



THE GARDEN CLUB *of* AMERICA
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PRESS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE: **January 30, 2017**
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NATIVE ASHE MAGNOLIA NAMED 2017 PLANT OF THE YEAR BY THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA

Magnolia ashei has been named 2017 Plant of the Year by The Garden Club of America (GCA). Annually since 1995, the GCA has identified a stellar North American native plant to receive its [Montine McDaniel Freeman Medal for Plant of the Year](#).

Commonly known as the Ashe magnolia, the plant is a deciduous understory shrub or small tree native to eight counties in Florida, but grown in USDA Zones 6 to 9 in rich, moist, well-drained acidic soil. The plant's glossy dark green leaves grow to two feet. The large citrus-scented, creamy white, saucer-shaped flowers have purple stains at an interior base of six to nine petals. The flowers bloom in spring, then set fruit borne on cone-shaped, pink-purple aggregates that add fall interest. The Florida Department of Agriculture lists the Ashe magnolia as endangered due to a small population and restricted area of growth.

“Long-lived, tolerant of heat and resistant to diseases, deer and insects, this magnolia is an ideal specimen tree for the small garden,” says Lucy Rhame of the GCA. The Ashe magnolia was nominated for the award by a member of Late Bloomers Garden Club, Jacksonville, Florida.

There were two honorable mention Plants of the Year in 2017, as well as one noted for special recognition. *Carpinus caroliniana*, commonly known as American hornbeam, ironwood or musclewood due to its closely grained and heavy, hard wood, was awarded an honorable mention. The small deciduous understory tree or multistemmed shrub is native to the eastern United States and grows in USDA Zones 3 to 9. The slow-growing American hornbeam reaches 20 feet high and 35 feet wide at maturity and prefers moderate soil fertility and moisture, but can tolerate a wide range of temperatures, soils and moisture conditions, even several weeks of drought once established. The tree is much admired for its bark; the smooth, gray trunk and branches exhibit a unique muscle-like fluting. Resistant to disease, insects, ice damage and deer browsing, American hornbeam is suitable in a woodland setting, along a street, in a garden or as a bonsai specimen. American hornbeam was nominated by members of Rochester Garden Club, Rochester, New York.

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A second honorable mention was awarded to *Halesia carolina*, commonly known as Carolina silverbell, a small deciduous tree native to the southeastern United States. The species may also be grown as a shrub. Pendulous white bell-shaped flower clusters bloom April through May. Grown in USDA Zones 4 to 8, this tree requires moist, slightly acidic soil and full sun or partial shade and will reach heights of 40 feet with a spread of 35 feet at maturity. Carolina silverbell is tolerant of wind and heat and resistant to diseases, insects and deer. This tree is useful in establishing and maintaining riparian forest buffers. Carolina silverbell was nominated by members of The Palmetto Garden Club of South Carolina in Columbia.

Aristolochia californica, commonly known as California pipevine or California Dutchman's pipe, received special recognition. The plant is widespread in northern California, native to the Sacramento Valley, San Francisco Bay Area and Sierra Nevada foothills and hardy in USDA Zones 8 to 10. California pipevine is the exclusive food source for the larva of the California pipevine swallowtail butterfly. The red-spotted caterpillars eat the leaves of the pipevine, then use the flowers as a secure enclosure to undergo their transformation from larvae to butterflies. A deciduous woody vine, this plant grows from rhizomes to a length of about five feet, but can reach over 20 feet. The vine prefers partial shade and regular watering, but can tolerate some drought. From January through April, California pipevine produces large, green to pale brown, musty-smelling pipe-shaped blooms attracting tiny carrion-feeding insects that aid in pollination. After blooming, the vine sends out green heart-shaped leaves. The leaves tend to dry and hang on the vine in the winter, so interplanting is suggested.

The Freeman Medal was established to highlight underutilized, but highly worthy, native trees, shrubs, groundcovers, vines and perennials. "The goal is to draw attention to select native plants to encourage their use in the landscape and make them familiar to gardeners and more available in nurseries," explains Rhame. Annual selection is made by a group of nationally renowned horticulturists and experts in the nursery trade. Woody and herbaceous plants are nominated in alternate years. The 2017 winners were selected from 18 plants nominated by members of GCA clubs.

The medal honors Montine McDaniel Freeman (1915-98), member of the New Orleans Town Gardeners Club, and was established by her son and daughter-in-law. Freeman was an outstanding horticulturist particularly enamored of native plants. Her 93-acre Beechwood Gardens boasted more than 4,000 azaleas, camellias and magnolia grandifloras.

The GCA, founded in 1913, is composed of 200 clubs with nearly 18,000 members who devote energy and expertise to projects in horticulture, conservation and civic improvement across the United States. (www.gcamerica.org)

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