

***Cornus kousa* var. *chinensis* 'Milky Way' and Name Recognition in the Nursery Industry**

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During the past 25 years, the debilitating effects of the common dogwood borer, *Synanthedon scitula*, on plants of *Cornus florida* and, more recently, the severe effects of "dogwood decline", have resulted in a reduced demand for plants of this species. At the same time, there has been a marked increase in the demand for the Asiatic dogwood, *C. kousa*, since plants of this species were known to be highly resistant to the dogwood borer and, in recent years, were found to be highly resistant to *Discula*, the incitant of dogwood anthracnose and a factor in "dogwood decline".

Foremost among the listings of *C. kousa* in many nursery catalogs has been *C. kousa* var. *chinensis* 'Milky Way', an introduction of Wayside Gardens in the 1960s. Apparently the demand for plants of 'Milky Way' outstripped the production capacity of growers as listings of "Seedlings of 'Milky Way'" appeared in various nursery catalogs during the last decade. To this day, it is not uncommon to see such listings in nursery catalogs.

In 1969, I ordered two plants of *C. kousa* var. *chinensis* 'Milky Way' from Wayside Gardens for inclusion in the performance trial of plants of *C. florida*, *C. kousa*, and *C. nuttallii* being assembled at Rutgers University as the first step in a program of intra- and inter-specific hybridization among these large-bracted dogwoods. It became evident after a number of years, that the two plants of 'Milky Way' were dissimilar, suggesting that the plants being sold as 'Milky Way' represented more than one clone. Later, as I saw listings for "Seedlings of 'Milky Way'" in nursery catalogs, my interest in the history, or origin, of 'Milky Way' increased.

With 25 years experience in hybridizing large-bracted dogwoods, I found it difficult to explain the apparent surge of interest in *C. kousa* var. *chinensis* 'Milky Way' and, more specifically, the reason for listing "Seedlings of 'Milky Way'". All the plants of *C. kousa* that I had experience with were self-sterile, seed being produced only as a result of cross fertilization, and the resultant seedlings were genetically highly variable. Thus, I decided to seek out what information might be available concerning both the origin and the genetic makeup of the plants Wayside Gardens marketed under the name *C. kousa* var. *chinensis* 'Milky Way'.

At the time 'Milky Way' was introduced, the headquarters of Wayside Gardens was located right across the road from the nursery of the late Paul Bosley in Mentor, Ohio. His son, Richard Bosley, a former president of the Eastern Region of I.P.P.S. was able to put me in contact with the person who was president of Wayside Gardens in the final years of operation in Ohio. That gentleman forwarded my inquiry to Mr. Richard Silvieus, who was the production manager at Wayside Gardens during the 1960s and early 1970s. He very generously provided quite detailed information concerning the origin of 'Milky Way'.

In the 1960s, Wayside Gardens had a field of several thousand seedlings of *C.*

kousa which were grown from seed obtained from many different plants. The seedlings in this field were evaluated for floral characteristics, with primary emphasis on large floral bracts and precocious flowering. About 15 plants that Mr. Silveus said were truly outstanding in these characteristics were selected and transplanted to the corner of a field at the 100 acre production nursery, Wayside Gardens maintained at Perry, Ohio. These selected plants constituted the "stock block" from which scionwood was taken for use in propagating plants of 'Milky Way' by budding.

Thus, an "original" 'Milky Way' plant traces to any one of approximately fifteen different seedlings resulting from seed collected from many open pollinated plants. Present day "Seedlings of 'Milky Way'" would thus be open pollinated seedlings of propagules of any one of those approximately 15 original open-pollinated (self-sterile) seedlings, and one would expect them to be highly variable.

So, what is the purpose of this story? Two conclusions are worthy of note. First, the original plant material distributed under the name *C. kousa* var. *chinensis* 'Milky Way' was not a cultivar, rather, it was a mixture of approximately 15 different clones, the parent plants of which were selected on the basis of floral traits.

Second, even a listing of "Seedlings of 'Milky Way'" apparently has market appeal today. This is strong testimony to the power, or value, of name recognition. Clearly, this is why many plant introductions have been patented in recent years with an absurd, or nonsensical, cultivar name and trademarked under a second, and more potentially appealing, name. A registered trademark, if properly used, can be renewed every 10 years; this allows the plant originator (inventor) to earn revenue as a result of name recognition long after the 17 years of protection provided by a plant patent runs out. 'Milky Way' was not patented or trademarked, but the fact that open-pollinated seedlings of the original mixture of approximately 15 different clones have sales appeal clearly illustrates the importance of name recognition of plant material within the nursery industry.