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Web Review – Modern Canna Cultivars

By Pat Malcolm

One of the most perplexing and aggravating problems in marketing canna lilies or buying canna

rhizomes from the retail market is the practice of renaming canna cultivars of old or new hybrids with illegitimate names. One reason merchants rename canna lilies is to offer the public an apparent new canna choice to plant in the garden. Another reason is to rename a canna that has fallen out of favor to the gardening public. This practice of renaming flowers is not just a recent phenomenon, but it began with the Victorian Era. Plant taxonomists also have given many arguments about the proper rules for the naming of native canna species. For instance, William Bartram reported the discovery of *Canna lutea*, page 153, of *Travels*, at Fort Frederica, Ga., in the year 1773, as growing luxuriantly, but modern taxonomists have renamed his canna, *Canna flaccida*. Bartram also reported in his book, *Travels*, pages 424, the discovery of a red flowering, 9ft.– tall canna growing near Mobile, Al, but *Canna indica*, named after the American Indians by William Bartram, has now been arguably renamed. This confusion has not been beneficial to the development and marketing of canna lilies.

Modern canna cultivars might, in one respect, have begun with the Luther Burbank back-cross of the wild, native American, *Canna flaccida*, onto Madame Crozy. Burbank was a forward thinking hybridizer who realized that the Victorian Era canna cultivars displayed large blooms with many bright colors but he also knew that his gold medal, award winning canna, "Tarrytown," that later received a name change of "Florence Vaughan," dropped clusters of old flowers, leaving the bloom stalks looking fresh. The Victorian Era, canna stalks appeared to generally retain its old flowers on the bloom stalks, sometimes were loaded with unsightly, brown clustered flowers that no one liked. Burbank noted the desirability of the canna stalks that released their spent blooms to fall to the ground. Burbank also saw the value in developing canna flowers into softer, pastel colors. This was apparent in his white creation, "Eureka," canna, and his pastel colored canna hybrids were named collectively as, 'Burbank'.

Modern canna hybrids are best discussed as groups, since most good and reliable growers were developed by intelligent canna programs of hybridization, rather than random selection of chance, natural hybrids that showed outstanding features for selection. Some collectors and travelers assembled choice canna hybrids from around the world to be multiplied and made available for distribution and sales to wholesalers and mailorder companies.

The Dupont family of Delaware Chemical fame, established a permanent garden for plant collections, that dated back to the late 1700's, later the garden was named, Longwood Gardens. A beautiful pastel pink, large flowered canna still grows there, named after the wife of one of the late founders, Mrs. Pierre Dupont. Today Longwood Gardens lists 23 cultivars on its Internet site and has its own hybridization program that has distributed its canna creations for testing for retail sales at garden centers in various parts of the U.S. The verdict has not been yet rendered as to whether or not these canna hybrids will be acceptable to the gardening public for the long term, but they have been made available recently on some Internet sites.

American Daylily and Perennials Co. from Missouri has released a series of canna cultivars called 'Futurity', that appear to have been absorbed into the marketing strategies of some wholesale suppliers and into a use for containerized garden centers to some extent. It is unclear as to which named canna hybrids were actually released by American Daylily and Perennials Co., or which additional names have been added by canna hybridizer pretenders by renaming old cultivars with the 'Futurity' Tag. One

Internet mailorder company claims to have for sale: Pink Futurity Canna, Yellow Futurity Canna, Rose Futurity Canna, Yellow Futurity Canna, Orange Futurity Canna, and Bi-Color Futurity Canna.

Ms. Rosalind Sarver of California was one of the most notable suppliers of high quality canna rhizomes to the wholesale trade in the 1980's. Her chief business interest was in the azalea plant which she marketed on a huge scale. Mrs Sarver's azalea interest was heightened by her travels to the Orient, that resulted in the introduction of many new azalea cultivars into the United States. While visiting Beijing, China, she discovered a strangely colored and variegated canna that she exported to California in large numbers. That canna was named, Cleopatra, that grows to a height of 5–6 feet and the bright, waxy–green leaves appear to be somewhat immune to most canna problems with insects and diseases. The bright yellow flowers are randomly striped with red, sometimes randomly with red or pink dots. The leaves are randomly striped with maroon and occasionally a leaf will be one–half colored maroon or on rare occasions completely maroon colored in its entirety. The maroon coloring can twist into bands around the stalk toward the top where it is translated into the individual flowers as red marks on yellow. A rare Cleopatra canna plant can mutate occasionally, and then can divide into a completely, maroon colored canna to produce a plant called "Ty Ty Red," in which the coloring covers the entire leafy surface and the flowers are completely maroon, about twice the size of the blooms of the Red King Humbert. The Ty Ty Red canna plant is dwarf, 3–4 feet tall and has never reverted back to any green variation that was apparent in the original Cleopatra –remaining entirely maroon in both flower and leaf. Other very important canna cultivars distributed by Ms. Sarver were :Eilleen Gallo" named after the wife of an heir to the Gallo Wine fortune in California, Crimson Beauty, Rosalinda, named after the First Lady, Rosalind Carter, and the famous 'Cleopatra,'the oriental hybrid that probably developed as a mutation of "The Humbert Canna." original series.

A series of canna hybrids came from Ty Ty Nursery, mostly dating back to the 1980's: Journey's End, a bi–color of red and pink dots on yellow petals; Malcolm's Red, a dwarf red canna with yellow petal margins that encircle all the flowers; Maudie Malcolm, a rare lavender colored bloom; the Red Stripe, a bright green leaf with maroon veins and mid– vein; Rosever, a rose, large bloom with maroon leaves; and Ty Ty Red, a stable mutation with orange flowers and wine leaves, that mutated from Cleopatra.

A host of variegated leaf canna cultivars has been offered to modern markets. The world canna lily expert, Englishman, Ian Cooke, suggested that the widely marketed and patented, 'Tropicanna', a striped leaf canna with orange flowers and leaves of orange, yellow and red stripes, that he described as "the most exotic and outrageously colored canna", was introduced into England in 1994 under the name of Durban and also Phasion. This renaming and misnaming has been repeated in many other variegated leaf canna cultivars, such as Striped Beauty, also renamed as Nirvana, and Christs Light that produces lemon yellow flowers with a pure white cross in the center with variegated white stripes on light green leaves.

The renaming fate of Pretoria canna was originally named, Bengal Tiger, that produced orange flowers and orange stripes on medium green leaves. The variegated canna cultivar, "Stuttgart" was marketed briefly with nice photos of a white, angular, random striping on green leaves. That canna was a dismal flop in the garden, most rhizomes showed no variegation, but the ones that did, grew into distorted, contorted, weedy, throw-a-ways, unfit even for the garbage pile. The Pink Sunburst was a beautiful creamy-pink flower with leaves of indescribable beauty and attraction. The leaves were delicately striped with a kaleidoscope of aesthetic shades of color blending: green, cream, pink, yellow and orange. Unfortunately this fabulously desirable plant was infected with a virus that totally eliminated it from the United-States retail markets, even through some merchants have claimed to have it in stock, orders were returned unfilled. This may work out for the best, because even though this may be the

most beautiful and desirable canna ever hybridized, it was cursed with a weakness that made it ridiculous to continue to salvage. No, gardeners do not need to be faced with the challenge to nurse a plant that was doomed to fail from the attacks of a virus for which there is no remedy and no recovery.

Patrick A. Malcolm, owner of TyTy Nursery, has an M.S. degree in Biochemistry and has cultivated canna lilies for over three decades.

<http://www.tytyga.com>

Web Review Of Victorian Canna Hybrids

By Pat Malcolm

Great progress began in 1870 in the hybridizing of the canna lily by a combination of genetic materials from the wild canna species that had been collected from around the world, leading to the production of the 'Madame Crozy' cultivar. A great interest developed in canna lilies as a colorful garden plant that previously had been grown chiefly for the fast growing, tropical foliage, since the wild canna blooms were mostly small and uninteresting. The stockpile of collected, canna wild species were again used to back-cross and intermingle with the celebrated hybrid, Madame Crozy.

The bright bazaar colors and the tropical look was excitable and exotic for the gardeners of the Victorian Age. Several countries including Italy, Germany, France, and England became actively involved in canna hybridization. Great efforts were made to codify the canna lily as an inexpensive, brilliantly flowered plant with the tropical, fast growing, garden choice to plant everywhere, and as often

happens, to the unstoppable point of being brashly overdone.

A few of the Victorian Era canna hybrids are still grown today, despite the general opinion of most canna lovers, that they should be buried with the past and forgotten except for the historical contribution that elevated the wild native hybridization canna combinations that created new directions for color and tropical leaf development to explore.

The naming of the Grand Opera Series of Canna lilies, was, a flower hybridizer's colorful idea of associating an Italian classical musical treasure— The Opera— with a group of hybrid flowers. These new canna hybrids, likewise, caused a sensation in the garden lovers world, and the possibility of the commercial production of canna rhizomes made it possible for gardening Italians to reasonably afford to plant the brightly colored tropical leaved plants in their yards. The brilliant idea of associating the beloved Operatic titles with colorful tropical leaves with stalks of glowing flowers worked well. These Italian canna introductions were planted and grown throughout much of the European continent. The Grand Opera Series of canna cultivars were tagged with names of the well known operatic performances of Aida, La Boheme, La Traviata, Madam Butterfly, Rigolletto and Der Rosenkavalier (German.)

The German Canna hybridizer, Wilhelm Pfitzer, had his own favorite canna names including, Stadt Fellbach. Most of Pfitzer named cannas were given vivid and specific color names such as: Crimson Beauty, Primrose Yellow, Salmon Pink, and Chinese Coral. In addition to adding clear colors of pastels, the Pfitzer canna grew into dwarf plants and rarely grew taller than 3ft. This dwarf feature was very attractive for small metropolitan gardens, where space was limited, and most of the Pfitzer canna cultivars readily produced seed that might grow into even better canna cultivars with that personal touch for the backyard gardener.

Italian interest in hybridizing canna lilies extended even into the Italian Monarchy reigns of King Emmanuel II and his son, King Humbert. The Yellow King Humbert canna is believed to have been renamed by an English gardener as Richard Wallace.

The noted French Hybridizer in 1870, Luther Burbank, the famous American Botanist, noted in his book, Flowers, published in 1921 that the Madame Crozy canna introduction laid the foundation for a canna hybrid industry to rapidly evolve, since the flowers were colorful and large and all existing

flowers of known wild canna species had produced small insignificant flowers. All interest in growing canna as a garden subject had previously come from an eclectic interest in the exotic tropical leaves, not from the flowers.

Luther Burbank imported the Madame Crozy canna into California, where he back-crossed it with Canna flaccida, an American S.E. Wild native canna, that grew in the salt marshlands of Georgia. That improvement named the 'Tarrytown', that resulted as a back-cross of the Canna flaccida on the Madame Crozy cultivar won a prize at the Buffalo, NY Flower Award. That excellent canna cultivar dropped its older flowers as they matured, leaving the cluster of blooms looking fresh and vibrant. Luther Burbank went on to develop several white flowered canna hybrids and another bi-color named for himself, "Burbank." Burbank's prizewinner, Tarrytown was distributed through a mailorder seeds

man, J.C. Vaughan from Chicago, Il. and renamed as, ' Florence Vaughan; the wife of J.C. Vaughan. The Florence Vaughan canna is an excellent cultivar, lemon yellow with creamy–orange splotches and dots, still sold by many mailorder catalogs today and can be found flourishing in moist ditches where it has become naturalized in many locations of the South.

Other Victorian type canna cultivars that still exist and are listed in mailorder catalogs are: Rosemund Cole, a bi–color, orange and yellow green –:leaved canna; Black Knight also sold as Ambassador, a deep crimson flower, a sparse bloomer; City of Portland, small pink flowers atop 6ft ratty leaves of green; and firebird, as orange–red small flowered orphan that has been expelled from most home gardens.

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