

New European Perennials—How Do They Get Here?

Steven Still

Department of Horticulture and Crop Science, 2001 Fyffe Court, Columbus, Ohio 43210

Plant breeding and selection of herbaceous perennials have been occurring for a long time in Europe. Many select European perennials have been in North American nurseries for many years. However, there are other perennials that are just now appearing in North American nurseries that have been in commerce for decades in Europe. These selections are being discovered or rediscovered by nurserymen and other plant importers who are searching Europe for exciting plants to add to their catalogs. These individuals are touring individual nurseries, public trial gardens, and horticultural expositions where perennials can be seen and compared. This presentation will highlight the individuals and nurseries in several European countries that, over the last 75 years, have provided a motherlode of select perennials. Nearly all the plants discussed are presently in production or are in trials in North America.

ALAN BLOOM

Alan Bloom of Blooms of Bressingham, Ltd., in Diss, England, has been responsible for a number of perennials that grace our North American gardens. Alan Bloom has raised, named, and introduced 170 new cultivars of alpine and hardy perennials. *Geranium cinereum* 'Ballerina' is considered by many plantsmen to be the finest alpine geranium. This vigorous 1962 selection has bowl-shaped flowers with crimson markings carried on low branching stems that are 4 to 6 inches tall. He released a very similar plant with darker flowers in 1980 and named it 'Lawrence Flatman' in honor of a long-time nursery employee. Most plantsmen do not feel that there is a great difference between these two hardy geraniums.

One of the most popular introductions from Blooms of Bressingham is *Achillea* 'Moonshine'. This 1954 hybrid of *A. clypeolata* × *A. "taygetea"* [Botanical editor's note: *A. taygetea* is not a valid name] has bright yellow flowers borne on profuse gray feathery foliage. 'Moonshine' is valued for its long summer display and non-spreading habit. Alan Bloom continued to refine this selection and in 1982 raised *Achillea* 'Anthea'. 'Anthea', named for Alan's daughter, is more upright, bears primrose-yellow to creamy-yellow flowers and is excellent for cutting. Although developed in the 1980s, 'Anthea' was new to North America in 1993.

Fragaria xananassa 'Frel', Pink Panda® hybrid strawberry, has large, pink flowers with rapid growth, making it an ideal ground cover. This recent introduction from Blooms of Bressingham, Ltd., is a new perennial now available in North America.

The 1994 Perennial Plant of the Year by the Perennial Plant Association is *Astilbe* 'Sprite'. This selection of *Astilbe simplicifolia* has spikes of delicate shell-pink flowers which are held above dark bronzy-green lacy foliage. Alan Bloom raised this cultivar in 1969 from a collection of seedlings which utilized *Astilbe simplicifolia* as one of the parents.

KEW GARDENS

Heuchera micrantha var. *diversifolia* 'Palace Purple' is an example of a native American perennial that went from North America to England and returned to North America as an outstanding perennial. 'Palace Purple' is highlighted by large bronze-purple leaves which remain colored throughout the season. The story of the enhancement of this North American native is the following. In the 1970s, Mr. Brian Halliwell was curator of the herbaceous and alpine collections at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, England. At that time he was redoing the Queen's Garden behind the Kew Palace. The original garden contained only plants that were in cultivation before 1700 and *Heuchera americana* was a popular plant during that period. Mr. Halliwell sent for seed from a now forgotten American botanic garden. The seedlings contained a population of plants with reddish-bronze colored leaves. To commemorate the Queen's Garden, the plant was named 'Palace Purple'. In 1986, Holbrook Farms, Fletcher, North Carolina, reintroduced *Heuchera* 'Palace Purple' to the North America nursery industry. In 1991, 'Palace Purple' was listed as the Perennial Plant of the Year by the Perennial Plant Association.

GEORG ARENDS

The Georg Arends Staudenkulturen (perennial nursery) in Ronsdorf, Germany, was started in the 1880s. Georg Arends was responsible for the introduction of over 30 cultivars of *Astilbe*, as well as *Sedum* 'Herbstfreude' [syn. 'Autumn Joy'], five *Bergenia* cultivars, and several garden phlox. There is probably no other continental perennial plant nursery that has produced a greater variety of new plants.

Many of the *Astilbe* cultivars available in North America were developed at the Arends nursery. Three excellent cultivars, 'Deutschland' (white), 'Rheinland' (pink) and 'Emden' (pink) were introduced in 1920. However, it has only been recently that these cultivars have been readily available in North America. Another very popular red cultivar, 'Fanal', was available in Germany in 1933. Georg Arends crossed four different species (*A. chinensis* var. *dauidii*, *A. japonica*, *A. astilboides*, and *A. thunbergii*) in developing the hybrid astilbes listed under *Astilbe* \times *arendsii*.

In 1966 Arends introduced a hybrid garden phlox with fragrant pink blossoms with good mildew resistance. 'Anja' is a hybrid of *Phlox paniculata* \times *P. divaricata*.

PRESENT DAY GERMAN HYBRIDIZERS

The Heinz Klose Nursery near Kassal, Germany, continues to release cultivars that have excellent market potential. *Salvia* \times *sylvestris* 'Viola Klose' [syn. *S. \times superba* 'Viola Klose'] (1975) is dark blue, 18 inches tall, and blooms earlier than 'Mainacht' [syn. 'May Night']. *Astilbe* 'Veronica Klose' is 20 in. tall, with flower spikes of rose-purple flowers in late July.

One of the best perennial authorities is Dr. Hans Simon of Marktheidenfeld, Germany. Dr. Simon has been president of the International Stauden Union and is also an avid collector of perennials with a nursery of over 6,000 different species and cultivars. *Geranium* \times *cantabrigiense* 'Biokovo' is a recent discovery. This natural hybrid of *G. dalmaticum* and *G. macrorrhizum* was found in the Biokova Mountains of the former Yugoslavia. This new geranium combines the low-growing habit of *Geranium dalmaticum* with the profuse flowers and fragrant foliage of *Geranium macrorrhizum*.

Ernst Pagels in Leer, Germany, was a student and friend of the famous Karl Foerster. Mr. Pagels has selected cultivars of *Miscanthus* as well as new cultivars of *Achillea*. The recently introduced *Achillea* 'Credo' is a hybrid of *A. filipendulina* × *A. millefolium*. It has large yellow flowers, a good texture, and best of all, strong stems which eliminate the need for staking. Other selections that may be seen in the future are 'Inca Gold' and 'Feurland' [syn. 'Fireland']. These are 4th-generation hybrids of *A. filipendulina* × *A. millefolium*. These selections also have stouter stems which reduce the potential for lodging.

OTHER EUROPEAN PERENNIAL INTRODUCTIONS

Other German selections include *Helenium* 'Golddrausch' (Karl Foerster, 1942) and 'Goldkugel'. 'Golddrausch' is 4 to 5 ft tall with golden-yellow blossoms with brown centers while 'Goldkugel' is 4 to 5 ft tall with light golden blossoms.

Origanum laevigatum 'Herrenhausen' is a sun plant from Germany with whorled clusters of half-inch lanceolate shaped leaves and small groups of purple blossoms which are excellent with gray foliage plants. 'Herrenhausen' is presumably named for the Herrenhausen Gardens in Hanover, Germany.

Salvia verticillata 'Purple Rain' was originally introduced in Holland by Piet Oudolf. This exciting selection of a native European species has smoky or grayish-purple blossoms from June to August provided spent flowers are removed. Plants are 24 inches tall. This cultivar is destined for greater use in North America where it can be combined attractively with grey foliage plants.

The Frikart Nursery is located near Zurich, Switzerland. *Aster* × *frikartii*, a cross of *A. thomsonii* and *A. amellus* was raised in this nursery in the 1920s. Four cultivars were selected from this hybrid with three named after the Bernese Oberland mountains, 'Jungfrau', 'Eiger', and 'Mönch'. 'Mönch' and the fourth selection, 'Wunder von Stäfa' [syn. 'Wonder of Stafa'], are most known in North America and 'Monch' is often considered the best cultivar. It has lavender-blue flowers and grows 30 to 36 inches tall with a 36 inch spread.

Perovskia atriplicifolia has been named the 1995 Perennial Plant of the Year by the Perennial Plant Association. This 3-ft tall plant with ghostly gray foliage is capped by violet flowers in late summer. *Perovskia* 'Longin' is equally nice with a more upright habit of growth with leaves not as serrated as the species. 'Longin' is presumably named for Longin Ziegler, the present owner of Frikart Nursery.

Cimicifuga simplex 'Brunette' and *Ajuga reptans* 'Braunherz' were first noticed by the author in a trip to Denmark. 'Brunette' has deep bronze foliage with white flowers during the late summer. It is probably an introduction from the nursery of Greta Peterson and selected by her father. The bugleweed 'Braunherz' has very dark metallic-purple foliage. It was first found by the author at the Ikast Nursery in Northern Europe.

A final plant for discussion is *Veronica* 'Sunny Border Blue'. This Perennial Plant of the Year for 1993 had its beginnings in Denmark. In 1947, Robert Bennerup imported several cultivars of *V. spicata* and *V. longifolia* from Denmark. These selections had clean violet flowers which were darker than selections in the United States. Mr. Bennerup began a series of crosses and finally selected a seedling which maintained a good flower for nearly 3 months. This hybrid had been lost and rediscovered and now, 40 years later, it has been sold throughout North America and has made its way back to Europe from where the parent plants originated.

The message in this presentation is that new selections of perennials are constantly being produced in all parts of the world. The European continent, in particular, continues to be a rich area where perennial nurserymen can search for that “new” perennial that may be better than or a pleasant change from the selections presently available.