

Book Note

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Wild Flowers of Yunnan and Central China by Beryl M. Walden and Shui-ying Hu. Hong Kong: B. M. Walden, 2000.

The authors of this attractive volume tell us that of the 30,000 recognized plant species in China, 16,000 occur in Yunnan, a province that comprises only four percent of the country's land area. In an effort to promote conservation by increasing public awareness, the authors have given us watercolor images and botanical descriptions of 516 of these plants, most of them from cold-temperate areas and nearly all from Yunnan Province. (The "Central China" of the title refers to Jiangxi Province, where a small number of the book's plants originate.)

Both images and descriptions testify to the lavish diversity of the region. Included are seven each of asters, camellias, irises, and thalictrums; eight viburnums; ten pedicularises; thirteen each of gentians and roses; fourteen orchids; seventeen primulas; and an astonishing twenty-seven species of rhododendron. Many of the 516 taxa—150 of them—are endemic to Yunnan, some occurring only in one portion of a mountain range.

Yunnan's botanic diversity mirrors its spectacular range of climates and topography, which includes "lateral and vertical zones and mini-zones." The authors quote the English plant explorer Frank Kingdon Ward as he described northwestern Yunnan a century ago: "You will see flowers growing in reckless profusion . . . For days on end you may tramp over carpets of flowers. Rhododendron in incredible variety, yet no taller than heather in Scotland, though of every conceivable colour." Already at that time 5,000 plants had been introduced in the West from Yunnan.

Shiu-ying Hu, author of the botanical descriptions, has had a long and distinguished career and is well known at the Arnold Arboretum. An accomplished botanist and fieldworker when she arrived in the U.S. from China in 1946, she carried out her doctoral dissertation on the Chinese hollies under the direction of E. D. Merrill, director of the Arboretum, 1935–1946. Her many publications on the flora of China, especially of Hong Kong, include works on Malvaceae, Compositae, Orchidaceae, the Chinese material medica, and food plants. Beryl M. Walden provided the watercolors of the plants in *Wild Flowers of Yunnan and Central China*, as she did for earlier collaborations with Hu, *Wild Flowers of Hong Kong* (1977) and a two-volume *Wild Flowers of South China and Hong Kong* (1983, 1987).



Beryl Walden's watercolor of Lilium bakerianum delavayi, endemic to Yunnan.