

Innovative Options in Plant Selections for Southern Gardens®

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INTRODUCTION

It probably began in the late 1970s to early 1980s when Dr. J.C. Raulston started making the nursery industry more aware of the importance of new species and cultivar introductions that would broaden the market for the ornamental plant industry. No one ever comes into a garden center and asks, “What’s old?” Now with increased breeding of annuals, perennials, and “woodies,” this has become even more important. But other sources of new introductions can come from exploring foreign markets as well as local hobbyists. We will examine some selections that will increase the plant palette of southern growers.

DISCUSSION

Akebia trifoliata ‘Silver Dust’ is a new selection found in Japan and hardy to Zone 5. This species is not as well known as *A. quinata*, which also has a variegated form, but this variegation is more stable. It has deep burgundy-red flowers in hanging panicles. It is easily propagated from semihardwood cuttings. It climbs by twining and does well in either full sun to fairly dense shade. Fruit is edible.

Anodendron affine ‘Gold Splash’ is a genus and species native to Japan and is not well known in the west. It is in the family *Apocynaceae* with *Trachelospermum*, *Nerium*, *Adenium*, *Mandevilla*, and many other genera. It is a vine which climbs by twining with narrow lanceolate leaves to 6 in. long, and in this cultivar are heavily splashed yellow and cream. It forms terminal and lateral panicle flower heads in the fall which then open in late winter as light greenish yellow with an extremely sweet fragrance. The cold hardiness is not well known although I have had a 5-gal specimen remain out of doors through -8 °C with no damage, which would probably make it a Zone 8–10. Its incredible fragrance and variegated foliage will be its greatest assets. Roots best with high temperatures using semihardwood cuttings.

Ardisia crispa ‘Kokkou Daruma’ is a cultivar of this very cold hardy species of *Ardisia*. In Japan one will find numerous cultivars of this species which are often displayed in shows in the “Koten Engei” style where they are shown in decorative porcelain pots. But in the nursery trade, this would make an ideal plant to be sold for the Christmas season market. Even with its variegation, it comes reasonably true from seed that needs no pretreatment for germination. It is a very slow grower and a Zone 7 plant.

Campylotropis macrocarpa is an obvious member of the legume family with its lavender to purple pea-like flowers which are arranged in panicles, terminally and laterally, along its stems from late summer to fall. It has a trifoliate leaf similar to *Lespedeza* on slightly pendulous branches which can reach 1.2 to 1.5 m (4 to 5 ft). It will perform well in full sun to part shade and roots well on softwood cuttings. Zones 5–9. Native to Korea and China.

Callicarpa dichotoma 'Shiiji Murasaki' is grown more for its foliage than for its fruit. It is a weak bloomer and fruiter, but its soft white variegation has a much longer period of interest than either its flowers or fruit would have had. This is one of the few callicarpas that is a foliage plant. It is likely a Zone 7–9 plant even though this cultivar is definitely hardy to Zone 5. It propagates easily from softwood cuttings.

Calycanthus floridus var. *glaucus* (syn. *Laevigatus*) 'Purpurescens' is an unusual selection of our native sweetshrub which has purple undersides to its leaves on the new growth. Another great characteristic of this cultivar is its incredible fruity fragrance. I acquired this selection from a collector in Japan, but he acknowledged that he had gotten it from Europe. As with all *Calycanthus*, it is very difficult to propagate from cuttings, but it suckers profusely from spreading rhizomes.

Euchresta japonica is a rare leguminous (family *Fabaceae*) plant found in mountainous areas of its native Japan. It is a small evergreen understory shrub 30 to 80 cm (1 to 2.6 ft) native to the main island of Honshu as well as the two southern islands of Shikoku and Kyushu. In April, it flowers with 20- to 25-cm (8- to 19-in.) terminal and axillary racemes of small white pea-like flowers and has dark green, alternate, trifoliate, entire leaves. It produces 10-mm glossy berries along its rachis which begin green and then turn a purplish-black.

Enkianthus quinqueflorus 'Pink Chandelier' is an evergreen shrub native to southern China which produces "glass-like" pink-edged, lantern-like flowers which are three times the size of *E. campanulatus*. They hang from the tips of its branches amongst the leaves which are whorled around the terminal bud. When first acquired from a specialty nursery in Japan, it was thought to be very cold tender, but since it has grown outside in a container down to -10 °C with no damage. It flowers in Zone 8 between mid March and early April and propagates by semi-hardwood cuttings.

Gardenia jasminoides (syn. *augusta*) 'Kaleidoscope' was an unnamed *Gardenia* with variegated foliage found in a small rare plant nursery in Japan. It has a quite variable variegation of irregular cream-white to yellow margins and fragrant single white flowers. The flowers are followed by very ornamental red seed pods. But its most amazing trait is that it is extremely cold hardy for a variegated *Gardenia*. It is quite vigorous and will probably easily reach 1.2 to 1.5 m (4 to 4.9 ft) in height and spread.

Hieracium nevosum or rattlesnake weed is an incredible little native "weed" that might be overlooked if one were just walking in the woods, but when grown in cultivation it doubles in size and is extremely ornamental with its small 2.5-cm (1-in.) daisy-like flowers produced on wispy wands of 30–36 cm (1 to 1.2 ft) from mid-April to early May. It is amazing how long it will flower. It maintains a rosette of leaves all year round at ground level, but in March, it begins to put up gossamer-like stems which terminate in loose panicles of brilliant yellow flowers from April into May. It is native to a good portion of the Southeast mostly in the Piedmont on clay soils. Not often found in sandy soils. Grow in full sun to part shade.

Hedychium densiflorum 'Assam Orange' is one of the most cold-hardy of our ornamental gingers. This is the true *Hedychium densiflorum*. Unfortunately there are many plants being offered as this species that are not correct. Its name "*densiflorum*" alludes to its small brilliant orange flowers which cling tightly to its rachis,

forming a dense flower spike late in the summer into early fall. It was found by the superintendent of the botanical garden in Katmandu, Nepal, and named for his son, Assam. One of the nicest characteristics of this selection is that it only gets to about 0.8 to 0.9 m (30 to 36 in.) tall in a tight clump. It seems to be happiest for us in filtered sun or morning sun and afternoon shade.

Ilex latifolia ‘**Variegated**’ is a selection found in Japan and shared with us by Mr. Mizunami Yamaguchi, Gifu Prefecture. This luster-leaf holly has irregular gold to cream yellow margins and has proven extremely stable. The only reversions have been to all yellow, but even this will harden off to green. It has not flowered for us so its sex is unknown. Even the parent plant in Japan which was about 3 m (9.8 ft) tall, had no fruit, so this cultivar may be a male. It roots in high percentages, but it is extremely slow, taking very firm wood in late summer or early fall on bottom heat. It grafts quite easily using ‘Nellie R. Stevens’ as the understock.

Itea virginica ‘**Japanese-American**’ was sold to me in Japan as *I. japonica*, but it is fairly obvious that it is not. The native Japanese *Itea* does not sucker like our native species. It is thought that this form was carried to Japan in the early 1900s from the U.S.A. and became known there as *I. japonica*. Flowers open white and then turn blush pink and the foliage is practically evergreen in Zone 8 with no fall color. So the provenance of this selection is probably the Deep South. But it has also not shown the propensity for leaf spotting common with many of our established cultivars.

Morus alba ‘**Issai**’ is a compact fruiting mulberry that produces large edible fruit even when the plant is only 46 cm (18 in.) high. The Japanese said that it was found in a very “outlying” province of China. It makes a superb backyard fruit bearer of a large shrub to small tree proportions. It roots very easily from softwood cuttings under mist. Many times, succeeding flushes through the growing season will also fruit. It is probably the same hardiness as the species.

Magnolia changhungtana is a species Chinese magnolia that has large white flowers with red anthers. Growing at the South Carolina Botanical Garden at Clemson, this species has tolerated temperatures to -15 °C. Presently it is being chip budded with success using *M. maudiae* as an understock. Northern hardiness is unknown, although it is at least a Zone 7.

Magnolia (syn. *Michelia*) *crassipes* grows similarly to the species *M figo* as a large shrub or small tree to 5 m (16.4 ft) in its native China. This is a selection found in the wild in China with its intensely velvety burgundy flowers which have great fragrance. It does not root as easily as *M. figo* and in Japan it is commonly sold as a grafted plant.

Magnolia (syn. *Michelia*) *laevifolia* ‘**Snow Angel**’ is a selection of Bobby Green, Green’s Nursery, Fairhope, Alabama. It has a dense, lower spreading habit than the species. It flowers in late March and early April in Zone 8, which misses most of the late freezes. It roots from semihardwood cuttings. This species is probably at least Zone 7 hardiness.

Magnolia (syn. *Michelia*) *foveolata* ‘**Shibamichi Gold**’ has proven quite cold hardy into Zone 7. In its native China, this species will reach 30 m (98 ft) tall with leaves 17 to 23 cm × 6 to 11 cm (7 to 9 in. × 3 to 4 in.). Its most unusual asset on this selection is the gold indumentum on both the top and undersides of its leaves on the new growth. With mature leaves, the indumentum remains on the undersides.

The flowers are only 6 to 9 cm (3 to 4 in.) in diameter. It does well as when grafted to *M. maudiae* understock.

***Poncirus trifoliata* 'Snow Dragon'** is a variegated, contorted hardy-orange. It is quite variable in its variegation with some new branches and leaves being devoid of chlorophyll initially, but the stems will eventually harden off to green. This is truly a novel "collector" plant; not for the big boxes. It propagates quite easily by cleft grafting on seedling understock in late winter, but it can also be rooted. Zones 6–9.

Poliothysis sinensis is the sole member of this genus and an interesting Chinese species which flowers in the Deep South in early summer, but later further north. The only other member of its family, Flacourtiaceae, commonly grown is *Idezia polycarpa*. It was only discovered late in the nineteenth century by Augustine Henry. It exhibits 15- to 20-cm (6- to 8-in.) terminal panicles of small white apetalous fragrant flowers turning yellow as they age. Foliage is an attractive dark lustrous green, turning yellow-burgundy in fall. In its native habitat it reaches to 15 m (49 ft). It propagates quite easily from softwood to semihardwood cuttings.

***Platycrater arguta* 'Kaeda'** is found in the family Hydrangeaceae and makes a low deciduous shrub of only 75 cm (30 in.). In late spring it exhibits terminal panicles of sterile florets and complete flowers, and it has a stunning gold fall color. It roots very easily from softwood cuttings. Hardiness is probably Zones 7–9.

Prunus japonica or Japanese bush cherry is one of the more showy flowering shrubs for us here in early to mid March with its branches being encircled with small medium to deep pink flowers so that the branches are not even visible. It will reach 1.5 to 2 m (5 to 7 ft). It is content to grow in full sun to part shade. The flowers are followed by bright red "cherries" that are edible. Far superior to *P. glandulosa*. Easily rooted from softwood cuttings. Hardiness Zones 4–8.

Podocarpus macrophyllus is normally considered to be a shrub with medium green foliage, but with two selections from Japan, 'Royal Flush' and 'Golden Crown' have bright pink and yellow new growth, respectively; these break the mold of this species. All flushes of new growth on each selection show their respective colors, even in the heat of the summer. Easily propagated from semi-hardwood cuttings. Zones 7–10.

Rhodoleia henryi is a more cold-hardy species than its better known relative, *R. championii*, found at over 2,400 m (7,874 ft) elevation. This unusual evergreen in the family Hamamilidaceae has exquisite geometrically shaped rose-red flowers up to 3 to 4 cm (0.8 to 1.6 in.) in diameter. This species makes a large shrub to small tree [to 15 m (49 ft) in its native haunts] and roots easily from semihardwood cuttings.

Rohdea japonica is an evergreen perennial preferring dry shade and will grow in Zones 6–10. The Japanese have made many selections for unusual foliage, form, and variegation, growing them in the garden or in containers where they are shown in the "Koten Engai" style. Slow to divide, but they have been propagated by tissue culture. When growing variegated selections from seed, one may get new variegated forms.

CONCLUSION

With the intense interest in "new" selections and the ability to "protect" new introductions, there will continue to be much interest in finding and developing new cultivars. Many times, this will also increase the marketing in plants by broadening the gardening public's palette as they discover the newest and the best.