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Hamamelis mollis

CHINESE WITCH HAZEL is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to eastern Asia (especially western China) it has small shaggy, fragrant yellow flowers.

It is also known as Cowslip-scented hazel, Epiphany tree, *Vilín měkký* (Czech), and Witch hazel.

Mollis is Latin (soft) meaning ‘softly hairy or velvety tenderness’.

In the 1850s the famous English Veitch Nurseries in Devonshire opened a new branch known as the Royal Exotic Nursery in Chelsea (in London) and Charles Maries, one of their foremen, was sent to the Far East to collect some new and exotic plants. In 1879 he found Chinese witch hazel and sent it back to England but the Nursery did not notice its straight petals and mistook it for a close relative, *Hamamelis japonica*, which has wavy petals and had been introduced by Veitch 17 years earlier. Thus Chinese witch hazel languished in the Nursery until 1900 or 1901 when a visitor (who happened to be the then Curator of the Botanic Gardens at Kew, George Nicholson), spotted it and drew attention to its rarity in England at that time. With this prompting the Nursery proceeded to propagate the plant and it became available to the public the following year.