



Lagerstroemia Breeding and Selection

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Goals are to produce dwarf (less than knee-high), compact plants with colorful foliage, range of flower colors, mildew, *Cercospora*, and leaf flea beetle resistance. Study has been underway since 1997 with second generation seedlings from some of the first selections currently under evaluation. The late Dr. Donald Egolf, US National Arboretum, hybridized for compactness for ~20 years before ›Pocomoke‹ and ›Chickasaw‹ were introduced. ›Pocomoke‹ is the better of the two. I have collected seed of all the US National Arboretum dwarf forms and worked towards the goals stated above. The variation has been gratifying with so many potential introductions that it will take at least 2(3) years before any release is possible.

A most unusual chocolate-red leaf form with glistening red buds and white flowers occurred in the population of #35 seedlings. #35 was the first selection made in 1998 for compactness, dark green foliage, and rich pink flowers. This second generation selection violates my compactness rule but has been singled out by every visitor for its uniqueness. I believe it has commercial possibilities.

The procedure is to collect seeds in late fall/winter, sow immediately, shift seedlings to cells, then 3-gallon containers. Approximately 50 to 75% flower the first year. A few take as long as three years. In 2000, 600 or so seedlings were reduced to 40 or so simply because they had violated the knee-high rule. This is a great yard stick to utilize for rapid assessment.