow this new hard-boiled cultivar. Just kidding.

***Cucurbita pepo* 'Marina di Chioggia'.** This is one of the most beautiful and unique of all squash. The rich, sweet flesh is a deep yellow-orange and delicious baked or in pies. Fruits of 10 lb are produced on vigorous vines. An heirloom winter squash called the sea pumpkin of Chioggia, from the coast of Italy.

***Cucurbita pepo* 'Costata Romanesco'** with its legendary nutty taste and distinctive prominent ribs, this zucchini is loved in Italy — another Italian variety.

***Sorghum vulgare* 'Ornamental Pod'.** An off-the-wall primitive corn for dry flower arrangers. Instead of a husk around the cob, each individual kernel has a husk giving the cob a shaggy appearance. Individual husk colors are tan, brown, red, and copper! It requires 110 days to harvest.

Mexican Sour Gherkin. We love the unbelievable sweet and sour flavor of this newly rediscovered heirloom cucumber species. It tastes like a cucumber with salad dressing on it! The 1- to 2-inch fruits grow dangling from the vine like miniature-striped watermelons that fall when ripe. Grow on a fence or trellis. This is the best-unknown vegetable to become available in decades, according to a French vegetable expert.

***Cucurbita argyrosperma* 'Tricolor Cushaw'.** Vigorous vines produce this uniquely colored winter squash with light cream-colored flesh with delicate sweet flavor. This is a rare cushaw cultivar and will grow 10-lb squash. Variegated yolo wonder a wonder of nature found in our garden, we hope to offer this soon!

Solanum muricatum. A grower in Belgium gave us this new plant. A juicy fruit-like perennial vegetable that tastes like a cross between melon and pineapple with the texture of papaya! Grown from cuttings, deep green narrow long leaves make a 36-inch wide dramatic and beautiful branched hanging basket with the fragrant dangling 'Pepino' — delicious creamy-yellow smooth-skinned fruit with stippled purple stripes. Sets fruit at 65 °F. Plant in a long-lasting hanging basket (of wood, for instance), so you can take it in during the very chilliest periods of winter (less than 28 °F). If you do, you'll have 'Pepino' indefinitely!

***Lycopersicon esculentum* 'Fatso'.** The same Belgium grower shared seeds and a taste of his great grandparents' special tomato that they have always called Fatso. It has a strong local following because of the sweet and acidic thick pulp and few seeds.

***Raphanus sativus* (Caudatus Group) rat-tailed radishes.** A big hit the last few years...the rat-tailed radishes have a long harvest of extraordinary crisp seed-pods that are yummy in salads or stir-fry and have a wonderful peppery aftertaste. Rather than harvesting the plant underground, the continuous sprays of flowers create constant tender pods from June through summer and early fall. We'll never be without them in our garden.

Looking for New Introduction. We're always on the lookout for new selections, listening to the plant buyers, gardeners, and traveling some (including to the trials in Zeeland, where thousands of lines of annuals and perennials are screened, selected, and assessed each year).

***Lotus tetragonolobus* (syn. *Tetragonolobus purpureus*).** This is an old vegetable that many don't know — asparagus pea with red flowers.

***Ainsworthia trachycarpa* 'Nature's Art'.** Boy is it!

***Helenium*.** Wonderful new *Helenium* varieties.

***Viola cornuta* Alba Group.**

***Plantago major* 'Rosuleris'.**

***Reseda odorata* 'Red Monarch'.** The old favorite with a new stronger habit — the most fragrant.

***Helleborus* 'Gold Bullion'.** The world's first lime foliage hellebore.

***Centaurea montana*.** This perennial has always been pure blue. We're playing with six colors.

***Nicotiana*.** I've always loved *Nicotiana*. Here's the new variegated we have been growing for a few years. And *N. knightiana*, and the new tall lime-flowered. We are so excited to have this new tall lime flower.

***Amicia zygomeris*.** Isn't this bizarre? Weird folded green leaves, large purple stipules, yellow pea flowers, tall and unearthly. Needs full sun, good drainage. Borderline hardy in the Northwest.

So now you've seen the backdrop of our first national program, Plant Curiosities™.

PLANT CURIOSITIES

We have many exclusives that have inspired us to widen our market to start a national liner program tailored to growers and independent retailers. We have been asked many times to make our plants available outside the Northwest.

For this new program, we decided to focus on our exclusive varieties that have curious behavior, flowers, or form — the Plant Curiosities. These are captivating plants. They are rarities for enthusiasts, but they have broad appeal, too.

For the last 30 years, our mission has been to support independent retailers in the Northwest by creating unique plant categories and rare plants, innovative labeling, and educational materials that give a competitive edge. We invigorate each season with new varieties. We give gardeners the reason to go back for more. By keeping the independent strong, the texture of our culture will continue on. We must all fight the overbearing sameness of the big box stores and strip malls.

We decided to take this mission nationally with the new Plant Curiosities program, to help independent nurseries source rare and interesting plants. We are adding a few new plants each year to this national program and giving preference to established customers.

***Echinacea purpurea* 'Doppelgänger'.** Here we have this incredible two-layered *Echinacea*, unbelievable! Since 2000, a Dutch grower friend has grown our clone of this plant for us. He whooped and hollered with appreciation when he heard our

chosen name, 'Doppelgänger'. The name could not be a better choice and is a wonderful name in many respects, he said. In literature "doppelganger" means, "double walker", and refers to the psychological shadow self that partners each being.

This is a spectacular new cultivar of coneflower! The initial flower form and purple-rose color of petals are those of the traditional *E. purpurea* but once established, a matching flower develops on top of the orange-stamened geometric cone! Together the two-layered effect is stunning!

Hardy, long-lived, the 30-inch-tall plants are useful in natural gardens and borders. Flower arrangers prize this unusual perennial for its unique structure and lively color. It makes a curious cutflower! Hardy to Zone 3.

Echinacea purpurea 'Doppelgänger' was the perfect candidate for this new program. It is certainly a curious plant!

Primula 'Penumbra'. This is the world's first silver-edged primula. Our kids named it 'Penumbra' for the curious slim edge of cool light that shows around the moon during an eclipse. 'Penumbra' grows to 10 inches and is heavenly in woodland gardens. Its uniform silver bands show in the night like outlines of floating flowers. Beautiful and mysterious, 'Penumbra' flowers have an extraordinary long bloom period from February to June and are hardy to Zone 4. 'Penumbra' is a true perennial.

Primula You and Me Series. Here is list of our hose-in-hose primrose — the first *Primula* You and Me Series F₁ from seed (eight straight colors): You and Me Series deep purple, You and Me Series white, You and Me Series rose, You and Me Series yellow, You and Me Series blue, You and Me Series cream, You and Me Series red lace, and You and Me Series golden yellow.

This is the hardest primrose on earth. But its most extraordinary characteristic is the unique flower — the hose-in-hose — which is rarely available in primroses. On top of that, the abundant amount of bloom time generated on each plant and the extraordinary long length of bloom time is unlike any other primrose.

Hose-in-Hose is a horticultural term that describes flowers in which the sepals are apparently transformed into petals, so that actually the flower looks as if it has two or more corollas superimposed on each other, or an identical flower growing out of the lower flower.

All You and Me Series eight straight colors match in habit, size, earliness, and length of flowering. They bloom from February through June, 12 inches tall, shade lover.

In the past, primrose collectors have propagated these rare hose-in-hose plants by division, with only a few divisions per plant available for the entire season. Through the work of a Czech institute for the last 15 years, this outstanding seed strain is now available though limited through three growers only. Liners are available through Log House Plants, and through a Japanese grower, and finished quart material is being sold by Meredith of England (formally Blooms of Bressingham). In March of 2003 gardeners were so excited about the unveiling at Wisley of this hose-in-hose F₁ hybrid that it was covered by the London Times, Sun, and Telegraph. Many magazine articles including the March 2003 issue of Royal Horticulture Society's *The Garden* magazine of England and *Horticulture Magazine* in May and June, and *Plants* magazine published articles. You and Me Series continues to create a stir, people are stunned by the plant's performance, year after year, hardy to Zone 4.

First described in Gerard's Herbal in 1597, hose-in-hose primroses are among the oldest documented garden flowers. In the late 1800s, Gertrude Jekyll's selected

white and yellow Munstead hose-in-hose primulas were famed for hardiness and persistent, colorful bloom.

This plant is rooted in an Oregon story. In the 1930s and 1940s, Florence Bellis of Sandy, Oregon, set the standard for primrose hybridizing with her Barnhaven hybrids. The Czech hybridizer used Bellis's hybrids and Jarad Sinclair's collection among other crosses to stabilize the hose-in-hose.

Delphinium 'Darkness Visible'. Our newest selection in the Plant Curiosities program is the world's first black delphinium, *Delphinium 'Darkness Visible'*, due on the market March 2005. We are very excited about this plant. Years ago a sport was discovered in our *Delphinium 'New Heights'*, the first 4 ft English delphinium. Our friends have been working on it ever since. 'Darkness Visible' stands 40-48 inches tall. It possesses all the Giant English Delphinium characteristics — hardiness, exquisite flower form, strong canes, and long bloom period. The floret color is dramatic but also it is stunning in that the richly colored bees match the dark brownish/black florets. This plant has much potential, though I had one friend say it would make a nice bouquet for commiseration for a divorce. Brown and black flowers are very popular...I love them! We are the only source in the United States.

Lavandula angustifolia 'Indian Summer'. Another new cultivar in our Plant Curiosities was chosen because of its extraordinary behavior. *Lavandula angustifolia 'Indian Summer'* blooms a full month after other lavenders — from late August through September! And it is beautiful! 'Indian Summer' is bushy, with dense, gray-green foliage, and strongly scented, violet flowers in cylindrical, slight interrupted spikes. It is hardy to Zone 5.

WINDOWPANE LABEL

We wanted to showcase these uncommon plants with a very special label, one that would emphasize the extraordinary qualities of our Plant Curiosities without overshadowing the plants themselves. We came up with the innovative Windowpane label.

This see-through label is a new concept, never used before in horticulture, here or abroad. We witnessed immediate and strong positive reaction to the Windowpane label from key contacts in horticulture. The reaction was so uniformly intense, that we knew the clean, uncluttered Windowpane label was a good fit for our Plant Curiosities. We have now patented the Windowpane label in six countries and the Economic Union and have an agent. Despite their transparency and seeming delicacy, Windowpane labels have a potent visual presence, which substantiates the Plant Curiosities program. These revolutionary, elegant labels seem so natural.

Dramatically different than anything else on the market, this new label speaks effortlessly to gardeners who prefer more plant and less marketing clutter. Windowpane labels let the plants speak for themselves. By respectfully showcasing the natural beauty of the plants, Windowpane labels make an immediate and powerful visual connection between plant and gardener. In the past, plants were often obstructed by the labels. Windowpane labels are like windows that reveal the essence of the plant. In recent years, branding has become more important than offering solid horticultural information. Even though consumers are increasing in sophistication, labels are often dumbed down to sadly low levels that frustrate gardeners. When the emphasis is on marketing, fancy labels can overwhelm the plants. However, our Windowpane label re-establishes emphasis where it should be-on the plant itself.

Our Plant Curiosities program continues to flourish because of the extraordinary selections and our revolutionary labels. Please call up <www.loghouseplants.com> and click onto Plant Curiosities on our website to see who has joined the Plant Curiosities club as a liner recipient or a retail outlet. As we bring out new plants we will send order forms first to past customers. Consider trying our hose-in-hose prim-roses this fall to get on the preferential list! Become a Plant Curiosities grower.

Thank you! Please continue propagating the joys of gardening our earth.

Propagating New Hostas at Shady Oaks Nursery®

Hans Hansen

Shady Oaks Nursery, 1601 5th Street S.E., P.O. Box 708, Waseca, Minnesota, 56093-0708, U.S.A.

Shady Oaks has been producing hostas since 1982 with the establishment of a retail nursery specializing in perennial plants that perform well in the shade. In 1984 a 5-acre parcel was purchased to grow and propagate field-grown hostas. These plants were dug and shipped to customers who ordered through the mailorder catalog, or potted and were available to walk-in trade.

In 1993 the tissue culture lab in the basement of the owner's home with two lab technicians produced enough plant material to publish a wholesale price list. In 1994 the lab expanded to the present location. Currently the tissue culture lab has a transfer room that houses six laminar-flow hoods. The hoods are made in-house and consist of Plexiglass sides and a stainless steel base that can be sterilized. Positive air movement ensures a work area free from pathogens and technicians contaminating the cultures. A fan forces air through two filters including a HEPA™ filter to remove bacteria and mold spores. Each lab technician wears a lab coat and hair nets. Trained technicians are capable of producing at least 1000 plants per day.

We use meristem culture to produce our plant materials. Hosta cultures are initiated using the eyes (growing points on the crown). On most hosta cultivars they are produced immediately after flowering. The eyes are carefully removed with a scalpel ensuring a portion of the crown is intact. They are cleaned of soil, leaves, and debris. The plant material (eye) is agitated in a solution of bleach, water, and a surfactant (Tween 20) for a period of time to kill pathogens, mold, and bacteria that would kill the culture.

The solution of bleach and amount of time varies depending on the size of the plant materials. After sterilization the eyes are placed in media. The hosta medium contains all the nutrients/micronutrients the plant would require growing in the ground with the addition of vitamins, and sugar as a carbon source. The sugar (end product of photosynthesis) provides the energy for the plant. A gelling agent (agar) is used to solidify the medium, which is stirred and heated to the boiling point to melt the gelling agent.

Hostas are divided/transferred every 6 weeks. In one calendar year the lab can produce the equivalent of 8 years of field production. Currently over 100 hostas are cataloged for sale as well as additional cultivars for future production and contract accounts. Some advantages of tissue culture include cleaning-up plants from root and foliar nematodes as well as providing a uniform juvenile plant.