'Corbett' Columbine

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Aquilegia canadensis L. is commonly called "Wild" or "Canadian" Columbine and is native from Nova Scotia to Georgia, and west to Tennessee and Minnesota, and may be found in moist, shady areas (Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium, 1976) as well as on rocky, wooded, or open slopes (Niering, 1979). 'Corbett', a recent selection named after the location at which it was discovered, differs from the species and its domesticates in height, habit, and flower color. These traits give it a unique niche in gardens, one that differs from other members of the species and its domesticates, and from other hybrid columbines.

Origin

'Corbett' was found as an isolated wild population along the abandoned Baltimore and Ohio railbed at the small railroad crossing of Corbett, Baltimore County, Md., by Richard Simon (grower and owner of Bluemount Nurseries, Monkton, Md.) in Spring 1985. It was initially collected and propagated by seed in a soilless medium for further distribution. No other wild populations of 'Corbett' have been found, nor have further crosses or selections been made.

Description

'Corbett' is similar in hardiness (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture zone 3), soil preference (moist, loamy), and light preference to the species and its domesticates. Light preference is for part

shade in the southern United States from Pennsylvania south to Georgia and west to Tennessee; part shade to full sun, with adequate moisture in the northern United States from New York west to Illinois and north to Minnesota.

As with the species and its domesticates, up to 6 weeks of bloom is possible in the spring, beginning in April in the southern United States where 'Corbett' is partially evergreen, and in May in the northern United States. 'Corbett' flowers are nodding, similar to the species and its domesticates, with usually three to eight glandular-pubescent flowers (2.5 to 5 cm long) at or slightly above the height of the uppermost leaves (30 cm for 'Corbett', 60 to 90 cm for the species). The five petaloid sepals of 'Corbett' are similar in size (≈ 1.5 cm long) and shape (ovate) to the species, but are not divergent and are a light pastel yellow (color 2D; *Royal Horticulture Society Colour Chart*) instead of red. The five petal limbs or blades of 'Corbett' are similar in length to those of the species (to 1 cm), as are the hollow, straight, and upward-pointing spurs (to 2.5 cm). Petal blades and spurs differ in color for 'Corbett' (light fading to dark pastel yellow, colors 2D to 7B; *Royal Horticulture Society Colour Chart*), from the species (yellow changing to red). The numerous yellow stamens hang below the petals, forming a column, for 'Corbett' and the species.

Shorter than the species and its domesticates, 'Corbett' also differs from the species and its domesticates in habit (full and compact). It forms a fairly dense mound ≈ 30 cm tall and 30 cm across under the conditions noted above. Individual leaves are twice-ternate, as in the species, and long-stalked, but are shorter (to 30 cm, to 60 cm for species) and with fewer leaflets (three to nine, nine to 27 for species). Leaf miner has not been reported to be a problem with 'Corbett', the species, and

its domesticates; the miner definitely has been less of a pest than with the columbine hybrids (Armitage, 1989; Dewolf, 1984). Caterpillar damage (partially to wholly eaten leaves) around bloom time has been observed on 'Corbett'. Although this damage does not appear to affect flowering in the current or in following years, the disfigured leaves detract from the overall appearance for garden use or sales, even though new basal leaves appear by August.

Utility and propagation

'Corbett' has potential for use in naturalistic or native landscapes and as a front in borders. It has been forced at the Univ. of Vermont greenhouses in 400-cm³ (10-cm) pots under natural daylength and at 0C from November through February, then at 10C during Mar. and Apr. 1990 and 1991. Forced 'Corbett' plants have potential for early spring sales as an indoor flowering plant from February to April, with subsequent transplanting to gardens as a perennial. 'Corbett' plants may, however, lose vigor (open habit, few flowers) in 3 to 4 years after transplanting. Thus, plants may need to be replaced if they do not self-propagate by seed. Plants are generally propagated easily by seeds with up to 95% final germination and no special treatment. Plants sown from seed July through September, with a minimum of 3 months at 0C, will bloom in ≈ 4 weeks at 18C.

Availability

'Corbett' is available from several sources, such as Dunvegan Nursery [1001 So. New St., West Chester, PA 19382 (wholesale only)] or Holbrook Farm and Nursery [P.O. Box 368, Fletcher, NC 28732 (retail)].

Literature Cited

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