

## Plant Geeks, Hard Core Horticulturists, and Daring Amateur Gardeners – The 2012 Rare Plant Live Auction is calling!

Scott Beuerlein's primary goals for the Rare Plant Auction have always been to offer plants that are rare, beautiful, growable, and, above all, plants that tell a story. This year he has expanded that list to include one or two plants that will be a worthy challenge for even the most determined plant geek! Read on about three unique trees which will be among the offerings in the 2012 Rare Plant Auction on May 4. This live auction starts at 7:30 PM during the Preview Party for the 2012 Plant Sale at CGC.



### **'Phoenix' White Pine *Pinus strobus* 'Phoenix'**

According to records, Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois bought white pines from Phoenix Nursery in Bloomington, Illinois in 1862. These pines can be seen in photos of Abraham Lincoln's burial at that cemetery in 1865. Some of those pines still exist, including one which developed a witch's broom (dwarf mutation) at 100' following a lightning strike.

Several years ago Guy Sternberg of Petersburg, Illinois, author of the Timber Press publication [Native Trees for North American Landscapes](#), had a climber friend retrieve a few pieces of the broom. These were sent to Richard Eyre of Rich's Fox Hollow Nursery, a noted conifer nurseryman, to graft. One of the grafts took. Shortly afterwards, a storm destroyed the broom. Guy named the plant 'Phoenix', both because that was the name of the nursery from which the parent tree originated and because the broom originated from the point of a lightning strike.

From this original graft, which Guy Sternberg has growing at his Starhill Arboretum, propagator Dax Herbst made a few grafts two years ago. I now have one of those grafts ready to auction at this year's Rare Plant Auction. Lovers of dwarf white pines and those who appreciate history should all appreciate this extremely rare and historically noteworthy plant!



### **Hybrid Ben Franklin Tree** ***x gordlinia grandiflora***

The story of the Ben Franklin Tree is a true legend. It was discovered by famed plant hunter John Bartram and his son along the Altamaha River near Fort Barrington in Georgia in 1765. Bartram recorded “several very curious shrubs” in his journal entry for October 1, 1765. He brought seed back to Philadelphia in 1777 and had flowering plants by 1781.

He named the plant *Franklinia* for his friend, Ben Franklin. The original plant came from a single site of two to three acres. According to some reports, that location still had plants in 1803, but no *Franklinia* have been seen growing in the wild since that time. All Ben Franklin trees now growing in cultivation are descendents of those few seeds Bartram collected in 1765 and trees he grew at Bartam’s Garden in Philadelphia.

As epic as that tale is, the difficulty of growing *Franklinia* is at least as grand. It is a rare beauty—bold foliage, large beautiful flowers that appear late in summer and often bloom alongside the plant’s stunning burgundy fall color—and it’s utter lack of anything resembling a will to live has broken many hearts. Amongst gardeners, the tales of lost *Franklinia* are worn like purple hearts.

Strangely, *Franklinia* is closely related to Eastern North America’s *Gordonia lasianthus* and Asia’s *Schima wallchii*, and cross genera hybrids have been made with each. We have for our auction, a cross between *Franklinia alatamaha* and *Gordonia lasianthus*, a plant called *x gordlinia grandiflora*. Featuring all of the beauty of both of its parents, its vigor and Z6 hardiness remain uncertain.



### Emmynopteris henryi

Barely known to cultivation and exceptionally beautiful, this is a small tree that has caught the attention of upper echelon plant people in recent years, its name bantered about with familiarity that no one has actually possessed. The first plant to flower in the West was only in 1971 at Villa Taranto in Italy. The flower especially is beautiful and intensely fragrant. Held on panicles, buds, white trumpet flowers, and white bracts all appear in unison. The appearance is somewhat reminiscent of *Hydrangea paniculata*. The bracts slowly turn to pink and continue to be held, making the tree appear to be in bloom for months. Rare and near extinction in the wild, this is truly one to own and grow, and to regularly report on to all those who wish they did, but don't.