The Genus Akebia. There are two species of *Akebia*, both natives of China and Japan and both represented for some years in the collections of the Arnold Arboretum. They are graceful vines with curious but inconspicuous flowers and are valued chiefly for their foliage which is of a pleasing texture and which holds its green color far into the fall months. Both species are ordinarily considered hardy in Boston, but this spring finds *Akebia trifoliata* (formerly known as *A. lobata*) killed back to the roots at the Arnold Arboretum, while even *A. quinata* has been somewhat injured. The latter is horticulturally the more important of the two, since *A. trifoliata* is coarser in leaf as well as less hardy. The two species, though obviously closely akin are easily told apart. *Akebia quinata* has delicate leaflets which are borne in groups of five. *Akebia trifoliata* has larger leaflets which are in groups of three and have a more or less wavy margin, so that its general appearance is not unlike that of our common poison ivy.

The flowers of both species are very similar to each other but are quite unlike any flower known to the average gardener. They are borne in graceful clusters composed of one or two female flowers, accompanied by a slender raceme of smaller male flowers. Their color is curious, being very close to that of raw liver. At its brightest and seen with the light shining through the petals, it may approach a rosy maroon; in the shade it is reduced to a dull chocolate brown.

The flowers, in favorable seasons, are followed by fruits which ripen in the early fall. They are even more fantastic than the flowers and look like chunky bananas of pale blue leather. The blue has to be seen to be believed: it is not a shade common to fruits, such as the blue of a plum or a grape; it is a brilliant violet or indigo, softened by a delicate gray bloom, and is altogether more reminiscent of a suede dancing pump or a fancy coin purse than it is of flowers or fruits. When fully
ripe, the fruit splits open, revealing the soft whitish flesh thickly studded with small black seeds. Though it is said to be an article of diet in the orient, it is insipid and watery to most western palates.

*Akebia quinata* has been in cultivation in western gardens for nearly a century, having been introduced into England by Robert Fortune. He first discovered it on the island of Chusan where, to quote his own words, it was "growing on the lower sides of the hills in hedges where it was climbing on other trees and hanging down in graceful festoons from the ends of their branches." While it has often grown well in American gardens, in few places has it become thoroughly at home. On the Proctor estate in Topsfield, Massachusetts, it grows in almost its native profusion. It has there run wild in a small woodland and has climbed to the tops of small trees, forming a graceful curtain of delicate foliage. It must be admitted, however, that in climbing up some of the smaller trees, it has twined so tightly that the tree has been killed. Were *Akebia quinata* to become extensively naturalized, it might become a serious pest in plantations of small trees.

Two years ago both species of *Akebia* flowered profusely at the Arnold Arboretum and Dr. Sax of the Arboretum staff fertilized the female flowers of *A. quinata* with the pollen of *A. trifoliata*. The resulting hybrids are now vigorous small seedlings which may eventually prove of some horticultural merit. From their foliage they are apparently intermediate between the two species and while this may not add to their beauty, it will probably, as in the case of many specific hybrids, produce a more vigorous individual. Before the question of their desirability can be answered, the seedlings must be raised to maturity and tried out in the Arnold Arboretum and elsewhere. There are a few extra plants which will be available next fall to those readers of the Bulletin who have the facilities for taking care of them and who will grow them carefully and report on their behavior. If those who are interested will send their names and addresses to Mr. W. H. Judd, Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, the requests will be put on file. When the seedlings are large enough, probably early next fall, requests will receive attention in the order of their receipt, in so far as material is available.

*Edgar Anderson*

**EXPLANATION OF THE PLATES**

Leaves, flowers, and fruit of *Akebia quinata* Decne.

(From drawings in Larolle: Arboretum Segrezianum; Icones Selectar...)

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