

Horticultural News and Research Important to American Gardeners

HOLIDAY TREES GET NEW LIFE IN SAN FRANCISCO STREETScape

Live trees are a treasured holiday tradition for many, with 25 to 30 million of them sold in the United States each year, according to the National Christmas Tree Association. Tapping into this demand, the San Francisco Department of the Environment and the Friends of the Urban Forest (FUF) have launched the “Dreaming of a Green Christmas”

croclimates. The trees will be delivered to peoples’ homes, and at the end of the season, the trees will be picked up and planted in the city’s most tree-deficient neighborhoods. Last year’s inaugural program resulted in 100 trees being planted throughout the city. This year, FUF hopes to double that number.

As Bieg explains, “Most urban areas in the United States have a 21 percent tree canopy, on average, but San Francisco



Thanks to an innovative new program, living broadleaf evergreen trees help brighten up the holidays, above left, and, later, beautify the streets of San Francisco, above right.

program, which gives residents an alternative to cut trees for the holidays while helping to fund street tree planting in San Francisco neighborhoods.

“We’re trying to bring about a paradigm shift,” says Amber Bieg, campaign coordinator for FUF. “Instead of cutting down trees, let’s plant trees.”

Starting in December, San Francisco residents can buy containerized trees, which will include a variety of species such as fruitless olives (*Olea europea*) and Brisbane box (*Lophostemon confertus*), known to do well in the city’s many mi-

has only 12 percent.” FUF, which is celebrating its 25th year, is a nonprofit organization that works to remedy that by getting communities involved in planting and caring for trees. The “Dreaming of a Green Christmas” program will help to raise needed funds and create awareness of the importance of trees in urban environments. For more information, visit www.fuf.net.

CRAZY FOR CATMINT

Each year, the Perennial Plant Association (PPA) chooses a Perennial Plant of the Year



‘Walker’s Low’ catmint makes a striking combination with ‘Moonshine’ yarrow.

based on adaptability, low maintenance needs, multiple seasons of interest, and ease of propagation. The 2007 Perennial Plant of the Year is *Nepeta* ‘Walker’s Low’. “As a landscape plant it is certainly a very durable selection that grows almost everywhere, and success is usually guaranteed,” says PPA Executive Director Steven Still.

Contrary to popular belief, the cultivar name does not refer to the height of the plant, but rather to the garden in which it was discovered in the 1970s. While various sources list a range of height anywhere from 10 to 22 inches, this cultivar actually grows up to 36 inches tall and 36 inches wide.

‘Walker’s Low’ has aromatic silver-green foliage and produces clusters of small, dark blue flowers on upright stems in late spring. If cut back after the first blooms fade, it will rebloom in summer. Bees and butterflies love this catmint’s flowers, but deer find the plant unpalatable. It grows in USDA Hardiness Zones 3 to 8 and AHS Heat Zones 8 to 1. To view previous Perennial Plants of the Year, visit www.perennialplant.org.

LEFT AND CENTER: COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF THE URBAN FOREST (2); TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF PERENNIAL PLANT ASSOCIATION

FROM AUSTRALIA WITH LOVE: THE WOLLEMI PINE

American gardeners now can own a piece of prehistory in the form of the WOLLEMI™ pine tree (*Wollemia nobilis*). This rare conifer belongs to a plant family thought to be extinct for the last two million years, until living trees were rediscovered near Sydney, Australia, in 1994. This holiday season, National Geographic has partnered with Floragem®—a brand-marketing company comprised of greenhouse growers and marketing professionals—to offer a limited number of these trees for sale (see “Gifts for Gardeners,” page 52). In the spring of 2007, the trees also will be available at select garden centers around the country.

A relative of the Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*), the Wollemi pine tree grows up to 65 feet tall and prefers full sun. It has pendulous, dark green foliage and its distinctive bark has been likened to bubbling chocolate. It grows in USDA Hardiness Zones 7 to 11 and AHS Heat Zones 11 to 1, but can be grown indoors as a houseplant as well.



A Wollemi pine growing in the Australian wild.

A portion of the sales will go to National Geographic’s mission programs and Wollemi Pine International Pty. Ltd., whose mission is to “conserve the Wollemi Pine for future generations and to raise awareness of conservation internationally.” For more information, visit www.wollemipine.com.

BOOZING UP YOUR BULBS

For those thinking of growing paperwhite narcissus (*Narcissus tazetta*) bulbs this winter, you might want to break out the hard liquor. Recent research from Cornell University’s Flower Bulb Research Program revealed that one way to solve the common problem of paperwhites growing too tall and flopping over is to grow them with a little alcohol.

Plant your paperwhite bulbs as usual in a bowl of gravel or other stones and add plain water. After the bulbs have sprouted roots and about one or two inches of shoots, pour off the water. Then mix one part 40 percent distilled spirits such as gin, vodka, whisky, or rum with about seven parts of water to make

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Cherry Lake Tree Farm is pleased to announce its corporate partnership with the American Horticultural Society and is committed to helping fulfill the AHS mission by promoting the importance of large trees in the landscape.



PEOPLE and PLACES in the NEWS

Anna Ball and David Lemon Receive Top Honors from All-America Selections

This past August, All-America Selections (AAS), a non-profit organization dedicated to testing and promoting new seed varieties, presented **Anna Ball**, president and CEO of Ball Horticultural Company, with its 2006 Medalion of Honor. AAS gives this award to “a person who contributes to the advancement of horticulture or the garden seed industry in an exceptional manner.” Among her many achievements, Ball strongly supports AAS by allocating considerable space for AAS trials at The Gardens at Ball. Additionally, PanAmerican Seed, a division of Ball, has bred or marketed 19 AAS award-winning varieties in the last 15 years.

AAS also awarded **David Lemon**, a plant breeder at the Paul Ecke Ranch in Encinitas, California, with the 2006



Breeders' Cup for his lifetime achievements in breeding superior plant varieties. In particular, his work with marigolds, geraniums, and sweet peas has set new standards for these plants. Lemon was also president of AAS from 1981 to 1982, and has served on numerous AAS committees.

Chicago Botanic Garden Receives Garden Excellence Award

The Chicago Botanic Garden (CBG) received the 2006 Award for Garden Excellence, given by the American Public Gardens Association (APGA) and sponsored by *Horticulture* magazine. This annual award goes to a public garden that “exemplifies the highest standards of horticultural practices” and is committed to “supporting and demonstrating best gardening practices.” The 385-acre garden, located in a northern suburb of Chicago, opened in 1972. Since then, it has become the second most visited public garden in the United States, and enjoys the largest membership of any botanic garden in the nation.

a five percent alcohol solution. Rubbing alcohol will also work, but one part of it should be mixed with 10 parts of water. Then add this solution to your bulbs and use it whenever you need to top off the water level.

William Miller, director of the Flower Bulb Research Program, says that what you will get is a shorter plant—up to half as high—that won't require support but with flowers that are just as large and fragrant as paperwhites grown without alcohol. He cautions that “as with humans,

paperwhites can also suffer alcohol overdoses,” so it is important to keep your alcohol solution in the four to six percent range to avoid undesired physiological changes.


AILING ASPENS

Stands of quaking aspen trees (*Populus tremuloides*) in western states have been in decline for decades, under pressure from grazing, competition with conifers, drought, and other factors such as pests and diseases. But they seem to have taken

a turn for the worse in recent years. Trees have been dying off at an accelerated rate, leaving large swathes of dead trees from Arizona to Alberta, Canada.

“We have two things going on,” explains Dale Bartos, aspen ecologist with the USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station in Logan, Utah. “The decline, which we have been talking about for the past 30 to 35 years, and the ‘die-off’ of whole clones.”

Aspens regenerate from their roots, sending up new clonal shoots when the main trunk dies back. The recent die-off has scientists concerned because affected mature trees are dying quickly, within a year or two, and new shoots are not replacing it. This indicates that the root systems are dying, but no one's sure what exactly is causing the root death.

This past September, more than 100 researchers convened at Utah State University for “Restoring the West: Aspen Restoration” to discuss the problem. The conference focused on a variety of restoration projects that are planned or underway throughout the Intermountain West. Additionally, “in the near future, the Rocky Mountain Research Station will get 25 to 30 of the top names in aspen research and management together to better define the problems and to discuss what kinds of research are needed,” says Bartos. 

Written by Assistant Editor Viveka Neveln.



The percentage of alcohol in the water used to force paperwhites has a marked effect on the plants' height. In this photograph, the four pots on the far left contain only water; the other groups, from left to right, contain two, four, and six percent alcohol.