



## SARATOGA HORTICULTURAL FOUNDATION, INC.

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### Loropetalum chinense

This unusual and ornamental, evergreen shrub is a member of the Witch Hazel family (Hamamelidaceae), which also includes the well known Sweet Gums as well as the Witch Hazels, Witch Alders, etc. The Sweet Gums (Liquidambar) are of course widely grown in California.

Loropetalum is a monotypic genus having only the one species - L. chinense - an evergreen, bushy shrub with a twiggy habit which will grow into a small tree to twelve feet tall in mild frost free localities. Where colder winters are experienced it rarely exceeds six to eight feet in height.

Loropetalum is native to the lower levels of the Himalaya through Assam and into China where it occurs in the warmer, southern parts of the country and consequently is only marginally frost hardy: it is also found with a limited distribution in Japan and new collections from such a provenance may prove to be hardier than the currently available stock which originates from China. Although the climates of central and southern California are mild enough to grow this plant it will succeed best in coastal conditions where there is a sufficient humidity and lack of extreme frosts, it is unlikely to flourish in the more arid climates.

Its close, compact, twiggy habit makes it a very suitable subject for use as a hedge either in an informal fashion or in a formally sheared pattern.

This plant has been in cultivation since 1880 in western Europe where it was sufficiently prized, in a previous generation, for it to be grown in a large container so that it was able to spend the summer outside and could then be wheeled into the Conservatory for the winter, in order that its subtle blossoms could be appreciated.

The Loropetalum has bright evergreen leaves and produces its creamy-white, four petalled flowers in mid-winter.

When the plant is growing vigorously, the leaves are oval in shape, and up to two and a half inches long and half as wide. The leaves are quite light and delicate in appearance when young and are a little deeper in colour than a mid-green on the upper surface and contrastingly paler beneath; as they age they become darker and adopt a coarser, matt surface which feels distinctly rough to the

touch. The young stems are distinctly and thickly covered with coarse brown hairs which are also apparent on the upper surface of the newly expanded leaves.

The flowers are typical of a Witch Hazel structure having four strap-shaped petals, each about three quarters of an inch long and an eighth of an inch wide, these are normally white or cream in colour but very occasionally yellow. About five or six of these individual flowers are clustered into a larger flower head. These clusters are produced in the axillary buds along the length of the previous season's growth. The flowering season tends to be sporadic and, in California, will last from late November until early March, but a spell of mild weather tends to produce a more spectacular flush.

Although the Loropetalum is described in much of the literature as being tender, it is tolerant of frost provided that the duration is not excessive and the temperatures do not drop much below 24.F, damage would also be related to the degree of ripening of the wood.

It is essentially a plant of acid land conditions and does not tolerate alkaline situations, in such situations the leaves become chlorotic and the plant declines. It is also a plant which benefits from a regular irrigation programme. Because of its evergreen habit and need for moisture, it would undoubtedly thrive best in a partially shaded position, unless grown in a distinctly coastal environment.

Evergreen; shrub; winter flowering; hedging plant.