

Mukdenia

Aileen Stocks

Mukdenia. Hardly an inviting name in the English language for what is an attractive genus, but if you lived in China you would recognize its origin as Mukden, once the ancestral capital of the Manchu dynasty and the old capital of Manchuria, now called Shenyang. Its common name is mapleleaf tickfoil. Originally they were classified as *Aceriphyllum*, presumably because the shape of the leaves of *M. rossii* resemble those of the *Acer* genus, but now they are ensconced in the *Saxifragaceae* family. Native to north east Asia, particularly north China, Korea and Japan, they are found in light woodland and perform best in cool, damp summers.

There are two species, *M. rossii* and *M. acanthifolia* and both have the usual characteristics of the family with a rhizomatous root system and a basal rosette of leaves from which rise panicles of white, starry flowers in early spring. In appearance they resemble *Darmera* but on a much smaller scale. They are hardy to Zone 4 but do need light shade and damp, though not waterlogged conditions. Perennial, they form clumps and make good ground cover without being invasive. As with many in this family they will need a period of dormancy for good growth and flower production. In most of the UK this will happen naturally as they will die down in the winter, but in countries or parts with a more consistently warm temperature all year, flower production might be inhibited.

Propagation can be by seed sown in autumn or by dividing the rhizomes in late winter or early spring. Care should be exercised as the flowers appear early before the leaves and can be damaged by late frosts. They are relatively pest-free apart from slugs and snails attacking the early leaf growth.

Mukdenia rossii – The starry white flowers rise to 40cms on naked green stems. They are closely followed by bright green leaves which



M. acanthifolia



M. rossii

© Aileen Stocks

© Aileen Stocks

can grow to 12cms across and are most attractive, being asymmetrically divided and plate-like. As the summer wears on, the leaves take on a bronze or reddish hue, the intensity of colour dependent on the heat.

There are several varieties: 'Shishiba' has deeper cut foliage and 'Karasuba', introduced from Japan by Dan Hinkley and known here as 'Crimson Fans', has crimson tips to the leaves all summer.

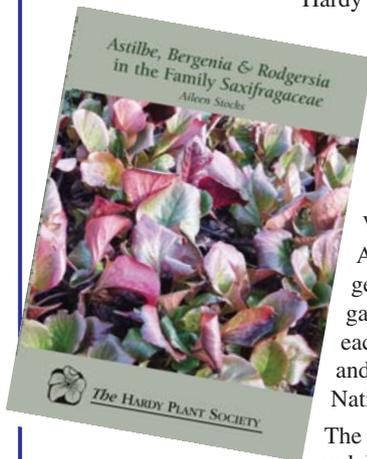
Mukdenia acanthifolia – This has well shaped leaves, similar to *Bergenia* but smaller and more refined. Bright green at first, they fade to a buttery yellow in late summer and autumn. The flower stem is early and carried high above the fresh rosette of leaves.

The specific name of this *Mukdenia*, namely *acanthifolia*, rather like the old name for *Bergenia acanthifolia*, has me a little perplexed. Neither has leaves that are 'pointed' or 'thorny' as the name would suggest, whilst the leaves of *M. rossii* do indeed seem to resemble those of the *Acanthus*. The *Bergenia* is now known as *Bergenia x spathulata*, giving a much more apt description that could equally be applied to *M. acanthifolia*. Maybe there is a Hardy Planter reading this who will put me straight. I look forward to the next edition and the answer to my quandary 🐞.

***Astilbe, Bergenia & Rodgersia* in the Family Saxifragaceae**

Aileen Stocks

Hardy Plant Society 64pp £3.00 inc. postage to members



This latest HPS booklet is a part revision of the three largest genera of Aileen's original booklet on Saxifragaceae, published in 1995. In the intervening years plant breeders and plant hunters have swelled the list of plants to grow, making it impossible to give a comprehensive treatment of the family in a single small volume.

Aileen describes the characteristics and history of each genus, and gives advice on their suitability for particular garden positions and on maintenance and propagation. For each genus there is a comprehensive list of species, hybrids and cultivars, with brief descriptions. Information on the National Collections is included.

The book is illustrated with colour photographs by the author and line drawings by artists Janet Wood and Shirley-Anne Kennedy.