

# Introducing *Weigela subsessilis*

Stephen A. Spongberg

**The Arnold Arboretum is pleased to offer an ornamental shrub of intriguingly variegated color.**

Among the seeds collected in Korea on the Arnold Arboretum's 1977 collecting expedition to Japan and Korea (Spongberg and Weaver, 1978; Spongberg, 1978; Weaver, 1978) were two lots representing a species of *Weigela* that had not previously been grown and tested at the Arboretum. At the time the capsules were gathered, the identity of the species was not known. It was not until eleven years later—after plants grown from these seeds in the Arboretum's collection had flowered and fruited, and herbarium voucher specimens had been taken—that the plants were identified as *Weigela subsessilis* (Nakai) Bailey.

When first described by the Japanese botanist Takenoshin Nakai in 1918, this Korean plant was placed in the genus *Diervilla*, a genus of shrubs that is now limited to three North American taxa, while the Asian plants previously included in *Diervilla* have been grouped in the exclusively Asian genus *Weigela* (Bailey, 1929; Hara, 1981). The specific epithet, *subsessilis*, refers to the very short petioles of the opposite leaves, which cause the leaves to appear stalkless, or sessile. The genus *Weigela* is well known for its spring-flowering shrubs, many of which are of considerable ornamental value. About twelve species are native to eastern Asia, with eight of them occurring in Japan, three or four in China, and four in Korea. Most of these species are also cultivated in North American and European gardens, and several interspecific hy-

brids are known from which many cultivars have been selected, named, and made available in the nursery trade (Howard, 1965; Krüssman, 1986).

*Weigela subsessilis* is apparently endemic to the Korean peninsula, and the 1977 introduction of the species into the collections of the Arnold Arboretum may, in fact, have represented its first successful introduction into North American gardens. Alfred Rehder included it in his *Manual of Cultivated Trees and Shrubs* (1940), but he questioned whether it had been introduced into cultivation in North America, and the species appears in none of the other standard references on cultivated woody plants, including those by Bean (1980), Krüssman (1986), and Dirr (1990). The *Supplement* to the eighth revised edition of Bean (Clarke, 1988) credits its introduction from South Korea to the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, in 1982, five years after the Arnold Arboretum had obtained its two accessions of seeds. One specimen in our herbarium (*S. G. March*, s. n. 5 April 1983) resulted from an earlier introduction by the United States Department of Agriculture (PI 371794), using seed received from Professor T. Bok Lee of the Department of Forestry, Seoul National University, in March of 1972. However, the plant or plants resulting from that introduction and grown at the U.S. National Arboretum (#40580) were apparently never propagated or distributed, except as herbarium specimens.



*Weigela subsessilis*. (a) flowering branchlet, (b) detail of maturing capsules; (c) individual leaf; (d) style; (e) open corolla tube and anthers (From Nakai, 1921).

The Arnold Arboretum collections now include three accessions of *Weigela subsessilis*. Two plants accessioned under #1906-77 were grown from seed collected on the wooded trail to the temple on Yongmun-san in Kyonggi-do Province northeast of Seoul. Another set of plants (#1901-77) was grown from seeds collected from plants growing on the wooded slopes of Kyebang-san in Kangwong-do Province, farther to the east. Plants of the third accession (#587-83) also trace their origin to seed collected on Kyebang-san by Chollipo Arboretum staff and offered in their 1983 *Index Seminum*.

These three sets of plants have had varying results. Plants of the third accession (#587-83) have been incorporated into the Arboretum's collections so recently that their performance has not yet been evaluated. Plants of the second accession (#1901-77) were planted as a

group on the slope of Bussey Hill, along Oak Path in a shaded, relatively dry location, but have failed to grow well in this location.

By contrast, two plants of the first accession (#1906-77) that were planted in a sunny location in moist but well-drained soil along Bussey Hill Road near the Dana Greenhouse drive have performed very well. These two shrubs are multiple-stemmed from the base and have grown to about five feet in height with a spread of about three feet. Compact and twiggy, these individuals have been free of disease and insect pests. Moreover, they have proven to flower generously each spring, and the gradual color changes in the flowers make these plants intriguing ornamentals in the spring landscape.

The flowers are produced on new growth from second-year wood as the leaves are ex-

panding. Each inflorescence consists of clusters of three or four, even up to six flowers. When fully open, the flowers measure between 2.5 and 3.5 cm in length. As the flower buds enlarge, they assume a yellowish-green color that gradually changes through various shades of pink to a pale lavender when the flowers are in full bloom. Since inflorescences are profuse and individual flowers represent different stages of maturation, the overall effect of the shrub is a unique combination of pastel colors from pale yellowish-green to lavender.

While these shrubs cannot be considered year-round ornamentals, their profusion of flowers in early May recommend them for trial in New England gardens and elsewhere in North America. The species has proven hardy in the Boston region, but the limits of its hardiness in more northern climates has not been tested. *Weigela subsessilis* may also prove of interest to hybridizers interested in incorporating both its interesting flower color and its floriferous habit in a new generation of hybrid *Weigela* cultivars.

#### References

- Bailey, L. H. 1929. The Case of *Diervilla* and *Weigela*. *Gentes Herbarium* 2: 39-54.
- Bean, W. J. 1980. *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*. Vol. 4. 8th ed. (D. L. Clarke, General Ed.). London: John Murray.
- Clarke, D. L. 1988. *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles Supplement* London: John Murray
- Hara, H. 1983. A Revision of Caprifoliaceae of Japan with Reference to Allied Plants in Other Districts and the Adoxaceae *Ginkgoana* No. 5 (Tokyo).
- Howard, R. A. 1965. A Check-list of Cultivar Names in *Weigela*. *Arnoldia* 25:49-69.
- Krussman, G. 1986. *Manual of Cultivated Broad-leaved Trees & Shrubs*. Vol. 3. Portland, OR: Timber Press
- Nakai, T. 1918. *Botanical Magazine* (Tokyo) 32: 229.
- 1921. *Flora Sylvatica Koreana* 11: 88. t. 41.
- Spongberg, S. A. 1978. Korean Adventure. *Arnoldia* 38: 132-53.
- & R. E. Weaver, Jr. 1978. Notes from the Arnold Arboretum: Collecting Expedition to Japan and Korea. *Arnoldia* 38: 28-31.
- Weaver, R. E., Jr. 1978. Japanese Journal. *Arnoldia* 38: 82-101.

---

Stephen Spongberg is horticultural taxonomist at the Arnold Arboretum and author of *A Reunion of Trees: The Discovery of Exotic Plants and Their Introduction into North American and European Landscapes* (Harvard University Press, 1990).

The Arnold Arboretum is pleased to offer to our Friends plants of *Weigela subsessilis*. They were propagated from rooted cuttings and are generally 12 to 18 inches tall. Donation, payable upon receipt of plants, is \$20.00 per plant. Shipment will be in the spring of 1994.

Spring Plant Distribution, Dana Greenhouse  
The Arnold Arboretum, 125 Arborway, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130