

Farges Filbert

Corylus fargesii

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One of the goals of plant exploration is to introduce new species into cultivation, and it is a rare and exciting opportunity for any plant collector to do so. *Corylus fargesii* (Farges filbert) was first described in China by Western botanists in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Although herbarium specimens were collected during this “golden age” of plant exploration, there is no evidence that living specimens were grown in arboreta and botanic gardens from these early collections. The first NACPEC collection of *C. fargesii* occurred on the 1996 expedition to Shaanxi and Gansu, and it was collected again on the 2005 expedition to Gansu (identified by collector numbers QLG-231 and NACPEC05-047, respectively). Until the introduction of Farges filbert seeds to the United States in 1996, little was known or written about this species.

Of the many taxa collected by NACPEC over the past twenty years, few arouse more excitement than *Corylus fargesii*. The trees display exfoliating tan and copper bark that rivals the most attractive birches and is especially reminiscent of river birch, *Betula nigra*. According to the *Flora of China*, Farges filbert grows to 40 meters (131 feet) tall and occurs naturally in mountain valley forests at elevations from 800 to 3000 meters (2,625 to 9,843 feet) in southern Gansu, Guizhou, Henan, Hubei, Jiangxi, south-



The attractive pyramidal form of Farges filbert.

ern Ningxia, Shaanxi, and northeast Sichuan (Chengkou Xian). During the 1996 expedition, Farges filbert was collected in eastern Gansu at the Xiao Long Shan Forest Bureau, Dang Chuan Forest Station. In their field notes, the collectors described it as a truly beautiful tree with exquisite bark. The parent trees had reached 12 to 15 meters (39 to 49 feet) tall and were found growing among rocks in sandy silt loam soil approximately 2 meters (6.6 feet) above a stream in open woodland.



Farges filbert displays exfoliating bark similar to that of river birch.

On the 2005 NACPEC expedition to southern Gansu, on a morning when we shared our hike through pastures and woodland with numerous cattle, we were fortunate to encounter and collect *C. fargesii* in Zhou Qu county, near the Sha Tan Forest Station. The parent plants were growing in a mesic mixed deciduous forest and were located a few meters above a stream. Many *C. fargesii* were seen throughout a small area; all of these trees had been heavily coppiced but had resprouted vigorously. As in 1996, we were impressed by the beautiful exfoliating bark.

Corylus fargesii is now well established at all of the NACPEC member gardens and in several other North American public gardens. Trees from the 1996 collection are doing especially well at the Morris Arboretum, where we have

10 plants from this accession, all of which show remarkably similar growth habit and size. These trees have grown quickly, reaching 25 to 30 feet (8 to 9 meters) after 13 years, with strong central leaders and very uniform broadly ovate habits. The trees exhibit some variation in the level of exfoliation and color of the bark, which ranges from a deep copper to a pale cream color. Farges filbert has clean summer foliage with no insect or disease problems, and turns a good yellow in autumn. Our plants are growing in several locations, with slight differences in soil pH and all with evenly moist, well-drained soils.

Farges filbert has been propagated successfully from seeds and by grafting, but with only marginal success from stem cuttings. The diversity of conditions under which it is growing successfully indicates broad adaptability from the central Midwest to New England and south to the mid-Atlantic states. The species appears to be fully cold hardy in USDA Zones 5 through 7 (average annual minimum temperatures -20 to 0°F [-29 to -18°C]). This tree's highly ornamental exfoliating bark and rapid growth rate indicate great potential as an ornamental tree for a range of situations, and it promises to be an excellent addition to landscapes in the future.

Literature Cited

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