

## Minutes

Beautiful Gardens™ Taskforce

Saturday, July 29, 2007

National Arboretum, Washington, DC

The group met in the parking lot of the National Arboretum at 8:45 am with Margaret Pooler, plant breeder in the Research Unit for the past 11 years at the National Arboretum.

Present were Fred Duis, Rick Baker, Don Hyatt, David Seward, John Wise, Rumen Conev and Linda Pinkham.

In the conference room, Margaret explained that BG would not be able to have an exclusive on any plants selected from their breeding work, but could possibly have a 2 year lead on propagating the germplasm. Also, that patenting would be a possibility if BG helped in the development of a particular plant.

She explained that a Sterile Plants Research Initiative for flowers and nursery crops had been established in 1997 as a joint effort between SAF (Society of American Florists) and ANLA (American Nursery & Landscape Association). In 2002, sterility work had commenced as a joint effort between the National Arboretum and Steve Strauss in Oregon and Tom Ranney in North Carolina. Dr. Straus is working from a biotech perspective and Dr. Ranney is doing triploid breeding and working on a sterile triploid mimosa, among other things.

Margaret said that her work has focused on breeding crape myrtles, redbuds and lilacs. The lilac (*Syringa*) research has been for heat tolerance, with 'Betsy Ross' being their first introduction. In 2006, they introduced 'Declaration' and 'Old Glory'. 'Declaration' is not as heat tolerant as the other two.

Work is also being done on inter-specific crosses of *Corylopsis himalayana* with *Corylopsis ?* to create a cold tolerant plant that bears long bloom racemes on a more compact plant.

She mentioned that Angela Treadwell Palmer is in charge of the Elite Plants Program at the National Arboretum and that BG may want to tap into her expertise.

Margaret took the BG group to her crape myrtle trials area for viewing. We looked at selected seedlings of 5 year old plants that had not been sprayed or pruned. The crosses made in 2001 were between *Lagerstroemia indica* and *L. faureii*. The breeding goal had been to create novel colors and novel plant habits, with resistance to powdery mildew. We also looked at 12 year and older plants in the field. She stated that sporting is common on all the dwarf forms, such as 'Pocomoke' and 'Chickasaw'. The group selected 6 plants for "materials transfer" and planting at the BG trial sites in VA. They were 31-01, 20-01, 19-01, 19-01 (9556X8977), plus a 12 year old purple that has been selected by the NA for introduction and a fastigiate red that could be marketed as a street tree. The purple selection must be given a cultivar name that is the name of an American Indian tribe.

Next, we looked at a *Viburnum* that was the result of a cross between *V. macrocephalum* and *Viburnum* 'Eskimo'. It is covered in the spring with many white trusses and matures at 12' H x 5'W. It would also have to be given the name of an American Indian tribe.

We were shown barberries that are in the *Berberis* sterility breeding program and cherries that were a cross between *Prunus maackii* and *P. serrulata*. The cherry breeding goals include getting better flowers, attractive bark and different bloom times than the cultivars predominately in the trade today.

We did not look at redbuds, but Margaret stated that she is breeding for resistance to *Botryosphaeria* blight, to develop cultivars that can be more easily rooted from cuttings and to produce novel flower forms, making crosses with *Cercis racemosa*, which is not cold hardy in DC.

We then took a tram ride through the 446 acre Arboretum, which was established by an Congressional order in 1927. In addition to the many collections, future plans are for installing a Chinese garden on an existing 12 acre site.

Back in the conference room, John Wise asked about a white *Cercis chinensis* and Margaret said it was slated to be introduced in 2009. *Prunus* 'Dream Catcher', which blooms about the same time as 'Okame' and 'First Lady', which blooms earlier, are already on the market. John also asked about the holly hybridized by *Eisenvise (sp?)* which Mobjack Nursery is growing and he wants to name 'Aurora'.

After having a box lunch, Fred Duis called the meeting to order. He read the minutes of the last meeting.

As a financial report, Rumen Conev reported that \$15,000.00 was left over from last year and \$25,000 was to be reimbursed to BG from the Tobacco Indemnification Board. He also stated that he was going to submit a new grant proposal for \$100,000 to \$150,000.

Rick Baker reported that he has secured a grant from VDACS & the USDA for \$10,000, which will be available between September 1 and October 1. It will have to be spent in 1 year and will be used for marketing the 2009 BG promotional plants.

Rumen reported that he has hired Lisa Lipsey as an Extension Program Coordinator considered 34% Research and 66% Extension. She is considered a VT Technician and reports directly to Rumen. She started working in mid-July and works part-time 3 ½ days per week. Her salary this year will be \$16,000 and next year it will be \$20,000 plus benefits, with time shifting to 40% Research and 60% Extension. She will be visiting all test sites and evaluating the plants growing there, among other duties.

Velma Groover has been hired as a Research Technician to assist Rumen with his breeding program at VT.

Rumen has met with Theresa Augustin, curator of Natural Areas at Norfolk Botanical Garden. She is taking over for Mark Weathington as overseer of the test plots there. Mark has taken over as Assistant Director of the J. C. Raulston Arboretum (NCSU) in Raleigh, NC, so he will no longer be a member of our Plant Selection Committee.

Rumen mentioned that the Plant Selection Committee will need to add a new member or two. Paul James was ruled out because of his busy schedule, but Rumen stated that he had agreed to be on our Advisory Committee. Paul told Rumen that he had approximately 15 plants that might make good introduction candidates for BG. Also, he invited us to tour his garden in the future.

Rumen showed pictures of 26 promising hybrids of flowering peach that he has secured from a Dr. Scorza, a breeder in West Virginia. He was working on edibles and found some interesting non-edible ones. They have been growing in the field for 14-23 years and have not been sprayed or fertilized. When he secures the budwood, Rumen will graft them and plant them at all test sites for further evaluation for leaf color, bloom, novel tree shape and habits, etc. He may also use them for further breeding.

Infrastructure improvements (I don't know what this entry referred to).

Rumen reported that Dan Miles has been hired by Greg Eaton for Claytor Nature Study facility and improvements will be made there.

Rumen reported that he will be attending the following:

- Southern Nurserymen's Association meeting in Atlanta in Aug
- Southern Plant Conference in Mobile in September
- Conference for Human Enjoyment of a Sustainable Environment (is this right?) in April or May 2008

Rumen also stated that he wants to explore the opportunity to promote BG's testing abilities to European growers.

Rick stated that he will be attending the plant show in Essen, Germany, in January.

Rumen showed pictures of the new BG brochure. Choices were made for the colors, etc. Rumen will send it to Chrissy Thornburg tonight and it will be ready to hand out at the SNA in Atlanta.

Rumen showed pictures of some of the plants at the test sites. Ghost Fern and 'Sagae' hosta do not seem to be worthy of promoting from a sales standpoint. *Adina rubella*, Chinese Buttonbush, has been outstanding. Positive features are showy red stems, attractive shiny leaves, no losses, attractive blooms. *Stokesia* 'Peachie's Pick' has been an excellent performer. It has a bushier habit than 'Klaus Jellito', the comparison plant. It starts to bloom later, but it continues until frost, which is a big plus. He showed pictures of *Callistemon sieberi*, which John Wise said he had originally secured from the Strybling Arboretum in San Francisco. It is a prostrate spreading bottlebrush from Australia/New Zealand with small pastel lemon-yellow flowers. It warrants more watching, especially for cold hardiness. He showed pictures of *Viburnum plicatum* which was attractive, but had never bloomed and *V. prunifolium* with red new growth. *Cephalotaxus* 'Duke Gardens' is looking good now, even though some were originally lost. Rumen showed a few other pictures of plants of a succulent nature and it was determined by the group that some of the names were mixed up. Plans were made to correct this.

It was decided by the group that the next meeting would be the week of September 10th in the Roanoke area.

Rick gave a report on grant money that is coming in – an additional \$17,000 (I must have missed the details here).

Rick reported that Duis Nursery was the only grower to respond to the letter sent out by Jeff Miller after the last meeting.

It was determined that sales calls need to be made immediately to growers. Rick said he would coordinate the effort to get it done as quickly as possible. A display will be set up at the VNLA Field Day on August 16th and Rumen will give a talk on BG.

Rick stated that his committee needs to determine the cost of promotional materials to charge to garden centers and tags to growers.

Fred reported that Bill McCaleb had contacted some former tobacco growers regarding setting up Tissue Culture labs.

David Seward reported that he has transported the VNLA plants from Lewis Ginter to Reynolds Community College. He is now working on moving the hoop houses. He should have the cold houses and mist system set up by mid-September. Funding from the VNLA should carry them through 2007. They will reapply in September for next year.

John Wise has some plants that go in the test sites. Others may be handed out at the VNLA Field Day and/or sold at the Lewis Ginter Garden Festival.

Linda suggested using the VNLA newsletter each time it is printed to promote BG and get growers interested in participating. She also suggested inserting the new brochure into the next newsletter. Rumen said he would contact Jeff to get that done.

Fred presented a letter from Bill Smith of Richmond who has 97 Magnolia hybrids that he wants to have evaluated. John said that Mr. Smith has already “farmed out” various ones to Richmond growers such as Watkins Nursery. Rumen was given the list and said he would send a copy to Linda. John said that he had seen 2 crosses that showed promise. One was *Magnolia grandiflora* with red new growth and the other was *Magnolia virginiana* that blooms in 3 years – earlier than most.

Fred brought up the fact that as the BG program moves to a new phase that Doug Hensel would make a good chairman. He is familiar with the retail industry, he knows VNLA members, having served as VNLA president and he has good rapport with the growers in the state. Doug agreed to take over Fred’s job as chairman. Fred agreed to stay on as an ex-officio member and to be an active committee member.

Rumen stated that he had met with Andy Hankins in Petersburg, the Dean of Virginia State and Cooperative Extension. They do not have a horticulture program, but will meet with the head of the Agriculture Department to further pursue plans for having a test site in Petersburg.

Rumen reported that Angelo Franceschi has gotten permission from Virginia Tech’s development department to name a daylily seedling of his ‘Virginia Tech’. Discussion followed concerning whether it should be trialed at the test sites. Since Linda knows Angelo, she said she would plant a couple of the plants at her house and observe them, then make a recommendation to the plant selection committee whether or not to put it at the sites for further testing. Rumen said he would contact Mr. Franchesci to see if he is interested in that.

Linda asked if anyone had any ideas for nominations for 2010 plants for promotion to let her know ASAP.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Pinkham (filling in for Jeff Miller)