

LESSER KNOWN PLANTS WORTH PROPAGATING

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The phrase, "lesser known plant" is an arbitrary one. A plant which is well known to one person may be rare to another. Plant material may succeed well in one part of the British Isles but may not be cultivated in another, even though soil and climatic conditions may be comparable. While preparing an inventory of trees and shrubs cultivated in Ireland and more recently at Glenveagh National Park, County Donegal, I have had an opportunity to examine several thousand trees and shrubs. Some are of botanical interest only but others deserve to be more widely cultivated. The taxa listed are in outdoor cultivation in this country and represent the floras of the temperate regions of the world. The plants selected have an ornamental value, such as flower, foliage, growth habit, peeling stems, or young foliage. They will succeed in any good garden soil and have little pruning requirements. Most are suitable for a suburban garden while the remainder could be planted in public parks or large landscape schemes. Some of the plants have been propagated but on a limited scale. Many are long lived.

LESSER KNOWN TREES

Lime trees, particularly *Tilia* × *europaea* are a common sight in our landscape. Less so are the Chinese species introduced in the earlier part of this century. *Tilia chingiana*, with a neat conical habit, glabrous ovate leaves, and sweetly scented flowers borne in mid-summer, has grown to 12m in 40 years. *T. henryana*, another Chinese species, is similar in size and habit to *T. chingiana*. It has distinctive bristle-tipped leaves and flowers in September.

Both species are in cultivation at Birr Castle, County Offaly, where they are cultivated from seed supplied to Lord Rosse by the Lushan Botanic garden, Jiangxi, China. Unlike the European species they do not succumb to aphid attack.

Carrierea calycina, another Chinese plant is also cultivated at Birr Castle. This deciduous tree has large cordate leaves and a candelabra-like inflorescence of white flowers. Ernest Wilson, who introduced the species, considered that it had singular beauty of flower. Several attempts to propagate this tree by cuttings have been unsuccessful.

There are many cherries and crabapples worth cultivating besides the frequently planted *Prunus serrulata* 'Kwanzan' and *Malus* 'Golden Hornet'. The Siberian Crab, *Malus baccata*, forms a medium-sized round-headed tree with oval leaves and ivory white flowers. The flowers borne in April and May are succeeded by very

small fruit. Large pink flowers borne on bare stems in March and rich autumn colour are the outstanding features of *Prunus sargentii*.

Prunus yedoensis, Yoshino cherry is one of the most floriferous of the Japanese cherries. In March and April the stems are clothed in clusters of pale pink blossoms. At other times of the year the specimen at Kildangan, County Kildare, is notable for its graceful, arching habit.

CONIFERS WORTH PROPAGATING

Spruce, fir and pine are usually confined to specialised collections and forestry plantations. However, many deserve the attention of the nursery trade. *Abies koreana* is a small tree with a conical habit and thickly set leaves, which are dark green above and white beneath. When only one metre high it produces blue cones. There are many fine examples in the country of which the specimen at Kilbogget County, Dublin, must be the finest.

Abies delavayi is taller with an open branching habit, glaucous green leaves which form a distinctive V shape on the stem and large cylindrical blue cones. At Rossdohan, County Kerry, trees grown from seed supplied by the Earl of Rosse coned within five years of planting.

Picea likiangensis will attain a height of 30 m. It has an attractive habit with young shoots upswept at the tips, small leaves and bright red male flowers. The developing cones are also red and expand to 5 cm in length. There are several specimens of known wild origin at Birr Castle, County Offaly.

Pinus parviflora, Japanese white pine, is slow growing with a bushy habit. It is a 5-needled pine with leaves 3 to 5 cm long. The egg-shaped cones are borne in profusion even on young plants, and they remain on the plant for several years.

Taxus baccata 'Dovastonii Aurea' is one of the many cultivars of the common yew. It was raised in France in the mid-19th century. The shrubby habit and golden foliage give it year round appeal. There is a fine specimen at Mount Usher which was planted in 1888. *Taxus baccata* 'Dovastonia', West Felton yew, grows at Powerscourt, County Wicklow.

UNCOMMON SHRUBS OF NOTE

The Chilean fire bush, *Embothrium coccineum*, is frequently planted, but less so are *Grevillea* and *Gevuina*, also members of the *Proteaceae*. *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* is a medium-sized shrub with rosemary-like foliage and habit. The red flowers are held in terminal racemes and whatever the season a few blossoms can be seen.

Gevuina avellana, Chilean hazel, is a very fine foliage plant

with pinnate and double pinnate glossy green evergreen leaves. The specimens in Ireland form large shrubs to 15 m. White racemes of flowers are borne from August until early winter. They are succeeded by a hard, red fruit similar to an oak apple. There are notable specimens at Dargle Cottage, County Wicklow and at Mount Usher. The latter was planted in 1919 with material supplied by Slieve Donard Nursery, County Down.

Trochodendron aralioides is an attractive shrub with a tiered habit similar to that of *Cornus controversa*. The apple green leaves are held in whorls which are likened to the tree ivy. The inflorescence borne in April and May is green with stamens arranged at the tip of a hemispherical calyx tube. An additional ornamental feature is the bronze-coloured young shoots. The specimens at Glenveagh National Park were planted in 1971 and have attained a height of 3 to 4 m. Seed sown in spring germinated successfully.

Illicium anisatum is a slow growing evergreen bush with cream-coloured flowers borne in early summer. The emerging leaves are bronze and expand to a dark glossy green. They are fragrant to the touch. It is a long-lived shrub. The two specimens at Mount Usher were planted in 1906.

Hydrangea aspera subsp. *sargentiana* forms a large, sometimes gaunt shrub with peeling stems and large hairy leaves. Flat corymbs up to 15 cm in diameter are borne in August and September and vary in colour from white through pink to purple. *H. aspera* though smaller in every respect is also worth propagating.

Another shrub with strong architectural qualities is *Senecio hectori*, a relative of the ubiquitous ragwort and groundsel. Out of flower the shrub resembles a luxuriant hydrangea. In July and August the large round inflorescence of daisy-like flowers reveal its identity as a senecio. The shrub is defoliated in winter and requires protection from severe wind. This species was introduced from New Zealand by Major A. Dorrien Smith of Tresco Abbey Isles of Scilly, from whom E. H. Walpole of Mount Usher received a plant in 1908. There is also a fine specimen at Ballywalter Park, County Down. Hardwood cuttings taken in the autumn have rooted successfully.

Aesculus parviflora is a shrubby chestnut which suckers at the base to form a ticket of slender stems. White flowers appear in August. It is cultivated in many gardens and deserves to be more widely planted in amenity planting schemes.

Vallea stipularis is a tender South American shrub, suitable for mild localities. The pear-shaped leaves are a good foil for the small pink campanulate flowers. This plant has an unusual globose gnarled fruit. Propagation by cuttings has been successful.

The genus, *Rhododendron*, is widely propagated, but this propagation is limited to azaleas and hardy hybrids and rarely includes species. Many species have attractive flowers, young

growth, and peeling stems. A selection includes: *R. lepidostylum*, *R. camplyogynum*, *R. megacalyx*, *R. thomsonii*, and *R. bureavii*. Some of the large leaved species make good foliage plants.

A lesser known member of the Ericaceae is *Zenobia pulverulenta*. It has a thin habit and will attain a height of 1.5 to 2m. The glaucous green young growth and the lily of the valley-like flowers develop in July.

CLIMBERS WORTH CULTIVATING

The large flowered clematis such as *Clematis* 'Nelly Moser' and *C.* 'The President' are widely available but less so are the evergreen species *C. armandii*, *C.*, *meyeniana*, and *C. balearica*. The latter species has dainty fern-like foliage, bronze when young, fading to dark green. Creamy coloured flowers are borne in winter. At Glenveagh National Park the plant grows in association with *pyracantha*. In 1914 Sir John Ross of Bladensburg, whose garden at Rostrevor, County Down had so many unusual plants, sent a specimen of this clematis to Mount Usher. This species was successfully propagated by cuttings inserted in a warm bench in spring.

Actinidia kolomikta is an attractive climber native to Manchuria and Western China. The leaves are purple when young and change to pink and white as the season progresses. There are fine examples at Mulroy, County Donegal, and Annesgrove, County Cork.

Dendromecon rigida is native to California. With thick, glaucous leaves and yellow poppy flowers, the shrub requires the protection of a sheltered wall. There is a specimen in cultivation against the wall of Malahide Castle.

The species and cultivars referred to here are in cultivation in gardens with botanical collections. With the cooperation of the garden owners I hope that the nursery trade will be able to make them available to local authorities, landscape contractors, and keen gardeners.

REFERENCES

1. Forrest, M. 1985. *Trees and Shrubs Cultivated in Ireland*. Boethius Press, Kilkenny
2. Forrest, M. 1986. "The Development of Database for the Conservation of Exotic Plants in Ireland" The planting dates, nursery, and wild known source data was extracted from a computer database compiled by the author for an unpublished thesis.