

PLANTS TO LOOK FOR

Frank Simerly

WARM WEATHER is approaching and an excellent way to be refreshed during the heat is to use and enjoy the public gardens. Many people expect out-of-town guests and will find sharing a visit to the Arboretum an enriching experience, particularly if they can acquaint their friends with some of the plants of current interest.

Several trees bloom at the Arboretum during this time and in particular one should view *Cassia leptophylla*, the Gold Medallion Tree. The Arboretum introduced this plant to the Southern California nursery trade in 1964. A picture of the flower is found on the cover of the December 1971 issue of LASCA LEAVES. Two beautiful specimens are located on the south side of the Arboretum administration building and another excellent specimen can be seen west of the library building near the Gift Shop. The Gold Medallion Tree is native to Brazil and becomes a small round-headed tree to 25 feet high and almost as wide. The flowers are produced in large clusters and as the name suggests, they are a bright yellow. Don't miss seeing this tree in flower; it is unforgettable.

Many people are acquainted with the crape myrtle. A wealth of color is found in these trees, mainly various shades of deep rose, lavender and white. We have purposely collected as many colors as possible and have grown seedlings for further selection. However, this selection process is not just for floral color, but also for colorful fall foliage and for mildew resistance. After many years we have selected two plants that show promise and have propagated them for addi-

tional tests that include coastal planting. Our largest planting of crape myrtle is among the *Arctotheca calendula* ground cover north of the jungle area. Besides the species *Lagerstroemia indica*, there is *L. fauriei*, located in the same area. Like the *indica*, this species is also in bloom. It has small white flower spikes and a most attractive bark, both deserving your attention.

Perhaps the most useful flowering shrub for summer color in Southern California is the oleander which is planted liberally throughout the Arboretum. Oleander is native to the Mediterranean area and is noted for its profusion of white, pink, red and even yellow flowers. *Nerium oleander* is known to be poisonous (as some plants are in nearly everyone's garden) but there is no record of any deaths attributable to this plant in the long history of Los Angeles County.

An interesting and more unusual shrub to see is the *Plumeria rubra*, native to the tropical areas of Mexico and Central America. Visitors to Hawaii will remember the delicious fragrance of this plant which we commonly call frangipani. It is frost tender, but we have found that it grows well in tubs, thus allowing us to move it into protected areas in the winter. Specimens can be found in the Demonstration Home Gardens during the summer. The flowers vary from white to dark pink and would be considered lovely even if they didn't have their pleasant fragrance.

Many other flowering shrubs deserve your attention. Here are a few to seek

out: *Abutilon megapotamicum*, *A. hybridum*, *Cassia corymbosa*, *C. surattensis*, *Cistus* spp., *Helianthemum* spp., *Pereskia sacharosa* (a curious member of the cactus family), *Punica granatum* and *Thevetia peruviana* (the 'Yellow Oleander'). Of course, this is a partial list.

SOUTH COAST

I have skipped the annual and perennial plants at the Arboretum so that you will be encouraged to see the fine plantings at our South Coast Botanic Garden in Rolling Hills. Annual plantings are a good way to get color into any garden and at South Coast there are some excellent plantings of marigold, petunia, candytuft, dwarf dahlia, lobelia and portulaca, to mention a few. The perennial plantings are especially worthy and include *Anigozanthos manglesii*, *Leonotis leonurus*, and several species of verbena, dianthus and begonia. Look for the day-lilies which have been much improved in recent years; South Coast has a good selection of cultivars. Also, note the variety of agapanthus that are available in various shades of blue and white, and in dwarf and giant forms. One of the favorite plant combinations of landscape architects is hemerocallis (daylily) and agapanthus. These plants are both good companions for *Moraea bicolor* and *M. iridioides* which can also be seen at South Coast. Many people having *M. iridioides* are not aware that the flower stems are perennial and should not be removed from the plant.

South Coast Botanic Garden has contributed to the Department plant introduction program. An improved marguerite, *Chrysanthemum frutescens* 'Palos Verdes' is a striking plant that can be seen in flower now. This marguerite is an intense yellow that is more disease resistant and winter hardy than many other varieties. There are many other perennials such as coral bells, ga-

zania, gamolepis and of course roses. In the Department of Arboreta and Botanic Gardens, however, roses are associated with the Descanso facility.

DESCANSO GARDENS

At Descanso Gardens there are two distinct kinds of roses covering nearly six acres. The old fashion rose planting includes roses that are recorded to have been cultivated as early as 1500. These plants are grown in chronological order up to about 1940. Beginning in 1940 the first All America Rose selections were designated and these constitute the other major kinds of roses grown at Descanso which are also arranged chronologically. The new A.A.R.S. award winners are announced each June and two of the hybrid tea roses, 'Electron' and 'Gypsy,' honored by the award this year, can be seen at Descanso.

'Electron' is a bright, rose-pink hybrid tea producing great quantities of large, fragrant flowers. The long, pointed buds open to high-centered, well-formed blooms of exhibition quality and are produced on stems of medium length. It is a bushy grower, well covered with dark green foliage.

'Gypsy' is a fiery orange red hybrid tea that is truly an outstanding flower which has dark red buds that unfurl to high-centered exhibition type blooms. It is one of the more colorful roses in the gardens, and it has been highly admired by all who have seen it. 'Gypsy' is the only hybrid tea in the red shades to win an A.A.R.S. award since 'Mister Lincoln' in 1965. The plant is husky and has rich green foliage.

Make a point to take visitors to each of the Department's facilities this summer. Knowing what plants to look for should make the trip more worthwhile and enjoyable.

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