

Recent Introductions of New Plants From the Sino-Himalaya®

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Since the reopening of China to foreign tourists in 1980, a great deal of plant exploration has taken place in the remote and often previously unexplored regions of that vast and plant-rich country. More recently, other countries and regions have opened their own borders so that previously inaccessible places such as Tibet, Vietnam, and Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland in northeastern India have become accessible to those with the funds, constitution, and the proper connections. In my duties at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden (RSBG), I have been privileged to undertake numerous expeditions to these regions in search of knowledge and to find new and interesting plants. As a result of the explorations of scientists, nurserymen, and enthusiasts, a vast array of new taxa has been collected and described — even in genera as large, ornamental (i.e., obvious), and well-known as *Rhododendron*.

The temperate flora of the Sino-Himalaya is the richest in the world. For example, more species of plants are known from a single mountain range (the Gaoligong Shan) in western Yunnan Province, China, than in all of Europe. Although this area was open to exploration for many decades in the late 1800s and early 1900s, many areas were only partially explored or were even ignored as plant hunters focused on richer hunting grounds. To this day, huge portions of this incredibly floristically rich region remain exceedingly difficult areas in which to travel. Remarkably, there are still areas that have not been properly investigated.

Even though it has become somewhat of a logistical nightmare, it remains possible to find and introduce into cultivation new plants as well as horticulturally superior forms of well-known plants (with proper documentation and permitting).