



Wild and endangered plants in cultivation

SUMMARY The introduction of plants from around the world has enriched gardens and inspired gardeners for centuries. However, gardeners should always be aware of threats imposed by the indiscriminate collection of plants from their natural habitats. There are regulations and guidelines about such collection which must be complied with. The Royal Horticultural Society encourages gardeners and nurseries to make themselves aware of acceptable means of acquisition and to choose their plants wisely.



Photo: Harry Smith Collection

RHS policy statements

- 1 The Royal Horticultural Society welcomes the responsible introduction of plants new to horticulture, with due reference to relevant conservation and plant health regulations in both the country of origin and the importing country. Ideally only small quantities of seed should be collected from large and healthy populations.
- 2 The RHS is concerned that international trade in plants should not damage wild populations. We strongly encourage the propagation of wild-collected and endangered plants in cultivation. It is important that plants or seeds raised in cultivation are made available to deter both illegal and excessive legal collections from the wild.
- 3 The RHS supports both national and international conservation legislation designed to protect wild plants and their habitats. The sale or exhibition of plants obtained by contravening CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna) or other conservation regulations is never acceptable.
- 4 The RHS does not permit the exhibition or sale of illegally-dug wild plants, moss, bulbs or corms at its Shows or in its Plant Centres.
- 5 The RHS encourages gardeners to purchase plants and seeds of declared cultivated origin. Those who trade in plants are strongly encouraged to offer for sale only plants that have been propagated in cultivation and to make their policy clear to the public.
- 6 The RHS will continue to monitor developments in conservation legislation, and give advice in support of the interests of horticulture to the Government and other organisations.

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Wild plants and gardens

Due to a favourable climate and a long history of interest in gardening, British gardens contain perhaps a wider range of plant species from around the world than those of any other country of comparable size.

Gardeners have always relied on introductions from the wild to increase the range of plants available to them and there are many plant species with ornamental potential yet to be brought into cultivation. Assuming that such species are collected under strictly controlled conditions, preferably as seed, further enrichment of our gardens is possible without damaging wild populations. However, introductions should be left to individuals and expeditions with specific permits to collect seeds or cuttings. Licences to collect and import plants from wild sources can only be obtained through appropriate government agencies.

Propagation

In the past, many plants new to cultivation remained confined to a few large gardens. This was often due to difficulties in propagation, although a desire for exclusivity undoubtedly stopped some people from distributing new plants. Modern advances in propagation methods permit most plants to be multiplied quickly, allowing wide distribution and so eliminating most needs for

further collections from the wild. This applies equally to newly introduced plants and those traditionally supplied repeatedly from wild sources, notably bulbous plants such as snowdrops, cyclamen and miniature daffodils, also cacti, succulents, orchids and air-plants. These plants should always be purchased from reputable suppliers of cultivated stock.

Conservation

Conservationists are rightly concerned about the wholesale collection of plants from the wild, both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, to satisfy the demands of commercial horticulture. Propagation in cultivation is the obvious long-term answer to this problem. Initiatives are now underway in several parts of the world to encourage local people, who traditionally have been involved in collection, to start propagation programmes. This is an effective way of conserving wild stocks while still providing them with an income. Bulbs in Turkey and cacti in Mexico are successfully being propagated in this way. Seed-raised bluebells can now be obtained from British nurseries and these are preferable to bulbs stripped from woodland. RHS Plant Centres seek assurances from suppliers about the sources of plants and stock plants that have been propagated in cultivation. The only plants sold that have been wild-collected are large tree ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) harvested under licences issued by the Australian government. Exhibitors at RHS Shows are not allowed to exhibit or sell illegally collected wild plants and moss.

Allied to the collection of plants for garden decoration is the removal of sphagnum and other mosses from the wild for horticultural uses, such as lining hanging baskets. An important consideration for gardeners in the purchase of wild-collected moss is that the supply originates from a sustainably harvested and approved source. There are easily-used alternative products, especially for basket lining, which make the indiscriminate collection of moss unnecessary. On a limited scale in gardens, raking moss from infested lawns will yield useful quantities.

Endangered plants

Legislation

Most countries have local legislation designed to protect their native flora; in Britain the Wildlife and Countryside Act applies, making it illegal to uproot any wild plant without the landowner's permission and giving even greater protection to some very rare species or plants on sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs). Additionally, international trade in certain endangered and vulnerable plants is controlled by a multi-national agreement. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is fully described in a separate Conservation and Environment Guideline leaflet, 'CITES'. Cross-border trade in certain species is strictly confined to plants of cultivated origin, while for others, including all orchids, cacti, cycads, succulent euphorbias, snowdrops and cyclamen, trade is limited under licence, with plants from cultivated sources heavily favoured for licensing purposes. Another relevant Guideline leaflet, 'Bringing in plants from abroad' covers CITES, plant health

Photo: John Vanderplank



Passiflora cuneata 'Miguel Molinari'



regulations, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other regulations affecting the importation of plants. Exhibitors at RHS Shows must comply with CITES regulations where these apply.

Education

Although there is legislation in place to protect endangered plants, its effectiveness is hampered by difficulties in the identification of plants or parts of plants by police and customs officers, and by the lack of understanding of the problem by the general gardening public. Gardeners need to be aware of the issues and be prepared to demand confirmation of an endangered plant's cultivated origin before purchase. Rarely is there justification for the continued introduction of further specimens of plants from the wild that are already established in cultivation, especially in the case of endangered species.

Other leaflets in the RHS Guidelines series can be read and downloaded from www.rhs.org.uk/publications. They can be obtained by post by sending an A4 SAE to A W Mailing Services Ltd, PO Box 38, Ashford, Kent TN25 6PR (98p postage for the full set).

Useful addresses

Botanical Society of the British Isles

c/o Department of Botany,
The Natural History Museum,
Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD.
[www.bsbi.org.uk]

Countryside Council for Wales

Maes-y-Ffynnon, Penrhosgarnedd,
Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2DW.
[www.ccw.gov.uk]

DEFRA

Temple Quay House, Eagle Wing, 2
The Square, Bristol BS1 6EB (for CITES
information)
[www.ukcites.gov.uk]

English Nature

Northminster House, Peterborough
PE1 1AU.
[www.english-nature.org.uk]

Fauna and Flora International

Great Eastern House, Tenison Road,
Cambridge CB1 2TT.
[www.fauna-flora.org]

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Monkstone House, Peterborough
PE1 1JY.
[www.jncc.gov.uk]

National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens

The Stable Yard, The Royal
Horticultural Society's Garden,
Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QP.
[www.nccpg.com]

Plantlife

14 Rolleston Street, Salisbury,
Wiltshire SP1 1DX.
[www.plantlife.org.uk]

Scottish National Heritage

12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 2AS.
[www.snh.org.uk]

The Wildlife Trusts

The Kiln, Waterside, Mather Road,
Newark NG24 1WT.
[www.wildlifetrusts.org]

World Wide Fund for Nature

Panda House, Weyside Park,
Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR.
[www.wwf.org.uk]



January 2005

Source: The Science Departments, The Royal Horticultural Society's Garden, Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB

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