



Acer 'White Tigress' one of many exceptional plants that Roy Lancaster has acquired over the past 40 years; it is a Champion growing along with several others in his garden in southern England. Ten of his favourite plants are described in this Yearbook. See pages 44 to 52.

Ten trees in my garden

ROY LANCASTER writes about some of the most attractive and interesting woody plants in his garden.

It is a cold but sunny morning in January as I write about ten of my favourite trees in the suburban garden my wife Sue and I have planted and enjoyed since we moved here in October 1982. Our third of an acre plot wraps itself around the house and comprises two main areas of planting, the smaller area at the front where the soil is a well-drained acidic sand over gravel while the larger, longer area sloping to the south at the rear, is on a heavy London clay.

Acer 'White Tigress'

Looking through the window of our study/office into the front garden the view is dominated by a splendid maple, *Acer* 'White Tigress' displaying a solid stem up to 1.7 m which has developed an upright cluster of subsidiary stems whose extremities spread outwards to form a loosely dome-shaped to rounded crown. Both stem and branches, save for the red young shoots which retain their colour through winter, display a smooth green bark marked by long narrow, silvery-white striations whose effect is best viewed now, in winter when they are bereft of foliage and the entire anatomy of the tree except for its roots can be studied and fully appreciated.

44

In spring the leaves begin to develop and as they mature they are seen to be shallowly three-lobed and mat green with red petioles, the whole canopy producing a light shade beneath which dwarf oaks flourish. Come autumn, from late September or October they begin to change to a succession of yellow, orange and finally a hint of scarlet. This varies from year to year depending on the weather conditions. Last year, the long dry summer accelerated leaf fall. Planted here on the 16 May 1994 this tree, when measured by David Alderman, Director of TROBI (Tree Register of Britain and Ireland) on 21 June 2021 proved to be 13 m in height with a girth of 127 cm at 1.2 m making it the TROBI Champion. Given that this tree, to the best of my knowledge, was the first to be planted in the UK this should not have surprised me.

The story of its origin and its arrival in the UK may be of interest to its many admirers. I first encountered 'White Tigress' in February 1993 when staying with long-time friend Tim Brotzman, a nurseryman in Madison, Lake County, Ohio, USA. According to Tim, his father Charlie first received a plant of this maple in 1962 under the name *A. tegmentosum*. It was given him by another (retiring nurseryman) and old friend Alan Cook who admitted that he didn't know whether it was of wild or garden origin. This plant was grown on until the early 1970s when, recognising its merit and garden potential they began propagating it from rooted cuttings under the name 'White Tigress', a name given it by Tim. On my admiring the Brotzmans' tree Tim suggested I take a bunch of hardwood cuttings with me on my return home with instructions to



Magnolia cylindrica grown from seed sent to Roy from Shanghai Botanic Garden in 1982.

45

get them to a British nurseryman who had his own instructions to supply me with one of the resultant plants for my own garden.

As to the true origin of this tree there is in some quarters uncertainty. Tim had wondered if it might be of hybrid origin, *A. tegmentosum* pollinated possibly in cultivation by a Japanese snake-bark species such as *A. capillipes*. Having seen *A. tegmentosum* in the wild in the rich broad-leaved deciduous and coniferous forests along the Chinese-North Korean border I recall the young shoots being more green and bloomy not unlike the cultivar named 'Valley Phantom'. Whatever its true origin there is no doubting its suitability for temperate gardens and parks.

Magnolia cylindrica

Planted as a seedling on 1 June 1984, this magnificent tree has for many years provided the major floral spectacle in the rear garden come April when its multitude of elegant white blooms decorate the now grey-green lichen-plastered branches. It originated from seed sent to me from the Shanghai Botanic Garden having been listed as No.253 in their *Index Seminum* of 1982. According to this source the seed had been collected by one of their teams at 900 m in Chang Hua prefecture in West Zhejiang province. It has been admired by many visitors including my friend the late Stephen Sponberg



Nothaphoebe cavaleriei, another TROBI Champion, was given to Roy by J. C. Raulston in 1996.

who in September 1995, when it was in fruit confirmed it to be the true species as against the plant long grown and distributed by the Hillier Nurseries under this name which was eventually identified as a hybrid and renamed 'Pegasus', a beautiful magnolia in its own right which boasts an Award of Garden Merit. Ten years after planting, my *M. cylindrica* had reached a height of 8 m and when last measured in June 2021 it had achieved 12.5 m × 116 cm at 1.4 m, a TROBI Champion.

Nothaphoebe cavaleriei

Another TROBI Champion planted in January 2000 is *Nothaphoebe cavaleriei* which, measured on the same day as the last tree, was recorded as 15 m × 91 cm at 1.5 m which makes it the tallest tree of my own planting in my garden. This is a handsome, fast-growing evergreen with large, pleasantly aromatic leaves, dark and glossy above and glaucous-green beneath. It belongs to the bay family Lauraceae and was given me as a small plant by the late J. C. Raulston in 1996. Initially I grew it in a pot in a cold greenhouse but left it outside during the 1999–2000 winter when, having survived strong gusty winds unharmed I planted it close to a beech hedge whose shelter allowed it to establish and thrive. Now, it towers well above the hedge and so far has survived winter temperatures down to -10 °C. Its tiny yellow-green flowers are of no particular merit and it is yet to produce fruit. Native to southwest China, I have seen it in Sichuan growing in temperate forests rich in species.

Carpinus fangiana and *Carpinus rankanensis*

One of my favourite group of trees are the hornbeams, several of which I have grown here over the years. One of these, *Carpinus pubescens* L.654 from seed I collected in the western hills above Kunming in China's Yunnan province in

1980, I later gave to the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, while three other seedlings still grow in Chris Brickell's garden in Sussex, Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens in Dorset and at Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire, where they thrive. I have also grown *C. viminea* whose young growths are bright red but eventually removed it to accommodate a *Wollemia nobilis* given to me as a present. Limited space accounts for so many difficult decisions in a gardener's life.

I am still blessed however with the magnificent *Carpinus fangiana* and *C. rankanensis*. The former is a Mikinori Ogisu collection No.91103 from Leibo in south Sichuan in 1991 introduced to the UK in 1992. My specimen measured in June 2021 has reached 6 m × 44 cm at 1 m with a broad crown, large, handsome multi-veined, drooping leaves and long, pendulous, green ageing to honey-brown fruiting catkins that present a striking effect in a good year though in occasional years, 2022 being one, it failed to flower. I first saw this species in the wild in October 1980 on the famous mountain Emei Shan in China's Sichuan province. Its name honours the late great botanist Professor Fang Wen Pei whom I was honoured to meet in Chengdu that year and again the year following. He died in 1983.

The other hornbeam I grow, *Carpinus rankanensis*, a native of Taiwan, as seen here is a more elegant tree than the last with more slender shoots, smaller buds and multi-veined leaves less than half the size which emerge a



Carpinus fangiana, collected by Mikinori Ogisu in south Sichuan in 1991 is one of two hornbeams Roy grows.



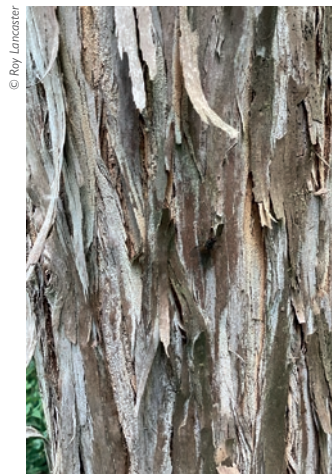
Carpinus rankanensis, a native of Taiwan, is a slender shoot elegant tree.

most attractive reddish colour before paling to green. My photo (above, left) taken from beneath the foliage on a bright sunny, late summer day emphasises their quality. The green fruiting 'catkins' in early autumn are pendulous and cylindrical, smaller and narrower than those of *C. fangiana*, a cigarillo compared to a full-blown Churchill Havana but charming nevertheless. My plant was given to me without details of origin and in 2021 was measured at 3.5 m.

Leptospermum grandifolium

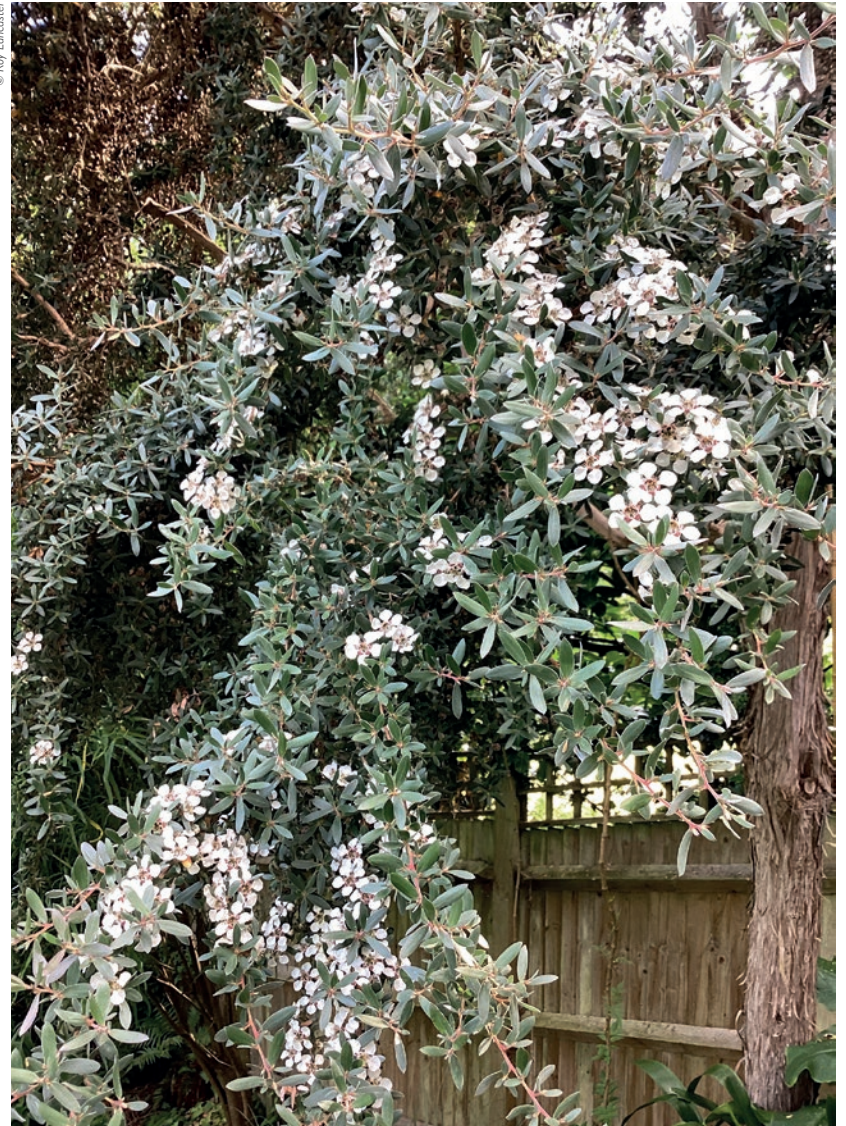
From an early stage this southeast Australian mountain tea tree developed a strong, single stem with grey-brown papery exfoliating bark before branching to form a dense canopy of slender branchlets clothed with narrow, evergreen leaves, green above densely grey hairy beneath. From June to July or later the canopy erupts into a multitude of relatively small white flowers, attracting the attention of bees and sundry other insects. It was planted on the south side of the house in its own bed at the end of the patio which offers warmth and shelter. We can enjoy a bird's-eye view of it merely by opening our bedroom window and the sound of the bees and we can enjoy the scent of the flowers without leaving our bed.

According to Elliot and Jones (*Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants*) it grows in the wild in swampy, sandy soils and along water courses.



The characteristic papery exfoliating bark of *Leptospermum grandifolium* and opposite, the tree in flower.

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It should succeed as a garden plant in both temperate and subtropical areas which, given our changing climate, bodes well for its future. Our specimen, 7 m × 50 cm at 1.5 m when measured in 2021 was planted here on 1 January 1987, a gift from the late and much missed Peter Chappell whose nursery, Spinners, at Boldre in the New Forest was a haven for plant lovers with a



Aucuba omeiensis L.614 was collected by Roy on Emei Shan in October 1980.

taste for the special and the rare. He was growing this plant (given him by a keen customer) under the name *Leptospermum grandiflorum* which is a less than hardy species from Tasmania where it is endemic to the Freycinet peninsula.

Aucuba omeiensis

This is perhaps my favourite evergreen, unusual in a genus best known for a single shrubby species *A. japonica* and its numerous green and variegated cultivars. My plant L.614, now 5 m × 31 cm at 0.9 m and still growing, I introduced as a seedling in October 1980 from Emei Shan in Sichuan, China since when it has thrived in a narrow border at the foot of our north-facing house wall. Its bold leathery-textured leaves never fail to catch the eye of visitors, especially plantspeople, and its progeny from cuttings may be found in several gardens in Britain and Ireland, especially in woodland gardens such as Caerhays in Cornwall. This collection is a male form (*Aucuba* being dioecious) producing pale green flower clusters but there are females around I believe from others' introductions.

In China, Sichuan certainly, it has long been planted in gardens especially those associated with religious sites where well established specimens can be found. Such a place is Emei Shan and its immediate vicinity where I have admired it on several occasions in the forest and temple courtyards and gardens. In April 2010 in the company of Mikinori Ogisu and other friends

we visited a temple garden by a river at Leshan where to our delight we came across a row of five well-shaped trees around 7 to 8 m tall comprising two male and three females, the latter studded with conspicuous ovoid-oblong fruits of a bright red.

Acer cappadocicum var. *sinicum*

This handsome Chinese maple dominates the south boundary of our rear garden where its wide-spreading canopy looms over two of my friendly neighbours' gardens. When measured in 2021 it clocked a height of 13 m × 127 cm at 1.5 m. Planted here in July 1984 it was raised from seed (L.967) I collected from a tree of similar size growing at 3,800 m by the Pi river in the mountains southwest of Kangding in Sichuan province. These mountains are dominated by the beautiful Gongga Shan (Minya Konka in Tibetan), whose gleaming snow-covered peak rises to a height of 7,556 m making it the third highest mountain in the world. I enjoy this tree for its slender red-stalked, sharply 5-lobed leaves which emerge a wine-red colour before settling for green. Its fruits also have red wings which is what first attracted me to the parent tree in the wild. Seedlings from my tree are frequent in our garden and no doubt those of my neighbours, some of which I pot-on for distribution.

Sorbus yuana

On a visit to the Arnold Arboretum in October 1997 I was taken on a tour by the late Stephen Spongberg. I was particularly interested in seeing some of the woody plant collections introduced by the Sino-American Expedition from China 17 years earlier among which *Heptacodium miconioides*, *Liquidambar acalycina* and *Sorbus yuana* particularly impressed me. All three were well established while the *Sorbus*, which was collected in the Shennongjia Forest Reserve in Hubei province was loaded with drooping bunches of oblong to obovate-oblong dark red fruits similar to those of *S. alnifolia* but larger. Steve, who was a member of the expedition invited me to collect some of the fruits which I promptly did and on my return I gave them to the propagator at the Westonbirt Arboretum who



Sorbus yuana. Arnold Arboretum, October 1991.

succeeded in germinating them. The following year I was thrilled to be planting one of the seedlings in my rear garden where it still thrives, and when measured in 2021 was 7 m × 45 cm at 1.5 m. I admire it for its fruits and its boldly veined leaves which turn a rich yellow in autumn. It also reminds me of the man for whom this species is named, Te Tsun Yu (1908–1984), whom I once had the privilege of meeting in Beijing where he was then Senior Professor at the Institute of Botany at Academia Sinica. He was a friendly man of slight build and gentle nature, and had proved a mine of information on the Chinese flora, especially Rosaceae, his specialist subject.

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Carrierea calycina

Known as the goat-horn tree in China referring to the two occasionally three-pronged, spindle-shaped woody seed capsules, this deciduous tree is comparatively rare in British cultivation. There was an old tree at Birr Castle in Ireland grown from seed introduced by E. H. Wilson in 1908 that flowered for the first time in 2015, but sadly died in 2022. My tree planted in 1996 and measuring 11 m × 86 cm at 1.2 m in 2021 was raised from seed introduced in 1994 by the late Peter Wharton, then Curator of the David C. Lam Asian Garden at the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden in Vancouver, Canada. It towers above a beech hedge in our rear garden and is worth growing alone for its slender, red-stalked glossy green leaves with conspicuous tapered 'drip-tips'.

The somewhat cup-shaped flowers comprising five pale green, heart-shaped tepals are carried in terminal candle-like clusters in June or July, and to my eye are more curious than ornamental though they certainly prove attractive to bees.

Peter described to me how he had collected his seed in Sichuan province on the Guizhou border, from a tree growing on a steep south-facing riverbank at 1,000 m. He believed it preferred moist situations which perhaps explains its uneven performance in my garden, especially during last year's summer drought when I feared I might lose it. I am presently awaiting its performance this coming year with some trepidation.

Carrierea calycina, Brownhill Road, June 2004.