

Pacific Plant Promotions Premiere Offering: *Deppea splendens*

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Announced in the last issue of this journal, the Pacific Plant Promotions is a program for distributing unusual, rare, or challenging plants—unattainable through normal retail channels—to plant enthusiasts through *Pacific Horticulture*. This first offering is of a choice plant now thought to be extinct in its native range in southern Mexico.

When Pacific Plant Promotions (PPP) was in the planning stages, we agreed that a blockbuster plant was needed to launch this project. *Deppea splendens*, whose story is as intriguing as the plant itself, leapt to our minds. A more fitting choice could hardly be imagined, as this species embodies both the driving force behind PPP and the importance of botanical gardens and their collections.

Shortly after I started working at the Huntington Botanical Gardens in 1982, I attended my first quarterly meeting of the Conference of Botanic Gardens and Arboreta of Southern California. These meetings are a good opportunity to see what's new at other gardens, discuss topics of common interest, and keep in touch with each other. They are also a good venue for gardens to distribute excess plants from their collections. At the Fall 1982 meeting, the Huntington brought several plants cryptically known only as "unidentified Rubiaceae, HBG #46808," grown from seed collected by Dennis Breedlove and Bruce Bartholomew at Cerro Mozotal in Chiapas, Mexico. Unidentified or unknown species often have a singular appeal to my colleagues, and these were eagerly snatched up. Some even



Deppea splendens. Photograph by Don Mahoney

sported the dangling flower clusters, adding to the allure. We had enough plants to continue distributing them at subsequent meetings and to offer a few at our annual plant sale, though we still had no name for it. Over the years this plant came to occupy a near-mystical status and I was often (and am still) asked about its identity. This taxon was not scientifically described until 1987 by Dennis Breedlove and David Lorence; two more years went by before I became aware that the mystery plant finally had a name: *Deppea splendens*.

Deppea is a Neotropical genus of twenty-five species of shrubs or small trees, most of which are found in the mountains of southern Mexico and Guatemala. *Deppea splendens* was first collected as pressed specimens by Dennis Breedlove in 1972 in Chiapas, Mexico, as part of his ongoing work for the *Flora of Chiapas*. More specimens were collected in subsequent years, but only once was living material brought back, from a collection made by Breedlove and Bruce Bartholomew in November 1981. Seeds of Breedlove and Bartholomew #55758 were given to the University of California Botanical Garden and the Huntington Botanical Gardens in January 1982. Seedlings grew and flowered

