

SAXIFLORA

PLATE 6

Daphne Genkwa
(*Thymelaeaceae*)

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There are forty species of *Daphne*, all of which are exotic plants in the Western Hemisphere; yet some of these species are among our most popular woody plants for the rock garden. The precocious-flowering *D. Mezereum* and the evergreen *D. Cneorum* are well known to all who would crave something of real merit.

Of higher rank still, but chiefly, perhaps, because of their rarity are several other species worthy of note. One that is lovely in bloom is *D. Genkwa*. Its lilac-colored flowers are produced on short-stalked clusters in the spring.

Its culture does not appear to be fully understood among gardeners, a fact that might easily account for its scarcity. A healthy plant while in flower is something that any rock gardener may well feel proud of possessing.

It is a native of China and was brought to notice when Robert Fortune introduced it to England nearly one hundred years ago. He once wrote that this species is used in China as *D. Mezereum* is used in Europe, probably referring to its medicinal or purgative uses. With reference to the use of *D. Mezereum* horticulturally, I have often seen it planted near a window or the door of the home in Great Britain, where its early flowers are a real harbinger of spring.

If *Daphne* as a genus is temperamental, *D. Genkwa* is no exception. Root disturbance is anathema and not only will transplanting be a delicate operation, but a position in the garden will be demanded where there is sufficient depth of soil to maintain an even temperature and a steady supply of fresh water from which the roots may draw. In 1844, Fortune saw it blossoming in the hills of Chekiang, China. A beautiful sight, he says—the hills covered with it and followed in bloom by azaleas. This would surely denote that a humus soil, not particularly alkaline, would suit its requirements. A mulch or undergrowth might be recommended, because, although this *Daphne* loves its branches to be fully extended in the sun, a sun-baked soil in which to live does not seem to be its choice.

The easiest form of propagation would be from seed, but it is seldom that seed has been known to mature in the New York area. On Long Island, only one plant that bears seed is known to me. Mr. P. J. van Melle reports seed on a plant in the Clarence Lown Memorial Garden at Poughkeepsie, N. Y. Cuttings of half-ripened wood are very difficult, if not impossible, to root. Where a greenhouse is at the disposal of the gardener and where a plant is established in a pot, young forced growth will be found to root.

Very young growth from a plant in the open might root under a bell glass, if special care is taken to prevent the cuttings from wilting. *D. Genkwa* can be grafted on *D. Mezereum*, but in my experience plants raised by this method have been short lived in every case. The most satisfactory method of vegetative propagation is from root cuttings. Inserting pieces of root in a sandy medium in spring about the time growth starts proves a good reproductive method. This plant, flowering on Long Island during the early days of April, will force very readily. I have seen it used in a charming way in a garden at the New York flower show in March.

There is a variety *Fortunei* listed, but it appears that no clear distinction can be made from the type. It is likely that the listing of this variety or form is merely the outcome of Lindley's description of *D. Fortuni*. We believe he wrote his description unaware that the plant had already been described as *D. Genkwa* Siebold and Zuccarini.

Some recent botanical research has placed *D. Genkwa* in the genus *Wikstroemia*, presumably on account of the axillary flowers, the opposite leaves and the white fruit that is, we are told, still surrounded by the calyx tube when dried.

Daphne Genkwa is a deciduous, free-branching shrub of rather slender appearance, reaching to a height of four feet, although specimens so high are rare on the Atlantic seaboard. It differs from other daphnes in that most of its leaves are opposite. A few are found to be alternate. They are ovate-elliptic, one and three-quarters to two inches long and three-quarters of an inch broad. The under side has slight pubescence on the veins and is a much paler green than the top. The flowers are in clusters of from three to seven on a short silky stalk, appearing first at the leaf-axils of the leafless growth of the previous year. Individual florets are shaped like a funnel, being a calyx or tube with four spreading lobes. The spread of the lobes is one-half inch while the length of the tube is three-eighths of an inch. In the mouth of the lilac-colored tube, the orange anthers are a pleasing color contrast. The fruit is a one-seeded oblong drupe and is pearly white.

JAMES G. ESSON