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We lose another Master Grower

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Darren Eminian shares his secrets

SEEDLING OF THE YEAR 2014 CHAMPIONS

THE 2014 WINNER



PM Amritapuri

(*Rum Runner x Lady Love*) - hybridized by Peter Moll

2nd



Tturt First Love

(*Unknown x Unknown*)
Hybridized by Dick Johnson

3rd



Mattiakis Prince Charming

(*Silver Memories x Me Oh My Oh*)
Hybridized by Steffen Frankenbach

4th



Electric Plum

(*Hitchcock x Neon Plum*)
Hybridized by Sonny Stollings

5th



PM In the Memory of Bob Carran

(*Scarlet Angel x Zauberfloete*) x Great Gatsby
Hybridized by Peter Moll

AUSTRALIA'S SEEDLING OF THE YEAR 2014



JEN BLAKELY
HYBRIDIZED BY BRONWYN CHARLTON



Brian Cheers, President of the Australian Hibiscus Society, presents Bronwyn Charlton with her trophy for the most awarded Seedling of the Year - 'Jen Blakely'

HIBISCUS INTERNATIONAL

My name is Bronwyn Charlton and I have been a member of the Gold Coast branch of the Australian Hibiscus Society for approximately 10 years.

When my late husband, Bruce, and I decided in 2000 to move north to the Gold Coast from Sydney, New South Wales, I told him I would be growing Hibiscus plants. My father was a very good gardener and as a child I remember him growing all our vegetables and fruit and always having strawberries in season.

It was just a fluke that I was in the right place at the right time when the Gold Coast Branch was having one of their many plant stalls at Helensvale Plaza. To say I was 'blown away' by the display would be an understatement. I had never seen such beautiful blooms and

the size was unbelievable. It was a Thursday afternoon and I purchased two plants. I went back on Friday and purchased another two plants. It was suggested I join the club and I brought my daughter back on Saturday, purchased another two plants and we both joined the club. This was a decision I have never regretted, and members of my family would say they have also benefited by having



The lovely 'Moorea Bronwyn Field', named specially for Bronwyn by hybridizer Charles Atiu.

beautiful blooms named after them and their children.

I can still remember the thrill of winning my first trophy ... and then the second ... and the third and bringing home the award cards after our monthly meetings.

After a couple of years as a member I decided to try my hand at hybridizing. This opened a whole new experience in my life. Harvesting my first seed pods, learning the correct way to grow seeds and seeing the first bloom open.

One of my first blooms was named after my

sister, Dawn Elizabeth. It was beautiful, with about five colours. Unfortunately I did not 'share the wood' quickly enough and by the time I had distributed wood to other members, the plant was suffering from root rot. Point taken - share the wood! Make sure other members are growing the plants and to ensure that it will 'live on' if anything happens to the grower's plant.

I was lucky enough to be sent seeds by Charles Atiu in French Polynesia. I was, by this time, Seed Bank Officer and Charles had contacted one of our members and offered to send some of his beautiful seeds to be distributed to Australian members to grow.

In one of our many emails I mentioned to him that my favorite colour was blue and that my husband's pet name for me was also 'Blu'. Not long after I received an email from Charles telling me that he had named a beautiful bloom after me. Although I could never have wood, he was going to send me some of the crosses he had of his Moorea Bronwyn Field.

I haven't successfully bred anything like M. Bronwyn Field but I do have some stunning blooms and am still waiting for something close to the original.

One of our members, Ida Dagan, has a nursery in her garden. Ida sells plants from her front door and grows the most beautiful blooms. Anyone who has seen the results of our benching would be familiar with the magnificent blooms that Ida and Keith Dagan grow.

This year I was thrilled to be awarded Seedling of the Year winner. I have two plants in the Australian HOTY (Hibiscus of

the Year) competition. Jen Blakely was named after my niece and Vera Sinclair was named after a wonderful 94 year old lady. My passion at the moment is hybridizing blue blooms.

Unfortunately my husband passed away in January this year and he wasn't here to share in the experience of me winning the Seedling of the Year trophy.

My advice to anyone interested in growing Hibiscus, try hybridizing. You will get some heartaches. Every time I see any insect eating blooms I have been waiting to open, I threaten to give up growing Hibiscus! But then I see a beautiful bloom open and the heartache and the waiting is all worth while.

By Bronwyn Charlton



'Vera Sinclair' - bred by Bronwyn Charlton. A contender in Australia's Hibiscus of the Year competition.

ED FLORY 1926 - 2014

Edmond Louis Flory was born in Jacksonville, Florida, to Wessie Hollaway Flory and George Henry Flory. He attended local schools and then joined the Navy during WWII.

After serving in the Navy Ed attended the University of Florida and graduated in 1949. He also attended the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Following his graduation he began a thirty year-long business career with Continental Insurance Company, eventually retiring as a Corporate Officer.

Also in 1949 he married Jane Trammell Flory. Ed and Jane moved from Jacksonville, Florida, to New York City and then to Dallas, Texas, where they lived for 22 years.



Ed and his wife Jane who, together, created beautiful Hibiscus.

In 1979, Ed retired and he and Jane moved to their present home on Lake Mirror in Winter Haven, Florida.

They were both avid gardeners. Ed was an active member of both the American Hibiscus Society and the American Orchid Society. Ed was also a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Winter Haven for many years, where he was an active choir member and lay reader.

Ed and Jane traveled all over the world by ship and plane and enjoyed their retirement together.

Ed Flory was a giant in the Hibiscus world and will be sadly missed. Our thoughts are with Jane who has lost her husband after 65 years of married life.

GROWING EXOTIC HIBISCUS OUTDOORS

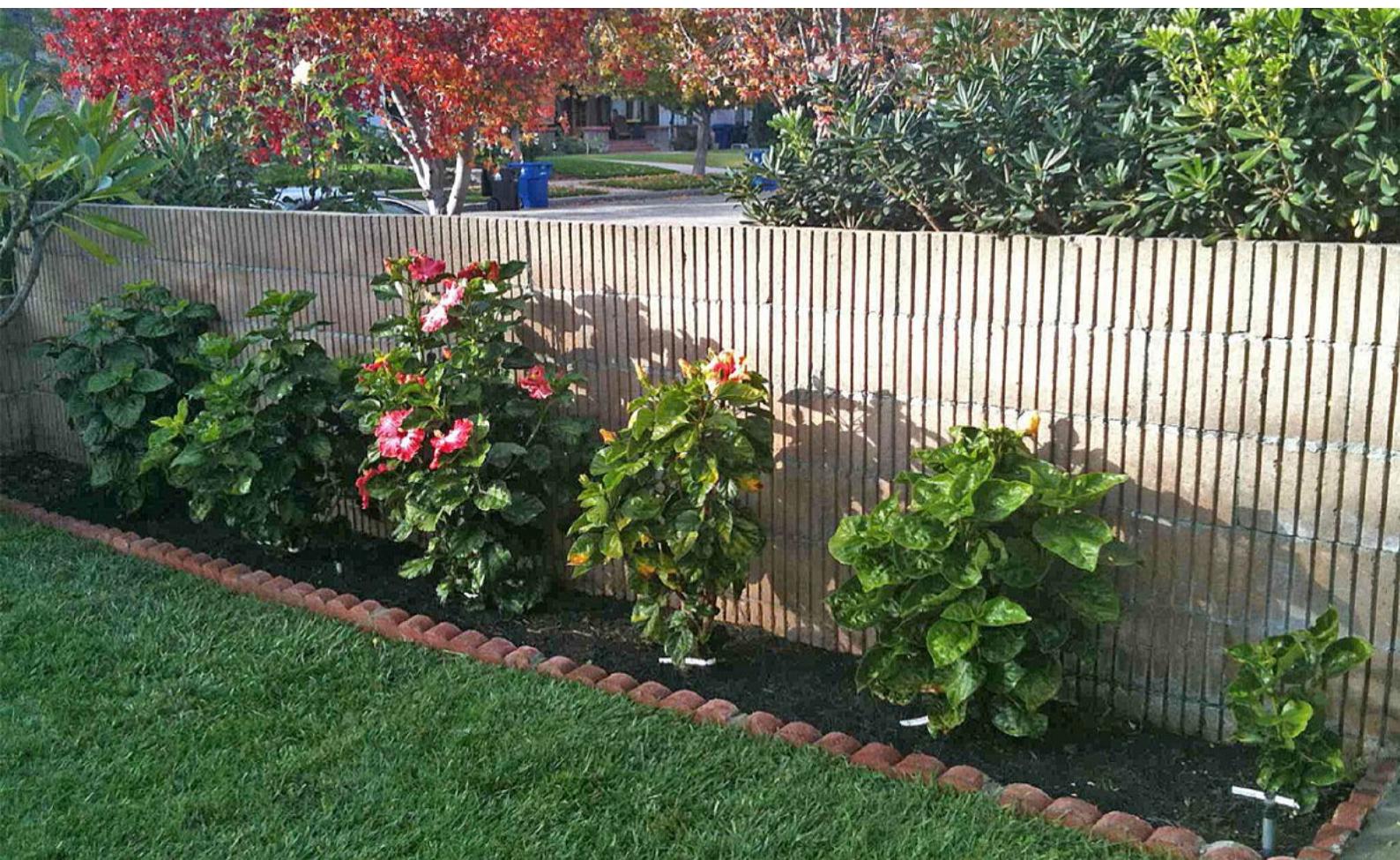
by Darren Eminian

I must say I am most fortunate to live in a climate that allows me to grow exotic hibiscus planted in the ground year round. Even if you do not have the opportunity to do so yourself and have to grow them in pots that are sheltered during colder months I believe there are quite a few key factors that are universal to obtaining healthy and vibrant exotic hibiscus plants. Most important of which is to have an open mind and be willing to continually experiment to find better ways to benefit your plants. Every single location is it's own microclimate that has unique circumstances and needs for your plants.

When I first started growing exotic hibiscus in April 2010 I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I had just cleared out a perimeter of 30 yr old dogwood hedges and

had three open planters to do whatever I wanted to with. I asked my wife what she thought and she said that maybe we could plant hibiscus as we always enjoyed seeing them in Hawaii on our vacations.

So I went online one afternoon and googled hibiscus plants. One of the first results I saw was for Hidden Valley Hibiscus. When the page opened up on my computer for their online store I pretty much fell out of my chair when I saw these enormous flowers with color combinations I could only have dreamt of. I had never seen such flowers before. So I checked out a few more exotic hibiscus websites and I was absolutely blown away. I decided to order a dozen plants and see how it would go. A nice start as this is how it looked after about 8 months in December 2010.



Well 200 plants later I'd say it was a life changing event as I will never be the same person again. But it has not been one constant success story. On the contrary! Not only was I new to exotic hibiscus and how to grow them but I was in for a rude awakening on my whole approach to gardening. I might not know all the science behind growing plants and plant structures but maybe that helps free my mind up a bit and keep things more simple when analyzing what I am seeing.

The first rule of successfully growing exotic hibiscus is that it is a roller coaster, especially as you learn the first few years. For me it was really challenging as no one I knew of was trying to do it in the ground. I guarantee that you will have some great stretches with very rewarding highs and some horrible low points that might even make you question if you want to continue on. The key is during those low points to be diligent enough to honestly reflect on what you might have done wrong and reach out for help. Keen observations are critical in moving forward.

These plants give out many subtle clues as to what is going on and how they are doing. My favorite example is yellow leaves. Could be from too much water, could be from not

enough. Well those are two extremes to choose from! It really can be very tricky so you in essence you have to learn to speak hibiscus. It is the best way I can describe it. You have to get personal with each plant and learn its characteristics.

Some may not tolerate direct sun too well, others might be unhappy unless they have lots of room for the bush and roots. My favorite one that I am still working on is if one starts doing really bad others around it seem to do so too for no other reason (but that can also work in reverse too!). There is quite a bit of interesting research being done recently that is starting to accumulate scientific evidence of an object's own morphic field and how it influences those around it. If you're interested I would recommend checking out the work of Dr. Rupert Sheldrake.

The first mistake I made when I got my initial group of plants was to plant them in the native soil of my yard which is wet, heavy clay. The plants did fine until their first winter and as soon as the temps cooled and it got wet disaster struck. My plants lost all their leaves and looked like stick skeletons. Here is a photo from April 2011 after their first winter – yikes! My beginner's luck had run out in less than a year.



The next requirement is to have soil that drains very well and provides pockets of air for the roots to breathe. This sounds simple but it is not. For starters your soil should have perlite or pumice stone of differing sizes. This is important as evenly sized pieces can actually create a seal at the bottom of your hole or pot and prevent your soil from draining. I also prefer to have a soil that consists of elements that retain moisture too. Quick draining soil can easily dry out very fast and dehydrate your plant in little time. In pots this can happen much more quickly, within hours on hot days. So you are shooting for two opposites at the same time: quick draining soil that can also retain moisture well. Also even



HIBISCUS INTERNATIONAL

with the best draining soil if you over water you will eventually eliminate the air pockets in the soil and drown your roots. Those air pockets are very important!

I have found that my hibiscus roots in the ground develop two main root features. You have the root ball that mainly consists of the fine squiggly feeder roots that are there to pull in nutrients. Then there usually are several large dominant roots that travel far from the base of the plant in search of a plentiful water source. This to me makes a lot of sense as those small roots are sensitive to lack of air and over saturated soil and can easily develop rot and cause major problems for the plant so the dominant roots can travel far to find a lasting water source.

Thus the immediate soil around the plant does not have to be drenched in water which suits the small roots fine but at the same time a nearby source of water is the desired balance for your in ground plant.

The photo on the left of my Chariots of Fire root system was taken at the time I was removing all the natural clay soil and replacing it with high grade planting soil. I would dig about 1 to 1.5 feet down and created a planter wide trench that I then filled in. My strategy was to not remove my plants that were already planted and instead excavate all the soil around them. Leaving the dominant roots intact ensured the plants would not go into shock. You can see how I left the dominant roots to wherever they were already growing deep into the clay soil. Also note how retarded the growth of the main root ball was due to the extremely heavy clay. It very much inhibited the growth of the feeder roots and thus the plants were not getting much in the way of nutrients with such a small root ball.



Here is a photo of my Exuberance plant as I was removing all the soil in it's planter. Note again how small the root ball is for that size of plant in an open planter. The clay was a disaster as all the plants were really struggling. The dominant roots were keeping it alive but a malnourished plant without much, if any, feeder roots.



The above photo of my Bon Temps plant shows a much healthier root ball. Here you can also see a couple dominant roots that are much longer growing away from the root ball as they search for a plentiful water source enabling the feeder roots to live in a less wet soil environment. So even with a healthy root ball those dominant roots are growing far and wide.

Now how to replicate that in a pot I am not sure of... You would rationally think a more dry layer of soil on the top 2/3 of the pot for the root ball and the bottom more wet for the dominant roots which gravity will help with but in just about any size pot all the roots seem to end up everywhere. What makes it even more problematic from my observations here is that the roots grow differently in pots than in the open ground. You end up with dominant roots all entangled with the fine feeder roots and no real advantage of the two root types separating out to create a balanced underground set up.

One other interesting strategy I have developed in growing my hibiscus plants is the use of forest bark (wood chips) on top of the soil. I saw a fellow grower not far from me cover all his planters to help

retain moisture in the soil as his entire property faced south and has strong sun exposure all day long. I did this as well for the same reasons. It not only helps significantly with moisture retention and weed prevention but I was in for a big surprise I never would have thought of....

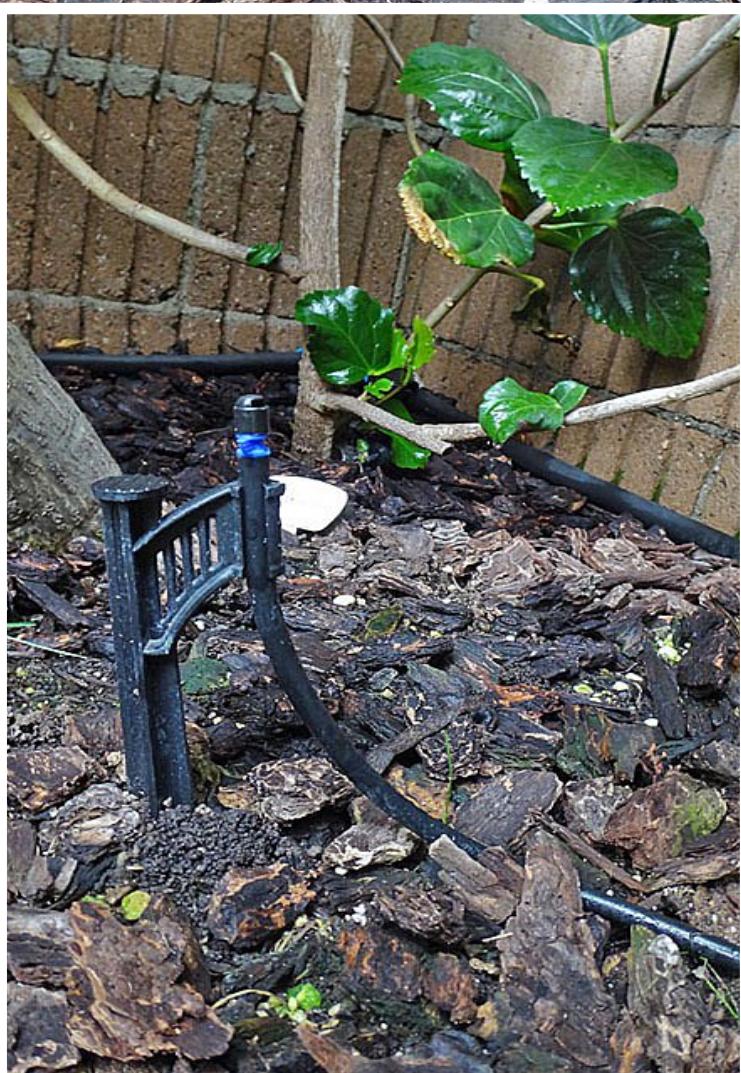
I kept seeing all the fine feeder roots start growing to the surface of the soil all around my hibiscus after placing the wood chips. At first I thought I needed more soil but then I started to think it through and it dawned on me that those roots found a safe place to get lots of air – between the wood chips and the soil surface. Now that is something I never would have seen coming and it makes total sense when you think about how those feeder roots like lots of air to stay healthy and strong.



This photo was taken after removing the wood chips so you can see how the feeder roots have broken through the surface of the soil and are enjoying the air.

Now with the knowledge that underneath all my wood chips are exposed feeder roots I got another interesting idea. All my plants are automatically fed by a drip system that uses drip emitters to feed the plants. Most of my plants have 2 gallon per hour emitters but they are only on for 10 minutes a day so I don't think all of the root ball is getting fed except for what is nearby the

emitter. What if I also installed jet sprayers along with the emitters so that the food is sprayed all around the plant base on top of the wood chips where it then soaks into the ground and right on top of all those exposed feeder roots? Now you are getting the food directly to the part of the plant that can assimilate it the best and in much larger amounts.



I find having a drip system a necessity to growing healthy dynamic hibiscus plants. Exotic hibiscus thrive off of regularity. They hate change of any kind unless it is beneficial like creating more room for example. A drip system gives them a chance to become extremely proficient at adapting to their environment and maxing out their performance as it is the same inputs every single day regardless of how busy or tired you become. Just make sure to check your fertilizer tanks and refill them as soon as it starts to look lighter in color. I have found that waiting for them to become almost clear really hurts your plants as they are not getting the same dosage of fertilizers and that means change which they don't like.

I use a 2 gallon fert holding tank that gets injected into the drip system water supply. I have two drip systems, one each for my front and back yards that run off of hose faucets. My front yard one has over 100 emitters plus a couple dozen micro sprayers so as you can see a lot of plants can be accommodated by one drip system. I fill my tank about once a month with HVH Special Blend Fertilizer, HVH Booster, SuperNova plant additive and Quelant K. I am always open to adding new things which I am always experimenting with. I cannot stress enough how important it is to talk to as many people as you can to discover new possibilities that can further improve results. Remember this is what works best for my garden and the climatic conditions in which my plants grow.



One challenge I finally conquered with my drip system was the pressure regulator (grey piece attached to faucet head). Being my faucet is always on the constant pressure becomes too much for a standard pressure regulator and

they start to leak or fail and I had bursting tubes and emitters constantly. I finally found a regulator designed to handle the constant water pressure and ever since not one problem with my drip system.

As your plants become stronger and flourish you will find that growing them becomes easier on several planes. First they are more resistant to pests. I used to have a really hard time with thrips every spring and massive bud drop with scratched up blooms. Not much of an issue anymore. I now only get the occasional spider mite break out in the hot and sunny planters but nothing several sprayings (to break the egg laying/hatching cycle) of a product like Avid won't stop. White flies are non existent which is interesting as I see many garden variety hibiscus struggle with white fly infestations.

Another interesting outcome I have observed is yellow leaves and leaf drop in extreme heat. Now that I have all my planters properly covered for watering and fertilizing that has also stopped with the exception of a few plants that just seem to be more sensitive to strong sun. I believe gentle but abundant watering is necessary in this situation for the plants to rely on when stressed by heat. I used to spend hours a day picking out all the yellow leaves from all my plants. It was a huge time waste and left me very unproductive

in other areas of my life so this is a big one for me.

Also as your bush gets larger over time it will shade the ground around it and whatever is behind it. This really helps as the soil will not dry out as fast and any walls or objects that can become very hot with intense sun do not heat up nearly as much. Now you have greater control over watering results with a more stable soil situation as it won't dry out nearly as much and you can start saving water too. Also they can shade their neighbors so that it is not all intense sunlight thus creating more optimal lighting conditions.

Now this leads to what I believe to be one of the most important factors regarding growing hibiscus successfully outdoors. It makes such a difference having hibiscus plants that have been hybridized to grow on bushes that have superior plant characteristics. Yes blooms are the main attraction for hibiscus as they are larger than most other flowers and full of the most amazing colors and patterns but what is the point if it hardly every blooms or they hang down so no one can see them?



I have learned a lot from the hybridizer Charles Black as he has made it his mission from long ago to create a gene pool of hibiscus that have all the desired qualities needed to grow a beautiful plant with a profusion of blooms. If you start with a solid foundation of a great plant then the sky is the limit with the incredible outcomes. And a superior plant also means more disease and pest resistant as well.



The desired qualities you want in a plant besides a pretty bloom are vigor, ability to branch, lush foliage, propensity to bloom, strong bud stems for upright bloom presentation and large sized blooms. Then when planted in ground they are free to show their true potential. I have come to find that those that have met the criteria for such a hybridizing program all have the potential to be super bloomers on monster bushes.



A small sampling of those the results I see on a regular basis here...



Valentine's Day



Cindy's Heart



Cosmic Gold



Daisy Mae



Dapple Dandy



Chariots of Fire



True Love



Crystal Pink



Flickering Flame



Prosperity



Kinetic Energy



Simple Pleasures

A two and a half year time lapse of growth and progress in my front yard garden...

February 2012

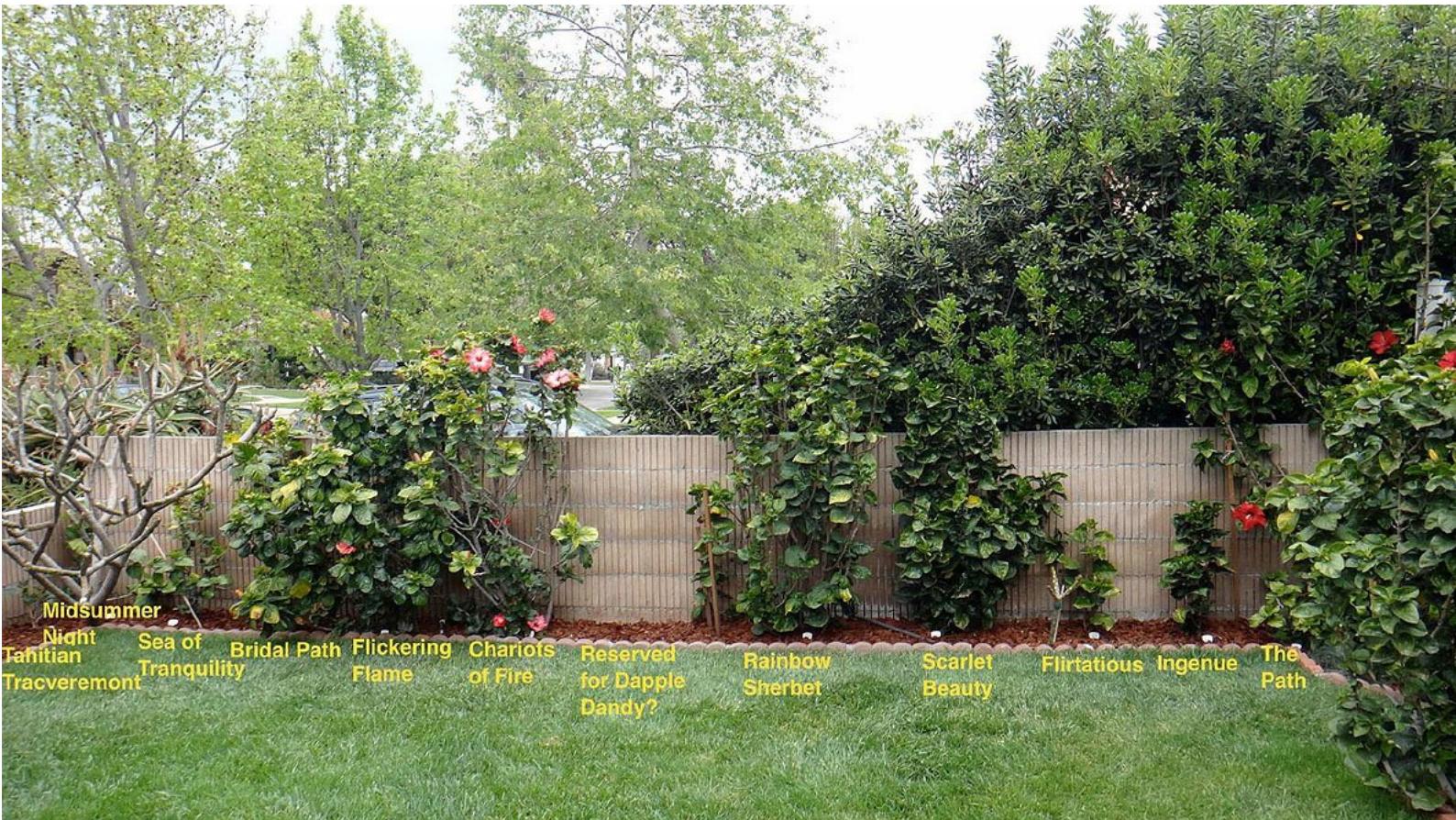


December 2014



An impressive seven months of growth...

March 2013



November 2013



Now that is some serious vigor!





Tahitian Orange Rainbow



Scarlet Beauty



Rainbow Sherbert



Black Dream

And then being outdoors can lead to events like this happening within your hibiscus plants...





And then it can lead to this....

Sharing with others who find the same fascination you do.

I wish you all the best in growing these amazing plants!

Darren Eminian, Larchmont Village, California



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