



SARATOGA HORTICULTURAL FOUNDATION, INC.

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Garrya elliptica

Garrya elliptica, is variously called 'Silk Tassel Bush', 'Coastal Silk Tassel' and 'Western Silk Tassel'. It is a native of the West Coast and has a distribution in the Coastal Ranges from the Santa Monica Mountains in Los Angeles County north to Oregon. It is one of the most decorative of winter flowering, broad leaved, evergreen shrubs. The name 'Silk Tassel' refers to the pendulous, male flowers which resemble catkins and seem to be made up of a string of silver grey beads, which in turn are accented by the golden stamens as they mature.

This Garrya, although one of the most spectacular of winter flowering natives and deserving of wide landscape use, should be limited to coastal and immediately inland locations as it may well prove susceptible to cold damage during the more severe of winter frosts. In those colder areas, where growth ceases in the autumn and the plant has a chance to harden its current season's stems before the onset of frost, it will not be so prone to damage.

The leaves of the plant are rounded, leathery and dark green in colour with a pale lower surface. The flowers are produced from the late autumn onwards, with a peak during the December to February period. The plants are unisexual and it is the male flowered plants which are so spectacular. The varieties available have been selected for unusual size, quantity and colour of this character.

Wild populations of this species vary considerably and differences can be readily detected in the height and spread of the shrub; shape, size and colour of the leaf; and length and colour of the male flower tassel.

It is a fairly rugged plant but its adaptation to coastal climates determines that it is not particularly drought tolerant, although it is tolerant of soil type (provided drainage is adequate), irrigation practice and fairly high levels of exposure. Under conditions of high light intensity and high atmospheric temperature the leaves will 'stand up' i.e. they will move to a position parallel with and adpressed to the stem, and so conserve moisture.

It is a relatively long lived plant especially when compared with most species of Ceanothus. Although Garrya will withstand quite rigorous pruning this activity encourages vegetative growth, large leaf size and a consequent paucity of flowers, for best effect the shrub

should be planted where it can mature unhindered to full size and will flower prolifically.

The cultivar 'James Roof' is probably the best known of Garrya elliptica selections and it is well established as a desirable shrub for both landscape and garden use. This plant develops into a fairly coarse growing shrub which will attain a height and spread of 10 to 12 feet. It produces large, dark green leathery leaves which have wavy margins and a dense, white felt on the underside.

The outstanding ornamental characteristics of this male cultivar are the prolific nature of flower production and the extraordinary length of each tassel. Once established several flower tassels are produced in virtually all the leaf axils of the current season's growth and the bush appears to be completely covered. Each individual flower tassel is usually 8 to 10 inches long but on specimens which have been well maintained it is not uncommon to find individual tassels of 12 to 14 inches in length. The colour of the flowers in this variety is a distinct metallic, silver grey.

The original plant grew in the Tilden Regional Botanic Garden and in 1952 its Director, James Roof, brought it to the attention of the SHF's Director, Maunsell Van Rensselaer. Cutting grown plants and cutting material were presented to the SHF at that time by James Roof. The plant was named in honour of its donor. When exhibited at the California Horticultural Society in 1961 it received an Award of Merit.

The cultivar 'Evie' was established from material which had been collected in 1971 by Wayne Roderick from a plant growing on a road bank bordering the Kruse Ranch on the Sonoma Coast. The plant was subsequently destroyed in road development.

This plant is a more compact growing shrub than 'James Roof' because of its more branching and twiggy habit, and shorter internodes. It has a less sombre depth of green in its leaves, which are also pale on the underside. It does however still develop into a relatively large shrub. Flower production is unusually prolific as the number of tassels produced in each leaf axil is considerable - as many as twenty. The flower tassels are long - developing on well grown specimens to a length of 8 to 10 inches. Individually each tassel has a distinct maroon ring in each silver grey 'link' of the tassel chain.

The cultivar name 'Evie' was given to honour Evie Matheson of Mannings Heather Farm, Sebastopol.

Shrub; evergreen; winter flowering.