

## Right plant, right place—forcing plants against their genetic predisposition- Vines: *Jasminum* species and *Bougainvillea* into short hedges ?

Doug Caldwell



*Left-A downy jasmine scrambles up a cabbage palm. Right-A wax jasmine hedge throws wild hairs and tends to get leggy as a hedge.*

If  
you  
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lived in southwest Florida for a year or so and have been obligated to look after your landscape with your very own sweat, blisters and time, you've probably arrived at the same conclusion I have. Plants grow year-round here and grow vigorously, so the less genetic "inclination" they have to grow and hence, need less pruning, the more likely I am to use that plant.

This was especially driven home when I moved to a residence with the typical, jasmine hedges used to frame the corner plantings around the house. When one looks around town, there is an abundance of jasmine hedges, they always look like a tight nice square hedge (as if it had been squeezed out of one of those large cake icing decorator cones), about 3 to 4 feet tall which sporadically bears small white flowers. There are several species of jasmine used in this manner and they include: *Jasminum nitidum* (shining or star jasmine); *J. multiflorum* (downy jasmine) and *J. volubile* (wax jasmine). Well, my shining and downy jasmine hedges were ignored for a

few months and, low and behold, I found them twining up into the pygmy date palms and then 20 feet up (OK, maybe the neglect was 6 months...or so...) into the cabbage palms. Wow, turns out these jasmines are not shrubs, but vines! Check any reference book. The descriptions for these species often read, "A vining species often **trained** as a shrub." I don't mind "training" a "real shrub" and shaping it into a "real hedge" with handshears. Real shrubs (arborcola, firebush, cocoplum, Jamaican caper, etc. ) tend to remain full at the base, from top to bottom and don't sneak up into the tree tops where it is a struggle to remove them. Using these jasmine species for shrubs is akin to using a skinny marathon runner when you need a big defensive lineman. Anyway, if the objective is to minimize maintenance costs, and I don't want to put landscape maintenance people out of work, but these *Jasminum*, I feel (please send in your comments to the NDN web site) are really a silly choice for a short shrub.



*Left-Magnificent bougainvillea vines takes over some cabbage palms in the Caribbean Gardens parking lot. Right- A maintenance worker trims some bougainvilleas in the medians on Livingston Rd. in Collier County.*

### **Bougainvilleas are vines not shrubs ?**

Another wonder to me was why would anyone plant bougainvilleas in roadway medians and prune the heck out of them to keep them at a 3 foot height? Everyone knows they grow to a rambling 40 foot vine, right? There are some prime examples in the trees Caribbean Gardens parking lot. I'd heard of a supposed dwarf variety called 'Helen Johnson' but many in the industry would wink when they said "dwarf". So I did a little e-mailing and asked Fernando Aguado (president of Bougainvilleas.com, Inc. in Miami) what would be a good bougainvillea for the medians.

He replied, “The classic dwarf bougainvillea, ‘Helen Johnson’, is the best for ground cover. They do not grow more than 3 feet. But, on the west coast of Florida, we have found that they produce a ‘Helen Johnson’ variety that is bigger and some people believe that it is a “degeneration” of the plant. It is possible that they are actually growing another variety called ‘Temple Fire’.

For this reason they grow higher than the real Helen Johnson. This is my personal opinion, not necessarily based on any research.”

“As far as the real ‘Helen Johnson’ variety, it should be trimmed in the summer to make it more compact and it should be planted with some soil elevation to allow proper drainage and avoid chlorosis. (If you want to see for yourself very old ‘Helen Johnson’ plants that we keep in 45 gal containers, you will see that they are compact and certainly not taller than 2 feet.)”

“With regard to ‘Tropical Bouquet’ bougainvillea, they are a summer plant. They are very pretty in the summer but in the winter they are affected. They grow about 3 feet.”

The trick is to get accurately labeled plant material from the supplier.

A nice reference is a 98 page booklet, ‘Brighten up Your Life with Bougainvillea’ by Eric Simon. Although much of the booklet is about foreign “bougies” and Malaysian soils, it is worth the price (\$10, call 561-374-9216) for the pictures (especially the Nong Nooch Tropical Botanical Gardens (600 acres near Pattaya, Thailand) and the info on ways to grow this variable species as: trees, (pages 61, 63-wow ), bushes, bonsai, trellis, topiary and as road dividers! In fact, there are 8 species of bougainvillea; but most of the varieties’ heritage is from 3 species: *B. spectabilis* (hairy leaves, canes, bracts and prefers a cool dry season before it can flower well); *B. glabra* (no pubescence and flowers year-long in the tropics); and *B. peruviana*. After looking at this booklet, one cannot help but be dazzled by the by the brilliance of the bougainvilleas...the more the better...just watch out for those thorns!

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