



Epimedium 'Amber Queen'

This popular hybrid was developed by Robin White. It has proved long lasting in the garden with large, marmalade-orange flowers, which are carried well above young foliage that is mottled and splashed burgundy-red. 45cm. RHS H6.



Epimedium 'Moonlight'

A new hybrid with the Chinese species *Epimedium brevicornu* in its parentage. Bred by the Flemish grower Koen Van Poucke, it is a deciduous cultivar with dainty, butter-yellow little petals capped with bright-white sepals. 20cm.



Epimedium 'William Stearn'

Robin White made this selection in memory of the late Professor William Stearn, for its mulberry-red flowers with deep-red sepals margined in pink. These are held above mottled, rich red-spotted young foliage. 30cm.



Epimedium x omeiense 'Akame'

A naturally occurring hybrid from Mount Emei in China's Sichuan province. It has bright vermilion sepals, and golden spurs and margins around the mouth. It is eye-catching among its marbled bronze young leaves. 35cm.

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very year at Chelsea there seems to be some must-have plant to beguile us – the latest bearded iris; the newest geranium – making its debut to a fanfare of praise. But only very occasionally do new species emerge. Yet, somehow, over the past ten to 20 years a deluge of new epimediums have slipped into commerce almost unannounced. They're being introduced by western plant hunters who are, exploring the remote valleys of the Sichuan and Yunnan provinces of China. The resulting plants are dramatic with larger flowers in different forms and myriad colours: a world away from the epimediums that traditionally fill those difficult spaces in dry shade. Their introduction has inspired garden designers to try out and use not only some of these new forms, but to re-assess those old, useful plants whose delicate spring flowers hover above and below bronze, evergreen foliage that few weeds can penetrate.

In the early 19th century the German botanist Philipp Franz von Siebold sent some of the epimediums he had collected while living in Japan to the Hortus Botanicus at Leiden and the Ghent University Botanical Garden, which today holds the reference collection for all epimediums. Modern breeders have developed these acid-loving Japanese species to produce new forms with larger flowers. The delicate, bell-shaped flowers are predominantly pink, purple or white, although *Epimedium grandiflorum* 'Yellow Princess' has lemon and white flowers: an exception that proves the rule.

Epimedium grandiflorum crossed with *E. diphyllum*, produces the hybrid *E. x youngianum*. These exquisite flowers look like little silk tassels with few, if any, spurs, and they too are acid lovers. Plants such as *E. x youngianum* 'Niveum' have entirely white flowers like snowflakes, on wiry red stems, and those of *E. x youngianum* 'Tamabotan' have tousled, double, pink flowers. They, too, are herbaceous, but the leaves often flush red in autumn before dying away.

Gardeners on alkaline soils have found that the Japanese species grow very well in pots of ericaceous compost, in a shady corner of the terrace. They only need to be tipped out and divided every few years, and friends are made with gifts of the surplus plants.

However, it's the new Chinese species and their hybrids that are currently wowing the horticultural world. Twenty years ago the late William Stearn began systematically to rationalise the entire genus, and although, he found many anomalies, his work resulted in naming 54 species. There have been very many more additions since, not least from the great Japanese plant collector, Mikinori Ogisu, and American plant-hunter Darrell Probst. Probst has also bred some spectacular crosses, including 'Pink Champagne' (right), with wide, pink sepals over deeper pink centres like hang-gliding spiders over a mat of dark, mottled foliage.

In this country, many of the new species were distributed through plantsman Roy Lancaster to a handful of British growers, including Robin White of the former Blackthorn Nursery. His crosses resulted in glorious plants, such as the marmalade-coloured *E.* 'Amber Queen' and *E.* 'Pink Elf' whose swarms of two-tone pink flowers often repeat throughout the summer. In the Netherlands and Belgium, a number of enthusiastic nurserymen are developing startling new hybrids, such as Koen Van Poucke's *E.* 'Red Maximum'. They are all selecting for large flowers that are held well above their gorgeously marked young leaves, and are also developing new colours: soft apricot and lavender, browns and reds, and two-toned flowers. In the UK nurserymen are crossing the large-flowered Chinese hybrids with the spreading forms. All are working on making these exciting new plants available to an appreciative gardening world. □

• Author Sally Gregson is the owner of Mill Cottage Plants in Somerset, and the author of *The Plant Lover's Guide to Epimediums* (Timber Press, 2015). Her recommendations for the best epimediums can be found over the next five pages.



Tuingoed Foltz
Tuingoed Foltz is a nursery in the north of the Netherlands run by Andries Bierling and Bob Foltz (above) that specialises in shade-loving plants and has several excellent plant collections, including the epimediums featured here.
tuingoedfoltz.nl

PLANT PROFILE

What Epimediums are low-growing, mostly herbaceous, woodland plants with pretty spider-like flowers in spring. Also known as bishop's hats, barrenworts or fairy wings.

Origins Italy and southern central Europe, Algeria, Turkey, Iran, northern India, China, Korea and Japan.

There are increasing numbers of species being discovered in the remote valleys of China's Sichuan and Yunnan provinces by modern plant hunters. As a result European and American growers are producing larger-flowered hybrids.

Season Flowering in spring among and above the well-coloured new leaves, many are great evergreens, some providing good groundcover.

Size Most are around 15cm tall in leaf, with flowers reaching to 45cm. Foliage ranges in height from 6cm to 20cm, and while in flower they can reach up to 1.3m. Individual flowers are usually 1-3cm across.

Conditions Moist, well-drained, rich soil in light shade, although the traditional forms will grow and spread in dry shade. The Japanese species prefer an acid soil.

Hardiness Epimediums are generally hardy throughout the UK and northern Europe. Most of those featured here have an RHS hardiness rating of between H4 (-10°C to -5°C) and H7 (colder than -20°C), and are suitable for gardens in USDA zones 4a-8b.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.
†Hardiness ratings given where available.



***Epimedium wushanense*
'Caramel'**

This cultivar bears large flowers, with spidery yellow sepals and petals with toffee-coloured mouths. The flowers stand well above the attractive long, spiny leaves that are splashed purple-brown. 1.3m.

***Epimedium* 'Pink Elf'**

One of the prettiest seedlings selected by Robin White. It is an evergreen cultivar that bears clouds of small, two-tone, pink flowers that appear from spring into early summer, often repeating later in summer. 35cm. RHS H6.



Cultivation

Epimediums are happiest in well-cultivated soils that hold some moisture but are well-drained. They appreciate a mulch of leaf mould in winter. All prefer light shade, preferably from overhead, but that provided later in summer by hydrangeas, roses and other deciduous shrubs is excellent. Most traditional types grow happily in dry soil under trees, but let them loose in the rest of a shady garden and you risk a bid for world domination.

The Japanese species – *E. grandiflorum*, *E. sempervirens*, *E. x youngianum* – prefer a rich, acid soil, and effectively fill in the gaps between rhododendrons and camellias. The new, evergreen Chinese species and their hybrids are happy in both acid and alkaline soils but prefer a rich, free-draining soil in shade, and steadily make bigger clumps without becoming invasive. The familiar, groundcovering forms should be trimmed over with shears in February before the flowering stalks extend. The over-wintered leaves of the Chinese species and hybrids can be cut back with more restraint in spring.

All epimediums are self-sterile, which means that any seed that forms is the result of hybridisation with its neighbours. It's important to cut off the seedpods to prevent seedlings arising in the crown of the mother plant. Lift and divide the mature plants after they have finished flowering during cool, damp weather. Replant them where they are to flower in ground that has been well prepared, preferably with leaf mould.

Epimediums are relatively disease-free, although they are prone to damage by vine weevils and at the first signs you should apply nematodes. Plants with thick, malformed or spotted leaves, or those with a yellow or cream mosaic pattern, may have tobacco rattle virus, which is transmitted through soil-living nematodes – although not those used to control vine weevils. If you spot any signs you'll need carefully to dig up the infected plant, and the plants around it, and dispose of all plants completely in a plastic bag. Don't replant epimediums in that space for at least five years. In country gardens it may also be worthwhile installing rabbit-proof fencing around the planted area as rabbits find epimedium leaves delicious.

Where to see and buy

• **Desirable Plants**

Pentamar, Crosspark,
Totnes, Devon TQ9 5BQ.
desirableplants.com
Mail order only.

• **Edrom Nurseries**

Coldingham, Eyemouth,
Berwickshire TD14 5TZ.
Tel 01890 771386,
edrom-nurseries.co.uk

• **Ghent University**

Botanical Garden
Plantentuin Universiteit
Gent, KL Leganckstraat 35,
Ghent B-9000. Belgium.
plantentuin.ugent.be

• **Jan Wilde een Tuin**

Ontsluitingsweg 7, 9678 TE
Westerlee, the Netherlands.
Tel +31 (0)597 414462,
janwildeeentuin
Open by appointment only.

• **Koen Van Poucke**

Heistraat 106, 9100
Sint-Niklaas, Belgium.
Tel +32 (0)3 777 7642,
koenvanpoucke.be

• **The Magnolias***

18 St John's Avenue,
Brentwood, Essex CM14 5DF.
Tel 01277 220019,
epimedium-collection.com
Private garden, open 28-29
April 2018, 10am-4pm.

• **Mill Cottage Plants**

Henley Mill, Wookey,
Somerset BA5 1AW.
Tel 01749 676966,
millcottageplants.co.uk
Open by appointment only.
Mail order available.

• **Tuinflour**

Nieuweweg 34 9682,
RM Oostwold,
the Netherlands.
Tel +31 (0)597 551383,
tuinflour.nl

• **Tuingoed Foltz**

Hereweg 346, 9651 AT
Meeden, the Netherlands.
Tel +31 (0)598 635000,
tuingoedfoltz.nl


* National Collection holder.



Epimedium

'Pink Champagne'

One of Darrell Probst's best hybrids, this bears large, leggy flowers in vibrant shades of rose pink sepals over strawberry pink petals. The young, purple-toned leaves set them off well. 30cm.



Epimedium stellulatum

'Wudang Star'

Discovered by Roy Lancaster in the Purple Cloud Temple in the Wudang Mountains, China, this delightfully simple white flower bears chrome yellow petals, stamens and anthers, over evergreen foliage. 20cm.



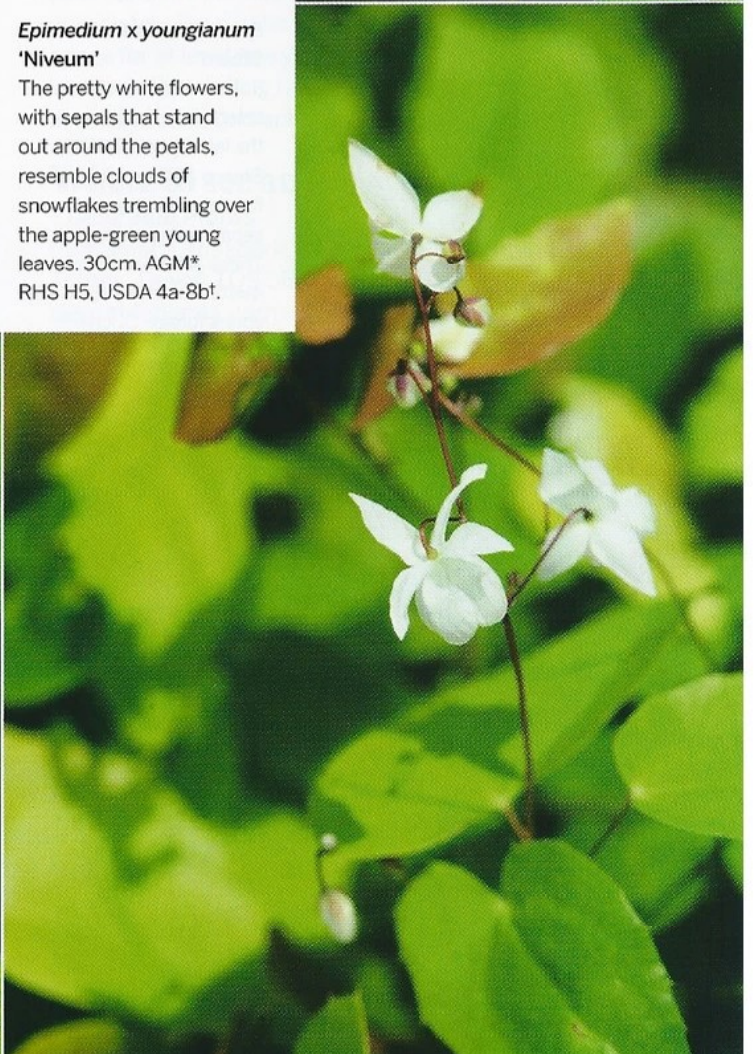
***Epimedium x omeiense*
'Myriad Years'**
A dazzling American selection from a naturally occurring hybrid found on Mount Emei in China. Its large, bi-colour flowers have sepals of the palest lavender over deep purple petals. 30cm.



***Epimedium x youngianum*
'Roseum'**
Pretty pink, spurless flowers on this small, acid-loving plant are followed by spring green, deciduous foliage. It mixes well with the white-flowered *E. x youngianum* 'Niveum'. 20cm.



***Epimedium fargesii*
'Pink Constellation'**
This elegant selection of *E. fargesii*, collected in China by Mikinori Ogisu, has bigger, pinker sepals that contrast well with the deeper purple petals and long, green stamens, which point down. 45cm.



***Epimedium x youngianum*
'Niveum'**
The pretty white flowers, with sepals that stand out around the petals, resemble clouds of snowflakes trembling over the apple-green young leaves. 30cm. AGM*. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8bf.