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Douglas Clay, Research Scientist, Calgary AB

Plants for Bees

Cotoneaster

Common Name

Cotoneaster: A common species found in Canada is the Peking or hedge cotoneaster.

Scientific Name

Cotoneaster acutifolius Turcz.

Native Range:

The genus *Cotoneaster* is a member of the Rosaceae family. There are about 66 species native to the temperate regions of Europe, Africa, and Asia. The *Cotoneaster acutifolius* is native to Siberia and northern Asia.

Canadian Distribution:

All *Cotoneaster* species are exotics to North America. The Peking cotoneaster is described in the USA as suitable for USDA hardiness zone 6 to 8, however, the variety sold through Aubin Nurseries in Carman, Manitoba has done well in southwestern Alberta in zone 2. These plants and many of their relatives are found across Canada and north to the Yukon and NWT. In fact, the Peking cotoneaster survive anywhere with more than 120 frost-free days. Most of the Canadian plants have come from a breeding program at Agriculture Canada's Morden Experimental Farm in Manitoba.

Description:

These perennial shrubs and small trees grow from 1 to 3 m tall in form from prostrate to upright. They have multi-stem trunks. Cold tolerant

species of cotoneaster are deciduous while those of warmer regions of the USA can be evergreen. The alternate oval leaves are shiny dark green with small flowers ranging from pink to white. Leaves are 3 to 6 cm long, shiny dark green. Cotoneaster often have colourful fall foliage while makes them popular as ornamentals.

Ecology

Cotoneaster do well in deep moderately well drained silty to sandy soils with a pH range of 5.5 to 7.5. They are generally hardy and often used for hedges and shelterbelts or windbreaks. They are salt tolerant.

The bark, as with many fruit trees, is attractive to mice and other subnivean (living beneath the snow) rodents. 'Ring-barking' can be a major issue, particularly near rural apiaries, as it is difficult to protect the multiple stems.

The flowers are small (7 to 8 mm) but can be attractive because of their abundance. The shrub blooms in mid spring – May to June in most of Canada. The resulting black fruit (6 to 10 mm) has 1 to 5 seeds in August and September.

Methods of Reproduction and Spread:

C. acutifolius generally must be grown from seed as cuttings and other vegetative means of reproduction are unsuccessful.

Honey/Pollen Potential:

Cotoneaster was identified as rare to occasionally visited by honeybees (0.5 – 5 bees per 3 minutes) in California (although it was unclear how this was assessed – the values were similar to Phacelia, vetch, and the true clovers – all popular honey producers). As there are few mass plantings of cotoneaster, evidence is mostly from observation. There is little quantitative information on honey production although Ramsey ranks it as a first class bee plant visited eagerly by bees. Cotoneaster provides both honey and nectar and is recommended by Howes for planting artificial bee pasture.

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Greetings from England

I am a on "wild" honey chase. Excuse the "pun"!!

I am now 70 years young and owe my life to Honeyboy Honey. Some 35 years ago, I was struck down with a very severe case of Yellow Jaundice and was confined in an solitary isolation unit in an infectious diseases hospital.

At the time, I was NOT aware that my next of kin were notified of my likely demise. After 6 weeks, I was discharged as cured, clear of a disease for which there was no cure. Bed rest and plenty of water, was the only Kill or Cure solution available. It transpired that I had had the highest bilirubin count of anyone ever admitted to the Hospital and had not been expected to survive.

As I said, no one told me of my impending demise, so I was enjoying a good rest, laid in the sunshine and getting a good tan, even though my Yellow Jaundice was actually more "Apricot" than yellow.

I had a restricted diet, but after a week, I developed a yen for "Jaffa Cakes" and Honey. The cleaner started to shop for me and brought me a box of Jaffa Cakes and a 3lb (imperial pounds) tub of "Honey boy honey", every 2 days. I ate the lot in the 2 days. I sat eating the Honey with a dessert spoon "neat", this continued until my discharge and beyond, though the honey consumption did drop as my diet returned to normal. The only OFFICIAL MEDICINE I was given was steroids in the last week, when my bilirubin count dropped dramatically and a Biopsy had shown no liver damage. After 3 months convalescence, I was able to resume my manual work as a North Sea Gas Convertor, although I was never able to return to my previous regular alcohol consumption, only having a drink at Birthdays and Christmas.

I subsequently heard of a considerable number of deaths of relatives of friends of mine. Apparently the "Middle Ages medicine" was Mead.

But I am convinced that my "Yen" saved my life. I had always and still do love honey in moderation. BUT I can not find a supplier of Honeyboy Honey, can you help? Is it still sold to the UK and What was the main FLOWER component, as I still regular eat honey, but would love to be able to find a source, the same flower type.

My health is not as good as it was and I want to try to regain some of my vigour of earlier years.

If you can help in this matter, I would be very grateful.

Seasons Greetings

Jack Whittaker
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Editor

This is the second enquiry that we have received about "Honey Boy" brand honey. It was sold in the UK in the 1970s and early 1980s. The fact that customers recall it fondness says a lot about brand recognition. The brand was owned by a Canadian distribution company and was packed by Bee Maid Honey. Unfortunately, the brand was discontinued in the early 1980's. The Canadian Honey Council passed on the enquiry to Bee Maid Honey and the CEO Gordon Marks has contacted Mr. Whittaker with information about where he can purchase BeeMaid export honey under the Clover Crest label.