



## SARATOGA HORTICULTURAL FOUNDATION, INC.

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### Laurus 'Saratoga'

This hybrid Bay Laurel is a new offering by SHF. It is now in the introduction phase and will be made available to nurseries later in the year as and when crops mature. It will be available as both single and multi stemmed plants in a gallon size container. Ultimately it may be used for such diverse purposes as a hedge or as a standard tree. It is a vigorously growing plant with all the attributes of the Bay Laurel (L. nobilis) but with larger, rounder leaves, a less sombre green colour to the foliage and apparently a greater resistance to some of the major insect problems which can plague this plant.

Laurus 'Saratoga' is a putative hybrid between L. nobilis and L. azorica (L. canariensis) resulting from the activities of Mr. Frank Serpa of Fremont in the 1950s. It was deemed to have been produced as a result of an initial cross between the two species and the resultant hybrid offspring being backcrossed to L. azorica. Several seedlings were produced and this plant was one selected by Mr. Serpa as being superior. This plant resembles the latter parent to a great extent, and this would be anticipated since it theoretically consists of 75% of that species. Certainly in those characteristics which are normally used for identification purposes, it is not easy to separate it from L. azorica.

Laurus 'Saratoga' is a strong growing plant with all the vigour associated with hybridity. It has a capacity to produce a single stemmed specimen with a dominant leader, and this domination by a leader shoot will continue in the development of the crown, so that it becomes a relatively easy plant to manage in nursery production. It will thus under most circumstances produce an even headed tree with an open crown without using much structural direction. However it is also capable of producing a dense and strong growing hedge when closely sheared. It can also be grown to produce an open tree - with a so called 'structural' habit - when the leader is pruned at an early stage of development to allow several stems to dominate equally; these can then be subsequently 'cleaned up' to produce a several-stemmed tree.

It is anticipated that L. 'Saratoga' will reach a height of 25 feet with a spread (depending on pruning) of 15 feet. It will have a relatively open habit when compared with the dense growth associated with the Bay Laurel

The foliage of this tree is very similar in colour and

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texture to that of L. azorica - that is the leaves are relatively large and are up to 5 or 6 inches in length, and have a round to oval shape. In young trees these may be abruptly acuminate and have prominent veins on the under side. The upper surface is a mid to olive green colour while the lower surface is pale and in the early season at least is tomentose.

The new young stems and the leaf petioles of this tree have a distinct and characteristically reddish tinge to their growth which is instantly recognisable and is an early season feature.

The flowers, which have their petals and sepals in fours, are pale yellow in colour and are produced prolifically during February to April. The flowers are produced in clusters in the leaf axils of the previous seasons growth and are sufficiently dominant in both number and colour to make a striking display. This particular clone has male flowers and will not therefore produce the problem of unwanted fruits, which may cause a problem in street situations. Laurus 'Saratoga' has shown itself to be marginally less hardy than L. nobilis when subjected to severe and sustained autumn frosts.

Although this tree is of a typical mediterranean type provenance and will survive well in low water usage situations, it will also tolerate normal irrigation practices and under these circumstances will grow and flourish more rapidly. It is naturally adapted to growing on well drained, light, sandy, impoverished soils but provided that it is given good drainage it will be remarkably tolerant of most soils and conditions. It will grow most satisfactorily in full sun but will also flourish in shady situations, although under these conditions it may not flower so prolifically.

The Bay Laurel (L. nobilis) has not generally proved to be succesful in cultivation in California, not least, because of its susceptibility both to the Laurel psyllid, which causes a distinct leaf curl much like the manzanita gall, and to the Soft Shell Scale; however L. 'Saratoga' does not appear to show the same susceptibility, perhaps because of its more open habit which allows a greater predation by birds, and possibly it may even demonstrate a degree of resistance.

The stems and leaves of this plant, when crushed, are strongly aromatic with the typical fragrance of Bay, and the leaves can be used for culinary purposes in the same way as those of the Bay Tree.

Evergreen; flowering; multiple use; (low water use).