

Horticulture for the Petite Flower Show

One of the questions I am repeatedly asked has to do with what horticulture should be/ could be written into a schedule for a Petite Flower Show. Mom had written an article in this newsletter when the Petite Show was first introduced letting us know that permissible horticulture includes “miniature, dwarf or naturally small” specimens. Well, that certainly takes in a lot of horticulture! Who decides if the specimen is dwarf or miniature? It is up to the grower or hybridizer. If **the tag** says it is a dwarf variety, then we go with that. “Sold to me as...”. Just be sure you are not looking at immature growth. We want the small version of the large plant. We should look for **the species name** (usually descriptive) to include the words “*nana*” or “*nanus*” meaning dwarf, “*minima*” meaning least or smallest, “*minor*” or “*minus*” meaning smaller, or “*minutus*” meaning very small. How about “*inconspicuus*”, “*parvus*” or “*parvulus*” also meaning small? Other species names beginning with or including the prefix “*brevis*” which means short may also be considered if it refers to height. Have you seen a species name “*pumilus*” or “*bumilis*” meaning dwarf or low growing? See how the botanical Latin can help you? Additionally, **the cultivar name** may give you a hint as to size: ‘Tiny Tim’, ‘Lilliput’, ‘Baby Doll’, and ‘Tom Thumb’.

Almost every genus of plants has a dwarf or small variety, whether naturally occurring or induced by man. Our own Lola Stark gave a presentation at Instructor’s Symposium (Feb. 2005) that opened my eyes to the vast array of plants to consider. There are miniature and semi-miniature Begonias, Bromeliads, Ivies, Hostas, Roses, Daffodils, African Violets, Daylilies, and Cacti. There are dwarf fruit trees, Hydrangeas and Hollies. Where can you find examples of these? If you have the time, get on **the computer** and ‘Google’ search ‘dwarf plants’ or even ‘terrarium plants’ or visit www.botany.com. As an example, if you are interested in just dwarf Hosta then try www.bridgewoodgardens.com. Got the idea?

As far as those plants that are naturally small, what do you consider “small”? What will fit **your staging space**? ‘Little Gem’ magnolia is smaller than its originator but may be too big for your purposes. Do try to include the Serissa, Japanese hollies, Haworthia and other examples of naturally occurring runts.

“But I don’t have time to do the research!” You are having a flower show soon and you just want a list of plants for the horticulture section. I understand that rushed feeling but I also know that Florida is a long state and the list for my Northwest Florida flower show would not be the list necessary for a flower show in Miami. So here’s what I want you to do. Take your existing **flower show schedule** and keep in what you think has miniature, dwarf or naturally small varieties and take out what you know will be too big. Simple, right? Have a group of members help you select the classes. Use a Petite Flower Show Schedule from our State Flower Show or from a neighboring District. It’s not cheating...imitation is the highest form of flattery!

I will be happy to help anyone who is struggling to create their petite horticulture schedule. Just email me what you need to ttuttle1954@cs.com.