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CITY LIGHTS

METROPOLITAN CHAPTER OF THE INDOOR GARDENING SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC. MAY 2009

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In this Issue:

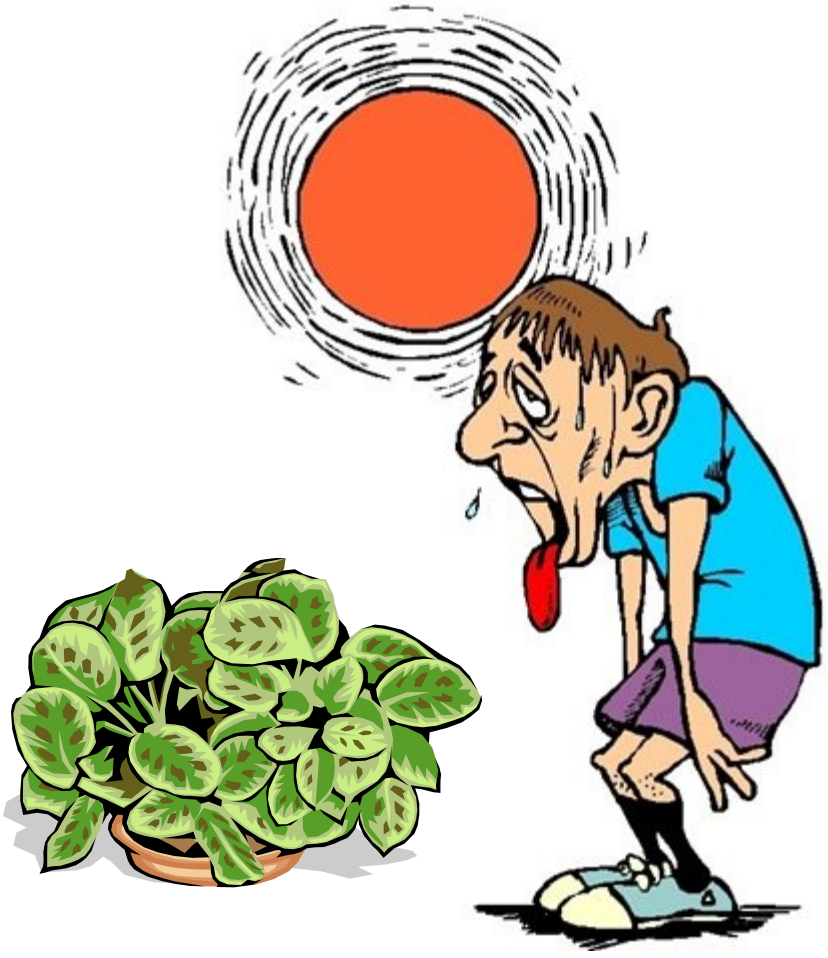
MEETING NOTICE : **Tuesday, May 26th, 2009**

TIME: Doors open at **6:00 pm** to bring in plants and socialize
Green Thumb Special at **6:30**, Plant Sale Table opens at **6:45**
Program begins at **7:30**
PLACE: The LGBT Center, 208 W. 13th St., West of 7th Ave.
(See reception desk for room number)

Program

Preparing Your Plants for the Summer

Summer brings us our our primary growing season as well as heat, drought, vacations and other hazards. Jim Paduala, Bob Baker and George Axiotakis will show us how to love the light and beat the heat.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

To Go Where No Plant Has Gone Before

Unless you've been away in some far corner of the galaxy, you've heard about the superhyped relaunch of the Star Trek series. Much fun has been made of the sets, costumes, and so forth of the original, but one has to realize that set designers, art directors and hair/makeup artists were working in unknown territory, probably commanded to make things look "alien", but not too alien, which to them apparently meant tacky sets left over from other shows, and for the women, were they human or alien, skimpy costumes and big hair clearly indicating their galactic origins to be Brooklyn or New Jersey. When it came to plants, their creativity was similarly parched. Although there were no African Violets or Spider plants in space, all the decorative houseplants I remember from Star Trek and other SF films and shows were A) Phaelanopsis orchids or B) Aechmea fasciata. That's not actually such a bad choice for the sixties, when your houseplant source was Woolworths or your local florist, neither of which carried said plants. Of course, fictional plants play large roles in all SF, whatever the media: book, film, TV, comic book, even theatre (Audrey in "Little Shop of Horrors"). Star Trek sites list about one hundred imagined horticultural entities from various incarnations of the series, such as the exploding spores that make Spock fall in love with an overall-clad farm girl and the infested wheat and rye hybrid that allowed Kirk to utter perhaps the funniest line in the original series: "Who put the Tribbles in the Quadrotriticale?" (triticale is a real grain hybrid, quadro implies futuristic cross breeding techniques, Tribbles were – oh, never mind). Well, we are, at least at Indoor, light years advanced in our horticultural knowledge and sensibilities. I'm willing to bet we could come up with plenty of real plants that could vary the décor and danger on any SF entertainment enterprise. For weirdness, I nominate Dracula orchids, Oncidium spectabile, Adenia perrei 'Snowflake', any number of Caudiciforms, monstrose Cacti, Euphorbias and other succulents, Amorphophallii titanium and others, Mammalaria 'Fred', many stapeliads, and yes, the carnivorous Sundews and Pitcher plants, just to start. As for danger, plants have so many defenses, from poisons to spines to odors and mimicry and hallucinogens, all of which can and have been put to use by purveyors of the space opera. I'm sure every member has some suggestions of their own. It is a little stunning to realize that we are growing some of these alien creatures in our living rooms. Plants have their traditional uses in space tales: food, scientific experimentation, and tranquil hobby as well as symbolizing the traveler's green home world. Yes, Indoorians, our spiritual descendents will while away the light-years, growing, hybridizing, propagating, just as we do, albeit with some unusual problems. The seminar on Repotting in Zero Gravity should be fascinating. Float on by and pick me up. We'll go together.

Tibor Fuchs

PLANT TABLE DONORS

Thanks to **Bob Baker, Ronnie Cohen**, **Karen Sternman**, **Beth Faricy, Roslyn Jones, Nadia Kulynycz, Robert Soret, Robert Fine, Zabel Meshejian, Tibor Fuchs and Norma Baum f**or April's donations.

TF

SHOW AND TELL

We had a very nice table this month, beginning with Ruth Lichtman's Sinningia hybrid with tubular orange and red flowers and a prominent tuber, grown in a south window. Proceeding, there appeared Michael Morales' Euphorbia millii with red and white flowers, South window, and Cattleya Aussie Sunset x Tokyo Magic, yellow with an orange lip, and Sophrocattleya Beaufort x Toshie Aoike, a complicated mix of plum yellow and white, no further info. Jim Padula exhibited a good-sized Plecanthrus Ernestii, SW exposure, from our prop meeting I'm glad to say, nearly in bloom and soon to develop a good caudex at this rate, and a reddish Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri - Easter Cactus - in bloom, eastern exposure. Robert Soret showed Sinningia "Tommorow", a beguiling orange-tubed plum-throated beauty grown under a single 75-watt equivelant energy saver fluorescent bulbon 14 hours/day, from the Gesneriad society cutting table and Kohleria "Snakeskin", orange-tubed flowers with a yellow throat speckled with more orange, same culture. Zabel Meshejian brought 5 plants, including the Pereskia grandiflora, a leaved cactus, in bloom, 2 40-watt tubes, 16 hrs/day, a shaggy Nephrolepsis or Boston fern with tiny leaflets, obstructed south, and three Pepperomias, rotundifolia , asperilla "Cactusville", and the pretty, but unfortunately named pustulata, all 2 40-watt tubes, 16hrs. Mitchell Bogen brought three aquatics: Lockhartia "Golden Speck", Paphiopedulum Bellatum, a white, red-speckled celebrity of orchid shows, and Drosera spathulata, an attractive Sundew all 2 40-watt tubes on 12 hrs/day except the Paph with 4 tubes. Lastly Tibor brought in 3 millii x moratii plants grown in 3 different ways. The first was allowed to follow its whims into a menorah-type candelabra shape. The second belonged to Roger Zimmerman who trimmed it to a triangle shape by removing lateral branches and spacing the remaining upward-growing ones evenly. The third, Leah Berkovits', was very overgrown with many long tangly branches. Then, it was cut back severely to about a couple of inches per branch with a splendid bonsaiish-looking result. Oh and Philip Elenko brought in an amazing Euphorbia ankarensis in bloom to the plant table and Tibor bought it and put it on the S & T table instantly. It is a silvery round column topped by green and pink flowers and looks amazing . Thanks to the bringers and to the rest: it's your turn this month!

TF

WHERE TO BUY IT

New systemic insecticide: The supplies table is now selling Bonide Systemic House Plant Insect Control, replacing Marathon which was recently banned in New York State. The price is $7 per 8 ounce bottle with accompanying instructions for use. For those unfamiliar with systemic insecticides, one sprinkles the powder onto the soil as per directions. Watering dissolves the powder over time and the plant takes up the poison, killing sucking insects such as spider mite, mealy bug, etc. DO NOT use this or any toxic insecticides on herbs, fruits or vegetables or anything you or a pet may ingest. Systemic insecticides work over a period of weeks or longer, so don't expect instant results. Eventually, the bugs will die off, even those that sprays can't reach.

Booklet on Light Garden construction: This is a do-it-yourself manual by Phyllis Wolf Banucci, selling for $2, one in a series published by the IGSA. The numerous shelving and lighting configurations depicted are for the grower who wishes to establish an artificial light gardening set-up that looks and functions as elegant furniture.

Beth Faricy

APRIL PROGRAM NOTES

Program: Gesneriad Safari with Michael Riley and Carolyn Ripps

These slides represent many trips that Michael and Carolyn and others took to Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Ecuador. Michael began "Ecuador is on the equator" but the climate is not hot due to the height of much of it. Quito, the sprawling capital is modern with some high-rises, but mostly 2-storey buildings as in California. Churches abound in the city representing one kind of culture and the people another. The indigenous people come in to sell their wares, such as the Otavalo weavers that we see in New York as well. Some dress in modern clothes, but many still dress in traditional garb that varies from village to village and proudly speak mostly Quichua (and some Spanish).A slide of an girl selling apples shows her wearing a hat. The apples are terrible since the climate is wrong for them, but they love them. Down the center of the country is the Avenue of Volcanoes, a sea-level plateau between two rows of peaks that range as high as 16,000 feet. In the east of the country, in the Amazon basin, also at sea level, the plants are the same from there to the Brazilian coast with relatively little speciation from one part of the Basin to another. The ecological niches of the Andes in Ecuador make it the most species rich country in the world. Gesneriads originate from 500- 5000 foot elevations with orchids and Bromeliads predominating at the higher levels. Of the 40,000 orchid species known, about 4000 are endemic to Ecuador. At sea level, it is hot all year-round, being on the equator, so oil palm, banana and pineapple plantations abound. The clouds blow in off the ocean and get hung up on the Andes, creating cloud forests and lower down, rain forests. Clouds blow in from the Atlantic and form in the Amazon basin and hang similarly on the east side of the Andes. When on a Gesneriad trip, you tend focus and collect only Gesneriads to determine whether the species you encounter are new to science or cultivation. The first plant found on this 1979 trip used to be called Dalberiara medicinalis, now a Columnea, its red-tipped leaves, when chewed, still thought to have some remedy as a snakebite poultice. Next, a pebbly-leaved Gasteranthus that is perishing in George Axiotakis' terrarium needing even more humidity than that frog-filled atmosphere can provide. It's weird that local nurseries in the mountains, such as the next slide shows, have the same coleus, African Violets and ornamentals as we do; the people like to break up the greens of the forest with anything colorful. Dense second growth forest makes collecting difficult. You look for red when looking for gesneriads, red flowers, red leaf undersides which attract pollinators such as the Triacantha in the slide red undersides, yellow flowers. Mudslides are common in rainy land so keeping the roads clear is a major task. The next plant was a Drymonia, which was determined only back in the lab since on-site identification of unknown plants is difficult. You can often reach out the car window and collect a plant from the roadside, it can be that easy. A roadside rocky wall can have thousands of plants, ferns, bromeliads, mosses. As you change elevation, the plants will change. Deforestation means nothing holds the clouds and they dissipate. Next we saw the market in Santo Domingo selling everything imaginable. All the water makes for many bridges and scary crossings by vehicles. The rain forest is burned to clear land for crops. Unfortunately, rain forests have little soil and after a few seasons it is depleted so they move on and clear more. Someone sees a red spot, the bus stops and Drymonia hoppii, an attractive vine in cultivation is found. Other species found: Parakohleria sprucei, a flea-bitten Alloplectus and a nice one with pink calyces, and a turquoise tree frog. A view of a valley and an epiphytic tree. Another Drymonia. A military checkpoint, a remnant of boundary disputes with Brazil and Peru. Waterfalls are good places to look for high-humidity plants. Carolyn took over at this point, showing samples, living and dead brought back for study. Lately, collection has been very restricted by South American countries to make sure that they and not others exploit the plants' commercial value. These slides precede those restrictions. In 1991, they went to Brazil to go with Mauro Peixoto, great collector responsible for many Sinningias and others in cultivation. Rio has nice mosaic sidewalks designed by landscape architect Roberto Burle-Marx who had many plants named after him. Tall offices and wide streets are right next to the beach. Hanging on a tree is Codananthe gracilis. The stark Organ Mountains, very stable and unchanging compared to the Andes, have a remnant of coastal forest at their base where the gesneriads are found. Sinningias are not thought of as epiphytic but here douglasii with its tuber embedded in a mossy tree. Nematanthus crassifolia and S. cooperii, also epiphytic. Herbarium specimens are brown and dead-looking but contribute greatly to Botany. S. magnifica is growing on a hillside above the road, S. speciosa in 2 different environments, on a shady forest floor and next to a cactus on an exposed sandy cliff near the ocean. Breakfast buffet: the

food in Brazil was very good. S. iarae, named for Mauro's sister, was gone from this site due to development shortly after the slide was taken, but is in cultivation. But habitats are disappearing. Mauro greenhouse has hanging baskets for the gesneriads, making efficient use of room. Chicken legs stick up out of the stew pot – lunch on the way. Inspection of samples by USDA in Miami. Back to Ecuador. Boxes are full of collection materials. Quito vendors now have stalls. Bad water means we take a break by the local grocery for soda in Maldonado. Michael and Carolyn cross the bridge to Columbia. Columnea byrsina. A topiary garden in Tulcan. All tourists must take a photo at the equator, one foot on either side, in both hemispheres! Hanging out with a boa constrictor and drying specimens. On to northwest and central Ecuador. Kohleria spicata is the commonest roadside weed. Scene on the bus shows laundry and shoes, always wet due to frequent rain, hung up to dry. Parakholeria rhodotricha can be found here in US. Pearcea hypocyrtiflora, with beautiful leaves was collected at the cost of itchy chigger bites. Evenings were spent processing specimens. Seed must be dried to avoid mold. Cuttings must be washed and numbered. A llama and the Quito herbarium. Photos of plants in habitat are important. Animals rarely seen as they avoid people. Seemania sylvatica is used as a landscape plant in these countries. Photo of group resting with Mr. Nagahide Nakayamo, horticulturalist, naturalist, Chirita 'Hisako' hybridizer. Bolivia. They saw Gloxinia perennis (in cultivation, peppermint scented) pollinated by an iridescent bee. Gloxinia erinoides on a log. Tiahuanaco on the shores of Lake Titicaca is an impressive monument of an unknown pre-Incan people with walls full of stone faces. Lots of quinoa grown around here. Seemania purpurascens occurs in various color forms and we don't know if the various forms are a true species or some hybrid. Besleria laxiflora with fruit off the stem. An old church completed in 1680. Back to Ecuador in 1998. A display capsule of a Drymonia with a red lining to attract dispersers. Achimenes not supposed to be in Ecuador, not described, but Carol has it at home .Paradrymonia hypocyrta loves shade, nice red and white flowers. Columnea strigosa, grows at high elevations, very difficult to grow. Corytoplectus cutucuensis has dark, silver-veined leaves, persistent calyces with black seeds at center. Ecuagenera orchid nursery whose plants Michael helps sell at shows. A beautiful tall yellow Parakohleria didn't survive. Elevated walkways needed to get around during river floods. Back to Brazil: Sinningia schiffneri is non-tuberous, so keep it wet. Nematanthus tessmannii, in cultivation, growing up a tree. Sinningia hatschbachii, growing in a crack in a rock, shows how Sinningias tolerate small bonsai pots. Coatamundis are raccoon-like pilferers of unwary tourists' food. A slide near Iguassu Falls in Brazil shows a Sinningia sellovii growing down a cliff. Huge Sinningia lineate tuber. As their bus wound down a narrow mountain road, Mauro walked alongside and threw tubers into the bus's open windows. S. leopoldii was growing in a rock crack. (Note – at this point the projector got stuck, Carol told a story about a tarantula and we applauded since we got to go on several trips to South America with very little effort and without meeting any tarantulas.)

Mauro Peixoto maintains an excellent website, www.brazilplants.com, where you can see photos of all the plants mentioned above and many more and read more accounts of these expeditions (with photos) from past issues of The Gloxinian. Highly recommended.

TF

NOBODY ASKED ME BUT …..

The Fifth Cardinal Virtue

Luck, they say, favors the prepared mind. They mean good luck, of course. Knowing as I do how bad luck can follow on being unprepared, I'm taken with this conventional wisdom. Fortune's expensive smile, Emily Dickinson said, is earned. Not surprisingly, then, I prepare my lottery tickets as carefully as I do my income fax - and my potting mix, although I admit that I heat pasteurize on the last. Yet I know that, regardless of what the Bard said, the readiness isn't all. You need as well that homely horticultural virtue which is embodied in the mythical Greek symbol of dedicated effort, Sisyphus, the crafty king of Corinth who was condemned to push that recal-citrant boulder up the hill. I mean persistence, or perseverance. I know many of you won't use toxic insecticides. I respect your feelings. Still, there is something to be learned from reading the labels on their bottles. This is from a Malathion label: "Spray thoroughly ... as soon as insects appear. *Repeat as needed* (italics supplied). And from the label on a rotenone / pyrethins spray bottle: "Repeat every 5-10 days or as needed. Even the label on the container of non-toxic Safer's insecticidal soap advises: "...spray again after 2 or 3 days... spray weekly... or as needed." Given the complicated life cycles of those elusive insect pests, your motto must be: "Once is never enough." - more so, if you avoid the stronger remedies. If you will spray only with benign isopropyl alcohol diluted to half strength with water... if you will only wash infested plants with running water or in a mild detergent, you must persist, persist, persist. Controlling any insect infestation is minimally a month long job; it comes with the territory. There is no other way.

(Some tips: Always spray at the full recommended strength. Any less and you risk developing a colony of resistant pests which will be harder to control. Should you fear damaging the tender new growth on your plants, run a few drops of clear water over the growing points five minutes after spraying. Persist in this too.)

Your perseverance should extend as well to the problem plants we all encounter. It's wonderful. to grow plants whose needs we have mastered, which likely means plants which happen to like our growing conditions. We bring them home, sit them in the window or under the lights and... voila... a show plant. Maybe this happens with all the plants you bring home. If so, congratulations, and skip to next month's City Lights. Most of us, however, know our failures, the plants we're tempted never to grow again. Like surgeons, we want to bury {and forget) our mistakes. But like surgeons too, we must persevere if we are to know the true (if tardy) success
which follows only on repeated failure. With me the test is episcias. I have grown some well ('Kee Wee'), and some poorly (again, 'Kee Wee"), with little predictability. Stems

elongate no matter how closely I grow them to the lights ('Pink Panther'); leaf tips brown (most of them); pink veining intensifies to bright red (again, yes, 'Kee Wee'); miniatures become massive {'Silver Skies'). and cold sensitive ones collapse before the eyes of amused judges at the New York Flower Show ('Cleopatra'). But do I give them up for more sinningias? Not on your life. I enclose them in plastic bags. (Seems to help- temporarily.) I drape green Reynolds wrap over them. (Achieves instant mutation, a new leaf color on the spot.) I pot them up in long-fiber sphagnum moss. (Makes for a much lighter container which is nice if you are constantly moving the plant about in search of that ideal light condition.) I also remove all the stolons. (Which gives me plenty of material to prop.) Or leave the stolons on. (Which doesn't.) No matter. .. Come hell or high water, I'm regrowing ' Cleopatra' for the next Little Show. Enclosed. In a plastic clamshell. In spaghnum. Stolons on. Close to the lights. It'll be a beauty. A Shakespearian sonnet of a plant.

Oh, there's another thing in which perseverance is a cardinal virtue - support for your society. I mean money, of course, but also attendance at meetings and eager participation in activities. Read City Lights. Tell the workers how much you appreciate their efforts. Woodrow Wilson's students at Bryn Mawr used to applaud at the end of his lectures. Can you imagine that? I guess we all like to know how we're doing.

Bob Baker

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

May: Preparing your Plants for Summer – Jim Padula, Bob Baker and George Axiotakis
June: Favorite Plant Night

Have you an amusing plant-related anecdote? City Lights is looking for contributions! Send your missive by mail to City Lights, c/o Tibor Fuchs, 505 Elmwood Ave #4H, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11230, or even better, by email to tfuchsya@yahoo.com.

To receive City Lights via e-mail, send your request to *tfuchsya@yahoo.com*. You will save us the expense of printing and mailing, get your copy faster, and enjoy a bonus page of color photographs as well.

HORTICULTURAL ARCHIVES

Bananas

There are a number of odd things about the domesticated banana plant *(Musa X paradisiaca* Linnaeus). It is an arborescent (tree-like) perennial herb. The pseudostem (stalk) is composed of leaf bases bundled tightly together. The true stem, a rhizome, remains underground. The inflorescence (flower stalk) grows from the rhizome through the center of the leaf bases and emerges at the top of the bundled leaves.

The inflorescence has male flowers near the tip and female flowers toward the base. Wild (species) bananas must be pollinated to have fruit, but the domesticated banana is a 'mule' (cannot reproduce). The plant is a triploid (having 3 sets of chromosomes) as the result of inheriting one set from the diploid, *Musa acuminata* (AA) and 2 sets from the tetraploid, *Musa balbisiana* (BB BB). The domesticated banana (ABB) has 33 chromosomes.

In most plants, if the ovules are not fertilized to form seeds, the fruit never develops. The female flowers of wild bananas develop relatively dry fruit with little or no pulp and large seeds. But the domesticated banana develops large, pulpy, nutritious fruit with no seeds. Because the chromosomes cannot divide equally, the domesticated plant cannot produce seeds. The nourishment that would normally go into the seeds goes instead to the fruit

The fruit of the banana plant is technically a berry with a leathery outer peel. There are at least 300 varieties of the *Musa X paradisiaca* berry. The same two parents have given rise to plants that produce berries that ripen yellow or red, are high in sugar, and are generally called bananas. *Musa* berries that ripen green, are high in starch, and must be eaten cooked are generally called plantains.

The domesticated banana plant is extremely productive and is a tropical substitution for potatoes. On a plot of ground that could produce 95 to 100 pounds of potatoes, a farmer can get 4,500 pounds of plantains. With potatoes, the field must be worked and replanted every year. A banana/plantain field is planted once. After the fruit is harvested, the old stalks are cut down and new stalks arise from the rhizomes.

Chelsie Vandaveer