

Garden Highlights – December



Garrya elliptica

Coast Silk Tassel

Garryaceae Family

Native to Pacific Northwest

The common name, Coast Silk Tassel, aptly describes the most outstanding feature of this native broadleaved evergreen. In December, the catkins elongate and gleam a silvery-white in the landscape. Some of the ornamental cultivars, such as ‘Eva’ and ‘James Roof’ are bred for their extra long tassels that can be 5” to 7” long.

Garrya elliptica can function as a large garden shrub, 12 ft high by 12 ft wide, and can be pruned to a small tree form as well. It can eventually reach 30 ft in height, so be aware of where you site it in the landscape. It thrives in well-drained soil, in sun to part shade.

On campus, the mature specimen at the Broadway portal, west of the Garrard building, is a good example of this shrub’s dense habitat, attractive, leathery evergreen leaves with slightly wavy margins and the beautiful long tassels.

Garrya elliptica provides a good sheltering environment for birds in the cold and windy winter months. In fact, the shrub at the Broadway portal was the site of a Northern Saw-whet owl sighting in 2007, a very rare sighting this deep into the city. He was being harassed by a flock of Anna’s Hummingbirds who evidently did not like his presence in their territory.

The fruits that develop from the female catkins (though not a favorite) will be eaten by robins in the late winter/ early spring.

