

Chimonanthus praecox

[Synonyms : *Butneria praecox*, *Calycanthus praecox*, *Chimonanthus fragrans*, *Chimonanthus fragrans* var. *grandiflora*, *Chimonanthus parviflorus*, *Chimonanthus praecox* var. *concolor*, *Chimonanthus praecox* var. *grandiflorus*, *Chimonanthus praecox* var. *intermedius*, *Chimonanthus yunnanensis*, *Meratia fragrans*, *Meratia praecox*, *Meratia yunnanensis*]

WINTERSWEET is a deciduous shrub. Native to China and Japan it has sweetly scented, dull purple-centred, pale yellow flowers.

It is also known as Allspice, *Chinesische Winterblüte* (German), Japan allspice, *La-mei* (Chinese), *Obai* (Japanese), Oriental sweet-shrub, *Winterorchidee* (German), and *Zimokvět časný* (Czech),.

Plants grown from seed can take 10-12 years to bloom. They are pollinated by a kind of beetle. *Praecox* is Latin (very early, premature, ripe before the time).

In China it has long been the custom at the Country's New Year celebrations for girls to dress their hair with the fragrant, delicate blooms that appear at that time of year. Also there and in Japan bound bunches of the aromatic twigs have been used for centuries as lavender (*Lavandula*) is used in western Europe. They are placed in cupboards and drawers to scent linen and clothing. Wintersweet is an ingredient in perfumes as well.

Some authorities suggest that the plant was introduced to Britain in 1760, others that a live plant was received by Lord Coventry, the 7th Earl (1758-1831) at his Worcestershire home in 1766, while yet others record that an Englishman, James Main, brought a specimen home from a trip to China in 1794. The plant that was cultivated in the conservatory at Croome in Worcestershire is said to have reached a height of 16 feet (perhaps unusually high) and a width of 10 feet by 1799 – and wintersweet had well gained fashionability in select English circles by the late 1830s.