

Our May webinar, titled *Of Cultivars and California Native plants - and 'Nativars'*, was presented by Bart O'Brien, Director of the ten-acre Regional Parks Botanic Garden in Berkeley. RPBG is dedicated to horticulture, conservation and research of California native

plants. The evening's program focused on cultivars found within the California Floristic Province, which consists of the Mediterranean climate parts of California (as well as small portions of Oregon and Nevada, and extending a good distance into Baja California, Mexico).

A fifth generation Californian, O'Brien is an authority on the flora of the state of California and of northwestern Baja California, as well as an accomplished collector, grower, photographer, lecturer and author. In addition to his current position at RPBG, O'Brien is the president of the California Horticultural Society and was recently honored as the 2022 recipient of the prestigious American Horticultural Society's highest honor, the Liberty Hyde Bailey Award. He is also working on a listing of over 300 named cultivars of manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos*) for an upcoming issue of *The Four Seasons*, RPBG's technical journal.

By way of definition, O'Brien explained that within the order of plant taxonomy – genus, species, sub-species, botanical variety, forma and then cultivar – forma refers to an unusual form of a plant found in the wild, and cultivar refers to an unusual form of a plant found in cultivation. Both are distinct from cultivariants which are names given to different growth forms of genetically identical plants.

The term cultivar was coined by horticulturist Liberty Hyde Bailey in 1923 in his paper, "Various Cultigens, and Transfers in Nomenclature" in *Gentes Herbarum*. They are always written in single quotation marks and have names in the common language (English, Spanish, German, etc.). Latin names are not acceptable for any cultivars named after January 1, 1959. He provided as an example *Erigeron glaucus* 'Wayne Roderick' (a wild selection) and *Erigeron* 'W.R.' (a cultivated variety), which are both cultivars but are often confused for one another because they derive from the same person's name, despite having very distinct differences. Also of note is the fact that while most cultivars are produced by cloning, a cultivar designation does NOT indicate that the plant is a clone or was

clonally produced. It does indicate that the plant shares definable trait(s) that the cultivar name was applied for (e.g.: size, growth habit, color, etc.) Further, "cultivariants" is a another term that refers to a concept equal to "clonal variants" or "clonal variations".

O'Brien then went on to share some favorite cultivars, some of which may be easily found in the nursery trade or conversely, only in the wild. Some of the ones readily available to the public are: *Glandularia* (formerly *Verbena*) *lilacina* 'Paseo Rancho', *Salvia clevelandii* 'Winifred Gilman', *Salvia* 'Aromas' and *Arctostaphylos* 'Howard McMinn', all grown for their specific traits as well as their garden adaptability and vigor.

He next spoke about the relatively new term "nativar", which was coined in 2008 by Allen Armitage to describe native cultivars and hybrids. These are plants that have been bred specifically for the nursery trade and would never be found in the wild. They have been hybridized from species that would never come together or have any contact in the wild. The four major plant families in which you will find the most "nativars" sought after by plant collectors are: monkey flowers, irises, lilies, and (more recently) lewesia.

While some purists argue that nativars do not serve the same functions in a garden that California native species provide, O'Brien explained that the vast majority of California cultivars are actually from the wild or derive from garden selections that can be found in the wild. He shared as an example *Ribes malvaceum* var. *malvaceum* 'Dancing Tassels' which was originally found on San Clemente Island, but is a large vigorous plant in cultivation, used extensively by native bumble bees and hummingbirds. Additionally, it produces enormous and plentiful fruit to support native wildlife as well. *Arctostaphylos bakeri* 'Louis Edmunds' and *Arctostaphylos* 'Sunset' are other examples of garden plants that were originally discovered in the wild, while others like *Rosa* 'Schoener's Nutkana' and many popular *Huechera*, are hybrid crosses between natives that come from disparate regions.

Finally, O'Brien spoke about intergeneric hybrids, wherein multiple genera are crossed to create a new plant. If only two families are involved, the new name must combine portions of both genus' parent names, as in *XChitalpa* (for *Chilopsis* and *Catalpa*) and *XChiranthofremontia lenzii* 'Griff's Wonder' (for *Chiranthodendron* and *Fremontodendron*). However, if three or more genera are involved – which is very rare, except within the orchid family – then an original name like *Leelenzia* is created (as long as it is not already in use).

He also mentioned several nurseries where some of these unique plants are available.

In addition to presenting a fascinating webinar and sharing reference publications and other resources, O'Brien also generously answered audience questions both during and after his program. The entire presentation, including all of his references, has been archived on SCHS' YouTube channel.

 Sabine Steinmetz


**Link to view entire program, including resources plus Q&A:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=352xuywVI1U>

## SCHS MONTHLY GARDEN SHARE

**Get ready for summer by staying ahead of problems with routine chores.**

- If you're not already doing so, deep water your trees monthly.
- Don't allow camellias and azaleas to dry out as they are already setting buds for next year.
- Spray foliage occasionally (in the early hours) to rinse off dust and refresh depleted plants.
- Keep dead-heading, weeding and replenishing mulch as needed - you can slow down next month!
- Begin covering soft fruit trees with bird-netting to protect your crop.
- Feed roses again, as they are getting ready for another bloom.
- Provide some supplemental shade on hot days for veggie seedlings and other tender plants.
- Harvest and then harvest some more to keep veggies producing.
- Plant pumpkins now if you want them in time for Halloween!

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