

# The Family Tree: *Prunus* 'Hally Jolivette'

Miles Sax

Ask someone to show you their family tree and you'll likely be shown a genealogy chart in an old book, or perhaps a family lineage document on the computer. As a child, if I asked my father to see our family tree he would take my hand, lead me outside, and show me the enchanting spring blooms of the 'Hally Jolivette' cherry in our yard. This tree—named for my great-grandmother—is important to me both as a link to my family history and as a horticultural gem.

*Prunus* 'Hally Jolivette' is a flowering cherry hybridized by Dr. Karl Sax, the Arnold Arboretum's fifth director (and my great-grandfather). A research scientist by training, Sax's investigations in genetics and chromosome studies played a seminal role in the biological sciences of his time, most notably in the field of cytology. His interests also encompassed plant breeding, a field to which he made many contributions through his extensive hybridizing studies. Conducting much of his work while a professor at the neighboring Bussey Institute, many of Sax's hybrids "jumped the fence" and ended up in the Arboretum's collections, and a number were introduced to the nursery trade.

Perhaps the best of Sax's hybrids, *Prunus* 'Hally Jolivette' was introduced by the Arnold Arboretum in 1948. It resulted from crossing *P. subhirtella* and *P. x yedoensis*, and then backcrossing with *P. subhirtella*. It is a fine-textured, densely branched, rounded small tree or large shrub that grows about 15 feet (4.6 meters) tall and equally wide. Each spring it delights the eye with a profusion of pink buds opening up to 1¼ inch (3.2 centimeter) diameter pinkish white double flowers. At the Arboretum, flowering occurs in late April or early May. Bloom may continue for ten to twenty days, a notably long period for a flowering cherry. Flowers open prior to leaf emergence so the floral effect is unobscured. The 2 to 3 inch (5.1 to 7.6 centimeter) long leaves are simple, alternate, and

dark green. 'Hally Jolivette' cherry grows best in full sun, is drought tolerant, and is an ideal plant for small gardens, specimen plantings, or even bonsai. Best adapted to USDA zones 5 through 7, this cherry is a precocious bloomer and often flowers in its second year of growth. Three young specimens (accessions 278-2007-B, C, and D) can be seen in the Arboretum's newly renovated Bradley Rosaceous Collection.

*Prunus* 'Hally Jolivette' has received many accolades including awards from both the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and Cornell Cooperative Extension. Of his many introductions, Karl Sax clearly held this *Prunus* in a special place because he named it in honor of his wife, colleague, and scientist in her own right, Dr. Hally Jolivette. She was a mycologist and botanist, and in 1912 was the first woman to receive a Ph.D from Stanford University in the field of botany. She held many academic posts across the country including instructorships at Washington State University, Wellesley College, and the Bussey Institute. She was a research scientist and published original work as well as co-authoring many papers with Dr. Karl Sax. Both a scientist and a devoted mother, she is remembered as a woman who put cookies on the table for her three children one minute and was deep in study with her microscope the next.

My family has been honored and delighted to have this tree that not only greets each spring with great beauty but also reminds us of our lineage. In the words of plantsman Michael Dirr "Great plants transcend the generations," and with this in mind I hope that *Prunus* 'Hally Jolivette' will be planted and enjoyed for many years to come.

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Miles Sax is a horticultural apprentice at the Arnold Arboretum, where he works on evaluating, maintaining, and improving the *Malus* collection.



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