

In my earlier years of traveling about over the country sides, usually alone, I would play a game of trying to name to my satisfaction all of the roadside showy wildflowers, small trees, and large trees. Composites were, and still are, a problem. Some were easy for a traveler to identify. Long-leafed pines, pitcher plants and such, Spanish moss hanging from trees, noble live oak trees, and on excursions into Texas, there were mesquite and different *Opuntias*. Perhaps my favorite tours were in the lower South and the lower mountain ranges of Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia and the Carolinas where I was familiar, or at least thought I was, with the species and the genera of plants. Trips to the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Northwest gave many problems as almost everything was different. Much the same was Arizona, parts of New Mexico and much of Texas where the plants were very much adapted to desert conditions. It was trips to Mobile, Alabama area, Houston, Texas area, and points between that pleased me most and presented me with a feeling of wonder at the number of plant puzzles. On one of my early trips to Briarwood, when Caroline Dormon was alive, she gladly pointed out a "Titi" growing in a wet area. For me, it was love at first sight, even without flowers or fruit. Later, on a trip to Mobile, the little town of Beaumont, Mississippi has always remained as a pleasing memory. The highways in those days all converged into a wide spot in town with a confusing factor of a pulpwood yard in "downtown." The highway to Mobile was evident. It led in a southeastern direction across some poorly drained wet areas. Low and behold, there was *Cyrilla racemiflora* growing wild and rank, a weed along the roadside. It was not in fruit or flower at the time, but it was well established as a highly desirable plant to try out on my place.

There were more pleasures, fascinations, and love affairs from there to Mobile. Outstanding was the pitcher plant bog on the Mississippi-Alabama line. Last time I saw that place, it was a mess. The roads were all torn up, but mostly the pitcher plant bog, as a four-lane highway was under construction. As usual, I digress from *Cyrilla racemiflora*, which I was told is known as titi, or black titi. The last common name was to distinguish *Cyrilla racemiflora* from its cousin *Cliftonia monophylla*, also known as titi or buckwheat tree. I got only good looks at both small trees and on my return home, I did some research and studying on my trees of love. To this date, however, if I have *Cliftonia monophylla* growing on the place, I am unaware of it, but *Cyrilla racemiflora* is another story of success. I have forgotten where on the sandy backroads of Mobile that I was when I came to a small creek of flowing water. There, extending across the ditch into the edge of the road, was a leaning tree of *Cyrilla* with ripe capsules of seeds. Of course, I stopped and to say that some seeds "jumped" into my pocket would be an exaggeration, but that is the way I still tell the story. I returned home with a raceme--how the plant got its specific name--and I planted the seeds in good soil and gave them no other treatment. Much to my surprise, I think every seed came up. I grabbed the seeds in the fall and planted them, and next spring I had many seedlings that I let grow in the pot all the next summer. For me, they are just as easily grown as they are desirable to have growing. During the summer, I read everything that I could find on titi or *Cyrilla*, and frankly, there wasn't a lot for me to read. In the autumn, when rains begin to fall, I planted them along an intermittent stream that my backyard slopes to and many lived to this day. I haven't given them any care, let alone special care, since then.

*Cyrilla racemiflora* is found growing on the Coastal Plain from Norfolk, Virginia to Texas. Through Florida, it hopscotches all across the islands of the West Indies into northern South America. The leaves are narrow, evergreen, grow alternate on the twigs and are two to three inches long. Old leaves turn orange to red before they fall. Flowers are small, white, and perfect, clustered in racemes on one year old growth. They are showy, radiate from the twigs, and are eagerly worked by honey bees among

other insects. It is considered an excellent bee plant. I have learned that it is a favorite deer browsing plant! It grows through a shrub and in time, becomes a large shrub or small tree, in moist and poorly drained soils. I am even getting good seed reproduction here on my place in Union County, Arkansas. I have seen wild plants growing as far north as Winn Parish in North Central Louisiana. The books all say that they grow well if watered in upland conditions. It grows well in light shade, but blooms best in lots of sun. I have never seen any cold damage to my plants and it gets very cold some winters. I have not seen any significant damages from insects or diseases, either. I definitely think they are good plants to grow and enjoy. I don't think birds seek out the seeds for food, but I suspect that warblers and vireos seek out insects feeding on the pollen and nectar of the flowers, much as they do on the male racemes of oak flowers. Frankly, for me, I think it is a first rate shrub or tree with outstanding features in all seasons of the year.

And Cliftonia? Just another reason I want to live to be more than a hundred years old. Carl Amason is a superior plantsman who gardens near Calion, Arkansas