

Washington Park Arboretum

BULLETIN



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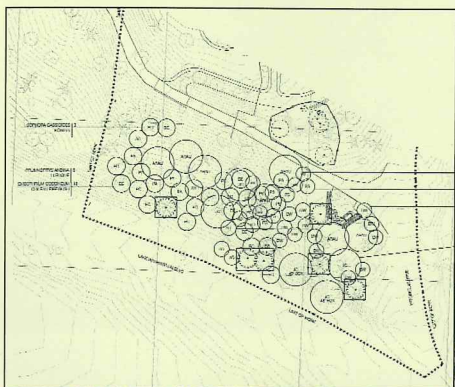
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Plants in the Arboretum's New Gateway to Chile Garden



The Arboretum's Homdahl Rockery has been undergoing a major transformation—into the site of a new garden filled with prickly, glowing, fuzzy, scented and otherwise remarkable plants drawn from Chile's palette of native plants. Three plant experts, involved in creating the Arboretum's newest garden, showcase some of their favorites.



Cone-Shaped Blooms, Leather-Leaved Ramblers and Spiked Clubs

BY RICHIE STEFFEN

Gunnera tinctoria

For any gardener, the first sighting of *Gunnera tinctoria* is a breathtaking experience. There is no other hardy plant that can rival the huge, umbrella-like foliage perched

atop its thick, prickly stems. With a surprisingly rough sandpaper texture, each leaf can reach over three feet across. The barbed stems look formidable, but the soft, somewhat-flexible thorns lack much bite. Anyone who has grown this plant will tell you that gunnera loves water and the moment it dries out, the foliage scorches into a brown and green mess. A fast grower, young plants can quickly reach four to five feet tall in a couple of years and—at maturity—leaves can top seven feet in height with a massive spread of 12 to 15 feet. Older

ABOVE: *Gunnera tinctoria* (Photograph by Richie Steffen)



plants will flower regularly with bizarre, cone-shaped blooms sprouting from the center. The cone is covered with hundreds of small flowers that will become tiny red berries, giving an interesting reddish-green color to the prehistoric-looking growth. The peeled stems are cooked and served as an odd rhubarb-like dessert in its native country.

Hydrangea serratifolia

Far removed from its common-blue, mop-headed cousins, the lustrous, deep-green foliage of this evergreen vine is hardly reminiscent of a hydrangea. The thick, leathery leaves—which are tough and tolerant—shake off the cold of winter and are unaffected by the frying heat of summer. Climbing hydrangeas do take some patience, however. They are slow to establish and slow to start flowering. New plants will often sulk the first year or two in the ground, but then take off in leaps and bounds, eventually becoming large and heavy vines. The first flowers may take five to seven years to appear and burst open from golf ball-like buds to reveal a dome-shaped bloom of hundreds of small, feathery, fertile flowers. *Hydrangea serratifolia* is a great rambler for use in covering

rockeries or the bare trunks of tall conifers.

Puya chilensis

The fascinating bromeliad relative *Puya chilensis* shows great potential for sheltered landscapes in the Pacific Northwest. The yucca-like rosettes slowly become a formidable clump of heavily armed foliage. Each slender, tapered, gray-green leaf is margined with sharp, hooked barbs ready to entangle the unwary gardener. The hooked leaves are so effective that in their native habitat animals regularly become trapped and die, their decaying remains providing the *Puya* with a rich nutrient resource. When mature, impressive flower stems reach six feet or more and are topped with a mass of flower buds that remind one of a spiked club. Hundreds of small, long-lasting tubular flowers gradually open to reveal a glorious shade of lime green.

RICHIE STEFFEN is the curator for the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden. He builds and maintains the rare and unusual plant collections for the Miller Garden and works closely with the Great Plant Pick educational plant awards program.

ABOVE: *Hydrangea serratifolia* covers the trunk of a tree (right) near the Chilean Central Valley's active volcano, Villarrica. (Photograph by Richie Steffen)



White Bells, Clusters of Butterscotch-Gold and Saucy Orange Flowers

BY DANIEL J. HINKLEY

Abutilon vitifolium

The so-called flowering maples are members of the Malvaceae, the plant family of hibiscus and hollyhocks. Primarily tropical in nature, the 150 or so species are found naturally occurring in both hemispheres on all continents.

Abutilon vitifolium, aptly named for its large, felted and lobed leaves, is a small tree or large shrub that is common in the mixed temperate forests of southern Chile. In the

Pacific Northwest, it is smothered in large, pale-lavender to white bells in late winter. Possessing the overall gestalt of a tropical plant, it never ceases to surprise those who encounter it in gardens for the first time.

Azara integrifolia

The genus *Azara*, with about 10 species (all occurring in South America) is an aggregate of evergreen shrubs or small trees. Once classified in the Flacourtiaceae, it has recently been assigned to the family of willows, the Salicaceae.

Though *Azara microphylla* is the most readily encountered species in gardens in the Pacific Northwest, there are numerous other *Azaras* that perform admirably while possessing more of a floral punch. Whereas the flowers

ABOVE: *Abutilon vitifolium* (Photograph by Daniel J. Hinkley)



ABOVE: *Azara integrifolia* (Photograph by Joy Spurr) LOWER: *Berberis trigona* (Photograph by Daniel J. Hinkley)

of *Azara microphylla* are quite insignificant, albeit powerfully fragrant, those of *Azara integrifolia* have a significant presence.

In mid- to late spring, amidst glossy, green leaves clad to stems rising to 15 feet, axillary clusters of butterscotch gold open to great visual effect. The *Azaras* are fast-growing and long-lived choices for Pacific Northwest gardens.

Berberis trigona

The genus *Berberis*, the barberries, is well represented throughout Chile and Argentina. Perhaps the most resplendent of all in flower is *Berberis trigona*. Once named *Berberis linearifolia*, its saucy, orange flowers appear along arching canes and deep-green foliage in late winter. It is rare in cultivation in its species form; however, hybrids between this species and *Berberis darwinii*—known as *Berberis x stenophylla*—have been popular in Europe for many years.

DANIEL J. HINKLEY wears many hats as writer, lecturer, consultant, designer and plant explorer. He gardens at Windcliff in Indianola, Washington.

Neon-Orange Ping Pong Balls, Fluffy Plumes and Dustings of Light Snow

BY RANDALL HITCHIN

Buddleja globosa

The genus *Buddleja* has gotten something of a black eye in recent years—and it's all the fault of just a single, invasive species, *Buddleja davidii*. To the surprise of many, this genus contains a variety of well-behaved and very worthwhile garden shrubs. Take for example the *palquin*, the vernacular name by which



Buddleja globosa is known in its native Chile. This 12- to 15-foot semi-evergreen is lacking in subtlety in all respects. Its very large, lance-shaped leaves are a dark, matte green above—a color that contrasts beautifully with the pale-buff, densely felted stems and undersurfaces of the foliage. At bloom time, the plant produces a branched, flowering structure that looks something like a TV antenna festooned with neon-orange ping pong balls. Subtle, like a train wreck. This is a shrub where placement makes all the difference: At close proximity, some might be tempted to describe the plant as “coarse.” However, with a little perspective, *Buddleja globosa* is at its glorious best. When seen at the back of a border or from a car passing by the Arboretum's Gateway to Chile garden, “bold” and “exuberant” are the adjectives that easily leap to mind.

Chusquea culeou* a.k.a. *chew-skē-ah coo-lee-u

OK. Don't be scared. Take my hand, and we'll get through this together. In truth, the most frightening thing about this plant is its name: a strange combination of hard sounds, soft sounds and way too many vowels. Relax.



ABOVE: *Buddleja globosa* (Photograph by Richie Steffen) RIGHT: *Chusquea culeou* (Photograph by Randall Hitchin)



LEFT: *Eucryphia cordifolia*
(Photograph by Richie Steffen)

fear not. In broad strokes, the bamboos are split into two groups: "clumpers" and "runners." And fortunately, *Chusquea culeou* is a clumper. So banish the notion of some giant grass careening through your garden, swallowing up all in its path. This is a bamboo with good garden manners, slowly forming a lush,

dense plant to 15 feet high. But it's not just some homely lad with good breeding. Certainly not! *Chusquea culeou* is a dandy—a real pretty boy. As with all members of the genus *Chusquea*, this species has exceptionally dense

branching, giving this plant a remarkably, fluffy, puffy, plume-y visual character that has earned it the common name Chilean feather bamboo. Add to that the beautiful colors of its culms ("stems" in bamboo-speak), that range from rich, emerald green to smoky, purple brown (depending on the form grown) and are set against brilliantly contrasting culm sheaths of straw or yellow. Homely indeed! Embrace the *Chusquea*—you have nothing to fear and much to love.

Eucryphia cordifolia

This is one of the most noble trees in the temperate rainforests of south-central Chile. From sea level up through mid-montane elevations, this dramatic evergreen forms broad, massive canopies that have earned it the Spanish vernacular name *ulmo*, a reference to the elms of the northern hemisphere. Valued throughout its native range, *Eucryphia cordi-*

folia is at the core of the Chilean honey industry and is the source of its premiere product, *miel de ulmo* or eucryphia honey. As an ornamental tree for mild climates, it has few equals. Jagged, lustrous, pleated foliage makes the tree a beautiful sight year round, but it is especially so in late summer—when the canopy is decorated with delicate, white flowers, as if dusted by a light snow. ☽

RANDALL HITCHIN is plant collections manager for University of Washington Botanic Gardens. His fieldwork includes leadership of numerous seed-collecting expeditions throughout North America, rare plant monitoring in California, and two botanical expeditions to southern Chile. He has authored numerous articles on horticultural topics, many of which have been published in the "Bulletin."

Don't panic! Recall your phonics lessons from grade school and sound it out. See? Not so bad after all... So now that we're past that, the next thing that strikes fear into the hearts of many gardeners is the word "bamboo." But

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