

Ruscus - Growing Guide

Growing Ruscus Aculeatus

Butcher's Broom

This is an unusual sub-shrub which is a native of Europe and the near east. It is widespread in southern England but absent in the wild in the north and Scotland. The butcher's broom is the only shrubby plant exhibiting monocotyledonous features which is native to England.

What appear to be the leaves on this plant are really flattened stems (known as cladodes) which carry out the function of true leaves. The actual leaves themselves on this plant are just tiny papery scales around the stems. The flowers are minute and borne in winter or spring on the surface of the cladodes. Male and female flowers appear on separate plants although some forms are hermaphrodite. The berries are bright red sealing wax cherries also in the centre of the cladodes.

The only other species which we grow which produces flowers and berries from the centre of its 'leaves' is *helwingia*. *Ruscus aculeatus* is, in this sense, a very primitive and unusual plant.

R. aculeatus grows to around 2ft in dense clumps of around 3ft in circumference. The attraction of this spiny branched plant is that it will grow almost anywhere. It thrives in dense shade and on poor soils. As such it can be a useful deterrent to intruders in the garden in a dark corner where little else will grow.

At Caerhays we grow *R. aculeatus* as a border hedge in an exposed part of the garden. It berries well most years and, although seen by few visitors, certainly earns its place.

Ruscus spreads by underground suckering growth. This can periodically be split and severed from the main plant which often develops a bare

centre as it spreads. The seed can readily be grown in a cold frame or in containers.

Burncoose now offers a compact growing hermaphrodite form of *R. aculeatus* called 'John Redmund'. So popular has it proved that you may need to preorder online.

We are also propagating another unusual species of *Ruscus* from southern Europe with much larger leaf like cladodes called *R. hypoglossum*. Without spines this too makes excellent groundcover in a shady shrub bed but it will be a little longer before we can bulk it up to offer for sale in our catalogue. In the Savill Garden it is a standout plant.



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R. aculeatus 'John Redmund'



R. aculeatus 'John
Redmond'



Ruscus hypophyllus

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