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THE SHRUBBY ROBINIAS. DURING late May and early June the robinia collection is a beautiful sight along the Meadow Road at the Arnold Arboretum. While all the species of the genus are native to North America, several of them have very restricted distributions, and a really comprehensive collection is seldom seen, even in botanical gardens. The species are all woody, ranging in size from forest trees, such as the black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), to low, trailing shrubs which barely rise from the ground.

Under the title of shrubby robinias we may conveniently group together about a dozen species which are shrub-like in form and size. Most of them are rather low shrubs with pinnate leaves, and pink flowers borne in drooping racemes. Of the dozen species, four are of more than ordinary horticultural importance: *Robinia hispida*, *R. Kelseyi*, *R. fertilis*, and *R. Hartwigii*. While they are quite similar, they may be distinguished as follows:

Petioles and peduncles viscid *R. Hartwigii*

Petioles and peduncles never viscid.

Leaflets oblong to oval, twigs hispid.

Plants 1-4 ft. high, pods very rarely developed . . *R. hispida*

Plants 4-8 ft. high, pods always developed *R. fertilis*

Leaflets lanceolate, twigs never hispid *R. Kelseyi*

Several of the terms used in the above key may require a word of explanation. "Viscid," when used as a botanical term, means that the particular part of the plant referred to is clammy or sticky to the touch. "Hispid" indicates a bristly, hairy condition. "Petiole" and "peduncle" are the botanical equivalents of leaf stalk and flower stalk, respectively.

Robinia hispida was the first shrubby species to be introduced into cultivation. Sir John Colliton imported this plant from the Carolinas into Exmouth, England, in 1741. It is easily distinguished from *R.*

Hartwigii by the characteristic dense coat of bristly, glandular hairs, which cover twigs, petioles, and peduncles, and from *R. fertilis* and *R. Kelseyi* by the fact that it rarely, if ever, develops seed pods. Thomas Meehan, in 1893, reports that he examined several thousand plants in their native habitat and found two or three under-developed seed pods as a result of his efforts. This species produces shell-like, rose-colored flowers in great profusion. Probably owing to the absence of seed production, plants of *R. hispida* have an exceptionally prolonged flowering season. It is perhaps the most commonly cultivated shrubby robinia. Because of its rather prostrate, straggling habit, and tendency to produce numerous root suckers, it is the least desirable species for garden planting. Used as a bank cover on sandy slopes, it is of considerable value; in such a location it is attractive and useful. *Robinia hispida* is completely hardy, at least as far north as Boston. It has endured the severe weather of the past winter with little if any damage.

Robinia fertilis when better known, should prove to be one of the most popular members of this group of plants. It is a native of the Carolinas, and has been in cultivation for some time, but seems to have been confused with other closely related forms. It is often difficult to distinguish between *R. fertilis* and *R. hispida*. Bristly, glandular hairs cover the twigs, petioles, and pedicels in both species. In general, *R. fertilis* is a somewhat taller shrub than *R. hispida*, the leaflets are oblong rather than round, and the flowers are usually smaller, although the latter distinction is quite variable. *Robinia fertilis* is a freely fruiting species; consequently after the onset of the fruiting season, it is easily distinguished from *R. hispida* by the plentiful crop of bristly, reddish-brown pods produced. It seems to be a more desirable ornamental than *R. hispida*, chiefly because of its upright stature, and the interesting appearance it makes in the fall, when its branches are attractively decorated with bristly, brown pods. This species seems to be slightly less hardy than either *R. hispida* or *R. Kelseyi*.

Robinia Kelseyi, introduced by Mr. Harlan P. Kelsey in 1900, is one of the most handsome of the robinias. It was found growing by Mr. Kelsey in the Blue Ridge Mountains, south of Pineola, North Carolina. It is readily separated from the other species of shrubby robinias by its lanceolate leaflets and its upright habit of growth. Like other robinias it flowers profusely, and in the late summer it is gracefully covered with dark, reddish-brown seed pods. This species seems to be fully as hardy as *R. hispida*. The rose-pink flowers, and rather upright stature of this species make it an excellent subject for planting as a background in iris gardens. The blooming period is about the same as that of iris. The blues and purples of the tall, bearded irises make a



pleasing contrast with the soft pink of *R. Kelseyi*.

Robinia Hartwigii (*R. viscosa* var. *Hartwigii* Ashe) has only recently been described as a distinct species. It becomes a thick, spreading shrub or small tree, with dark-green, graceful foliage. The handsome foliage borne by this shrub makes it a charming sight throughout the summer. It can easily be distinguished from the other robinias dealt with at this time by the clammy, viscid nature of the petioles and pedicels. The flowers except for a pale rose blush, are almost white. It can be separated from its nearest relative, *R. viscosa*, by the fact that the twigs are very seldom viscid. In addition, the flowers have less color; it is more spreading and hence never becomes a tree as *R. viscosa* very often does. *Robinia Hartwigii* has a marked tendency to flower continuously during the summer and fall. In a garden planting it seems to be preferable to *R. viscosa* because of its shrubby habit, handsome foliage, and prolonged flowering season. During the past season this species has suffered considerable damage, and it seems to be noticeably less hardy than the three previously mentioned species.

For the successful cultivation of the shrubby robinias, the selection of a well sheltered location is of major importance. The wood of these species is exceptionally brittle, and the plants are prone to suffer severely from wind damage. Robinias do not have a rigid soil preference, doing well on any soil of moderate quality, preferably a light well-drained one. It is usually desirable to propagate by seed, in species where viable seed is matured. *Robinia hispida* and *R. Kelseyi* are very often grafted on *R. pseudoacacia* stock, in which case they become small trees. This practice should be discouraged because the plants are usually short-lived when propagated in this fashion. High winds very often snap off the trunk at the union. *Robinia hispida* and *R. Kelseyi* are propagated easily by root suckers.

Probably owing to their shrubby habit, the four species of robinia enumerated above suffer far less from the depredations of the locust borer (*Cyrtene robiniae*) than does the black locust (*R. pseudoacacia*). The large trunk and branches of the latter species apparently offer a more suitable site of entrance for the borer than do the shrubby types.

While the shrubby robinias are in general aspect, often weedy, particularly in the winter time, and while they usually look a bit unkempt because of occasional dead twigs, their leaves are light and graceful, and their flowers are superbly beautiful in form and color. Understandingly used they have a place in many gardens.

THOMAS W. WHITAKER

EXPLANATION OF THE PLATE

Flowering branch of ***Robinia fertilis***.

(Photographed in the Arnold Arboretum, June 1934.)



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