

PLANTS OF THE YEAR 2006

by Martha Kent, Chair of the Plant of the Year Committee 2006 and committee members Mary Collins, Mike Davenport, Marilyn Griffiths, Heather Jacobsen, Christie Jones and Jason Lopez.

We are pleased to announce our selections for 2006. Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden is working to support home gardening in tropical South Florida. These selections represent some of the very best plants for Miami gardens. The following criteria is considered when making our choices: ornamental appeal, ease of growing, low maintenance, suited to tropical South Florida climate and growing conditions, non-invasive and non-weedy, and underused and under-represented plants in the local landscape.

Three plants were chosen: *Pimenta racemosa*, a fine, small to medium evergreen tree that provides a delightful aroma when you crush a leaf in your palm; *Senna polyphylla*, a shrub or small tree with charming yellow flowers that attract butterflies; and *Tecomanthe dendrophila*, a vigorous vine with gorgeous clusters of mostly pink flowers. We think each selection is special in its own way and hope you will take note of these plants at Fairchild. Come visit them and decide if they are right for your garden.

Pimenta racemosa

Botanical name: *Pimenta racemosa*

Family: Myrtaceae

Common name: bay rum

Native to: Northern South America and West Indies

Habit: Upright, narrow tree to 25 feet tall in South Florida.

Flower: Inconspicuous white, fragrant flowers in spring.

Growing conditions: Full sun, well-drained soil. Drought-resistant once established.

Propagation: Seed

Comments: Oil is obtained from leaves and twigs to make bay rum, which is used in cosmetics and medicines. The fruit, bay rum and essential oil are toxic and should not be ingested. Lemon-scented bay rum is a naturally occurring form of *Pimenta racemosa*. The bay rum tree is closely related to allspice.

The dark green, shiny evergreen leaves produce a wonderful spicy aroma when crushed. The trunk and main branches have interesting bark, which peels to expose lighter shades. It is a small to medium size upright tree 15-25' tall. Fragrant white flowers are followed by black, oblong berries. *Pimenta racemosa* leaves contain aromatic oil similar to clove. This essential oil is extracted from the leaves through distillation. It is an ingredient of bay rum cologne, which was first produced in the West Indies. This species is best grown in full sun. Plot 45.



Senna polyphylla

Botanical name: *Senna polyphylla*

Family: Fabaceae

Common names: Desert cassia, twin senna

Native to: Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Hispaniola

Habit: Slow-growing evergreen shrub or small tree, to 10' tall and wide.

Flower: Bright yellow, 1" blooms appear along the branches.

Growing conditions: Full sun, well-drained soil.

Propagation: Seed

Comments: Best grown as a shrub. Great choice for a small garden.

This supreme butterfly attractor is drought tolerant and excels under the toughest growing conditions. Canary yellow flowers smother each branch, setting the shrub aglow with color. It blooms most of the year, heaviest during South Florida's dry season. Tiny leaves and interesting gnarled branches create a bonsai-like appearance. The desert cassia is a specimen plant deserving enough space in the garden to show off its wonderful form. It is a charming, underused plant in the South Florida landscape. Plots 43 and 51.



Martha Kenz/FBC



Mary Collins/FBC

Tecomanthe dendrophila

Botanical name: *Tecomanthe dendrophila* (synonym *T. venusta*)

Family: Bignoniaceae

Common name: New Guinea trumpet creeper

Native to: Australia, New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Moluccas

Habit: Fast growing, vigorous vine.

Flower: Rosy pink and cream clusters develop on woody stems, intermittently between September and May.

Growing conditions: Full sun to part shade in a moist location; needs strong support; fertilize for optimum bloom.

Propagation: Cuttings, seeds

Comments: For maximum bloom, avoid cutting woody stems; needs control.

This vigorous woody twiner (liana) could simply be grown for its deep green foliage, but it is the large pendant clusters of trumpet-shaped flowers that steal the show. Rosy-pink colored at the base and fading to paler rose, the flowers open to reveal creamy white throats. Blooms appear intermittently between September and May. The mature stems wind around each other creating an entanglement on which the clusters of flowers are curiously borne. *Tecomanthe dendrophila* requires a pergola, fence or other strong support. Plot 4 (vine pergola). 