

## **The late J.C. Raulston trial on Calycanthus in the early '90's.**

### **A report from the Arboretum newsletter gives a beautiful sense of how things developed:**

*“NCSU Arboretum (now the JC Raulston Arboretum) can now proudly announce a new such hybrid created for the first time with a cross of the southeastern U.S. native Sweetshrub, Calycanthus floridus and the newly introduced genus from China called Sinocalycanthus chinensis. The cross was made a few years ago by our undergraduate student, Richard Hartlage, while he was working at the arboretum. Many of you know him from his dramatic floral arrangements made for our arboretum events, his design workshops, and fine lectures – Richard is now Director of the Elisabeth Miller Botanical Garden in Seattle, WA. One day we were looking at the two plant species flowering in the west arboretum and I said that although the flowers were so very dramatically different (broad white petals vs. narrow maroon petals), the fruit are so virtually identical as to be almost impossible to separate visually – and that it seemed possible they might conceivably be crossed. So Richard took it on as a curiosity project – and made reciprocal crosses using the two parents. From his trials, only one seed pod eventually developed – on the Sinocalycanthus parent, and this yielded 6 seeds which all germinated readily after stratification. The young plants were grown on, with 2 eventually dying (from cultural stress). Of the remaining 4 plants – 3 looked identical to the Sinocalycanthus parent – but the other one seemed more intermediate in foliage characteristics between the two parents, and also intermediate in growth habit and environmental tolerance. (Calycanthus is full sun tolerant; Sinocalycanthus is much happier in light shade). This spring the plant finally flowered – with daily eager watching the buds develop and unfold during the week of April 23 – and finally on April 30 the first flower was fully open – and it was indeed an intermediate hybrid – with flowers of maroon petals about half way in shape between the two parents and flowering midseason between them. Most observers have felt the flowers are quite spectacular, and it has created considerable excitement as word has spread in very limited plantsmen circles (the IDS tour group went beserk, crowding and pushing to get photographs like rock star paparazzi!). We will be working to formally publish a full description and further information in a “real, legitimate” horticultural publication – but felt it would be good to share the news here as soon as possible with our membership who make all the arboretum does possible with their support. We look forward to the day when we can then share plants of this exciting new plant as well throughout the plant world. The name? Well that is yet to be determined – generally bigenerics are named from the first half of one genera name with the second half of the other and preceded by an X – perhaps X Calysinocalycanthus or X Sinocalycalyanthus (or since some botanists consider them both species of the same genus – Calycanthus, we may lose the “bigeneric honor” and “just” have a Calycanthus hybrid) – either one being a tongue twister”*