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SFA Mast
Arboretum News
Winter 2004

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A Winter Friend

By Matt Welch

January holds a valuable pause for gardeners, a sort of limbo between fall cleanup and late winter preparations, when you can take a deep breath and calmly ponder. Now may be the very best time of year to unabashedly enjoy your garden, free of all the usual seasonal maintenance issues. It's a time to dream up future plans and plant acquisitions, and to reflect on past gardening decisions, both good and bad.

As you stroll through your paradise, take a long look at what's around you. Has your garden's glory been reduced to stubby skeletons of perennials past, or perhaps cavernous craters left behind after the frenzied plucking of annual castor beans? Are you still relying on that one last reddish-brown leaf dangling limply on the Japanese maple to provide some brand of color to your landscape? Be honest.

If you can answer yes to any of the above rhetoric, fear not. Although I cannot solve all your gardening winter woes, perhaps I can help: it may be time to consider a conifer. As some of you know, the Arboretum has been boldly plowing into the world of ornamental conifers for the last few years, and we are emerging victorious. Many specimens of this ancient group of plants previously thought impossible to grow in Texas have proven themselves quite hardy. We've scoured the globe for new



Thuja orientalis var. juniperoides

species and cultivated varieties, so it comes as no surprise to find out that one of the superstars of the collection is native to China.

Unfortunately, a botanist found this plant before a horticulturist did, so the name is forever soaked in the formaldehyde of botanical taxonomy: *Thuja orientalis* var. *juniperoides*. But don't let the ugly name scare you; this large shrubby conifer is a knockout, especially in winter. The growth habit of this *Thuja* is best described as *billowy*. Soft, mounding layers of foliage make for a shrub that is friendly on the eyes and the skin. In spring and summer the color is a cloudy blue-green; not at all unattractive, but certainly not the most noticeable plant in the landscape. The miracle of this plant occurs every fall immediately after the first frost. Within days of the first freezing winter air, the blue-green foliage is replaced by a fantastic purple plum hue with bluish highlights at the tips of the branches: a purple cloud with a silver lining. I can't think of any evergreen, broadleaf or conifer, that undergoes a more dramatic metamorphosis than our *Thuja*. Come spring, the plant packs up her brilliant burgundy winter décor and replaces it with spring and summer's inconspicuous blue-green.

Not reaching over 6' high by 5' wide, this plant requires no maintenance. Although definitely not a dry garden species, *Thuja* prefers to be in soil that leans toward the dry side. Not a fan of a full day's sun (but in need of at least morning to noon sun), this plant will thrive best planted beside an east-facing wall.

If you'd like to see *Thuja orientalis* var. *juniperoides* in her winter glory, just walk into the conifer collection behind the Art Building; you can't miss it. It has been said that the best gardens are found in the winter, so in your endless quest for the next great plant, consider making a winter friend.

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Rarely Encountered Members of the Magnolia Family

By Dr. David Creech

The Magnolia family is huge, complex and exciting. Of course, in the South the three that stand out are *Magnolia grandiflora* (Southern Magnolia), *M. virginiana* (sweetbay), and *M. soulangiana* (saucer). The SFA Mast Arboretum has a fine collection of species, varieties, hybrids and seedling selections . . . and there are many with promise. Here are a few of the proven performers.

Manglietia yunnanensis is one of 20 species in this genus of the Magnoliaceae that has proven to be adapted to the garden. Foliage is dense and attractive, and flowers are simple, solitary and erect. The species has proven hardy in North Carolina, and many spots across the South are reporting superior performance. There are other Manglietias in the Arboretum that appear adapted, including *M. moto*, *M. grandis*, *M. fordhammei*, and *M. chingii*. What is needed to test their hardiness is a hard winter freeze, an event down into single digits, something we haven't had here in Nacogdoches since 1989. *Parakmeria lotungensis*, Joy lotus tree, is another Magnolia relative that has performed well in the Arboretum and is narrowly columnar with glossy green foliage.

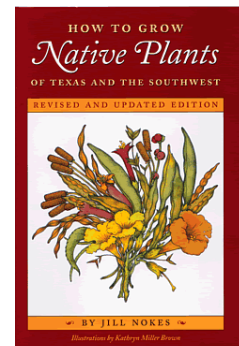
Michelia maudiae, smiling lily tree, is the biggest surprise and a major excitement in the Arboretum. *M. maudiae* is a fast-growing tree with a stunning flower display from the end of February through most of March. Blooms are in the 3-5" range. With three heavy flowering specimens in the 15' category, we remain optimistic. We have failed to root the species, and cuttings we've shared with nurserymen have met a similar fate; a callus ball develops but no roots. More trials are suggested. Matt managed to flag and collect a number of cones and we successfully germinated 49 seed, now happy seedlings in the greenhouse (cleaned, planted with no chilling, quick emergence).

There are other Magnolia family members that should be noted for their superior performance. *Parakmeria loutungensis* is narrowly columnar and dense with foliage. Most exciting has been the show in the Michelia world. *M. figo*, banana shrub, is common, with many old specimens across the South. *M. skinneriana*, introduced in the 1990s, is more vigorous, easier to root, appears quite hardy, and is now commercially available in the trade. Bloom is similar in size to that of *M. figo*. *M. wilsonii* and *M. sinensis* may actually be synonyms for the same plant and hardiness remains a question. *M. x foggi* #2 sports larger leaves and flowers but suffers low temperature damage when temperatures fall into the teens. *M. yunnanensis* is shrubby, floriferous and vigorous in the

Arboretum. *M. foveolata* is a columnar tree sporting large leaves and creamy yellow small fragrant flowers. *M. platypetala* is another large flowered banana "shrub" – actually a tree – that is new to the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden – and reports indicate that the species is hardy into Zone 7. Time will tell.

Native Plant Expert Featured at February Les Reeves Lecture Series

Jill Nokes, well-known author, landscape designer, wholesale nursery owner, and proponent of native plants, will be the featured speaker for the February 19th Les Reeves Lecture Series at 7:00 p.m. in Room 110 of the Agriculture Building. Her lecture, titled "Flor Y Canto – Flower and Song- Xoxhitl en Cuicatl" will explore the ethnobotanical garden in Oaxaca, Mexico.



Nokes' book on the propagation and cultivation of native Texas plants, *How to Grow Native Plants of Texas and the Southwest*, is one of the first books in our region to promote the use and production of native plants and naturalistic landscape design. Books will be available for purchase at the lecture.

In her landscape design business, Nokes works with both commercial and residential clients, helping them to develop a sustainable plan using both native and adapted plants that will thrive despite the sometimes extreme demands of our climate. Recent projects include several AIA award winning houses; a ranch house near Laredo; a German-Texan heritage garden in Columbus; two writer's residences in Marfa, Texas for the Lannan Foundatio; a new bank in Eagle Pass, Texas; a master plan for student housing at Southwest Texas State University; as well as numerous residential projects in the Austin and Central Texas area.

Jill Nokes graduated from the University of Texas and earned a master's degree in Horticulture from Texas A&M University. She has operated a wholesale nursery and worked as a landscape consultant and designer for over fifteen years. She is a frequent lecturer at workshops and conferences throughout the state, and also regularly appears on radio and television.



Great Horticulture Books

When it is too cold to be in the garden this winter, why not curl up with a great garden book? The SFA Mast Arboretum staff chose a few of their favorites to share with you.

A "must-have" reference for Dr. Creech, Director, is *The Royal Horticultural Society Dictionary of Gardening: A Practical and Scientific Encyclopedia of Horticulture*, edited by Fred J. Chittendon. For fun reading, Creech recommends *Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollen.

Dawn Parish, Arboretum Research Associate, uses *Hortus Third: A Concise Dictionary of Plants Cultivated in the United States and Canada by the Staff of the Bailey Hortorium at Cornell University* as her main reference book. Dawn's other favorites include *The Organic Rose Garden* by Liz Druitt and two books by Allan M. Armitage: *Manual of Herbaceous Perennial Plants* and *Manual of Annuals, Biennials, and Half-Hardy Perennials*.

Barb Stump, Research Associate, really enjoys *Identification, Selection, and Use of Southern Plants for Landscape Design* by Neil Odenwald and James Turner and has included the following enticing information: "This book is my idea of a great garden reference book, because it is arranged like a field guide. I turn to this book constantly to help me decide where to plant specific trees, shrubs, and vines in my own gardens. The best features are the line drawings—of the foliage, flower, and ultimate shape of the plant—and the listings of plant characteristics, covering foliage, flower, fruit, landscape values, ultimate size, USDA growth zone, common and scientific names, and whether the plant is evergreen or not. If you have an idea of the genus, you can look up details in a snap. Related cultivars are given under remarks, so it's easy to build up collections. Notation on a small southern US map shows where the plant can be expected to grow well. Both common and scientific names are listed in the detailed index. Finally, there is also an illustrated glossary of terms used in the descriptions (e.g., whorl, anther). Odenwald and Turner have published a 3rd edition (October 1996), which I assume is only better than my well-worn first edition I drag out to the garden."

Lance Craig, Research Associate at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center, chose Michael Dirr's *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants* and Elray Nixon's *Trees, Shrubs, and Woody Vines of East Texas* as his all-time favorite reference books.

Matt Welch, Azalea Garden Technician, loves *The Collector's Garden* by Ken Druse. He feels that this is the most inspirational garden book he has ever seen because of the incredible photographs, great articles, and awesome plants. Matt also recommends *The Natural Garden* by Ken Druse.

Elyce Rodewald, Education Coordinator, is currently enthralled with *Native American Ethnobotany* by Daniel Moreman. This book is the result of 25 years of study by the author and is a comprehensive reference of the plants used by Native American peoples for medicine, food, fiber, dye, ceremonial items, cleaning agents, and many other purposes. Elyce also enjoys pouring over the Seeds of Change catalog and the classic *Rodale's Guide to Organic Gardening*.

Elyce encourages you to share the joy of gardening with a child this winter, and a great place to start is with these exceptional books that introduce children to horticulture at an early age:

The Gardener by Sarah Stewart

During the depression, young Lydia Grace must move to the big city to work in her cantankerous uncle's bakery. She brings joy and beauty with determination and a suitcase full of seeds.

The Money Tree by Sarah Stewart

Miss McGillicuddy notices a strange tree growing in her yard, but doesn't understand the neighbors' preoccupation with its unusual leaves.

The Reason for a Flower and *Plants That Never Bloom* by Ruth Heller

These beautifully illustrated books make botany fun and understandable for young children. Written in rhyme, you are sure to hear "read it again!" "And then you'll see the reason for a flower—even weeds. The reason for a flower is to manufacture seeds..."

The Oxcart Man by Donald Hall

Set in colonial New England, the cycle of the seasons is told by a year in the life of the oxcart man and his family.

Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney

Eccentric and adventurous Miss Rumphius finally finds a way to make the world more beautiful!

The Legend of the Bluebonnet by Tommie dePaola

This story of compassion, sacrifice, and natural beauty is a wonderful way to introduce children to wildflowers and the amazing world of native plants.