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Contributed by Lin Moeller

THE FRAGRANT GARDENIA

The heady, jasmine-like fragrance of a gardenia evergreen shrub in full bloom permeates the air around it. I first caught a whiff of this intoxicating scent many years ago in the garden of my husband's grandmother in Orange, California. Generally, a tropical plant, our zone 7 is the northern most habitat for a couple selections of *Gardenia jasminoides*. In my garden (planted by the previous owner) is the single blossom *Grif's Select* (pictured) which grows to 4 feet tall and wide, blooms in late spring to early summer and is hardy to 5F.



Gardenia jasminoides 'Grif's Select'



Gardenia jasminoides 'Frost Proof'

A double blossom variety that also grows well in this zone is *Frost Proof* (pictured) which reaches a height of 4-5 feet. Both do well with afternoon shade. Gardenias are part of the Rubiaceae (coffee) family and native to China. Carl Linnaeus a Swedish scientist who developed the binomial nomenclature system of naming organisms, named the gardenia after Dr. Alexander Garden (1730-1791), a Scottish born American naturalist. The second part of its name refers to its scent being closely related to jasmine. The Plant List recognizes over 140 species of gardenias of which *G. jasminoides* is just one.

The gardenia has long been grown for the strong, sweet scent of the flowers. It is used in candles, perfumes, lotions, soaps and aromatherapy. Its essential oils have been a staple in Chinese herbal medicine for over a thousand years.

It has been known to reduce depression and alleviate anxiety when used in aromatherapy, as well as treat irritability, stress and insomnia. The essential oils are used as an anti-inflammatory to treat arthritis and contain antibacterial, antioxidant and antiviral compounds used for respiratory and sinus infections.

Like many of our garden plants, just one whiff of its scent brings a smile, a calmness and joy – like being among friends.

