

## More Buddleia

FEATURES - PLANTS

With advances in breeding, the world does need another *Buddleia*.

MICHAEL A. DIRR | September 6, 2012

---

[Share on facebook](#)[Share on twitter](#)[Share on pinterest](#)[\\_share](#)[Share on linkedin](#)[Share on email](#)[Share on print](#)

Butterfly bushes are taking over the world. A July 2011 garden visit to England provided the impetus to cobble this story together. *Buddleia davidii* seedlings, primarily lavender, are in abundance in the chalky (limestone) soils in the south of England, particularly Hampshire, where Bonnie and I spent most of our vacation.



A daily walk along the Test Way had us in the shadows of 15-foot high *Buddleia*. A visit to the national *Buddleia* collection at Longstock Park, just north of Stockbridge, prompted the question . . . Does the world need another *Buddleia*? Apparently, the answer is yes, for Peter Moore, plant breeder extraordinaire and curator of the collection. He is currently expanding the planting area and has added many of the newer introductions including Denny Werner's 'Miss Molly,' 'Miss Ruby,' 'Blue Chip,' the Buzz series and many others. I commented about a deep saturated blue, 'Griffin Blue,' with 12-inch long panicles growing in the collection. I mentioned to Peter that I found it as a self-sown seedling in Griffin, Ga. He said it really was not that impressive.

So much for Georgia's contributions to breeding *Buddleia*. In the late '90s, early 2000, butterfly bush improvement was an active pursuit. At the time, 'Attraction' (red-purple), 'Bicolor' (lavender-purple with butterscotch eye), 'Bonnie' (lavender with orange eye), 'Griffin Blue' (blue), 'Guinevere' (deep purple), 'Honeycomb' (yellow), 'Silver Frost' (white), 'Violet Eyes' (dusty violet), 'Lavender Eyes,' 'Raspberry Eyes,' and 'White Eyes' were introduced with 'Attraction.' Werner used 'Attraction' in breeding 'Miss Molly' and 'Miss Ruby.' 'Bicolor' with the butterscotch eye and lavender-purple outer corolla attracted commercial growers. In fact, according to Moore, the latter was renamed by the Dutch as 'Flowerpower.'



National collection at Longstock Park

Jeff Gillman, now at the University of Minnesota, worked on mite resistance in *Buddleia*, utilizing the Georgia collection. When Gillman graduated and the

market appeared flooded with introductions, the program was dismantled. Did the world want another *Buddleia*? Not at that time, but things change.

### Leading breeders

Jon Lindstrom at the University of Arkansas; Werner at North Carolina State University; Peter Podaras from the Landscape Plant Development Center (and formerly with Cornell); Thompson and Morgan's Buzz Series; Elizabeth Keep of the East Malling Research Station in Kent, England; and the aforementioned Peter Moore, have contributed mightily to *Buddleia* improvement. Before these breeders, most introductions were chance seedlings, open-pollinated (mother known, father carried on the wind) and branch sports, primarily variegated like 'Harlequin,' 'Santana,' 'Evil Ways,' Strawberry Lemonade ('Monrell'). Genetic plasticity in *Buddleia davidii* is enormous and an open-pollinated seedling population will yield significant variation, most of it worthless. Anyone with the itch to breed *Buddleia* should assess Longstock's collection and consult the 2008-2010 trials report, *Buddleia davidii* and its close hybrids, at [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk).

The future of the genus: A true red-flowered introduction, compact types like 'Blue Chip' with unique flower colors and larger inflorescences, silver-gray or evergreen foliage, self-cleaning (i.e., flowers abscise), double flowers (observed such a selection), multi-colored inflorescences (again observed such), mite resistance and sterility (have this in newer hybrids).

At the Center for Applied Nursery Research (CANR) at McCorkle Nurseries in Dearing, Ga., thousands of seedlings were evaluated. All flowered in the first growing season, a trait that contributes to the ease of selection. The capsular



Flutterby series

fruit dehisces in mid- to late fall and on windy days, seeds float on the currents, akin to pine pollen in spring. Collect seed, sow, up it comes, transplant to 2-gallon container and 10-12 weeks later flowers are abundant. Select a great one, vegetatively propagate, evaluate for habit, size, rebloom, sterility and by year two, the itch/impulse to name is mighty. Practice patience

...

Unless, of course, Doug Welty, the specialty marketing manager at QVC visits (as he did Plant Introductions in 2010) and requests in five colors, 50,000 of each for an offering on QVC. I told Welty that UGA released 11 with a broad color range. He wanted new and went with the Buzz series, selling 250,000 in 2011. So much for "Who cares about *Buddleia*?" Time for Plant Introductions Inc. to start breeding.

## Exciting releases

In the plant breeding business, general familiarity by the gardening public with certain plant names is helpful. Hydrangea, crapemyrtle, azalea, butterfly bush, etc., are recognizable names, often associated with a grandmother's garden, and ones that retailers do not have to educate consumers about. Denny Werner's 'Miss Ruby' then 'Miss Molly' and Peter Moore's 'Sugar Plum' have excited gardeners. The Royal Horticultural Society, Wisley, granted an Award of Garden Merit to 'Miss Ruby' in 2011. In its butterfly trials it was the most highly rated cultivar by the visiting public, outdistancing some 70 others. On our trip to England, 'Miss Ruby' was already available in several garden centers. It was released by NCSU in 2007.

Based on the successes of the new introductions, I believe (actually know) that the *Buddleia* cupboard will be full to overflowing far into the future. Allow me to discuss the wave of new observations based on the literature and correspondence with the breeders. I have not observed all, but enough from each breeder/series to provide modulated guidance. Possibly the over-



*Buddleia davidii*  
Asian Moon

arching error is the release of too many in a given series. The Flutterby series from Peter Podaras and Ball Ornamentals Inc. includes 15 selections. Growers and gardeners deserve the best, so as breeders we should deliver on that promise. With about 100 species of *Buddleia*, opportunities for unique combinations abound. The newer cultivars are of mixed species' parentage and not simply derived from the *Buddleia davidii* gene pool.

The Buzz Series, orchestrated by Charles Valin at Thompson and Morgan, generated commercial interest because of its smaller size – 3 feet by 3 feet (or 4 to 5 feet according to Cultivars North America), large flowers and “knockout” appearance in containers. They are moving into the European and American markets. The original Buzz concept was to develop seed-produced cultivars, like petunias, marigolds or zinnias that were uniform in characteristics. The idea was worthy and the execution was a failure, but the current series resulted from this work. The images on the web depict compact plants with strong stems, large and abundant flowers. At Hillier Garden Center in Ampfield, Hampshire, England, I observed Buzz Magenta Improved, Buzz Sky Blue and Buzz Lavender. Colors were similar to many other *Buddleia* with nothing color-wise as exciting as Werner's 'Miss Ruby' and 'Miss Molly.' Other colors, including Buzz Purple, Buzz Violet and Buzz Ivory are now available from Pacific Plug and Liner.

## Peter Moore's contributions

Let's visit Longstock Park's Moore, a veteran plant breeder (50 years in the

horticulture industry), who, as he approaches retirement, continues to breed unique garden plants. I first met Moore in 1999, and most recently, July 2011 when he shared photos of several new *Buddleia*, *Philadelphus* and *Choisya* selections. The most exciting hybrid was a double-flowered, deep violet-blue butterfly bush -- the first I have observed. The individual flowers reminded me of a double-flowered African violet, but with four corolla lobes instead of five in the violet. The flowers were positioned like a hose-in-hose azalea. The group from Memphis, Tenn., that joined Bonnie and me for the visit were oohing and aahing.

Moore also showed a photo of 'Raspberry Ripple' with light lavender-white florets sprinkled among the deep raspberry-purple florets. He would not share with me who would be introducing them into the U.S., but be assured they are on the way.



'Blue Heaven'

Moore's earlier *Buddleia* releases include:

'Autumn Surprise': (*B. crispa* × *B. alternifolia* 'Argentea') late, pale lavender, silver-gray foliage.



'Violet Eyes'

'Little Treasure' (Garden Beauty): *B. lindleyana* type with compact habit, released in 2012-13.

'Longstock': (*B. agathosma* × *B. alternifolia*) large shrub, sterile, lavender flowers two to three weeks before *B. alternifolia*, silver-green foliage.



'Summer Beauty'

'Longstock Silver': (*B. agathosma* × *B. alternifolia* 'Argentea') attractive wavy leaves, few flowers, foliage useful in flower arranging.

'Sugar Plum': clean dark foliage, bright plum flowers close to 'Miss Ruby,' 'Miss Molly' and 'Attraction,' planted in proximity to the first two cultivars at Longstock and from 10 feet, I had difficulty separating them (Garden Beauty, 2011 introduction).

'Silver Anniversary': (*B. crispa* × *B. loricata*) artemesia-like silver-gray foliage, probably best as foliage plant, white flower with a butterscotch eye, available in U.S.

'Pink Pagoda': Pink with orange eye, ball-like clusters similar to *B. ×weyeriana* types, cross of *B. davidii* and *B. ×weyeriana*, fragrant, beautiful flower, named by Roy Lancaster, marketed under Garden Beauty by Lowaters Nursery Limited.

'Queen of Hearts': gray-green large leaves, subtend pink-rose flowers, still under trial in 2011.

Moore is the curator of the national collection of *Buddleia* in England. He has access to many unusual species to incorporate unique characteristics. The collection is impressive and overwhelming for there are so many beautiful cultivars.

### **Selections from Denny Werner**

Kudos to NCSU's Werner for his futuristic and sustained *Buddleia* breeding. The introduction of 'Miss Ruby' and 'Blue Chip' energized the *Buddleia* market.

Newer introductions are 'Purple Haze,' 'Miss Molly,' 'Ice Chip' and 'Lilac Chip.' I have trialed 'Miss Ruby,' 'Blue Chip,' 'Summer Frost,' 'Purple Haze' and 'Miss Molly.' All have their virtues.

'Miss Molly' is darker pink-rose-red than 'Miss Ruby,' although side-by-side, 'Miss Molly' appears brighter to this evaluator. Flowers are described as red-purple in 4-inch long panicles. It sets moderate amounts of seed and grew 4.4 feet by 3.8 feet in two years. 'Miss Molly' was released in 2010.



'Silver Frost'

'Ice Chip' is a complex hybrid with 'Blue Chip' in its pedigree. Flowers are white, in 3-inch long panicles. It grew 1.6 feet by 4.2 feet in two years, and is highly female sterile and no viable pollen is produced. It was released in 2011.



'Honeycomb'

'Purple Haze' has a compact, mounding-spreading habit, and grew 2.6 feet by 4 feet in two years. Gray-green leaves are 4-inch by 1-inch long. Flowers are purple-violet in 8-inch long inflorescences. It's female sterile and was released in 2010.

'Summer Frost' has medium purple flowers in a branched panicle subtended by silver-gray foliage, and grows 5 to 6 feet high.

Another compact introduction, 'Lilac Chip,' described by Werner as "very very dwarf," is smaller than 'Blue Chip' and is in the process of release.

Most of these new introductions are marketed via Spring Meadow Nursery and Proven Winners.



## Plants from Peter Podaras

Possibly the most prolific breeder/introducer of *Buddleia* is Peter Podaras, allied with Landscape Plant Development Center and Cornell University. Ball Ornamentals Inc. is marketing the selections under the name Flutterby. I observed only five cultivars with Blue Heaven, the most intriguing with close to blue flowers, blue-green-silver leaves and a compact habit. The foliage appeared to have *B. crispa* in its constitution, a casualty in the Georgia trials. The orange-flowered selections like Tangerine Dream appear to have *B. marrubiifolia*, *B. tubiflora*, *B. madagascariensis* in their makeup. Again minimally cold hardy. I checked United States Patent and Trademark Office site and noted none were listed so could determine nothing specific about parentage. I suspect the market will determine the winners and losers among the fifteen.

Peter's program focuses on invasiveness and developing sterile cultivars, flower colors (describes a pink that is better than 'Pink Delight'), doubleness, fourth generation true dwarf plants (1½ feet by 2 feet), increased hardiness, etc. He has utilized *B. davidii*, *B. lindleyana*, *B. crispa* and *B. alternifolia* and, like all plant breeders, a cadre about which I can only speculate.

## Contributions from Elizabeth Keep

Elizabeth Keep of the East Malling Research Station in Kent, England, bred blue-purple Adonis Blue ('Adokeep'); Peacock ('Peakeep'), a rich pink; Purple Emperor ('Pyrkeep'), a mauve-purple; and Camberwell Beauty ('Camkeep'), lilac-purple, with branched inflorescences like 'Dartmoor.' All are compact, bushy, 4-5 feet high, with large inflorescences. Adonis Blue is striking and available in many retail outlets. Camberwell Beauty has sensationally large flowers and in the Royal Horticultural Society's three-year evaluation grew 3 feet by 7.7 feet, while 'Dartmoor' topped out at 10 feet by 13.3 feet. Spring Meadow Nursery introduced these into the United States market.

## Opportunities abound

### Award of Garden Merit

A note on the Award of Garden Merit is in order. It's akin to Consumer Reports Best Buy evaluations and based on a plethora of common sense garden criteria. Twenty *Buddleia taxa* were awarded, reconfirmed or recommended for the AGM based on the 2008-2010 trials. They include 'Blue Horizon' (blue), Camberwell Beauty, Nanho White ('Monite'), 'Royal Red,' 'Dartmoor,' 'Black Knight,' 'Pink Delight,' 'White Profusion,' Nanho Purple ('Monum'), 'West Hill,' 'Miss Ruby,' 'Silver Blue' (blue), 'Silver Lilac' (silver-pink), 'Sunkissed' (lavender) and 'Darent Valley' (white).

I have observed and/or grown all but Camberwell Beauty, 'West Hill,' 'Silver Lilac' and 'Sunkissed.'

The old tried and true are still holding serve, but with time will be replaced by the younger generation.

It's safe to speculate that *Buddleia* breeding has a vibrant future and the elusive true red will someday appear as well as more cold-hardy, reliable yellow- and orange-flowered introductions. Many gardeners are still attached to grandmother's 'Black Knight' and 'Royal Red'. The butterfly bush world is moving at the speed of light. Hop on board for an incredible experience.

National testing sites, perhaps three, in USDA Hardiness Zones 5, 7 and 9, would assist growers, retailers, breeders, garden writers and gardeners about the merits of these new *Buddleia* cultivars. For a template of how this might be accomplished, please see the trials report, 2008-2010 of *Buddleia davidii* and its close hybrids, ([www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)) downloadable and an easy read with excellent photos.

Michael A. Dirr is a retired professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia; and partner in Plant Introductions Inc., [www.plantintroductions.com](http://www.plantintroductions.com)