

Stachys sieboldii var. *sieboldii*

[Synonyms : *Stachys affinis*, *Stachys sieboldii*, *Stachys tuberifera*]

CHINESE ARTICHOKE is a perennial. Native to China it has light red and white flowers. It is also known as Chorogi, *Crosne* (French), Japanese artichoke, *Japanische Kartoffel* (German), *Knollenziest* (German), Knotroot, *Koregi* (Swedish), and *Mukulapähkämö* (Finnish).

Sieboldii commemorates a German physician and naturalist, Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866), who was one of the first Europeans to teach Western medicine in Japan, especially ophthalmic practices. After joining the Dutch army as a medical officer in 1822 he was sent to Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia). He then became resident physician and scientist in 1823 at the Dutch island trading post (originally run by the Dutch East India Company) at Nagasaki, a posting which would end in his expulsion by the Japanese in 1829 for treasonable acts after discovering accidentally that he had acquired maps of Japan and had also mapped parts of northern Japan. In the intervening years he and his Japanese partner had a daughter (the first Japanese woman known to have trained as a physician), and he established a medical school, treated Japanese patients in the area, studied Japanese flora and fauna, developed a botanical garden in which he nurtured over 1000 native plants for Dutch cultivation, accumulated a large ethnographic collection of Japanese everyday artefacts and illustrations of flora, fauna and Japanese activities, obtained specimens of rare animals, sent three shipments of herbarium specimens to Europe, and smuggled viable tea plant seeds to the Javan Buitenzorg Botanical Garden (now Bogor, Indonesia). He left Japan for Batavia with the bulk of his remaining collections (still thousands of plants, animals, artefacts and papers) and reached Europe in 1830, eventually settling in Leiden. His living plant collection ended up at the University of Ghent but the other massive collections were bought by the Dutch Government who put them on public display. William II (1792-1849) appointed him Adviser to the King on Japanese Affairs (a role which he would assume for several other governments in the following years) and, as an adviser too, he returned to Japan in 1859 only to be recalled by the Dutch Government in 1863 (cultural exchanges between Japan and Holland were not considered appropriate then). He was a member of the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences which ceased in 1962. His published works include *Nippon: Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan*, and *Flora Japonica* the latter in collaboration with a German botanist, Joseph Gerhard Zuccarini (1797-1848).

A French agronomist, Auguste Pailleux, introduced chinese artichoke to France and in 1882 its cultivation began at Crosne. Chinese artichoke's popularity was at a height between 1890 and 1920 but it has declined considerably since then not least because peeling the tubers can be time-consuming.

Some authorities say that Dr. M.T. Masters (1833-1907) brought the Chinese artichoke to Britain in 1888 but it seems that he may have been beaten to the post as Sir H. Thompsons's gardener, a Mr. Haskins, cultivated them at West Molsey (just outside London) and exhibited them at a meeting of the Royal Horticultural Society in December 1887. Its uncertain arrival in England notwithstanding chinese artichoke never gained popularity in England even initially.

