

NATIONAL PLANT COLLECTIONS®
Asclepias & Gomphocarpus, Calycanthus,
Lobelia spp., Rubus spp.

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Introduction

As a passionate horticulturalist and botanist, I have been interested and involved in collecting and conserving plants for over 20 years. I started with a small nursery on the Isle of Wight and then joined the Hillier Gardens, where I am now the botanist and plant records officer. Away from work I manage 5 National Plant Collections (4 on display today) of my own and have been a collection holder and Plant Heritage member since 2004. My plants are grown within my garden at home and a small woodland close by.

Asclepias & Gomphocarpus

This collection consists of two genera that are closely related, in fact they were once combined. Members of the Dogbane family, *Apocynaceae*, these plants are commonly known as the Milkweeds or Butterfly Weeds. The first name refers to a milky like sap that exudes from the plant when damaged; the other refers to the plants being high in nectar and thus very attractive to butterflies. *Asclepias* are, in fact, the only larval food plant of the Monarch butterfly and several other related butterfly species.

These are superb plants for garden cultivation. Not all species are hardy in the U.K. Some are runners, forming substantial colonies and perhaps suited to the wild garden or prairie landscape and some are clump formers, making strong flowering herbaceous perennials for flower beds and borders.

Grow in: Full sun, any soil, but well drained in winter.

Propagation: from seed in spring (some will need cold stratification) or by division in spring or autumn.

Lobelia spp.

An unusual member of the Bellflower family, *Campanulaceae*. Most people know of the hanging basket plant *Lobelia erinus*, which comes in a range of colours and forms. This plant is most often treated like an annual, but is, in fact, a perennial. However, as this South African species is not cold hardy, to keep it perennial it is necessary to keep it in a heated greenhouse with extra lighting. There are many hardy species that are suitable for growing in the garden and most are generally easy to grow. Among the most rewarding of these is *Lobelia x speciosa*, a hybrid of two North American species. It comes in a range of

colours and produces tall flower spikes laden with large colourful flowers. Some forms have deep red foliage too. One of the best, long lived of these varieties is 'Hadspen Purple'. If you want a species that is large and impressive and gives an exotic feel to your flower beds, *Lobelia tupa* from Chile with flower spikes up to 2 metres tall, is the plant for you. This surprisingly hardy species is generally very easy to grow.

Grow in: Full sun, any soil, but well drained in winter.

Propagation: from seed or by division in spring. Some creeping species are easy from cuttings.

Calycanthus

This small group of shrubs is native to North America (three species) with one species coming from China. Collectively they are sometimes known as the Spice Bushes, due to the spicy, cinnamon-like aroma derived from the stems and roots. The beautiful, magnolia-like flowers are delicately scented and are said to smell like soap. These are easy shrubs to grow in acid or alkaline soils and can give months of flower from late spring all the way through the summer. *C. 'Aphrodite'* is one of the newest hybrids and produces large, maroon flowers with a white eye. I have observed this variety flowering from beginning of June to the autumn. 'Venus' is a white flowered form, introduced in 2005 in the UK. The flowers are very magnolia-like, large and with a dark red eye.

Grow in: Part shade or full sun, any soil, but well drained in winter.

Propagation: from seed in spring or by division in spring or autumn.

***Rubus* spp.**

Most people will know these plants as Blackberries and Raspberries, or a more common name is Bramble. They are members of the second largest plant family, the rose family, *Rosaceae*. My collection is of species from around the world. It is my largest national collection with over 250 species represented, from every corner of the globe. *Rubus* can be grown for fruit, but I also have found that many species can make extremely decorative plants for the garden too. Many have attractive foliage or large colourful flowers. They can be grown as a ground cover, *Rubus pentalobus* is perfect for this and makes a tight mat of foliage, small white flowers and edible golden fruits. They can be used as climbers and trained against a wall or fence, *Rubus henryi* is wonderful for this with its glossy, tri-lobed leaves, pink flowers and shiny black fruits. There are also several species that make superb autumn colour plants, *Rubus trifidus* from Japan with its large, palmate leaves that turn a deep bronzy red in autumn, is one of the best. Most species are easy to grow and need little maintenance. They are plants that can be grown in the worst of soils, where perhaps, most other plants would fail.

Grow in: Full sun, part shade (depending on species). Any soil but avoid waterlogged.

Propagation: from seed in spring, softwood to hardwood cuttings and tip layering (all species can be propagated this way).