

ARNOLD ARBORETUM  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



BULLETIN  
OF POPULAR INFORMATION

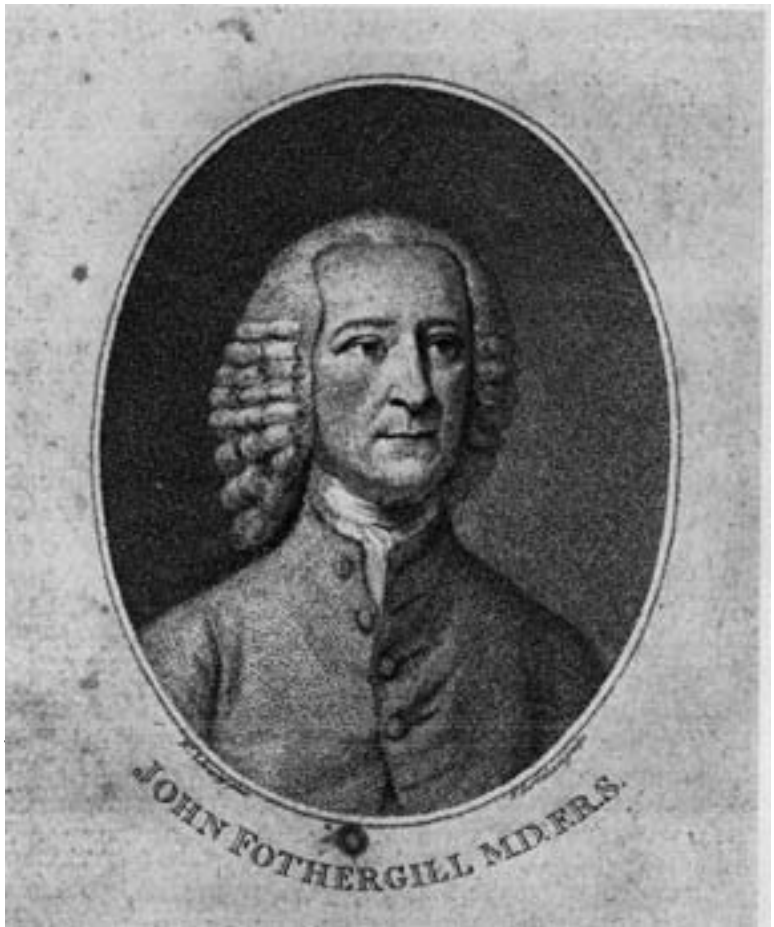
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**F**OTHERGILLA MAJOR. FORTUNATE, indeed, are those plants whose common names are attractive and imaginative. The very name of "Butterfly Bush" served as a letter of introduction when Buddleias were first offered to American gardeners. Part of the public interest in *Davidia involucrata* is due to the popular name of "Dove Tree", an imaginative allusion to the large white bracts below the flowers. Lacking such a name, the Fothergillas have made their way slowly into public favor. In the southern states, where they grow wild, country children sometimes call them "Bottle-brush Bushes" because of the curious shaggy flowers of dull white. Sometimes they are called "Granny Grey beard" or "Grant's Greybeard", though these names are also used for other quite different shrubs. Within recent years the name "Springscents" has been suggested, and if it becomes current it may prove useful.

There are several species of Fothergilla but for northern gardens the most desirable is *Fothergilla major* with which may be included the very similar *F. monticola*, by many botanists considered to be merely a variety of the former. As its name implies, *F. major* is a tall shrub. Both in the shape of its leaves, and in the general appearance of the bush it shows its kinship to our native witch-hazels. The creamy white flowers are borne in spring, just as the leaves are unfolding. They are massed in tight little plumes at the ends of short, upright branches, each little plume being made up of many individual flowers, whose long, milk-white stamens are their most conspicuous feature. During the summer Fothergillas are surprisingly similar to their cousins, the witch-hazels. More than one botanist, in fact, has mistaken them for a lower, more compact, witch-hazel at that season of the year. As autumn comes on, they again show their individuality by coloring most brilliantly. Some bushes are pure yellow, others are deeply overlaid with brilliant crimson, but in either case the colors are clear.



*lucis suas artes, sua dona luctus  
Et herbarum et Venae salientes rotam  
Sicere concepsit, celerem et medendi  
Uctius usum:*

*From a Bust in the Hospital, N<sup>o</sup> 10, Tottenham*

FOTHERGILLA *major*





As a result, from a short distance the leaves seem almost to shine as if they had been lacquered.

*Fothergilla major* and the doubtfully distinct *F. monticola* are native to a very restricted area in the southern Alleghenies. Though grown in England as early as 1780 it apparently passed out of cultivation altogether until it was re-introduced by Professor C. S. Sargent, who sent it to Kew in 1902. This latter attempt has been more successful and it is now occasionally seen in public and private gardens in northern Europe. Surprisingly enough, it seems to be hardy far north of its native home and is known to have come unharmed through temperatures as low as 30 degrees below zero.

It can be grown apparently in any good garden soil, though heavy applications of peat are reported as having a beneficial effect. One or two English writers have listed it as rooting from cuttings but in this country it has been found a very difficult subject. The simplest method of propagation is to pot up small suckers from the base of established plants and to grow them until they are ready for a permanent position. The species can be grown from seed sown when ripe and kept in a cool greenhouse where it germinates in about six months. These seedlings should be grown in small wooden flats for a year or so, and are then ready to be potted up. The old specimens of *Fothergilla* at the Arnold Arboretum have been fruiting well the last few years and seed will be supplied cheerfully to those private and professional gardens, *who have the facilities for taking care of it.*

Though *Fothergilla* may not sound attractive when used as a common name, it is most appropriate that a group of American shrubs should be so designated. Linnaeus named the genus in honor of Dr. John Fothergill, an eminent London physician, who was an unswerving champion of the American colonists during the troubled times of the Revolution. He was a close friend of Benjamin Franklin and of the Philadelphia botanist, John Bartram. It was in Fothergill's garden that many American plants were first grown in Europe. His own description of this Anglo-American garden makes interesting reading:

“Under a north wall”, we find him writing to an American friend in 1772, “I have a good border, made up of that kind of rich black turf-like soil, mixed with some sand, in which I find most of the American plants thrive best. It has a few hours of the morning and evening sun, and is quite sheltered from mid-day heats. It is well supplied with water during the summer: and the little shrubs and herbaceous plants have a good warm covering of dry fern thrown over them when the frosts set in. This is gradually removed when the spring

advances, so that as the plants are never frozen in the ground while they are young and tender, I do not lose any that come to me with any degree of life in them; and it is acknowledged by our ablest botanists that there is not a richer bit of ground, in curious American plants, in Great Britain; and for many of the most curious I am obliged to thy diligence and care. My garden is well sheltered; the soil is good, and I endeavour to mend it as occasion requires. I have a little wilderness, which when I bought the premises was full of old yew trees, laurels and weeds. I had it cleared, well dug, and took up many trees, but left others standing for shelter. Among these I have planted *Kalmias*, *Azaleas*, all the *Magnolias*, and most other hardy American shrubs. It is not quite eight years since I made a beginning, so that my plants must be considered but as young ones. They are, however, extremely flourishing. I have an Umbrella tree (*Magnolia tripetala* L.) above twenty feet high, that flowers with me abundantly every spring; but the great *Magnolia* (*grandiflora*) has not yet flowered; it grows exceedingly fast; I shelter his top in the winter; he gains from half a yard to two feet in height every summer, and will ere long I doubt not repay my care with his beauty and fragrance."

That this collection was indeed a scientific treasure house is borne out by such tributes as that of Sir Joseph Banks:

"At an expense seldom undertaken by an individual he procured from all parts of the world a great number of the rarest plants, and protected them in the amplest buildings which this or any other country has seen. In my opinion no other garden in Europe, royal or of a subject, had nearly so many scarce and valuable plants." Perhaps, after all it is just as well that Dr. Fothergill's name, though scarcely euphonious, should be perpetuated by so lovely a flowering shrub. In so using it we shall be carrying out one of his own precepts. "Let us", he wrote, "preserve the memory of the deserving: perhaps it may prompt others likewise to deserve."

EDGAR ANDERSON  
W. H. JUDD

#### EXPLANATION OF PLATES

Page 62. **Dr. John Fothergill**

(From an old engraving.)

Insert. **Fothergilla major**

(Drawing by *Blanche Ames Ames*.)