Developments in Plants for Private Gardens and Public Plantings

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Abstract
A closer look at the plants that are for sale at nurseries and garden centres shows that there is a continuous flow of plants that are labelled as “new”. Where do these “new” plants come from and are they all really new and garden worthy? How well have the novelties been studied and tried in trials to assess their garden value? Is there a trend to be found among the many trees, shrubs and herbaceous perennials that have recently been introduced for use in private gardens and parks? This paper presents a short description of the distinguishing characteristics and origin of a variety of recently-introduced trees, shrubs and herbaceous perennials.

INTRODUCTION
The development of plants (trees, shrubs and perennials) that are suitable for private gardens and public plantings continues. What is meant by development? It may mean that plants are being offered that have a distinguishing property over other similar plants in the nursery trade, e.g. a different colour of leaves, branches or flowers, a different growth habit or plant shape, a so far unknown or lesser known plant or a new hybrid.

Variegated Plants
For several years there has been an increase in the popularity of variegated plants. A nice pattern of variegation seems to add to the market value of an already existing (but green) cultivar or brings new marketing possibilities. Some of the recent introductions with variegated leaves are good looking plants at the selling stage but are poor performers as garden plants.

Some examples of recent introductions with variegated foliage include:

- **Pieris** ‘Flaming Silver’ is a sport of **Pieris** ‘Forest Flame’ and adds value to the latter because of its white margined leaves. The young shoots in springtime are bright red and then change colour during the growing season from orange-yellow to green.
- **Aesculus hippocastanum** ‘Hampton Court Gold’ has golden leaves sometimes with green stripes and speckles as the young leaves appear and they gradually turn green during summer. This variegated tree is only suitable for use in shady areas because the leaves scorch very easily in full sunlight.
- **Metasequoia glyptostroboides** ‘White Spot’ was recently discovered as a branch sport. As a young plant the white variegation is clearly visible but this characteristic will lose its value once the tree grows taller.
- **Stachyurus chinensis** ‘Joy Forever’ makes a perfect highlight in a shady corner of the garden or public planting. The golden variegated leaves that appear after flowering add value to this species that is a rather underused ornamental shrub.
- **Ligustrum sinense** ‘Lemon and Lime’ has yellow and lime green spots on the leaves but it does not make a very striking display.
- **Brunnera macrophylla** ‘Jack Frost’ originated as a tissue culture sport from **Brunnera macrophylla** ‘Langtrees’ and makes a very showy perennial with its very large pewter grey markings on the leaves. This not only makes a very attractive looking container plant for springtime sales in garden centres etc., but it also makes a good plant in the semi-shaded perennial border or in the undergrowth of shrubs or trees.
*Helleborus argutifolius* ‘Pacific Frost’ has a dense pattern of white stripes and spots on the leaves. This variegation pattern looses value once the plant is in the garden.

*Helleborus foetidus* (unnamed) arose as a chance seedling and shows an irregular pattern of golden stripes and spots on the leaves. Some consider this very attractive, whereas others describe it as “interesting”.

*Lunaria rediviva* (unnamed) was found in Alnarp in Skane, Sweden. The leaves in early spring are cream and green in colour. Later, the creamy colour changes to white and eventually the leaves are all green by late summer. Nevertheless the colour of the young leaves is a welcome addition to the spring border.

*Lonicera nitida* ‘Lemon Beauty’ looks very nice when used in mass plantings in public plantings as well as when used as a specimen shrub or small hedge in the private garden. It arose in Belgium as a branch sport on *Lonicera nitida* ‘Elegant’.

*Cornus kousa* ‘Wolf Eyes’ the pattern of variegation is not different from that of *Cornus kousa* ‘Snowboy’ but the plant has the advantage that it is more vigorous in growth.

**Copper Coloured Varieties**

Copper coloured leaves of ornamental shrubs or perennials as well as those with golden foliage are very welcome colourful additions to several types of plantings. The following are a few of the cultivars that have been introduced over the last couple of years:

*Sambucus nigra* ‘Gerda’ Black Beauty is supposed to be an improvement over the older selection *Sambucus nigra* ‘Guincho Purple’. The dark purple leaves in springtime and the pink tinted inflorescences make both cultivars very beautiful ornamentals for a wide range of uses.

*Physocarpus opulifolius* ‘Diabolo’ was found in Germany and has dark purple leaves. It is a popular shrub for large-scale planting in parks and public plantings. The intense purple colouration turns to a dark green by the end of the summer.

*Geranium pratense* ‘Victor Reiter’ originated in a garden in California, USA. It was named after the introducer. The leaves emerge dark purple in spring and eventually turn dark green, the flowers are dark lilac. Seedlings of this selection show variation in the intensity of the purple colour in the leaves and this has already led to the registering of several named cultivars. Breeding work with other species is being done to supply more purple coloured selections of *Geranium*.

*Lysimachia ciliata* ‘Firecracker’ is a quick spreading (by rhizomes) perennial that in contrast to the plain green species has dark purple young leaves and shoots in spring to early summer. By the time the flowering starts the leaves turn a dull dark green. The bright yellow flowers compensate for the loss of leaf colour.

*Eupatorium rugosum* ‘Chocolate’ was found in the native range of the species *Eupatorium rugosum* (eastern North-America) and is by far better in leaf colour than the existing cultivar ‘Braunlaub’.

*Persicaria microcephala* ‘Red Dragon’ has an intriguing pattern of colouration of the leaves. The purple leaves have pewter coloured stripes and spots. When in bloom the white flowers in loose inflorescences make a beautiful display in combination with the dark background of the leaves.

*Caryopteris x clandonensis* ‘Worcester Gold’ is a sun tolerant low shrub for warm locations. The contrast between the golden leaves and the blue flowers is striking.

*Cotinus coggygria* ‘Ancot’ Golden Spirit is the only golden leaved form in within *Cotinus*. It originated as a golden leaved seedling in a batch of *Cotinus coggygria* in The Netherlands. In autumn when planted in a sunny location the golden foliage turns lemon yellow.

**Varieties with Autumn or Winter Colour**

Autumn or winter colour can be found in a wide range of trees and shrubs. Two remarkable new selections are
*Itea virginica* ‘Henry’s Garnet’ was found as a seedling in Virginia, USA. It was selected because of the superior fall colour of the leaves. The leaves are plain green in spring and summer but a rich red in autumn.

*Cornus sanguinea* ‘Winter Beauty’ shows the best colours of the branches once the leaves have dropped in autumn. The colour of the bark on this-year’s branches change from the bottom to the top of the branch. The lower part is yellow, the middle orange, and the top bright red. It is a spectacular effect. For best colouration cut back the branches in early spring.

**Selections with Different Flower Colours**

Flower colour of course plays an important role in the ornamental value of perennial plants and shrubs. Already many selections exist with a wide range of colours and still good colour breakthroughs occur. For example

*Rosa* ‘Spevu’ Lovely Fairy and *Rosa* ‘Sperien’ Fairy Queen have a growth habit like their parent ‘The Fairy’ but a much darker pink flower colour.

*Magnolia x brooklynensis* ‘Yellow Bird’ has cup-shaped deep yellow flowers that open in late spring.

*Phlox paniculata* ‘Empty Feelings’ has inflorescences that remain green. No petals are formed to build a corolla. It is a very interesting malformation that has potential for the cut-flower industry.

*Clematis heracleifolia* ‘China Purple’ was selected in Boskoop, The Netherlands. Seeds of this deciduous, semi-shrubby species of clematis collected near the Great Wall in China provided several plants that showed a range of colours varying from pale blue to dark purple. The darkest coloured form received the name ‘China Purple’.

*Geranium macrorrhizum* ‘Sandwick’ is not so different in the colour of its petals but the combination of a green inflated calyx (more often you see red suffused calyces) and pink petals so far was not available in nurseries. The same goes for *Geranium macrorrhizum* ‘White Ness’ that has a green calyx and white petals. The latter is an introduction from Ness Botanic Gardens, Liverpool, United Kingdom.

*Acanthus mollis* ‘Jeffalbus’ was named in France and is a white flowering form of the normally pink or purple flowering species.

*Akebia quinata* ‘Shirobana’ originates from Japan. ‘Shirobana’ has white flowers instead of the red-purple flowers of the species. Even the fragrance of the flowers is different.

*Brunnera macrophylla* ‘Betty Bowring’ is a somewhat slower growing but attractive white flowering form of the forget-me-not-blue coloured *Brunnera macrophylla*.

*Aster ageratoides* ‘Harry Smith’ has a somewhat different shaped and coloured flower than the, until recently, commercially available species. An extra that adds to the ornamental value is the dark purple coloured stem. It makes a nice contrast to the pale purple-blue flowers.

**Unusually Shaped Plants**

Plant shape is another aspect that can add value to a plant by making it suitable for different uses. Weeping, columnar, contorted, and dwarfed forms all have found their place in many a garden or park.

*Lonicera* ‘Honey Baby’ is a selection of normally climbing honeysuckles but this form grows into a shrub. It makes a perfect plant for selling in full bloom in a container.

*Malus* ‘Courtabri’ Pomzai is a dwarf ornamental apple tree that flowers profusely. Again, it is suitable for selling in a container and is ideal for use in smaller gardens.

**Lesser Known Species**

*Abelia mosanensis* is native to North Korea and is a good hardy shrubby ornamental plant for those countries where *Abelia* normally is too tender.
Aconitum vilmorinianum (‘Red Wine’) is a climbing, deciduous species from China with wine-red typical monkshood shaped flowers. It is a very attractive colour and totally different from all the other blue flowering monkshoods.

Deutzia calycosa was introduced several years ago from China. It has large flowers, in bud dark pink opening white on the inside. It is similar to Deutzia purpurascens or D. x rosea.

Heptacodium miconioides is a vigorous, upright growing tall shrub. The genus belongs to the Caprifoliaceae family and was only introduced in the early 1980s from China. A striking shrub that flowers with small, fragrant white flowers at the end of the shoots in late summer or autumn. After flowering, the calyx enlarges and turns red thus giving further another ornamental value. The bark is brown and exfoliating.

Ixia stolonifera is a rapidly spreading ground covering perennial with yellow daisy like flowers and thin pale green rounded leaves.

Melliodendron xylocarpum belongs to the Styracaceae and grows into a tall shrub or small tree. The white flowers in drooping inflorescences are very showy.

Picrasma quassioides has an outstanding golden orange or scarlet autumn colour. It is a very ornamental small tree with large pinnate leaves.

Sinojackia xylocarpa is a very ornamental free flowering shrub. The white bell-shaped flowers appear in short axillary racemes in May.

Recent Hybrids

Geranium ‘Dilys’ is a cross between Geranium sanguineum and Geranium procurrens. The pinkish purple flowers are formed on long trailing stems from June onwards until the first frosts. The leaves are like those of Geranium sanguineum. It was introduced by The Axletree Nursery.

Geranium ‘Sirak’ occurred as a chance seedling at the nursery of Hans Simon, Marktzeidenfeld, Germany from a cross between Geranium gracile and Geranium ibericum. The 50 cm tall plant has broad, large leaves and makes a good ground cover. In autumn the leaves turn yellow.

Geranium ‘Blue Sunrise’ is a plant of uncertain parentage but presumably Geranium wallichanum was one of the parents, according to Hans Kramer from De Hessenhof Nursery, The Netherlands. The ornamental value of this selection is that the emerging leaves are orange-golden turning yellow by the time the first pale blue flowers appear. A very colourful display is created from a single plant.

Thalictrum ‘Elin’ arose in Sweden as a cross between Thalictrum flavum subsp. glaucum and Thalictrum rochebrunianum. This tall plant grows over 2m high without staking. It is an ideal selection to use in the back of a perennial border or even in between shrubs.

Paeonia ‘Bartzella’ is one of the interesting hybrids between the shrubby Paeonia suffruticosa and a herbaceous perennial Paeonia species. Early crosses resulted in plants with huge flowers like those of the shrubby peonies but they were hidden in between the herbaceous perennial type of leaves. However, ‘Bartzella’ shows its flowers perfectly on top of the leaves.

Malus ‘Adirondack’ is a very ornamental crab apple. It grows into a small tree with an upright habit. The flowers are borne densely on the long straight upright growing branches. They are red in bud, opening to white and are followed by tiny orange-red fruits. It was raised by Don Egolf at the US National Arboretum, Washington DC, USA.

CONCLUSION

The development of plants for gardens and public plantings is going in many directions. Visual attractiveness is very important, plant health and propagation aspects play a role but seem to be less important. New varieties of plants may have different backgrounds: some occur spontaneously as sports or seedlings others are the result of deliberate crosses, whereas some come directly from the wild. As long as the plant looks different from other similar plants it seems to have potential in the plant selling business.
It is not clear if the introducers of the new varieties all did a proper check to assess the garden values of the new plant. Considering the wide variety of new selections that are being offered it is difficult to speak of trends. My impression is that anything will do, the customers decide eventually which plants are successful and for how long they are a commercial success.

**Figures**

![Fig. 1. A composition of leaves and / or flowers of Brunnera macrophylla 'Jack Frost', Geranium 'Dilys', Persicaria microcephala 'Red Dragon' and Heptacodium miconioides.](image)

Fig. 1. A composition of leaves and / or flowers of *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost', *Geranium* 'Dilys', *Persicaria microcephala* 'Red Dragon' and *Heptacodium miconioides*. 
Fig. 2. A variety of attractive leaves from *Itea virginica* 'Henry's Garnet', *Lonicera nitida* 'Lemon Beauty', *Stachyurus chinensis* 'Joy Forever' and *Geranium pratense* 'Victor Reiter'.