



NEWS FROM

SUMMER HILL

Winter/Spring 2003

INVASIVE ???

Lately, the word "invasive" has become quite prevalent in the attacks made by environmentalists on some of the plants in the nursery trade. Nurserymen will have to learn to be far more selective in the use of this term. "Invasive", as I see it being used now by the "do-gooders", means plants that spread by seed production and overrun extensive areas, choking out native growth, or just plain competing with native growth, or perhaps living alongside native growth. In any case, the environmentalists want the sale of these plants curtailed and I must say, in the case of Multiflora Rose, *Elaeagnus*, Oriental Bittersweet, and Hall's Honeysuckle, I agree with them. These, indeed, can become invasive and spread by seeds to locations where they were not meant to be grown.

However, for years, we in the trade have grown certain plants that do spread naturally by rhizomes but do not necessarily move by seed distribution. A good example of this is the many forms of bamboo. A lot of people term some species of bamboo as being "invasive" when actually they just spread and form colonies in the location they have been planted. Bamboo cannot spread by seed very readily since most of the species of bamboo that are hardy in our area only seed every 50 to 100 years or so, and at the time of seeding, the original plants die. These plants spread by underground rhizomes, but not by seed distribution, so they cannot escape to areas far from where they are planted, as in the case of the "invasive" plants being mentioned by the environmentalists. "Spreading" plants can be controlled by underground barriers and other methods, which is another difference from the way "invasive" is being used for seed producing plants.

Nurserymen are going to have to use alternative terms for this type of plant growth. "Spreading" or "running" may not be the right words - maybe someone else can come up with a more appropriate phrase.

HEAT, DROUGHT AND COLD

TRAVEL AND PLANTS

Last year, as usual, more people talked to me about my article on our travels than anything else in the newsletter. Perhaps this was because we drove to Alaska a second time, and that was of interest to a lot of people. This past year we only took a couple of relatively short trips, but they were of interest plantwise.

In late September, early October, we went up to Acadia Park in Maine and did a lot of hiking. We saw a multitude of native species, especially on the mountaintops. The plant that impressed me most up there was *Potentilla tridentata*, which was growing in a lot of areas between rocks and in dry gravelly places. I have never seen this plant growing in the wild before, and it was very interesting to see since we've been growing it here at the nursery for about six or seven years - an excellent little ground cover for a tough spot. Also, on the hilltops is a plant that we don't grow but will start growing - *Gaylussachia baccata*. The fall color was excellent on these plants which we saw in large groups, once again in the upper areas of the Island. All in all, of the forty-three species of native plant material that we grow here at Summer Hill, we saw twenty-three growing wild up there, plus half a dozen more at the Garden of Acadia which is a wildflower garden planted in the middle of the park by the Bar Harbor Garden Club.

As was the case in most of New England, due to a couple of years of drought, the berry set on most native plants was spectacular. The color on *Sorbus americana*, Mountain Ash, and

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What a year this has been! When I wrote last year's newsletter, the headline said "This Is Winter?" (with a big question mark) We were going through the mildest winter any of us could remember, but of course, it turned out to be an ugly, cold spring. All of us have had a trying time with weather in the last eighteen months or so. We knew we had a drought in the fall of 2001, but certainly thought it would be alleviated during the winter. However, one of our major ponds which is always full by Thanksgiving was still only two-thirds full come March. It did finally fill up by the end of April before we started irrigating, but the water table was so low that all our ponds went down quite rapidly when we finally got some hot, dry weather in the summer. It was only by strict water conservation that we managed to get through the year, but we did make it and some rain finally came. Fortunately, we've had quite a bit of rain down our way since September, and the water situation at the moment looks fine.

The temperature was another matter, and I must say I was very worried about the nursery at the end of June. A lot of people have forgotten how cold the month of June was - nothing wanted to grow for we were getting nights down in the 40's. The tomato plants in my garden seemed to want to dig a hole and cover themselves up every night. Nursery stock, with a few exceptions, was just standing still; but then, of course, we went in the other direction with extreme heat for a long period of time in the middle of the summer which made most items grow but made some varieties check their growth to some extent. Overall though, by the

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end of the season, everything seemed to even out and just about all our plants went into the winter in excellent shape. Of course, this winter has been just the opposite of last year - constant cold driving the temperatures in the quonsets down. The lowest we have had so far is minus 7°F at the main nursery and minus 12°F at our Rockland Lot. This is a year when the extra protection that we give our root tender plants really pays off. Recording thermometers down between the containers under this protection seemed to be in the 28°F range which means the root tender plants that are covered should make it through the winter in fine shape. I'm writing this in early February, and I'm hoping that most of the extremely cold weather is just about over, although a cold spell is predicted for the end of next week.

One good thing about having these cold temperatures is we will be able to observe the damage that occurs at low temperatures with some plants we have planted out in the past few years. We haven't had any really low sustained temperatures to cause damage to most of the borderline plants we are growing, and it will be very interesting for us to see how they make it through this winter. This is particularly true of the bamboos that we are starting to grow, since the various sources of hardiness information I've read have given me figures that are very different for some varieties. It will no doubt be a subject I can write about in next winter's newsletter. Hopefully, having this cold weather through December, January and perhaps February will mean we have a warm and beautiful spring, and customers will want to get out and do all the planting that they put off because of the drought last summer.

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the *Ilex verticillata*, Winterberry, was spectacular. I saw one plant of *Ilex verticillata* with very large berries and an extremely heavy berry set, probably better than any of the named varieties in the trade today. I took a few cuttings, but it was too late in the season and we couldn't get them to root. If I ever get up there in the summer, however, I remember where that plant is and will take a few cuttings at that time.

Bar Harbor, itself, is sort of a neat little town but was quite crowded. I was very surprised to look out in the harbor to see a cruise boat anchored there, and then we realized why there were so many people walking around town that late in the season. We did visit a few very good restaurants, by the way. Acadia is a very nice place to visit, except I wouldn't think of going there in the summer when I'm sure the crowds make it impossible to find a place to park. If you are into birds, we saw a great array of sea birds while climbing along the seaside cliffs on parts of the Island - eider ducks were everywhere.

A few weeks later, we took a two week trip out to one of our favorite areas: New Mexico, Arizona and Utah. We went back to a lot of the spots we always liked best but also found some very interesting county roads there. The county roads are generally gravel and not very well marked on the map, so it can be somewhat of an adventure to take them. Usually, you don't see anybody at all on these roads. Going so late in the season, however, darkness fell a little bit too early for us to do all the exploring we wanted to. We have two or three roads marked on the map that we want to go back to on our next trip there.

One sad note about the Southwest is the bark beetle and attendant dis-

ease that is wiping out all, and it does appear to be all, of the Ponderosa and Pinyon Pines in the Four Corners area. This bark beetle is a native, naturally occurring insect and usually doesn't cause too much damage because pine pitch normally produced by these pines tends to flood the tunnels and drown the larvae, keeping the damage of this insect under control. However, due to the excessive drought in this area (we were told the wood in living trees is even drier than kiln-dry lumber) the trees are not producing any pitch. Therefore, the beetles have proliferated and just about all the Pinyons and Ponderosas are either dead or dying. We went through areas where every single Pinyon Pine was brown. This is a great loss to the area for many reasons. Ponderosa Pine, of course, is a timber tree, and Pinyon Pine is valued by Native Americans and others there for pine nuts, which are produced every few years in great quantities, and are a food source for people and wildlife. They are also a cash crop for many people who sell the nuts. Probably less known is the use of Pinyon Pine pitch by the Navahos in finishing their pottery - all their pots are coated with Pinyon Pine pitch to bring a shiny sheen to the pottery. Their water baskets, which they don't use anymore but, at one time, were necessary for their living, are coated with a large quantity of pine pitch. These are now produced for the tourist trade and, once again, the loss of the Pinyon Pines will take away a source of income for many Navahos. Some of the rangers we talked to were also extremely worried about the number of dead trees and the dry timber that will be standing just waiting to burn. All and all, this is a colossal disaster covering millions of acres of the Southwest.

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CARY AWARD

The Cary Award Plants for 2003 are:

Acer griseum, Paperbark Maple

This is an excellent small tree, extremely interesting bark, but very hard to propagate and not readily available in the trade. We do not grow it here at Summer Hill although we do have a couple of fairly large ones and have tried to germinate the seed with very little success.

The other Cary Award for this year is Kalmia latifolia, The Little Leaf Laurels. These are some of Dick Jaynes' introductions of laurels with small leaves and very compact habits. We grow 'Elf', 'Minuet', and 'Tiddlywinks'.

'Elf', which we have been growing for years, is a rather upright, small leaf plant with a pink bud and very light pink to white open flower. 'Minuet' has even a smaller leaf on a more compact plant

and has an interesting banded flower. 'Tiddlywinks' is a compact plant with a pink bud. This is a relatively new one for us, and I feel it is going to turn out to be far more compact than 'Elf'. (Others that we do not have available at this time are 'Little Linda' and 'Tinkerbell'.) These are all nice little plants and hopefully, having the Cary Award, they will become more popular in the trade.

Plant Notes

Abeliophyllum

Abeliophyllum distichum, White Forsythia and Pink! I've written about Abeliophyllum in The Plants We Grow, noting that it is a twiggy shrub, somewhat rangy, and needs to be cut back every couple of years. However, it has very pleasing white flowers early in the spring that are extremely fragrant. We hadn't selected it at the time, but we also have a pink flowering form of this species. We found several pink flowering plants in our group of White Forsythia several years ago and have listed them as White and Pink for a number of years. I see now one of the large nurseries that specializes in lining out stock has listed a pink one this past year as something new. Where their plant originated from, I have no idea but it may be this plant normally reverts to a pink flowering form. Quite frankly, I like the pink flowering form more than the white. It is a light blush pink - very pleasing. Although I haven't done this yet, I'm planning on making a small planting of Abeliophyllum using the white and pink plants alternately. I believe that having both planted together will make an extremely nice effect. You might want to try this if you have an interest in this plant.

Arctostaphylos

Arctostaphylos Varieties About three or four years ago, two of our customers, within a couple of days of each other, told me that Arctostaphylos uva-ursi 'Vancouver Jade' was superior to any other Arctostaphylos that they had seen. Naturally, I picked up on this and bought a few hundred rooted cuttings so we could try this variety. I must say I have been quite disappointed in its performance compared to Arctostaphylos uva-ursi 'Massachusetts', which is the one we are primarily growing at the moment. 'Vancouver Jade', at least for us, is a rather coarse plant, larger leaved than the native Arctostaphylos one usually finds on the East Coast, and it seems just as susceptible to the die-back disease that a lot of varieties of Arctostaphylos fall prey to. So we have gone back to growing 'Massachusetts', which makes a much fuller, better looking plant with a much less disease problem, as well as another selected form of "East Coast" bearberry. But we feel at this time you can't beat the 'Massachusetts' variety.

Aronia

Tom's Aronia 'Red Berry' versus 'Brilliantissima' A number of years ago, Tom Dilatush gave me a plant of Aronia that he just called 'Red Berry'. We've grown this and listed it under that name, but I haven't written about it in the past. This fall, some of the plants that I planted in a naturalistic setting across from the nursery had berries on them for the first time, and, indeed, they were an extremely good red color. This plant tends to grow wide and makes a rather pleasing effect. Right next to the 'Red Berry' form are a couple of plants of 'Brilliantissima' that I planted to see how they would compare. 'Brilliantissima', of course, is a very stiff looking upright plant, and they didn't grow as well as Tom Dilatush's 'Red Berry'. So we are going to be producing a lot more of this red berried form of Aronia - I feel it is a far superior plant to 'Brilliantissima'.

Azalea

Azalea Ruth May Every year on the day before Mother's Day, we assemble some of our surplus one gallon evergreen azaleas. They normally are in full bloom at that point, and we let our employees take one home for their wives, mothers or "friends". I have noted with interest the last two or three years that the first variety to be picked up is Azalea Ruth May. Unfortunately, we always have some of these in surplus. We propagate quite a few because I feel it is the most beautiful of all our pink evergreen azaleas - a light blush pink, two-toned, really indescribable - you have to see it to appreciate it. 'Ruth May' originated at Oliver Nurseries in Fairfield, CT, and it really is a gorgeous plant. It's one that I always have in our home in the spring. Because it is not common in the trade, it is not nearly as well known as it should be, and I guess I'm writing this to recommend that you try a few. I think you will find that they will sell very well at your garden center.

Azalea poukhanense 'Yedoense' Every year I'm amazed at how few of this double flowered form of Azalea poukhanense we sell. A. poukhanense 'Compacta' is a wonderful plant - very hardy, semi-evergreen and better color than straight Azalea poukhanense which has, what I consider, a fairly washed out lavender flower. But we sell many more of these two than 'Yedoense', which actually makes a more spectacular show, and at one time was considered far more desirable because of its double, very full flowers. I would

think this should be an excellent plant for garden center sales. If anyone has a good reason why it would not sell in a garden center, I would like to hear from them so I can find out why I am so far off base.

Berberis

Berberis thunbergii 'Concord' 'Concord' is an excellent variety of dwarf red barberry. The color is much darker and more pleasing than either 'Crimson Pygmy' or 'Bagatelle'. It looks like it is going to be a much tighter and fuller plant than 'Crimson Pygmy', and maybe even more so than 'Bagatelle', although it would seem that it grows about the same speed as 'Bagatelle'. This is a wonderful little barberry that I like very much; and if you want something a bit slower and darker red than 'Crimson Pygmy', try 'Concord' - it is a beauty.

Clethra

Clethra alnifolia 'Ann's Bouquet' We are now growing many varieties of Clethra, maybe too many, but I couldn't pass up propagating this one because it does make such a nice, full plant. I found this within 50 feet of a salt pond in Rhode Island. It has made a colony that is probably 20 feet long and 15 feet wide. The maximum height of this colony is no more than 5 1/2 feet. It has a nice, clear white flower and is one of the nicest forms I've seen in a while - an excellent form of Clethra. If you are doing any naturalistic plantings near the salt water, I would definitely recommend this variety as I know it is salt tolerant, coming from its location near the salt pond and only approximately 150 feet back from the ocean.

Forsythia

Forsythia 'Hamden Golden Bells' A few years ago, Holly visited a couple of our customers over in the North Haven area, and Ralph DiSanto of Paradise Nurseries told her about a forsythia that has an extremely large flower. The owner of this plant said it would be fine if we took cuttings. However, he asked that we name it 'Hamden Golden Bells' since he lived in Hamden, Connecticut - that is where the plant was growing. We have propagated it and, indeed, the flowers are very large. Its plant habit is somewhat coarse, but because of the size of the flowers, it makes a terrific display in the spring compared to other varieties of Forsythia. You may want to try a few to go along with the other varieties you are selling. I would be interested to hear of people's reaction to it. The color is a good, deep clear yellow, not too different in shade from 'Lynwood Gold'.

Hypericum

Hypericum frondosum 'Sunburst' This is a great plant for summer color - relatively large bright yellow flowers on a tight growing shrub that should reach 3 to 4 feet. The leaves are small and neat with an appealing blue-green cast. I really like this shrub because it gives color in the shrub border when everything else is looking rather dull. It likes full sun and fairly dry conditions and should probably be used a lot more than it is.

Lonicera

Lonicera sempervirens 'Mandarin' We don't like growing too many patented plants, but when we saw the color on 'Mandarin', we decided we should add it to our collection of *Lonicera sempervirens* hybrids. It has a very pleasing orange to yellow flower which cannot be described in words. A hardy vine that will not get out of control with some judicious pruning here and there. 'Mandarin' is a very good plant for mid-summer color in a sunny location.

Spiraea

Spiraea x bumalda 'Froebelii' I, for the life of me, cannot understand why we sell so few 'Froebelii' and so many 'Anthony Waterer'. *Spiraea* 'Froebelii' has all the attributes of 'Anthony Waterer', good red buds fading to very dark pink flowers. It grows to about the same size as 'Anthony Waterer', 3 to 4 feet maximum in height, and is reputed to be hardier than 'Anthony Waterer'. Also, to its merit, its foliage is all dark green with a clean appearance, not having the disfigured albino leaves that 'Anthony Waterer' tends to have, which gives the appearance of either insect damage or disease. If someone can give me a good reason for using 'Anthony Waterer' instead of 'Froebelii', I would like to know the reason; unless, of course, it is just plain name recognition.

Styrax

Styrax americanus I first saw this plant in Nick Nickou's garden. It produces a nice shrub or a small tree. Its leaves are slightly smaller than *Styrax japonicus* but very much the same. It is a more upright plant and tends to be more of a multiple stemmed tree than *Styrax japonicus*. The major difference is the flower, which is much smaller, more dainty, and because of this will be more interesting to some people than *Styrax japonicus*. There has been some question about the hardiness of this species. I have a couple of plants planted out, and we will be able to see how it makes it through the minus 7°F of this winter. This is definitely a plant for the discerning gardener as opposed to the general garden center "grab the color and go" shopper.

Vaccinium

Vaccinium macrocarpon, American Cranberry I can't believe I haven't written about this before, but Betty tells me I have not. This is an excellent ground cover, especially for damp sites as well as sites near salt water. Our cuttings originally came from plants that were very close to a salt pond and thrived in that location. Until I saw this plant growing wild, I really had no idea of what an excellent ground cover it could produce. It has tiny leaves on many, many stems that spread quite rapidly and root down to form a solid mat and, of course, produce edible cranberries in the fall. These berries, as they turn red, only add to the beauty of the plant. Green leaves in the summer turn to a dark mahogany red in the fall. While this plant will tolerate a slight amount of shade, it really should be in full sun to do its best. It is a ground cover that is not thought of very often but could be used more frequently in naturalistic-type settings.

Rhododendron

Rhododendron Pioneer Silvery Pink I've written about R. Pioneer Silvery Pink in *The Plants We Grow*. This is what I said: "Rhododendron 'Pioneer', a hybrid including *Rhododendron racemosum* and *mucronulatum* parentage, is an interesting plant with its pink flowers blooming up and down its stems early in the spring. However, it has many things going against it (don't stop reading for I discuss 'Pioneer Silvery Pink' in the next paragraph). The leaves, not evergreen, are persistent; and after they die and turn brown in the winter, hang onto the stems giving the plant a decidedly unattractive appearance as it goes into spring. The *R. mucronulatum* blood is evident in that the flowers open so early in the spring that most of the time a late frost will freeze them just as soon as they open.

'Pioneer Silvery Pink', however, is a much better plant. This is a chance seedling discovered years ago and introduced by Hoogendoorn Nurseries in Newport, Rhode Island. 'Pioneer Silvery Pink' is evergreen, holding its leaves well through the winter. It blooms about a week to ten days later than regular 'Pioneer', therefore has a much better chance of escaping a late freeze. The flower color is a light clear pink - a very pleasant pink in my estimation. Lud Hoffman says it is the best. This is going to be an excellent addition to the small leaf rhododendron group."

I'm repeating this at this time because I still have a terrible time trying to sell 'Pioneer Silvery Pink'. Although we sell thousands of 'P.J.M Hybrids', a couple of hundred 'Pioneer Silvery Pink' is all we can manage. If you see the plant in bloom, you will realize that it has a far superior color than any of the other purple or pink small leaf varieties. It grows well and is a marvelous plant that should be used far, far more than it is. Try a few and see how they go in the garden center. I'm sure customers are going to want it.

BAMBOO

This summer will be our fourth summer of growing bamboo, and little by little we are learning about this very interesting group of plants. We should have thirty-eight varieties of bamboo this summer although only approximately half of them will be in quantities large enough to list in our price list. In last winter's newsletter, I described sixteen of the varieties we are growing (if you would like to have that information, please give us a call and we will send you a copy). However, here, I would like to describe five new varieties which we plan on listing this summer.

Fargesia robusta When I first visited Susanne Lucas' bamboo garden in Plymouth, Massachusetts four years ago, among the bamboos she was most interested in was *Fargesia robusta*. She had a *F. robusta* planted in front of her house in quite a sunny location and pointed out to me that *F. robusta* can take quite a bit more sun than most of the other species of *Fargesia*. She was good enough to give me a couple of plants, and we have made divisions and will have a very few of these for sale in relatively small sizes this summer. In our experience, it can take a good bit of sun, but full sun all day long is a little bit more than it wants. As its

name implies, this is a fairly large growing *Fargesia*, growing to perhaps a height of 20 feet at maturity. I've read listings of its hardiness which can be between -15°F and 0°F depending on the source of information.

Hibanobambusa tranquillans 'Shiroshima' This fairly rare form of bamboo is a very attractive plant growing to a maximum height of 16 feet but usually much less in our area. The leaves have white stripes running down the leaf (not across) giving a very interesting and striking effect. This bamboo can take quite a bit of sun and is indeed spectacular when the full sunshine hits its variegated leaves. This is a good, fairly rare plant - quite hardy, reaching perhaps a bit below the 0°F range. (Learning to pronounce the names of bamboo is even more difficult than propagating them)

Pleiblastus viridistriatus This is a strikingly beautiful bamboo - not too large in size, maximum height being only 6 feet. The new leaves are chartreuse with darker green stripes running through them. It should be grown in full shade to give its full effect as it loses some of the vivid striping when planted in full sun. In our experience, it actually has a lot of leaf damage when grown in full sun. This, as well as many of the other *Pleiblastus* forms, should be cut to the ground in the spring because it is the new growth that gives the most vivid coloration. This plant has a different color striping than most others and indeed can be quite spectacular. It is best used as a ground cover or a small shrub.

Pleiblastus viridistriatus 'Chrysophyllus' This too can be a spectacular plant, but the leaves are totally chartreuse without the striping. Grown in full shade, its leaves become rather luminous in tone. I have a hard time deciding which of the two plants I like best. Once again, this one should be cut to the ground each spring to encourage new growth.

Sasa senanensis Last spring when I drove into Nick Nickou's driveway, I happened to notice a very nice bamboo that he has planted next to his turn-a-round. When I asked him about it, he said it was *Sasa senanensis*; and if I wanted any runners, I should bring a spade and take as many as I wanted. I did this a few weeks later and also bought some small plants to grown on. This species has very large leaves up to 15 inches long. It is quite hardy, having no problems to at least 10° below 0 or less. The maximum height is about 7 feet - Nick Nickou's is still much lower at this point, culms only coming up about 4 feet. Considering the size leaf it has, a 7 foot tall plant would indeed be spectacular. It is an aggressive runner so unless you want a large colony, some type of barrier would be advised. Nick Nickou has a built in barrier that will be made with my spade as I continue to take runners as long as he allows me to do so. I really think this is a knockout plant if you want a mid-sized bamboo. It has a spectacular leaf but does require a good bit of shade.

As I mentioned before, because of the difficulty in propagation we still have a very short supply of most of our bamboo varieties. If you are interested in any, I would suggest
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you get your order in early for fall 2003 and
spring 2004.

Since I still consider myself a novice when it comes to bamboo, I would be appreciative of any information you can give me on your experiences with planting and growing bamboo. Eventually we may become experts here at Summer Hill, but I'm afraid it will take a long time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Hamamelis

I just came back from walking through some of the quonsets that have 1 and 2 gallon Hamamelis in them. Most varieties are in full bloom and make a really beautiful presentation at this time of year. We should have two or three red varieties, three or four yellow varieties and 'Jelena', which is copper-orange, available this fall. Think about taking a few this fall so that you have them in bloom for your customers before the shipping season starts in 2004.

Spring Pick-up Orders Please FAX or Phone

This coming spring, if you would like to pick up a few plants from us that have not already been ordered, we would appreciate receiving a FAX of your request before 8 o'clock in the morning, or a phone call, letting us know what you would like. We will get back to you and let you know exactly what we have available. With all the varieties we are growing, it takes some time to check on availability (computers don't go out into the field and count). After April 20, if you want to come to the nursery and assemble an order from our surplus area, that is fine; but if you know the items you need, it is much better to call ahead for it could save you a trip if we don't have them available. In any case, if we can assemble the order in advance, it will save you quite a bit of time as we can load you as soon as you get here.