Pineywoods Native Plant Center, Fall 2004

SFA Gardens, Stephen F. Austin State University

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On the Trail of the Red-Flowering Sweet Osmanthus, Osmanthus fragrans

By Dr. David Creech

In plant-hunting circles, one of the elusive treasures yet to make its way into the USA is the red-flowered Sweet Osmanthus. There have been rumors and some have said they have seen pictures, or knew someone who had the plant, or heard of someone who had a friend who saw a picture, and there have been other intriguing tales but still, no factual encounters. Well, I can now say that the rumors are over. I have seen O. fragrans ‘Zhusha Dangu’ and while I caught it just past peak with petals a bit spent, I can say, yes, it’s red enough to make the mark. Sure, there’s a slight cast of dark orange in the petals but there was enough red there for me to go drooling and wanting to snatch a cutting. I didn’t because Chinese jails are reported as spartan, but I’ve got the ball rolling to introduce this cultivar and about a dozen others in the near future. Let’s just say I told my host “I have got to have this one.”

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Osmanthes fragrans var. aurantiacus at Suzhou Osmanthus Garden.
Nacogdoches should be the very first official Osmanthus garden in the USA! Think about it. The Mast Arboretum is ideally suited to test, protect and promote the wide variety of cultivars found in the gardens of China. I imagine a mapped, signed and data-based campus-wide collection—a sweet-smelling garden to serve as the foundation for a new and growing industry.

**Influence of Nitrogen Fertilizer Timing and Rate on Azalea Bloom**

By Julie Fullenwider

The azalea is a must-have shrub in the southern landscape. Fertilization recommendations often suggest fertilizing the plant after bloom to discourage early bloom and damage due to late spring freezes. The objective of this study was to determine the effect of fertilizer timing and rate on azalea bloom. Five varieties of azaleas were selected for this study, using sixty plants in each variety, for a total of three hundred plants. The four varieties located in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden on the Stephen F. Austin State University Campus include ‘Koromo Shikibu,’ ‘PoukhanenseCompacta,’ ‘Kampheri 6811,’ and ‘Roses.’ One variety, ‘Elsie Lee,’ is located in front of Steen Hall also on the Stephen F. Austin campus.

Three rates (0, 50 and 100 lbs of nitrogen/acre) of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) were applied at four different times of the year (December, February, March, May). Each plant received a simple application of fertilizer. Each fertilizer treatment was replicated five times within each variety.

Beginning in March, buds and blooms were counted on a previously tagged branch of each plant. This data was put into one of four categories:

**Stage 1:** Pink tip (bud swell with first color showing at tips)

**Stage 2:** Pink bud (expanded and just prior to opening)

**Stage 3:** Open (fully open in prime show)

**Stage 4:** Bloom decline (bloom in wilt or other indication of decline)

In terms of popularity, Sweet Osmanthus has a long way to go in the USA. We visited one nursery near Guangzhou that produces 1.5 million plants per year! While most Chinese nursery plants are destined for the China marketplace, which is huge, there is a growing interest in exporting new cultivars and plants to the international market. For that to happen there will have to be cooperation, marketing and promotion. I have proposed to the Sweet Osmanthus Branch of the Chinese Flower Association that the SFA Mast Arboretum in

**Nacogdoches Recognized as First-Ever ASA Azalea City**

By Barb Stump

On November 2, 2004, the first-ever Azalea Society of America “Azalea City” designation was presented to the City of Nacogdoches. Mayor Bob Dunn accepted the award presented on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Azalea Society of America. The award is represented by a plaque with the citation and colorful images of an evergreen azalea and a deciduous azalea.

In the award notification, the chairman of the ASA’s Azalea City committee, Joseph Schild, said about the Nacogdoches application: “It is clear from the information and application submitted that the City of Nacogdoches, Texas has an active history of promoting and celebrating azaleas with various municipal, civic and community events. Azaleas are obviously a part of the community culture and it is only fitting that your city should receive from the Azalea Society of America the certification as an ASA Azalea City.”

This award recognizes the efforts of many people who are planting azaleas, learning about them, and making the annual Nacogdoches Azalea Trail a success. Among these are Azalea Trail Committee members Gayla Mize and the Flora Garden Club; Rocky Dumas; Sherry Ward; Eloiseider; Trey Anderson, Wes Schuler display the corn and ‘cormlets.’

By Dr. David Creech

Jack, SFA’s amazing first-ever-to-bloom-in-Texas corpse flower, has settled into his new home in the glasshouse, and he’s ready for a long winter. After all the excitement of Jack’s Jamboree, it’s time for a deep sleep. It’s true we had high hopes for seed set but we failed. Pollen flown in from a University of Connecticut plant was applied through a window we cut near the bottom of the spathe. Everyone had a hand in swiping the pollen on with a spatula, so now we can all blame each other for the failure, I guess. At any rate, the pedicle supporting the cone-shaped fruiting head melted into a pitiful puddle of despair—taking with it our hopes and dreams for baby jacks to spread across the South. To add to our disappointment, we learned that the University of Connecticut and Disneyland plants both failed to set seed, so we’re zero for three attempts. Not too good. Since that time, we’ve waited and wondered. Is Jack dead? Will he ever come back to life? What should we do?

In terms of popularity, Sweet Osmanthus has a long way to go in the USA. We visited one nursery near Guangzhou that produces 1.5 million plants per year! While most Chinese nursery plants are destined for the China marketplace, which is huge, there is a growing interest in exporting new cultivars and plants to the international market. For that to happen there will have to be cooperation, marketing and promotion. I have proposed to the Sweet Osmanthus Branch of the Chinese Flower Association that the SFA Mast Arboretum in Nacogdoches should be the very first official Osmanthus garden in the USA! Think about it. The Mast Arboretum is ideally suited to test, protect and promote the wide variety of cultivars found in the gardens of China. I imagine a mapped, signed and data-based campus-wide collection—a sweet-smelling garden to serve as the foundation for a new and growing industry.

There are over 157 varieties of sweet olive in China divided into four main groups: Fragrans, Latifolius, Thurnbergii, and Aurantiacus. It’s the latter that’s attracted the plant hunters’ eyes . . . for in it rests the oranges and orange-reds. All emit a beautiful fragrance. In the last twenty years, an effort was made to preserve the species in China and select superior cultivars. Cultivars have been selected for flower size, characteristics of the flowers, abundance of flowers, time of bloom, tree form and habit, bark, branch, leaf, pedicel, and fruit. Osmanthus fragrans has been in cultivation in China for over 2000 years before it was introduced into the West. Sweet Osmanthus did not make it into our country until 1856, and there are very few varieties and certainly no dark oranges or reds to be found here. Hopefully, that will soon change. The most exciting recent introduction into the USA is ‘Fudingzhu’, or more popularly known as ‘Nanjing Beauty’. It’s very floriferous, white flowered, and is known to bloom quickly in the nursery container. O. fragrans var. aurantiacus is the orange-yellow form that one can find occasionally in the landscapes of the South; and it’s a treasure when it reaches peak bloom and fragrance. There are a few other varieties reported but none have taken the trade by storm.

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