

THE HIBISCUS IN FLORIDA

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Outstanding among all the shrubs from the South Sea Islands and epitomizing all their mystic charm and glorious brilliance of color and elegance of form is the hibiscus. It had been made the official flower of the territory of Hawaii and is fast becoming the dominant note of color in Florida gardens and the tropics around the world. Multitudinous in sizes, forms, and colors, it fascinates the professional gardener, the landscape architect, and the amateur alike, and yet it is so easy to grow that it is almost like a weed.

Individual flowers of the hibiscus resemble the hollyhock, so well known in Northern gardens, and like it, belongs to the Mallow family. Unlike the hollyhock however, the hibiscus blooms are borne singly and a few at a time all over the plant rather than in a spike. During the coldest days of winter, there may be short periods when there will be few hibiscus flowers, but on the whole it might be said to be in bloom the entire year round. The flowers come in both single and double forms and almost all gradations in between. The colors range from pure white through all shades of pink and yellow and red down to almost black. Recent hybrids include lavender and purple shades, but no true blue flower has been developed as yet. Originally of one main color, the flowers in recent hybrids show all gradations and combinations of three or four colors at a time. Many have special markings in the throat which give those varieties a

distinctive appearance. While mostly scentless, some of the newer varieties have a noticable fragrance and it is not unlikely that the enthusiastic hibiscus hybridizers may soon present us with a race of hibiscus of varying fragrances to match their beautiful forms and color.

In the 1880s, which is about as far back as we have any records, there were only 8 or 10 varieties of hibiscus in Florida. These included such old, well-known sorts as the red and pink versicolor, peachblow, double pink, and double blood red. In 1895, Egbert N. Reasoner brought in a single-flowered orange-salmon variety from Jamaica. Around 1900 H. B. Plant, the East Coast developer, is reputed to have introduced the Lutea variety, a single yellow with dark red eye from Hawaii. These were first planted on the grounds of the old Royal Palm Hotel in Miami, and it is said that he refused \$25 per plant for the first few plants that were available.

This, then, was about all the hibiscus that were available in Florida until 1913, in which year E. N. Reasoner sent out an assortment of some 12 or 15 varieties named after the heroines of Greek Mythology. The single salmon introduced in 1895 was renamed "Euterpe" in this list, and is so named today. Other varieties sent out at this time included "Venus," "Psyche," "Urania," "Minerva," "Terpsichore," "Melpomene," and others. Several introduced at that time have since been discarded because of poor growth, shy blooming, or other undesirable characteristics. The origin of these varieties is not definitely known at this time, but it is believed they were

seedlings raised by Mr. Reasoner from seed imported from Hawaii about 1908 or 1909. As a boy, I remember two rows of seedling hibiscus growing in the field on the west side of our old property at Oneco and I believe these named varieties were selected as the best of this lot of seedlings.

In the period from 1925-1930, George Anderson of Fort Lauderdale became very much interested in hibiscus, and through friendly connections in Hawaii, introduced a number of the varieties then current in Hawaii. By crossing these he raised many seedlings, some of which are among our better present-day varieties, such as "Florida Sunset," "Old Gold," "Neutrality," "Eddie," "Double Yellow 161," and "Nan Patterson." While an earlier double yellow had been originated by J. J. McCann of Punta Gorda, Anderson's Double Yellow 161 was a better grower and bloomer and more easily propagated and so became the first really practical double yellow to be widely disseminated. George Anderson will long be remembered for this contribution to Florida hibiscus, and, as this variety has never been named, there has been a recent movement to name it for him posthumously.

The single white variety with the pink style in the center, which is sometimes known as "Anderson's Single White," was not originated by him but was one of those brought in by him from Hawaii; the correct name being "Mrs. Ruth Wilcox" (named for the wife of the first director of the Hawaiian Experiment Station). The old double white which flushes pink in cool weather was also one of his introductions from Hawaii. George Anderson should also be given credit as the originator of a new type of hibiscus in which the single flowers have

the addition of a few modified petaloids attached to the "style" in the center of the flower. His variety "Nan Patterson" is believed to be the first of this type.

A little later than Mr. Anderson, Mr. James Hendry of the Everglades Nursery at Ft. Myers, Florida, became interested in hibiscus and began raising many seedlings. One of his earliest was a two-toned reddish-orange and gold double-flowered variety which he named "Mrs. W. W. White," but which is better known in the trade as "Talisman," since it resembles the Talisman rose in coloring. Mr. Hendry has many fine double yellow-flowered varieties to his credit, such as "No. 10," "No. 40," "No. 111," and "Betty Hendry." His "No. 40" is perhaps the largest-flowered double yellow to date, and his "No. 111" is perhaps the most fragrant yet originated.

Perhaps Mr. Hendry's greatest contribution to hibiscus culture, however, is his introduction of purple and lavender tints by crosses using pollen from *Altheas* (*Hibiscus syriacus*). "Myrna Loy" (Double Lavender) and "Dolores" (Double Purple) are the results of this work. His "Mahogany" is also a second generation cross from this parentage. "Stella Lykes" is a contribution to the petaloid group, and his "Y-11" is one of the strongest growing and most freely blooming of the single-flowered orange-yellow type.

About this same time, when Anderson was sending out his seedlings and Hendry was just getting started, the U.S. Department of Agriculture did its best to aid hibiscus culture, sending out three different lots of hibiscus to its list of collaborators. Most of these were varieties which had been introduced from Hawaii, but some were seedlings raised at Chapman Field and at the Puerto Rican Ex-

periment Station. Mr. T. B. McClelland, who was at Chapman Field at the time, was particularly interested in hybrids between the common Chinese type (*Hib. rosa-sinensis*) and the so-called "Japanese" or "Fuchsia" type (*Hib. schizopetalus*). The many fine hybrids of this parentage available today are largely due to his interest. Among the better known varieties disseminated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture are the "Mrs. Earle Anthony," the best known of the single yellows, and "Flamingo Plume," a very free-flowering double variety with the coloring of flamingo plumage.

Following the work of Anderson and Hendry, quite a number of others became interested in hibiscus culture and started making crosses and raising seedlings. World War II delayed this progress somewhat and only in the last year or two are some of these latest varieties becoming available. It is impossible to list all of these experimenters, but among the most prominent were Mr. Charles James and his sister, Mrs. McGee of Miami, who have such fine varieties to their credit as the "Charles James, Jr.," "Van's Delight," "Debutante," "Betty Shalk," "George Neff," "Lynn McGee," and "Mary Kelly." Mrs. Entwistle, also of Miami, has come out with such excellent varieties as the "Daisy Entwistle," "Fleda Hughes," and "Emmaline Lee." Mr. Ruhl of South Miami, has brought out such excellent varieties as "Elizabeth Arden," "Teddy Ruhl," "Cavalier," and "Senorita." Many others in the Miami area and elsewhere are also producing seedlings and will doubtless bring out many more new varieties.

With this number of varieties already in existence, believed to number probably in excess of 500, and likely to be doubled in the next 2 or 3 years, it be-

comes immediately apparent that some sort of central agency or clearinghouse is very badly needed to try to clarify discrepancies in present nomenclature and to act as an agency with which originators can register the names and descriptions of their new varieties. There being no such agency in existence, your author has been attempting to fill this vacancy temporarily, but will gladly relinquish the work to any qualified authority such as the University of Florida or the University of Miami, should they wish to take it up. In this work he has been ably assisted not only by all the above-named hybridizers but also by many others throughout the State, in Texas and California who have had an opportunity to compare hibiscus varieties in some quantity. Mr. W. B. Parnell of Miami, has been especially helpful and his splendid collection of varieties has been most useful in obtaining descriptions, as has also Mrs. Zapain's collection at the Valencia Gardens and Mr. Penney's, also in Miami.

Names and descriptions are now on file for close to 400 varieties, and it is hoped that early this coming summer this work shall have become sufficiently stabilized to allow the production of a mimeographed list of varieties with descriptions. As considerable work is necessary in the production of a bulletin of this sort, a nominal fee of \$1 will be charged for these when ready. Much later, probably several years away, all this information should be published in book form with some colored illustrations, but this will depend on the interest shown in this work by the higher educational authorities, or the creation of some sort of Hibiscus Society.

In conclusion, it is well to remember that there are a great many very fine new

varieties of hibiscus now being originated in Florida, and with the interest shown and the number of experimenters now raising seedlings, it is not at all un-

likely that south Florida may soon be known as the leading center of hibiscus culture, rather than Hawaii, as at the present time.

BROMELIADS IN FLORIDA HORTICULTURE

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The cultivation of plants for ornamental horticulture is followed on the premise that beauty is a necessity in your life and mine. Horticulturally bromeliads have been developing, and in Florida they can provide a very pertinent addition to our gardens, creating more plant interest and decorative value than many other previous additions to the Florida scene.

Bromeliads in Florida are a natural. And in considering bromeliads for Florida horticulture first of all we must be aware that they are already here in the species of *Tillandsia usneoides*, (the ubiquitous Spanish Moss); in *Tillandsia utriculata* (the "Fountain Plant"), vicinity Vero and Merritt Island; in *Tillandsia tenuifolia* of southern Florida; in the *Tillandsia fasciculata* (Cardinal Plant), dense in the cypress swamps around Kissimmee; and in *Tillandsia recurvata* (Ball Moss), noticeable in trees along with the Spanish Moss and prominent on telephone wires all over Florida. Just why they seem so happy on telephone wires would afford a very interesting study.

There are ten other bromeliads less conspicuous in Florida. All but three of the seventeen bromeliads native to the United States are growing in Florida. While other States, Texas, Louisiana,

the Carolinas, and even the southern section of Virginia can claim some bromeliads, Florida can boast fifteen native species, twelve tillandsias, one guzmania and two catopsis. This affirms the fact that bromeliads like it here and therefore conditions are favorable to the introduction of others from afar.

If the bromeliads had not had to depend almost entirely on the wind for distribution we might have had still more species here in Florida. The ones we have, no doubt, came by way of Cuba and Mexico, as our native bromeliads are also found in these Caribbean countries. We might say that many centuries ago these air-fed, air-domiciled, air-borne seed plants established the first air communications between this country and our Latin American neighbors. Man who feels that he has advanced so considerably in the air needs only to study the ages old history of air-minded plants.

The bromeliads which have already traveled on their own as well as the ones which have traveled in the stomachs of beast and bird are now coming into Florida as introductions to horticulture by the man made air routes.

The native members of this great family (commonly known as the pineapple family) here in Florida are all epiphytes creating, thus, their own natural tree garden. You can see these