

"Just Add Water"

Articles and Photos by Soni Forsman

'Petunias' for the water garden

Ruellia brittoniana 'Chi Chi' and Ruellia brittoniana 'Purple Showers' are tropical plants with petunia-like flowers that can be grown in the water garden. I have grown 'Chi Chi' for more than five years. Several years ago, I added 'Purple Showers.' Their trumpet-shaped flowers last only one day. However, once they begin to bloom in late spring/early summer there are flowers into September. They bloom best in full sun.

Both grow upright with dark green narrow leaves on purplish stems. 'Chi Chi' attains a height of two-plus feet while 'Purple Showers' grows to more than three. They will tolerate a variety of growing conditions – moist to dry. I have only grown them in water. In the water garden, I place the growing pots so the tops are level with or just above the water's surface. I've read they are deer-resistant.

I first met 'Chi Chi' at a garden center in Rockford, Ill, always a must-stop on our way home from Kentucky. It has unusual plants, garden art, food and houses for the birds, hardgoods, equipment for hydroponic gardening and, of course, aquatic plants and related supplies.

The pink Ruellias were sitting amongst the aquatic marginal plants. The pink petunia-like flowers pictured on the identification tags caught my attention. I had never seen this plant available as a water plant or a terrestrial one. I was curious. Information on its tag read water depth recommended as one-half meaning very shallow or for a bog garden. Worth a try!

A few years ago, 'Purple Showers' appeared on the list of plants available from the wholesale grower of the plants for the Eagan Garden Club's annual sale. Purple has proved to be just as good as pink.

Right now, they are inside resting in a pan of water under a four-foot shop light. I cut the foliage back before bringing in. When danger of frost is past, I will snip back the winter foliage, divide and repot. Looking forward to another summer of pink and purple 'petunias' in my water gardens.



Ruellia brittoniana 'Chi Chi'



Ruellia brittoniana 'Purple Showers'