

Nursery Crop and Landscape Systems Plant Evaluations by SERA-27 in the Southeastern U.S.: 2010 Update[®]

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INTRODUCTION

Many new woody and herbaceous plants are introduced every year with extensive marketing programs, exclusive growing agreements, protective plant patents, and extensive distribution. However, there also exists a wide range of plants that fall outside of this circle that, although lesser known, may be quite worthy of use in the landscape for specific regions. When information is not available on the performance of these plants in different regions, a coordinated system of independent evaluation, along with dissemination of the resulting information to nursery and landscape professionals, becomes invaluable. In the southeastern U.S.A., the SERA-27 group was formed to serve this purpose.

The Southern Extension and Research Activities/Information Exchange Group 27 (SERA-27) for Nursery and Landscape Systems was established in 1994. The group is composed of research and extension faculty working in the commercial nursery and landscape disciplines from among fourteen 1862 land grant universities in the southeastern U.S.A., along with scientists from the USDA-Agricultural Research Service.

Since its inception, over 40 plants have been evaluated, or are currently under evaluation, by the group. A number of the plants evaluated by the group in past years have found useful application in today's southeastern U.S.A. landscapes, including *Cephalotaxus harringtonia*, *Lagerstroemia* 'Pocomoke', *L.* 'Chickasaw', *Illicium mexicanum* 'Aztec Fire', *Styrax japonicus* 'Emerald Pagoda', *Conradina ca-*

nescens, *Ceanothus* × *delilianus* ‘Gloire de Versailles’, and several *Hemerocallis* cultivars. Some of the newer plants currently under evaluation are *Arisaema dracontium* (green dragon), *Callicarpa dichotoma* ‘Duet’ (‘Duet’ beautyberry; NA 72235), *Eucalyptus neglecta* (Omeo gum), *Hypericum olympicum* (St. John’s wort), *Syringa* ‘Betsy Ross’ (‘Betsy Ross’ lilac; NA 62973), and *Tagetes nelsonii* (Mayan marigold).

OBJECTIVES OF THE SERA-27 GROUP

The objectives of the SERA-27 group are as follows:

- As a group, identify underutilized ornamental landscape plants with superior environmentally sustainable qualities that can enhance the ornamentals industry in the southeastern U.S.A.
- Using multistate cooperators, evaluate these selected plants at multiple trial locations over a 5-year period. (Depending upon the plant, this period could be shorter or longer.)
- Meet annually to share and discuss quantitative and qualitative results collected from the multiple trial sites.
- At the end of the evaluation period, summarize the regional results with quantitative data, qualitative comments, and an overall rating for the plant.
- Collectively and individually disseminate information gained from the plant evaluation system, such as cold hardiness, heat tolerance, growth rate, and environmental adaptation limits, to a wide variety of audiences.