

Clerodendrum 'Musical Note', a Cheery Filler in the Shrub Bed

Doug Caldwell, Commercial Landscape Horticulture



Clerodendrum incisum 'Macrosiphon' sometimes referred to as 'Musical Note' strikes a winning chord in the small shrub orchestra. This plant is not one of the well known species in the large *Clerodendrum* group. And unusual for a *Clerodendrum*, it makes my "short shrub" list at 3 to 5 feet tall and 4 to 5 feet wide; it needs little pruning. This is a repeat bloomer and produces flowers almost monthly, if left unsheared.

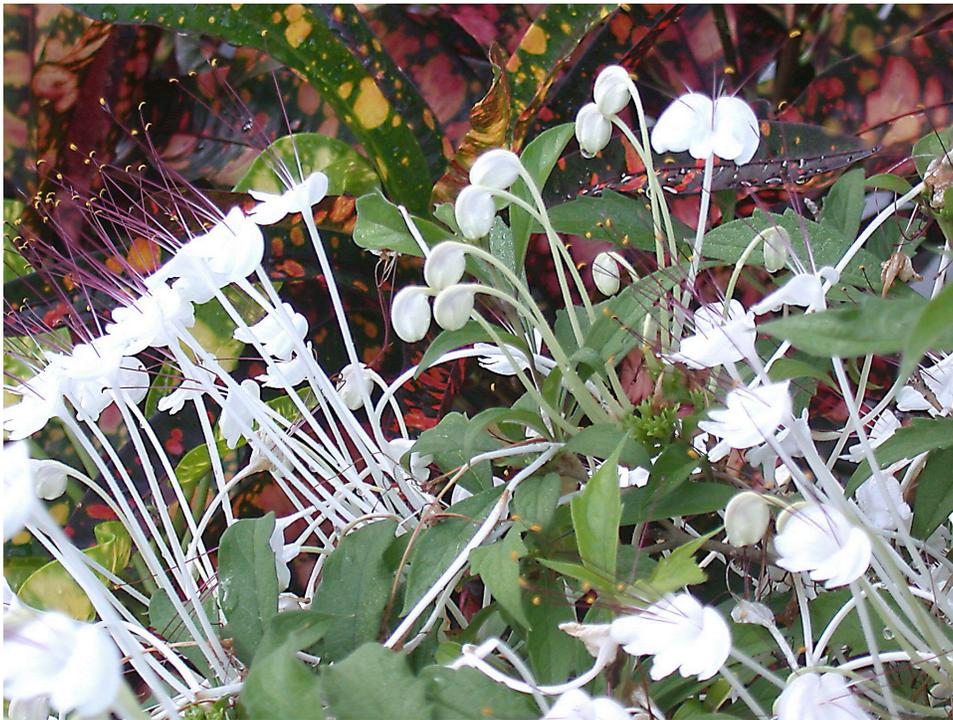
As with many of the *clerodendrum* species, the flower has outrageously long stamens that add to the delicate interest as they extend outward about 1.5 inches beyond the flower's merged petals or corolla. The four-inch long, trumpet shaped blossom expands amazingly from a little nubbin and briefly resembles a soprano-range, eighth note. As the flower stretches, the club portion or end of the "note" splits and flattens into a corolla resembling a small white butterfly. The flower clusters start in a series of about 5 to 10 buds and with several buds on a twig tip, this plant puts on a "WOW" show! Watching these flowers develop is much like watching a butterfly proboscis uncoil or one of those curly party favors (in slow motion) people blow and toot to annoy others at New Years events.

Unfortunately, the flowers, which don't have a fragrance, are short lived, maybe lasting for two days. If it rains they tend to drop and it looks like a drift of snow beneath the plant. My plants start flowering around the fourth of July and have repeating bursts on a monthly basis into November or so. The lanceolate leaves don't get a high rating as they are a dull green. They range from two to four inches long, are variable in shape some have smooth entire margins, other leaves have scattered 1/8 to 3/8 inch long, seemingly random serrations.

Maybe because the two shrubs I have are in mostly sandy soil, they lose their leaves during the winter and look absolutely ugly. This species does better in semi-shade; avoid full sun exposure. I persuaded Michelle Rowland, Landscape Superintendent at Grey Oaks, to try this plant. There is a planting to the right of their pool entry area. Their plants don't defoliate in the winter! I imagine there is some potting mix in that bed that improves the situation. I label this species semi-deciduous, defoliation is variable depending on how much stress and cold it is exposed to. Michelle gets favorable remarks about the plant. They plants are cut back moderately in March-April or so and they quickly fill in. One maintenance issue is that the flower petals don't drop completely, so cleaning the old petals off the shrub is something to expect. The maintenance folks at Grey Oaks do some light touch up pruning during the summer as the plants become a little floppy.

Michelle remarked that 'Musical Note' tolerates dry spells once it is established. If sooty mold develops, look for aphid infestations on the new growth and use a horticultural soap or contact insecticide labeled for landscape plant use.

Try adding this intriguing plant from Nigeria to your shrub bed areas, but you may not want to place it in the front row, in case it drops its leaves during the winter. This unique flowering plant is a real attention getter. Also visit, http://toptropicals.com/cgi-bin/garden_catalog/cat.cgi for lots of pictures and information on tropical flowering plants.



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