

# *Stachyurus praecox* Japanese Early Spiketail



*Stachyurus praecox* catkin-like inflorescences GBG.  
September 2018. Photo: JD

The genus *Stachyurus* is native to areas from the Himalayas through China to northern Indochina and Japan. *Stachyurus* is the only member of the Family Stachyuraceae. While the family is now generally accepted, its placement among other families is still in dispute.

The German explorer and physician, Philippe von Siebold, discovered *Stachyurus praecox* in Japan and this was described in collaboration with another German physician, Joseph Zuccarini, in their book, *Flora Japonica*, in 1836. This is very early for exploration of Japan as it was isolated politically and socially, except for a few Jesuit missionaries. Japan strictly controlled trade until 1868. However, plant collectors were keen to find exotic species in the 19th and 20th centuries, and today *Stachyurus* comprises about 8 species, half being native to China.

This plant likes moist, humus-rich soil, neutral to acid.

## Plant description

This plant is upright, around 4 metres in height and spreading to a similar width. It is deciduous with shiny, dark brown, arching branches. The leaves appear after the flowers and are toothed and elliptic in shape. These colour in autumn.

When in flower, it is the most spectacular. Flowers appear in very early spring. Small, 4-petalled very pale green bells hang in long inflorescences from along the branches. This is a dioecious plant with functionally separate male and female plants. The main pollinators are probably hover moths and early bees.

Our plant has not been known to bear seed. However, the fruit are small, 4-chambered berries with many seeds.

## Propagation

In the absence of a plant of the opposite gender and therefore fertile seeds, let alone hover moths and early bees, ours can be propagated by cuttings.



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Map on page 3

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*Stachyurus praecox*

bisexual flowers which function as male flowers, only.

Photo: Qwert 1234, Wikipedia Japan CC BY 3.0



*Stachyurus praecox* fruit.

Photo: Σ64 Wikimedia commons CC BY 3.0

## Name and Taxonomy

The name derives from Greek: stachy = “spike”; orua = “tail”; praecox = “early”.

There has been great controversy as to which family the plant belongs to. Until 1882 only two species had been discovered. However, recent DNA analysis revealed a relationship between 3 families – Stachyuraceae, Crossosomataceae and Staphyleaceae. The plant rests now in the Crossosomatales, an order with no Australian representatives and only one other species, *Staphylea colchica*, growing in Public Gardens in South Eastern Australia.

## References

Wikipedia: [en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Stachyurus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stachyurus)

The Plant List: [www.theplantlist.org](http://www.theplantlist.org)

Plants of the World, M. Chrisdtenhusz, RBG Kew, 2017

International Union for the Conservation of Nature: [www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)

## Summary

Family: Stachyuraceae

Genus: *Stachyurus* (The Plant List accepts six other species.)

Species: *Stachyurus praecox*

Common name: Japanese Early Spiketail

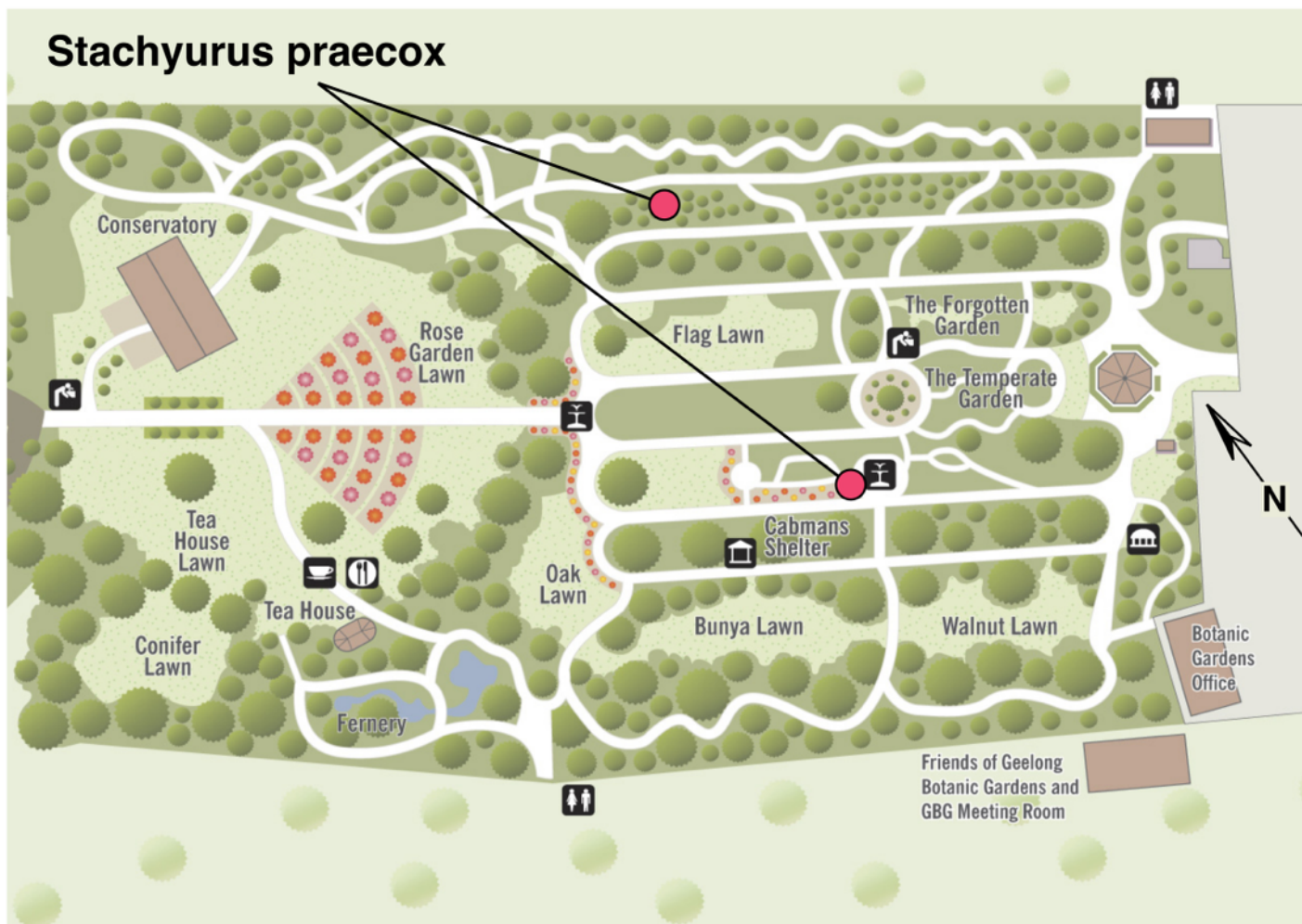
Conservation status: No species of *Stachyurus* are classified in the IUCN Red Book.



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*Stachyurus praecox*  
The plant is flowering and  
new leaves have begun to appear.  
GBG September 2018.  
Photo: JD







*Stachyurus praecox*: parts of the plant. 1. flower; petals, stamens & pistil (non-functional) of a bisexual flower; 3 petal; 4 stamens and ovary; 5 stamens; 6 vertical and 7 transverse sections of ovary; 8 floral diagram: a & b: sepals, usually 4 outer small brown sepals (only 3 shown here), b\* & c: 4 inner larger light green sepals (2 outer small, 2 inner larger); d: 4 petals larger than sepals, e: 8 stamens; f: ovary & stigma. Image: Curtis's Botanical Magazine, Hooker JD 1882, p6631; from [herbaria.plants.ox.ac.uk](http://herbaria.plants.ox.ac.uk)