

Epimediums

Epimedium spp.

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Although the vast majority of the plants targeted for collecting by NACPEC are trees and shrubs, several genera of herbaceous plants have been targeted as well. Since China is the major area for the diversity of epimediums (*Epimedium* spp.), it made perfect sense to target this group of adaptable perennials. Thirteen accessions of epimedium were collected during NACPEC trips, several of which are highly ornamental and should be recognized as worthy plants for the shade garden.

In the fall of 1994, members of the NACPEC expedition to the Wudang Shan mountain range located in central China (which is famous for its exceptionally rich and diverse flora) collected several noteworthy accessions of epimedium. This was a historically significant trip as there were many new species of epimedium being described in China at the same time. With the help of Darrell Probst, an expert in the collection, identification, and introduction of epimediums, those 1994 Wudang Shan epimedium accessions were correctly identified and, more importantly, several of them proved to be new species not represented in the NACPEC members' institutional holdings. *Epimedium lishihchenii* and *Epimedium stellulatum* are just two of the species identified from that trip.

Epimedium lishihchenii is an attractive plant hardy to at least USDA Zone 4 (average annual minimum temperature -20 to -30°F [-28.9 to

-34.4°C]). It has a running habit and reaches 12 inches (30.5 centimeters) in height. The large evergreen leaflets are leathery and sustain little damage in the winter months. It has bright yellow flowers with elongated spurs, and blooms in late April or early May. Although the flowers are attractive, this plant's best quality is the



Epimedium stellulatum bears starry white flowers.



Epimedium lishihchenii has long-spurred yellow flowers.

foliage. It remains fairly clean throughout the growing season. In the winter, the foliage may be tinged with an attractive burgundy color.

Like *Epimedium lishihchenii*, *Epimedium stellulatum* is an evergreen species hardy to Zone 4. It has a clumping habit and is smaller in stature than *Epimedium lishihchenii*. *E. stellulatum* blooms early in the season, revealing small white starlike flowers that are held above the leaves on erect stems. Though it is considered to be evergreen, it has sustained more winter damage to the foliage at the United States National Arboretum than *Epimedium lishihchenii*. During the 1996 NACPEC expedition to the Quinling Mountains, several additional accessions of *Epimedium stellulatum* were collected. These additional accessions have leaflets that are slightly larger and narrower than the 1994 *Epimedium stellulatum* collection.

The epimediums that hail from China occur primarily in woodlands in temperate hilly or montane regions. Keeping this in mind, they do best in moderately cool and half shady conditions. They thrive best in a moist but well drained soil and will tolerate periods of drought provided their roots are not exposed. They benefit from being mulched with leaf mold. Epimediums are best propagated by division.

Epimediums make excellent landscape plants because they can grow in a variety of situations and are easy to care for. Depending on the species, they thrive in sun or full shade and can provide year-round interest in gardens.

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Glossy, leathery foliage is an ornamental feature of *Epimedium lishihchenii*.