

THE COMPOST PILE

NEWSLETTER OF THE LOUISIANA SOCIETY FOR HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH
JULY 2019



MEET MICHEL HONHON

story and photos by Dr. Mike Maher

Born in Liege, Belgium, new LSHR board member Michel “Mike” Honhon grew up among gardeners. “My parents and grand-

parents were all pretty young and in our family, all the elderly people had a passion for gardening,” Honhon remembers.

“For most of them, gardening was

a serious hobby since it had been an important survival skill to have during World War I and II. It seemed like every home had a pretty garden

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LSHR COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER CHANGES TO ANNUAL PLANT RELEASE

The annual spring plant release will likely include fewer but larger plants in the coming years.

At its spring meeting, the LSHR board formed a Plant Release Committee chaired by board member Billy Welsh with committee members Albert Durio, Rebecca Moss and Dr. Ellis Fletcher.

In the early years, LSHR sent horticulture experts on plant collecting expeditions all over the planet, and early plant releases resulted from these collecting ventures.

Nowadays it’s difficult to import plants from abroad because of the threat of invasive species and the potential introduction of plant pests and diseases.

Domestically it’s also hard to find new plant material that hasn’t been patented or in wide commercial production.

“It’s getting harder and harder to find suitable plant material for the spring release,” committee chair Billy Welsh notes. “The goal of the spring release has never been merely to get a bunch of free plants,

but rather to provide LSHR members with plants that might not be commercially available, so they can evaluate them.”

In recent years members have typically received 10 plants in 4-inch plastic pots. In the annual review of the plant releases, members report high mortality rates, and some members report having given away some of their plants to neighbors.

“There’s never been an LSHR rule that limits releases to 4-inch pots,” Welsh says. “We think fewer but larger plants will give members nice plants from the start, with higher survival rates.” The committee has not yet decided on the spring release plants for 2020.

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full of trees, plants, flowers and vegetables. Many families spent lots of free time or even the entire weekend in the garden. As a kid, I worked a lot with my grandfather. Each spring, we planted Irish potatoes, took care of all kinds of veggies and strawberries. He had designed a beautiful rock garden with many different conifers and perennials. I remember being at ease around nature and from then on, staying in contact with it became almost indispensable.”

Nevertheless, it was French culture and his language skills that first brought Mike to Louisiana. After earning a degree in teacher training at Liège, he pursued his dream of living in the USA and obtained a CODOFIL teaching contract in 1982.

“With a handful of Belgian and French fellows, we launched the new French elementary program in the Shreveport / Bossier area,” Honhon said. From 1982 to 1985, he taught French to first, second and third graders. In 1987, he was hired by the St Landry Parish school board and moved to Opelousas. There he taught French as a second language to grades 4 to 12 in the surrounding country schools.

In 1992, Honhon received a B.A. in Foreign Language Education from UL Lafayette (USL at the time). In 1994, he completed three more full semesters in Spanish education at UL.

This allowed Honhon to teach French and Spanish in high schools from 1994 to 2000. In 1994, he also built a new house in the beautiful Hidden Hills community near Grand Coteau. “As I settled there, I could finally have room for pets and a garden of course. The country side helped me relax from the increasing pressure of teaching.”

In 2000, Honhon grew disenchanted with teaching. “Most of my students did not come to school to learn but to get an a.s.a.p. degree, to get a good job and earn money. This did not fit my views of education at all.”

At age 40, Honhon decided to make a career change to horticulture. “I could not believe I had spent 25 years of my life studying at school to become an instructor. Different approaches with different purposes obviously lead to very different results. It was time to start again in another direction.”

Honhon worked for a landscape architect for two years and got familiar with landscape maintenance and installation. “The pay was miserable but I learned something new every day and it felt like I was able to grow up again. I was so glad to reconnect with the outdoors and the new surge of physical activity helped me feel so much better. To my surprise, I never missed the classroom.”

Honhon became a master gardener in Lafayette in 2002 and obtained a landscape designer certificate from a technical institute in Norcross, Ga.,



Honhon at one of his landscape installations between Lafayette and Carencro.

the same year. “I landscaped during the day and studied horticulture and landscaping techniques at night for two years.” In 2003, Honhon obtained the Louisiana landscape contractor license and the nursery specialist certificate. He opened his own landscape business in October 2003.

“I was a proud owner/manager/employer/employee/laborer/landscaper/independent contractor,” Honhon says. He acknowledges

LSHR board member Rob Barry as a mentor, as well as Lafayette naturalist Bill Fontenot.

“I learned a whole lot more about my new occupation, gained an understanding of the structure of the green industry and a better sense of direction in my new life,” Honhon says. “The LSU Ag Center connected me with many experienced specialists. Dr. Allen Owings was a great teacher. Even though I never enrolled

in any of his classes, he taught me so much about plants and made me realize the importance of sharing knowledge with the public. My new goals were to learn how to manage a business while continuing to study horticulture on my own.”

Honhon never stopped wanting to do the actual landscaping work on a daily basis. Lately, he has subcontracted experienced horticulturist Al Ernst. “We like working together and

Michel Honhon—continued from p. 2

currently maintain 45 to 55 gardens and hope to install four or five new landscapes per year.”

Honhon and Ernst like working for clients who enjoy gardening. “We prefer plant installation and the work gets done with a minimum of equipment, mostly by hand. We do not provide lawn care, landscape irrigation nor large tree care. In response to the ups and downs of the local economy, landscape maintenance is becoming the backbone of our work schedule. It is less creative, but it helps us keeping in touch with nature’s unpredictable pace.”

Honhon likes designing with shrubs. “Their shapes, textures and spacing can be combined in infinite ways,” Honhon says. “Camellias, roses and azaleas demand more care but the extra effort is always rewarded. My favorite tree is the Japanese maple.”

On a smaller scale, Honhon says that perennial flowers are terrific, but a mixture of shrubs with small, colorful pockets of annual flowers makes the best borders. “Variety is the most important feature of a garden. English gardens and Japanese gardens are definitely my favorites. A great

garden always needs the best soil possible; then keep amending it properly and simply strive to develop the design that you initially desired.”

Honhon has learned that landscape work is competitive: “The

services and the lawn ‘care’ teams end up doing it all too. The Louisiana State contractor’s license is not taken seriously by many people, and in fact, it only guarantees a right to work. Not enough is been done to protect

way and we hope that naturally the “low ballers” will just vanish but they don’t.

“The green industry functions well only when landscapers satisfy their customers and when nurseries reach their volume sales. This is quite a challenge considering the swings of the economy and the recent whims of Mother Nature! As a result, Lafayette has seen its small local nurseries shut down one after the other.”

Honhon laments that people shop nowadays in the big box stores at discount prices or in oversized retail centers. “For the landscapers, it is very difficult to find good nursery and hardscape materials at a wholesale cost in order to offer a competitive price to our customers. To make matters worse, thrifty customers rely on unqualified labor to install the plants they purchased on their own.”

Honhon feels that the overall quality of landscaping has dropped in the Lafayette area. Homeowners view garden projects as a chore instead of a source of enjoyment, he adds. “In the last few years, the more experienced landscapers have had less consistent work; they are discouraged and seek higher managing positions which are less physically demanding and better

paid. Can we blame them? However, landscaping remains a true hands-on activity. When the loss of skilled personnel affects productivity, the quality of work goes down and the entire business suffers in the long run.

“I think that gardening and landscaping skills should be taught in technical schools just like home economics and agricultural science” Honhon says. “This technical course could become a prerequisite for the state license test and for the entrance to colleges of horticulture. No one needs a four-year degree to trim crape myrtles, but a minimum of plant knowledge and cultural practices is necessary to do it properly.”

Honhon feels that an added credential could benefit the status of landscaping laborers while improving the image of the gardener.

Michel Honhon was installed as a board member at the Spring 2019 LSHR meeting. “I have enjoyed participating in the LSHR activities,” Honhon says. “It gave me a chance to meet many interesting people who have a real interest in plants.”

Honhon also enjoys the plant auction. “I look forward to it every year. I also like trying out and growing the new plants. It must be difficult to find new varieties each year. So far, so good!”

Honhon would like to see an extra LSHR event beside the annual spring meeting, perhaps a trip to local gardens, to an important nursery or an horticultural facility.



Honhon likes to mix shrubs and flowers in his landscape installations.

green industry expects its members to cooperate but in reality, the work is so hard and the spirit of competition so strong at all levels that we all have to compete fiercely against one another just to be able to survive,” Honhon says. “So, the nurserymen landscape; the landscapers are told that they will need their own nurseries soon or later; large retail centers offer all

the licensed contractors (who keep up good standards, pay overwhelming insurance premiums and keep pursuing education) from the unqualified opportunists who call themselves landscapers and provide poor quality services at cheaper prices without any license nor liability. Instead we tend to believe that the efforts of the good guys will prevail some kind of

LABUFFAROSA RAIN LILY

story and photos by Dr. Ellis Fletcher

The Labuffarosa Rain Lily, *Zephyranthes* 'Labuffarosa,' was an LSHR release in 2005. Discovered in 1900 as a naturally occurring hybrid in Mexico, this widely adapted rain lily has quickly gained widespread acceptance as a valuable addition to garden environments.

These hardy, bulbous, quickly multiplying and durable plants are popular as well for the number and size of their very showy flowers.

This plant, as suggested by its common name, is often stimulated to flower shortly after receiving rain from late spring until fall. Flowers develop in flushes during the active growing season.

Often confused with closely related plants that flower when a relatively dry period is ended by rain, the Labuffarosa Rain Lily is quite distinctive. Flowers of 'Labuffarosa' are mildly fragrant and have a single, star-shaped, upward-facing to slightly nodding, mainly flattened flower on each stem. Relatives, also called rain lilies, have more funnel-shaped or tubular flowers that angle downward rather than facing upward.

Petals and sepals of basically the same size, shape and color are commonly referred to as petals and comprise the six-petaled flower. Buds, on 6-12 inch scapes, open to reveal snow-white to light-pink



AN LSHR FAVORITE RELEASE

overlapping petals that form flowers about three inches in diameter. Flowers may uniformly transition in color from the palest of pink to rose or the non-pink color may create floral segments expressing both colors. Individual flowers are at their peak for only a day or two but new flowers may develop over several days to create flushes of flowering. Variable coloration is normal when plants are increased by means of

seedlings, rather than separation of mature bulbs or division of established clumps.

Most predictable and heaviest flowering occurs in full or mostly sunny locations, when moisture is adequate. Plants perform well in a wide range of slightly acid to neutral soil types that vary from somewhat wet to seasonably wet or even very dry. Once established, plants are fairly drought tolerant. Irrigation

to a limited extent may stimulate flowering, but not to the extent of natural rainfall. Many maintain rain lilies "know" the difference between rain and watering.

Arching mounds of glossy, narrow, strap-shaped leaves of about the same length as flowering stems are present during most of the year; however, leaves may die back when plants experience prolonged drought, frost or freezing temperatures.

Other common names for *Zephyranthes* 'Labuffarosa' include Blushing

Rain Lily, Fading Rain Lily, La Bufa Rosa Rain Lily, Labuffarosa, Labuffarosa Zephyr Lily, Pink Fairy Lily, Pink Magic Lily, Pink Surprise Lily and Summer Snow. Named selections are available differing in plant and flower size, as well as coloration. Plants, with a little more attention to media and watering, may be successful when grown in containers.

Rain lilies, especially the bulb, contain various alkaloids that make them an irritant or toxic to humans and pets if consumed.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Words alone cannot begin to say how successful our 2019 events were from the special plant releases, the great results of the auction to Maarten van der Giessen's wonderful horticulture presentation. Getting to visit with many horticulture friends was also a big plus.

I want to commend our Board of Directors and Officers for their work and dedication in making this event so successful. Thanks to Billy Welsh and Kristy Thompson for their work in preparing the plant releases. Also, a special thank you to those who graciously donated plants for the auction. They are listed on page 7.

Summer is definitely here and I know most of you are trying to escape the heat while caring for your precious plants. Hopefully the plant releases you received in March are in their new home, whether in the ground or pots, and thriving.

Plans for 2020 are already confirmed. Thanks to JoAnn Pugh and Billy Welsh for coordinating. JoAnn got reservations for our luncheon at The Petroleum Club on March 14, 2020, and Billy made contact with Adam Black from Peckerwood Nursery to be our speaker. Please be sure to mark your calendars for this big event.

We are so happy to have Dr. Michael Maher as our new Editor for the Compost Pile and look forward to his additions to it. We are constantly striving to make our society even better.

—Norman Balliviero

'VERMILLIONAIRE' LEADS 2018 PLANT RELEASE RATINGS

by Glenda Balliviero

Tallying all the information provided by our members on the reports each year is interesting, as we all seem to see things so differently. What is beautiful to one person is straggly or unattractive to others.

I feel that often reports are hurriedly filled out at the last minute and really not a true indication of the plants' performance. I've also found that more and more people are indicating that all their plants died, which doesn't seem possible if cared for in any way.

In reading each report individually I see that often a reason for a criticism is because the information provided with the plants was not followed. Planting a shade plant in full sun is an example. I've also found that more and more members are giving their plants away for some reason, and I can understand because some people just do not have room in their small gardens. If this is the case we feel that you should find out from the recipient how the plant performed in order to fill out the plant information sheet. Remember this is a research society and in order for our results to be valid it is necessary to collect information from all the recipients.

The top plant from the 2018 releases was the *Cuphea* 'Vermillionaire.' This plant received 3s (highest score) from 56 members thus indi-



Scott Reed

Cuphea 'Vermillionaire'

cating it was a great plant. Its overall rating was 2.64. Its beautiful colorful flowers were attractive not only to the members but served as a buffet for butterflies and hummingbirds.

The second place was *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Madeline Hill.' It received 4 3s and overall 2.39.

It was interesting to see that an herb scored so high and was chosen basically for its fragrance. 3rd place went to *Phlox paniculata* 'Robert Poore.' Its overall rating was 2.32. It received high ratings basically because of both the fragrance and beauty of the flowers.

Below are the ratings of each release plant with a description of how

members perceived them. Remember 3 is the best rating and 1 the lowest. The average rating is listed beside each and determines that plant's overall score.

1. *Cuphea* 'Vermillionaire' LYTHRACEAE (Large Firecracker Plant) - 2.64

This perennial plant covered with beautiful and colorful yellow, red and orange tubular flowers was the favorite plant for the 2018 Plant Release. It was considered to be a great sun plant, trouble-free with non-stop blooms, easy to propagate and drought tolerant. It bloomed profusely with attractive flowers from spring through fall and was considered a magnet for hummingbirds and butterflies. Despite all the good marks, a few members indicated that the petite flowers were not showy and didn't perform well.

Insects/disease: White flies, aphids and scale were problems for a few members.

2. *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* 'Bath's Pink' CARYOPHYLLACEAE (Bath's Pink Dianthus) - 1.99

This herbaceous perennial was liked for its fine textured blue-gray foliage. The foliage by one was described as popping to make the plant stand out. The thick spreading mat performance was a plus and considered by a few to be a great ground cover. For those who put in pots the

cascading was the plus. Not many were fortunate to see blooms but those that did said they were an awesome pink. 40 members lost their plant and many felt that too much rain was the reason; however, it could have also been possible that some were planted in areas that did not drain well. It became the home for ants in one yard.

Insects/disease: None

3. *Distylium* 'Spring Frost' HAMAMELIDACEAE (Spring Frost Distylium) - 1.92

This compact evergreen shrub did not receive many comments from members. Several pointed out the beauty of the variegation of the foliage. The frosty-white new growth that turns green as summer progresses was considered unique. Many considered it to be a slow grower and one considered it to be a strong survivor without care. No one reported any type of bloom.

Insects/disease: Fungus on the leaves was a problem for a couple members.

4. *Lilium formosanum* LILIACEAE (Formosa Lily) - 2.05

Several members considered this bulbous perennial to be the best overall plant. It was described as a stunning bloomer, made a beautiful display and multiplied. A few indicated that it had blooms 2 different times.



Gianda Bellivero

Formosa Lily

The fragrance and the foliage were both pluses; however, a few had to add stakes for support. The unique seed stalk that dried resembling a candelabra was unique and many kept for the seeds.

Insects/disease: A few had aphids.

5. *Phlox paniculata* 'Robert Poore'
POLEMONIACEAE (Robert Poore Phlox) - 2.32

This erect perennial was rated third in the overall 2018 releases. Most members reported it as fast growing and clumping but a few indicated it grew slowly. Its long blooming, self-cleaning and abundant flowers were high lights.

Beautiful, fragrant clusters of purple flowers were enjoyed by most; however, a few did not have blooms. Its drought tolerance and mildew

resistance were more pluses for this plant.

Insects: Only one person reported aphids.

6. *Podocarpus macrophyllus* 'Pringle's Dwarf'
PODOCARPACEAE (Pringle's Dwarf Podocarpus; received as *Podocarpus macrophyllus pringlii*) - 1.76

This compact coniferous shrub was actually planted in containers by many. Most indicated that it grows very slowly but it is a no maintenance plant. The contrast of colors was interesting. The dark blue-green foliage making a great appearance with the bright, light green new growth was a highlight for many. More than 20 members lost this plant many blaming on root rot due to the weather being too wet.

Insects/disease: Mildew, fungus



Gianda Bellivero

Robert Poore Phlox

7. *Rhododendron macrosepalum* 'Koroma Shikibu'
ERICACEAE (Spider Azalea) - 2.08

The purplish-pink flowers on this shrub were described as beautiful, unique and spidery shaped.

Many were surprised that they could withstand the coastal humidity and heat. The slow start was a disappointment to many; however, several did report that their plant grew to 3' in the one year. Not only were the flowers attractive to our members but one reported that they were also attractive to their ducks and geese. More than 20 members lost their plant and it could have been that some were not planted in well-drained soil. One member even indicated a Death Notice 6-30-18.

Insects/disease: Leaf fungus, aphids, spider mites and one had leaf lice (a term I had to look up).

8. *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Madeline Hill'
LAMIACEAE (Hill's Hardy Rosemary) - 2.39

This erect, aromatic perennial herb bearing fragrant evergreen needle-like leaves was a favorite for many thus was rated highly. Several did plant in clay pots. The fragrance was a big plus and a few used the needles in cooking. Its low care, cold hardiness and drought tolerant characteristics were great assets.

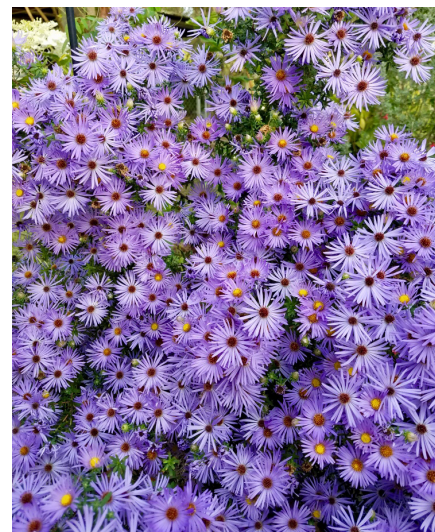
Even though it is supposed to produce blue flowers in mid-spring no one was fortunate to have them. One person reported propagating from cuttings taken when pruned back. Several people did report root rot

due to excessive rain during the year. It was indicated in the release that these plants needed a well-drained soil which could have been part of the problem.

Insects/disease: A couple members reported fungus.

9. *Symphotrichum oblongifolium*
ASTERACEAE (Aromatic Aster) - 2.2

This bushy perennial was greatly loved by many for its gorgeous daisy-like, blue-purple flowers with yellow centers. Most members indicated that it bloomed profusely and especially in the fall. The flowers were considered gorgeous, showy, unique, attractive, stunning and the aromatic leaves added another plus. Many reported it multiplied well, and another felt the stalks were too tall and thus had to be staked. Amid all the beauty that was seen by so many there were several



Scott Reed

Aromatic Aster

who felt the plant was scrawny, leggy, unimpressive and even weedy looking, until it finally bloomed. One person did take cuttings hoping to have more plants for a greater display. Unfortunately, over 20 members lost this plant.

Insects/disease: None



Gianda Bellivero

Pine Cone Ginger

10. *Zingiber zerumbet*
ZINGIBERACEAE (Pine Cone Ginger) - 2.01

This tropical perennial was slow to sprout for many but then the beauty of the unique pine cone looking bloom made the wait worth it. For many the leafy stems grew to be over 4' high. The tall green cone-shaped bracts eventually turned red in early fall. The creamy yellow-white flowers that then appeared added more beauty. The fragrance of the liquid in the cones was a great plus. One member was impressed at how long the cut stalk lasted as a cut flower in her home. Unfortunately over 20 people lost this plant; many feeling that the rhizomes could not withstand the wet summer and thus rotted. Insects/disease: Mold on rhizome

TREASURER'S REPORT

PLANT AUCTION SETS RECORD OF \$5,872

I just love reporting all the great figures from release day!

What a fun day enjoyed by all with new plant releases, spring plant auction, silent auction, refreshments, annual meeting, guest speaker and luncheon.

Just seeing so many plant loving friends makes an awesome day!

LSHR distributed 130 boxes of new releases and wonderful plants

that are thriving now. Plant auction had 55 members who purchased 250 plants for a total of \$5,586 and silent auction raised \$286, for a total of \$5,872. This total is an all-time high, beating last year's figures by \$1,000. All the hard work of the board to pull together and have such a profitable day to now be able to award research grants and college scholarships made us proud. With

great members participating and supporting LSHR, we are getting the attention of many growers and nurseries with our survey information. After release day, the work to analyze data from survey starts to be shared with members.

The luncheon had 81 to attend to hear Maarten Van der Giesen's great presentation.

Mark your calendar now for next spring meeting, March 14, 2020. More details will follow in winter *Compost Pile*. Enjoy your summer and all your new plants too. This beancounter is going to count all my blooming plants!

—JoAnn Pugh

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- Sarah Schoeffler First Vice-President
- Robert Barry Second Vice-President
- Roxanna Champagne Recording Secretary
- JoAnn Pugh Treasurer

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- Billy Welsh 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20
- Scott Reed 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21
- Michel Honhon 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22

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LSHR thanks these donors of 2019 plant auction items

- ALLEN OWINGS
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- IRA NELSON HORTICULTURE CENTER
- GLENDA BALLIVIERO

IN MEMORIAM

Longtime LSHR member Lorraine Ann Billeaud, 56, passed away at her home on June 12, 2019, surrounded by her family.



A charismatic and engaging advocate for plants, Lorraine graduated from USL in 1985 with degrees in horticulture and business. She then earned her master's degree in landscape horticulture from Texas A & M.

Billeaud worked as horticulture supervisor at the Lou Ana Foods Wildflower Research Program. In the early 1990s, she began Billeaud Horticulture Services, designing landscapes for homes and businesses throughout the Lafayette area.

Active in many community organizations, Lorraine was also a supporter of the Louisiana Festival des Fleurs.

Memorial contributions in Lorraine Billeaud's name can be made to Miles Perret Cancer Services.

MEMBER NOMINATIONS

New member nominations should be directed to LSHR@lusfiber.net. Usually nominations for new members are sent in throughout the year for approval at the Fall board meeting.

THE COMPOST PILE

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P.O. Box 51366
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Editor: Dr. T. Michael Maher
tmmaher@gmail.com

LSHR plant people, send me your news!
I welcome articles and photos about your favorite plants, growing techniques and plant lovers.