

## THE OLD AND THE NEW IN ORNAMENTAL PLANTS<sup>1</sup>

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California has been receiving ornamental plants from the far corners of the world since the Spanish padres arrived in 1769 with seeds and cuttings. The forty-niners brought plants overland from the east and their Chinese associates likewise brought in seeds from their homeland. Introductions continued in a modest way until the turn of the century when many new plants were introduced by the Southern California Acclimatizing Association, a comparatively short-lived but most effective organization guided by Francesco Franceschi and Peter Riedel. Among the ornamentals dating from that period are the now rare *Genista aethnensis* (introduced in 1900 from Sicily) *Dais cotinifolia* (1900, South Africa), *Acrocarpus fraxinifolius* (1900, India), *Stigmaphyllon littorale* (1908, Brazil), *Filicium decipiens* (1900, tropical Asia), *Telopea speciosissima* (1900, Australia) and the more common and well known *Santolina chamaecyparissus* (pre 1900 and perhaps even an earlier introduction from the Mediterranean) and *Gunnera chilensis* (1908, Andes).

From 1910 through the 1940s, with low points during the years of the two World Wars, many new plants arrived on the California scene and it is interesting to list some of these, if only to note how few have survived. Among them are *Casuarina sumatrana* (1913, Sumatra), *Athanasia parviflora* (1935, South Africa), *Bauhinia blakeana* (introduced in 1925 into Florida but a much more recent introduction into California), *Corokia cheesemanii* (1928, New Zealand), *Adenium obesum* (1933, Arabia), *Felicia (Aster) fruticosa* (1935, South Africa), *Protea barbiger* (1936, South Africa), and *Holmskioldia sanguinea* (1925, Himalayas).

This list of plants and their origins emphasizes the diversity of ornamental plants potentially suitable for California.

Some of the many introductions were tried only once from single, and perhaps poor, introductions and then lost. Sometimes they were carried in cans until they were hopelessly root-bound and did not survive transplanting. Some were introduced into the trade but were so unattractive in nursery cans that they never sold and were soon abandoned. As any nurseryman knows, the introduction of a new plant is perilous and is often purely experimental. Frequently nothing is known of its growth requirements with respect to nutrients, water, sun or shade, its rate of growth under

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<sup>1</sup> Talk presented at the 1974 annual Western Region banquet.

cultivation and its ultimate size. This is in contrast to selections and hybrids obtained through planning. Parents of a hybrid are selected to provide desired characters and selections are made for specific characteristics.

Some of the old favorites have been greatly improved in recent times with special selections. Among these are *Arbutus unedo* 'Rubra,' double *Bougainvillea*, *Pittosporum phillyraeoides* from new seed sources, and even our own California poppy, *Eschscholzia californica*, taken to Europe where many seed selections are now available.

In the last two or three decades there have been some truly new introductions resulting primarily from the increased activity of botanical gardens, arboreta, and such organizations as the Saratoga Horticultural Foundation. These include such plants as *Fraxinus holotricha*, *Thevetia thevetioides*, *Cunonia capensis*, *Mandevilla* 'Alice du Pont', *Zinnia maritima*, *Pachystachys lutea*, *Erythrina humeana* var *raja*, and the New Guinea *Impatiens*. Many other plants are being tested and one should watch for them in the trade. Others should be introduced for testing. Some plants that were once here should be reintroduced.

We need to look for plants to meet today's needs — plants that will thrive in containers on the small balcony or terrace and those that have a size compatible with the small garden. Some of these we may find among the old-timers, others will be new dwarf selections as well as new discoveries. There are new miniature palms from Costa Rica, dwarf oleanders, and new selections of *Tecomaria capensis*. In southern California there are Huntington Botanical Garden introductions from Mexico, selections of native plants from Rancho Santa Ana and Santa Barbara Botanic Gardens, and many exotics now in cultivation at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum. Similar organizations elsewhere are active in ornamental plant introduction.

Plant exploration and test plantings should be encouraged and supported. We need to test the new introductions and selections in a variety of sites and under a variety of conditions. We must continue the introduction of new genetic stocks of old favorites as well as new materials.