

Stauntonia latifolia, Fragrant, Large, Vining, and Edible!

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sausage vine, or *Stauntonia latifolia*, is a vining plant native to the Himalayan Mountains of Southeast Asia that has the potential to offer its unique qualities to a variety of landscapes. This species produces multicolored sweet-scented flowers throughout the spring, followed by the development of a purple-red edible fruit in the late summer to early fall. It has a vining growth habit, and requires support to remain healthy. While there is a sensory appeal to the fragrant flowers and colorful, melon-flavored fruit of *Stauntonia latifolia*, the evergreen, shiny leaves provide further landscape allure. This species is well suited for both edible and ornamental landscapes in USDA zones 8-11. This review aims to provide a brief history on the species, followed by identification of its potential landscape and garden uses, and a product information guide. Identification of current gaps in knowledge and areas in need of further research regarding the species is included throughout the review.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Study Species

Stauntonia latifolia, also known as *Holboellia latifolia*, has the common name of sausage vine. Sausage vine acquired this memorable name from the characteristic fruit produced by the plant; an oblong, purple-red berry roughly ten centimeters in length (Huxley and Griffiths 1992). This woody vine is native to the Himalayan Mountains of Western Asia, and produces racemes of fragrant flowers (Chen and Shimizu 1994; Blackhall-Miles 2014). The vine was brought to the United Kingdom in the early nineteenth century by Sir George Staunton (Blackhall-Miles 2014). While *Stauntonia latifolia* lacks intense, widespread breeding and domestication efforts, it holds the potential to be a desirable ornamental in both Europe and the United States.

B. Taxonomic Classification and Geographic Distribution in the Wild

Sausage vine, or *Stauntonia latifolia* is a member of the Lardizabalaceae (Mitra and Karrer 1953). The Lardizabalaceae family is comprised of seven genera and forty species, with many members being woody, climbing vines (Christenhusz 2012b). As recently as 2012, restructuring in this family has occurred, resulting in the *Holboellia* genus being recategorized into the *Stauntonia* genus (Christenhusz 2012b). As a result of this, plants formerly referred to as *Holboellia latifolia* should be more accurately be placed in the *Stauntonia* genus, but may remain in the *latifolia* species. *Stauntonia latifolia* is more commonly referred to as sausage vine, broad-leaved sausage vine, or august melon (translated from Chinese) due to the shape and color of its characteristic fruit. *Stauntonia latifolia* has undergone very little in the way of domestication and breeding, however *S. l.* var. *angustifolia*, var. *bractera*, var. *acuminata*, and var. *obstuca* are identified varieties belonging to this genus and species (Christenhusz 2012b; Huxley and Griffiths 1992).

As previously mentioned, *Stauntonia latifolia* produces a red to purple oblong berry along its vines, resulting in the common name of sausage vine (Huxley and Griffiths 1992). The fruit is edible, averagely 10 centimeters long, and filled with a white pulp scattered with dark brown glossy seeds (Chen and Shimizu 1994). These berries result from the green-white and purple flowers of the vine, which have a notable cantaloupe-like fragrance (Blackhall-Miles 2014). There has been recent debate over whether *Stauntonia latifolia* is monecious (having separate male and female flowers on a single plant), or diecious (having separate male and female plants) (PFAF 2023). Regardless, this species has been found to have sexual dimorphism in flower appearance. Green-white flowers are often male and female flowers are often pink or purple (Huxley and Griffiths 1992). These flowers develop in a raceme structure, with three to seven flowers per raceme, as seen in Figure 1.1 (Huxley and Griffiths 1992). Leaves are evergreen, palmately compound, and appear green and shiny (Huxley and Griffiths 1992). Plants can reach a height and width of up to five meters in maturity (Huxley and Griffiths 1992; PFAF 2023). *Stauntonia latifolia* flowers from April through May, and fruits July through September in its native habitat (Chen and Shimizu 1994).



Figure 1.1 (left) depicts female (upper) and male (lower) flowers on a *Stauntonia latifolia* plant. Image courtesy of Crûg farms (www.crug-farm.co.uk)

Figure 1.2 (right) depicts *Stauntonia latifolia* on a wall in Kew gardens, London.



Stauntonia latifolia is native to the Himalayan mountains of Southwest Asia, including the Guizhou, Sichuan, Xizang, and Yunnan provinces of China, as well as Bhutan, Northeast India, and Nepal (Chen and Shimizu 1994). *Stauntonia latifolia* grows in a diverse range of soils and habitats; it has been documented growing on mountain slopes, forests, forest edges, stream edges, on valley edges, as well as in most soil textures (Chen and Shimizu 1994; PFAF 2023). Generally, *Stauntonia latifolia* thrives at elevations between 600 meters and 3,000 meters (Chen and Shimizu 1994). In garden settings, this plant is reported to require moderate light, consistent soil moisture, and plenty of growing room to perform well (Don and Miller 1832). When not in bloom, *Stauntonia latifolia* has stunning dark green foliage (Figure 1.2).

Stauntonia latifolia was introduced to western cultivation by the British Sir George Staunton, a prominent diplomat and politician from the early to mid-nineteenth century (Blackhall-Miles 2014). Sir George Staunton likely brought a specimen of *Stauntonia latifolia* to Britain after one of his expeditions to China and India in the early nineteenth century. Staunton likely gave this specimen to Fred Louis Holboell, the superintendent of the Copenhagen botanic garden at the time

(Blackhall-Miles 2014). It is believed that the genus *Stauntonia* is named after Sir George Staunton, and the genus *Holboellia* after Fred Louis Holboell.

Stauntonia latifolia is not currently listed as an invasive species in Britain nor the United States, and there is little documentation indicating that it is considered invasive in other countries (USDA 2023; Royal Horticultural Society 2023). Despite the lack of documentation, the variable environments that *Stauntonia latifolia* can grow in hold the potential for invasiveness to become an issue if cultivation becomes widespread. Furthermore, little research has been done to evaluate the potential of this species to become invasive. With this in mind, home gardeners and landscapers should be conscientious of where they plant *Stauntonia latifolia*.

In its native environment, *Stauntonia latifolia* is primarily used as a food resource to native groups. The fruit is reportedly mealy in texture, with a faint taste similar to that of cucumber and melon (Facciola 1990). A German study published in 1953 found potential from some extracts of *Stauntonia latifolia* to be used as a poison, specifically on fish, however no development in this area has occurred in the following decades (Mitra and Karrer 1953). Aside from *Stauntonia latifolia*'s edibility, there are no known medicinal or notable attributes to this crop, apart from its value as an ornamental.

III. CROP SPECIES

A. History and Potential Uses

There is little evidence of the breeding and subsequent domestication of *Stauntonia latifolia*. The species appears to be largely unchanged in European and American markets since it was first obtained and documented by Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century. That said, there is documentation of at least four varieties of *Stauntonia latifolia*, specifically var. *angustifolia*, var.

bractera, var. *acuminata*, and var. *obstuca* (Huxley and Griffiths 1992). There are no further sources on the characteristics nor history of *Stauntonia latifolia* var. *bractera*, var. *acuminata*, nor var. *obstuca*, however, some references to *Stauntonia latifolia* var. *angustifolia* exist in specialty horticultural shops. The vast majority of *Stauntonia latifolia* plants sold online are sold as wild type rooted vegetative cuttings from small-scale growers in the United Kingdom. Vendors of this type include Bluebell Arboretum and Nursery (bluebellnursery.com), Burncoose Nurseries (burncoose.co.uk), Architectural Plants (architecturalplants.com) and in the United States, Forestfarm at Pacifica (www.forestfarm.com) and Trade Winds Fruit (www.tradewindsfruit.com).

While few large-scale breeding efforts have occurred, there are a handful of hobby breeders who have begun to breed *Stauntonia latifolia*. These include the breeders at Crûg Farm (www.crug-farm.co.uk/) who have recently developed a cultivar titled HWJCMoo8, from a specimen gathered in Nepal (Christenhusz 2012a). Furthermore, breeding efforts to further develop the hardiness of *Stauntonia latifolia* are currently underway at Crûg Plant Farm, with a specific cultivar that shows potential for hardiness being HWJK 2213 (Christenhusz 2012a). Seeds for this genotype were collected on the Tibetan border at a high altitude. This origin is likely responsible for the enhanced hardiness this cultivar displays.

Many of the distributors of *Stauntonia latifolia* sell this plant directly to consumers via rooted vegetatively propagated cuttings. This makes sense, as these specialty distributors are transporting their plants to consumers largely within their own country, so shipping times are not necessarily a prohibitive factor. However, if distribution range were to be larger, seed propagation may be an easier method to transport seeds to retailers, with the presumption that these retailers will go on to sell established plants to consumers. This is further supported by the relatively large

number of seeds produced by each fruit; seed propagation could be more affordable for producers.

A potential distribution chain can be seen in Figure 2.1 below.



Figure 2.1, above, illustrates a potential distribution chain pathway for *Stauntonia latifolia*, with retailers ultimately selling to consumers. Specimen hunters may be breeders, sent by breeders, who travel to areas where *Stauntonia latifolia* is native. These individuals could locate seeds from plants growing in conditions similar to those they may be breeding for. Once back from their excursion, specimen hunters would transfer their collected specimens to researchers who will breed these plants until they're marketable, although this step is not completely necessary, as many retailers sell wild type *Stauntonia latifolia*. Producers (such as Pan American Seed Company) then gain access to the seeds produced by breeders, and scale up production so they can sell them to distributors, who distribute seed to retailers. Retailers (like Bachman's) would germinate seeds, and grow seedlings to sell to consumers, who may be hobby gardeners, landscape architects, or individuals simply looking for a large climbing vine with notable flowers.

IV. ANTICIPATED CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS

A. Life Cycle

Stauntonia latifolia is a woody, evergreen perennial vine (Chen and Shimizu 1994; Huxley and Griffiths 1992). When grown outside of the Himalayan mountains *Stauntonia latifolia* is native to, this plant reportedly makes for an excellent addition to the garden (Thomas 1992; Chen and Shimizu 1994). *Stauntonia latifolia* requires support in the garden, in the form of a garden wall, large trellis, or into a tree (Huxley and Griffiths 1992). The garden appeal of this species arises largely from their dark green compound leaves and their delicate, fragrant flowers, depicted in Figure 3.1 (Royal Horticultural Society 2023). In addition to these traits, *Stauntonia latifolia*'s striking edible fruit has the potential to generate a draw for hobby growers of unusual plants. Flowers are typically produced in this species in late March through May, and if pollination is successful, red-purple sausage-shaped fruit (Figure 3.2) is produced in the fall, specifically in August through September (Burncoose Nurseries 2023; Christenhusz 2012a). It should be noted that the planting of multiple vines near each other improves fruit production (Christenhusz 2012a; PFAF 2023). Regardless, these separate flowering and fruiting times create two points of interest for landscape architects as well as hobby gardeners who desire to utilize *Stauntonia latifolia* in their landscape.



Figure 3.1, left, depicts fragrant *Stauntonia latifolia* flowers in Bhutan (Phuntsho 2016).

Figure 3.2, right, depicts a ripe sausage vine fruit in Bhutan (Phuntsho 2016).



B. Winter Hardiness & Drought Tolerance

Broadly speaking, *Stauntonia latifolia* is native to Southwest Asia, in regions with a generally warm climate (Chen and Shimizu 1994). Due to this, *Stauntonia latifolia* is believed to be hardy to USDA zones 8-11 (PFAF 2023). Furthermore, *Stauntonia latifolia* has been recorded to be damaged by prolonged periods of time where temperatures are below -5°C (approximately 23°F) (Huxley and Griffiths 1992). While this may be true for a typical *Stauntonia latifolia* specimen, new cultivars developed by specialty breeders could improve hardiness (Christenhusz 2012a). For example, *Stauntonia latifolia* HWJK 2213, a cultivar developed by Crûg Farms from a *Stauntonia latifolia* specimen collected at an altitude of 3,150m in East Nepal (Christenhusz 2012a). There is currently no data on *Stauntonia latifolia*'s USDA Heat Zone and this should be an area of research in the near future.

As discussed previously, *Stauntonia latifolia* grows in a variety of environments in its native habitat, from various positions in forest ecosystems with different levels of shade, to various landscape positions such as on mountainsides or riverbanks (PFAF 2023; Huxley and Griffiths 1992; Chen and Shimizu 1994). While variable light conditions have little effect on the ability of this vine to thrive, maintaining a consistently moist soil is necessary for *Stauntonia*

latifolia to perform well (Huxley and Griffiths 1992; PFAF 2023). In garden settings, it's recommended to plant *Stauntonia latifolia* along a garden wall (Christenhusz 2012a). This placement protects the plant from strong winds, provides a growth support, and provides sun for upper leaves and shade for the plant's base, conditions which sausage vine thrives in (Christenhusz 2012a; Huxley and Griffiths 1992).

C. Potential Production Environment

There is little public information on the current production practices utilized by *Stauntonia latifolia* producers. However, based on available information regarding the native habitat and landscape conditions preferred by the species, a preliminary production environment guide is possible.

Stauntonia latifolia seeds should be sown into a 128 plug tray, in well-draining soil media in early spring. After germination, seedlings should be grown in greenhouse conditions and transplanted as needed for their first year. Greenhouse day temperatures should be near 21° C, and night temperatures near 18°C. Lights should be programmed for long days (16 hours on, 8 hours off), and at 500 $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ to ensure growth is maximized. Plants should be fertigated daily to maintain high soil moisture, and to ensure access to nutrients to promote growth. Again, there is little to no available research on the nutrient needs of *Stauntonia latifolia*, however 125 ppm 15-5-15 may be a place to start for producers, due to the widespread applicability of the fertilizer type and concentration.

In the second year, plants should be acclimated to outdoor temperatures, and be sold to consumers. There is no evidence for the need of pinching, plant growth regulator (PGR) application, nor cooling in the first year. After being planted in a permanent location, plants may

be slow to establish and could take two or more years to bloom and fruit, but careful site selection may alleviate some of these issues (Christenhusz 2012a).

V. MARKET NICHE

A. Target Sales Date

A possible target sales date for *Stauntonia latifolia* is April 1st. A target date of April 1st serves two purposes. This date would allow *Stauntonia latifolia* specimens to be nearing, or at, their bloom time, which creates an immediate draw for consumers. The strong, pleasant scent of these flowers may serve to attract consumers interested in an uncommon landscape perennial. Secondly, this date has the potential to make *Stauntonia latifolia*'s humorous common name of "sausage vine" into a strong marketing strategy. April 1st is commonly known as April Fool's day, a day where people play small pranks or jokes on each other (Dean 2022). With the humorous aspect of this date in mind, it seems fitting that a plant with the strange common name of sausage vine be sold on this day. The comical aspect of the date, combined with it being at the flowering time of the species, creates a unique opportunity for *Stauntonia latifolia* to be marketed as the one of the first April Fool's day plants.

B. Potential Crop Limitations

As has been alluded to throughout this paper, there are many gaps in what is known regarding *Stauntonia latifolia*'s biology, nutrient requirements, greenhouse production, and precise USDA hardiness and heat zones. This lack of knowledge could result in monetary losses for producers if a crop fails, or losses in reputation if a consumer's plant dies due to cold or heat.

Additionally, it may be difficult to force blooms in *Stauntonia latifolia* specimens produced in greenhouses. It could be possible to experiment with cooling or vernalizing plants for varying

amounts of time since they flower in the spring, but there is little to no information on this process. This issue is compounded by the perennial nature of the vine, as well as a lack of knowledge of the exact age plants begin to flower.

Lastly, in the landscape this plant is limited by its hardiness. With a reported hardiness to zone 8, and a need for constant soil moisture, these plants would be greatly limited in where they may be able to grow in the United States.

C. Competitive crops:

Stauntonia latifolia shares its spotlight with several other fragrant vines, one somewhat similar plant commonly seen in the garden is honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.). Garden varieties of honeysuckle have a sweet fragrance to them similar to that of *Stauntonia latifolia*, and both plants have vining growth habits (New York Invasive Species Information 2019). While honeysuckle can add pleasant smells to the landscape, it lacks the edible fruit that sausage vine possesses. Furthermore, *Lonicera* spp. are known to be invasive throughout much of North America, as seeds from their fruit, while poisonous to humans, is widely spread via bird droppings (UW-Extension 2019).

Stauntonia latifolia lacks the invasive nature of honeysuckle, and offers more than a sweet scent to a gardener's landscape. This unique vine produces odd-looking edible fruit in the fall, after producing racemes of fragrant flowers in the spring. These two distinct production times can generate interest at both the beginning and end of the growing season in the garden, which could allow other species to take center stage in the landscape mid-season. Furthermore, sausage vine holds the potential to be a species of interest for both hobby horticulturists, and community gardens, due to its appealing blooms and alien-like edible fruit. All in all, *Stauntonia*

latifolia offers blooms similar in scent to those of honeysuckle, but brings additional gifts of edible fruit and shiny dark green foliage to the landscape.

D. Marketing story:

Sausage vine can add a sensory sizzle to your garden landscape. Sausage vine, or *Stauntonia latifolia* hails from the Himalayan mountains, and was brought to Britain in the early 19th century. This plant produces racemes of mouth-wateringly fragrant flowers throughout the spring. After pollination, and throughout the summer, sausage like fruits develop on the vine, but worry not! The visual appeal of *Stauntonia latifolia* is not limited to its reproductive organs. Sausage vine has shiny, dark green evergreen foliage, providing a wonderful backdrop for summer-blooming garden plants. In the fall, *Stauntonia latifolia* takes the stage again as its purple-red, edible sausage-like fruit ripens. This fruit is visually striking, and tastes like a combination of cucumber and melon. It will certainly be a point of interest in your garden. Seeds of this distinctive species are currently available from specialty horticultural retailers in both the United States and the United Kingdom.

VI. PRODUCT INFORMATION GUIDE & CROP SCHEDULE

Market production of *Stauntonia latifolia* is an under-researched field in need of further development, however, it is possible to develop a potential product information guide (PIG) for greenhouse production given the current understanding of the species. As discussed briefly in Section II A, it's recommended that producers utilize seeds instead of vegetative cuttings under market production. Furthermore, production should occur in greenhouses over a 65-week period in USDA zones 8-11; regions *Stauntonia latifolia* is hardy to. This range allows for hardening off to easily occur in week 8 of year two of production.

To better understand *Stauntonia latifolia* seed germination, a small germination experiment was conducted. Seeds were sourced from Trade Wind Fruits (www.tradewindsfruit.com), and 12 seeds were sown into 2 806 containers. 6 seeds received no scarification, and 6 were scarified. Seeds were sown into germination mix, then placed into a mist room at the University of Minnesota Twin-Cities Plant Growth Facilities to germinate. No germination occurred over a 14-week period, and seeds showed evidence of molding.

With this in mind, producers should sow seeds into a 128 plug tray filled with a 2:1 ratio of germination mix to sand in week one of the first year of production (Krebs 2009). This substrate ratio allows for improved drainage in the pots, which reduces risk of seed molding during *Stauntonia latifolia*'s lengthy germination period. Seeds take 2-3 months to germinate, translating to an estimated germination time of week 12 of year one of production (Krebs 2009). Sown seeds should be placed in a greenhouse and watered daily to induce germination. Placement in a mist house is not recommended, due to the potential for mold development.

Seeds are expected to germinate in week 12 of year one. After germination occurs, fertigation with 125 ppm 15-5-15 fertilizer should begin. This provides necessary nutrients for seedlings as they begin to develop their true leaves. There is little information on the timing of *Stauntonia latifolia*'s growth stages; this is an area that necessitates further research. Regardless, when plants start exhibiting true leaf growth (likely week 14), they should be transplanted to 3-inch pots. Throughout the remainder of year one, plants should continue to be grown in greenhouse conditions, with daily fertigation and transplanting to larger containers as needed. Furthermore, when plants begin to exhibit their vining growth habit, likely near week 20, vine support must be provided. It is important to note that *Stauntonia latifolia* does not require the application of any plant growth regulators.

In the second year of production, production should continue in the same manner as the end of year one. The final transplanting of *Stauntonia latifolia* should be into 8-inch standard round pots. In week 8 of year two, or the end of February, plants should begin to be hardened off to spring conditions in preparation for market sale. Near the target sales date of April 1st (week 13), plants should become available for retail sale. A complete outline of the 65-week production process is visualized in Figure 5.4.

Given the perennial nature of *Stauntonia latifolia*, and the two-year (or longer) period before flowering begins, it is not a sustainable option to wait until flowering to sell this crop to consumers. The high energy and water requirements of greenhouses, as well as the considerable amount of space *Stauntonia latifolia* occupies as it matures and its vining nature lead to the sale of *Stauntonia latifolia* in its vegetative state to be the more sustainable and realistic option for producers. Since marketable plants will not have flowers nor fruit at the time of sale, it is important that retail pot labels include a photo of a mature *Stauntonia latifolia* plant in bloom and a description or photo of its characteristic edible fruit (Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3).

As alluded to, there is little research and information available on *Stauntonia latifolia*'s germination, production, and suitability for different landscapes. These are all areas that necessitate future research prior to large-scale production, as the product information guide outlined above is preliminary. Adjustments should be made to this guide as information on the species continues to accumulate.



Figure 5.1, left, depicts a potential photo suitable for *Stauntonia latifolia* horticultural marketing (Gardner 2007).

Figure 5.2, right, depicts another potential photo that depicts the entire *Stauntonia latifolia* vine (charliepridham 2016).



Figure 5.3, left, depicts a potential *Stauntonia latifolia* fruit photo suitable for inclusion on retail labels (Mauquié 2020).

Figure 5.4, below, outlines a potential production timeline for *Stauntonia latifolia*.

Year	Week Number	Production Step	Description
Year 1	1	Sowing	Sow seeds into 128 plug tray, filled with 2:1 mixture of germination mix and sand. Place into greenhouse, water daily.
Year 1	12	Germination and true leaf development	Fertigate daily with 125ppm 15-5-15 fertilizer
Year 1	14	1 st transplanting	Transplant to 3-inch pot, include trellis for vine support
Remainder of year 1	14-52	Growth	Continue to fertigate daily in greenhouses, transplant to larger pot sizes as needed.
Year 2	1-8	Growth, final transplanting	Continue to fertigate as needed, transplant to standard 8-inch round pot
Year 2	8-13	Hardening off	Harden off plants to outdoor temperatures (zones 8-11)
Year 2	13, April 1st	Target sale date, retail sale begins	Plants available for retail sale

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