

The Development of *Hamamelis* × *intermedia*®

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This paper covers the history and development of *Hamamelis* hybrids from the first recorded examples to the present day. The role of notable people in hybridising and selection will be discussed together with the most important cultivars they raised. Possibilities for future hybridisation will be discussed.

ORIGINS OF THE HYBRIDS

Hamamelis × *intermedia* occurred as a spontaneous hybrid between *H. japonica* and *H. mollis* in the 1930s in three separate locations: the Arnold Arboretum in the U.S.A., Charlottenlund Botanic Garden in Denmark, and Kalmthout Arboretum in Belgium. Since then the hybrid has occurred elsewhere together with F2 and F3 generations of *Hamamelis* × *intermedia*.

In 1945 Alfred Rehder, gave the name *H. ×intermedia* to a group of seedlings at the Arnold Arboretum which had been raised from seed sown in 1929. Later, in 1963, one of these was given the cultivar name of *H. ×intermedia* 'Arnold Promise'. It remains an excellent cultivar with medium-sized lemon-yellow flowers and good scent. The plant is of vase-shaped habit with twiggy growth and the bonus of good autumn foliage colour.

In 1953 a plant was selected from a batch of seedlings sown at Charlottenlund Botanic Garden in 1934 and given the cultivar name *H. ×intermedia* 'Nina' after the wife of Dr. Larsen, who was responsible for sowing the seeds in the garden. It has a good clear yellow, medium- to large-sized flower on a plant of bushy habit.

Kalmthout Arboretum was founded in 1902 by Antoine Kort from the neglected nursery of Charles van Geert. In the 1920s, Kort raised some seedlings from a plant of *H. japonica* var. *flavopurpurascens*. These were planted in the arboretum and grown on. He made some initial selections in 1935 but did not name any. The nursery became overgrown during the second world war and in 1952 Robert and George de Belder purchased the property. Robert, together with his new wife Jelena, started to clear the undergrowth and found the seedlings, some of which were subsequently named.

The best of the Kalmthout cultivars are:

- *H. ×intermedia* 'Vesna', with large, scented, light orange flowers, upright growth habit and good autumn foliage colour.
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Jelena', with large coppery-orange flowers on a spreading bush and good autumn foliage colour.
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Diane', the most widely cultivated red-flowered selection, with medium-sized flowers, bushy growth habit, and good autumn foliage colour.

¹The author is holder of one of the U.K. National Collections of *Hamamelis* (National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens)

Hemelrijk, Belgium. In the 1960s the de Belder's purchased an estate at Essen near the Dutch border and here they planted around 2500 seedlings from which about 100 selections were made over the following 30 to 40 years. From these selections 22 have subsequently been named.

The best ones to date are:

- *H. ×intermedia* 'Robert', with large, scented flowers of a good coppery-orange colour on a plant of bushy habit and with good autumn foliage colour.
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Harry', very floriferous with large pale orange flowers on a compact bushy plant.
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Orange Peel', that bears large, scented, orange flowers and has good autumn foliage colour.
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Frederic', fairly upright in growth habit with large orange flowers, excellent autumn foliage colour.
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Ripe Corn', with good, slightly scented, bright yellow flowers on a plant of bushy habit.

Westerstede, Germany. After the Second World War, the nurseryman Heinrich Bruns raised many witchhazel seedlings, most of which were named by other Dutch and German nurserymen. His most notable hybrids include:

- *H. ×intermedia* 'Barmstedt Gold', of upright growth habit and floriferous with good golden yellow flowers bearing reasonable scent
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Orange Beauty', very floriferous, with strong sweet scent from its medium to large orange flowers on a spreading bush
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Old Copper', of upright growth habit with dark burnished coppery red flowers.

Breda, The Netherlands. Johan van Hieningen, a retired school teacher, sowed seeds of *H. ×intermedia* 'Pallida' and *H. ×intermedia* 'Vesna' and has selected and named several cultivars, three of which have become very popular plants:

- *H. ×intermedia* 'Angelly', good large citron yellow flowers, with excellent scent on a compact, bushy plant.
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Aurora', the largest flowered of all witch hazels with pale yellow blooms, stained red at the base of the petal, and with excellent scent — good autumn foliage colour too.
- *H. ×intermedia* 'Aphrodite', large, burnt orange flowers — different from all other orange-flowered selections — on a spreading bush.

Boskoop, The Netherlands. Wim van der Werf, who holds the National Collection of *Hamamelis* in Holland, has raised many seedlings and has some interesting selections which may well be named in the future. Of the few already named his best one is *H. ×intermedia* 'Wiero', named after his father. Medium-sized flowers, pale yellow with a green calyx, faintly scented on a plant of bushy plant.

Royal Horticulture Society, Wisley Garden, England. *H. ×intermedia* 'Pallida', a seedling raised at Wisley, has turned out to be the most popular and widely grown witch hazel to date. It is very floriferous with highly scented, medium to large sulphur yellow flowers on a spreading bush and butter yellow autumn colour to the foliage.

Hakoneya Nursery, Japan. Kochiro Wada made several selections of *H. mollis* and *H. ×intermedia* and one of his seedlings, which he did not name, has excellent flowers. The author felt this seedling was deserving of a name and called it *H. ×intermedia* ‘Glowing Embers’. Its large coppery orange flowers are freely borne on a spreading bush.

Witch Hazel Nursery, England. The author has raised many seedlings, several of which are currently being assessed while many more await initial selection. The only one named so far is *H. ×intermedia* ‘Foxy Lady’, which in the author’s opinion is undoubtedly the best red to date as it is a very clear red and does not fade to brown as the flower ages — as do virtually all existing red-flowered hybrids. It also has some orange-red autumn foliage colour and is a bushy plant.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Already there are hybrids that have *H. vernalis* blood in them and three which have *H. virginiana* parentage.

Hamamelis vernalis brings good scent and strong flower colours to the hybrids but reduces flower size significantly. These need to be crossed again with good *H. ×intermedia* cultivars and *H. mollis* cultivars to increase flower size yet retain the good qualities of scent, flower, and foliage colour.

Autumn-flowering *H. virginiana* offers the possibility of extending the flowering season of the hybrids from November through to December before the existing *H. ×intermedia* cultivars begin flowering after Christmas.

It is important to have clear goals in mind in the selection of seedlings for naming and introduction whether sowing open-pollinated seed or from controlled crosses and the following points are significant:

- Must be scented
- Must not retain dead leaves in winter
- Must be floriferous
- Must have good flower colour
- Must have good flower size
- Must have good autumn colour to foliage
- Must have desired growth habit (mainly upright for modern gardens)
- Must branch well

This is a tall order, but it means there is plenty of work to be done in breeding better hybrids. It is very important to refrain from naming a plant unless it is distinct or a real improvement on existing cultivars — of the 140 or so named cultivars at least 80% are inferior, in the opinion of this author, a self-confessed lover of all witch hazels.