

STRATEGY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF IRISH CULTIVARS

Version 2. (2023)

This document replaces *A Strategy for the Preservation of Irish Cultivars*, Version 1. (2004)

IRISH GARDEN PLANT SOCIETY

The constitution of the Irish Garden Plant Society (IGPS) states as one of its objectives "to research and locate garden plants considered to be rare or in need of conservation, especially those raised in Ireland by Irish gardeners and nurserymen" (paragraph 2.d) and "to co-operate with horticulturalists, botanists, botanical and other gardens, individuals and organisations in Ireland and elsewhere in these matters" (paragraph 2.e).

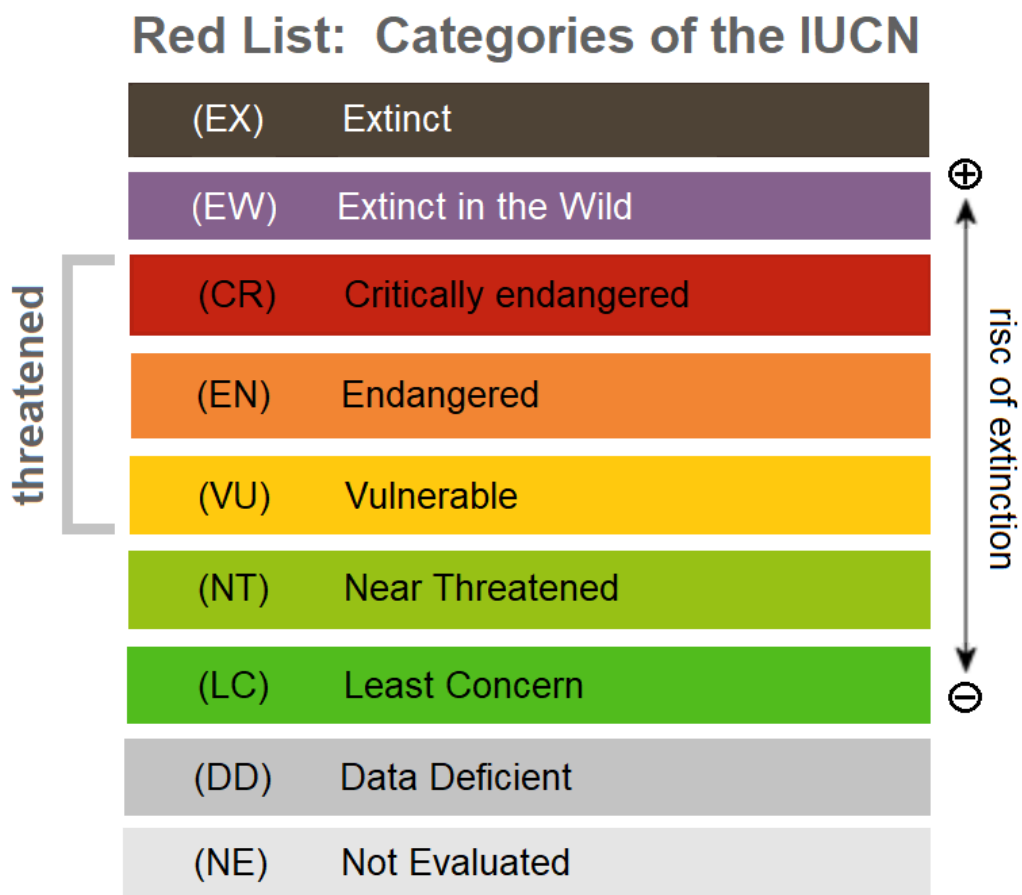
At the start in the 1980s and 1990s details regarding the above mentioned plants were almost unobtainable by members. In 2000 the IGPS cemented its commitment to the preservation of Irish cultivars and Irish associated plants by facilitating the publication of *A Heritage of Beauty* by E. C. Nelson. No organisation can proceed in conservation without the information as to what needs to be preserved. The Society now has the most authoritative list of Irish cultivars and associated plants and needs to proceed with their preservation . Some plant introductions since 2000 were illustrated in *Heritage Irish Plants – Plandaí Oidhreachta* published in 2016. Since the initial version of the Strategy, 951 cultivars have been recorded on the Plant Heritage database, Persephone, under a dispersed National Collection of Irish Heritage Plants (accessed 19 October 2023).

The general consensus amongst an informal Working Group is that the best method to proceed is with a formal strategy, one that can be easily followed and that will allow the preservation program to proceed through committee changes.

STRATEGY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF IRISH CULTIVARS

A Heritage of Beauty lists over 5,000 plants with Irish associations and though very comprehensive is not an exhaustive list. Many of the cultivars listed are already extinct. Since its publication there are many new Irish associated plants and cultivars in development or launched on the market. A system of classification of the conservation status of each cultivar will allow the IGPS to prioritise the plants that need preservation. The system used by international bodies involved with conservation can be adapted for use by the IGPS. Indeed it is best to use the categories that are in use and familiar to gardeners and botanists worldwide. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) gives a detailed categorisation system and assessment format for endangered plants in the wild. The Red Data books for individual countries follow these assessments and categories. Even though the assessment format is inapplicable to IGPS concerns, the utilisation of the categories are useful.

They are as follows:



THE FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF THE CATEGORIES AND HOW THEY APPLY TO THE IRISH GARDEN PLANT SOCIETY

Initially all plants that have not been evaluated would get a **Not Evaluated (NE)** category.

The plants that have been evaluated will fall into one of the following categories. The only category used by IUCN that does not apply to an IGPS evaluation system is **Extinct in the Wild (EW)**.

CATEGORY ONE

Cultivars known to be in cultivation

Critically Endangered (CR) - Cultivars where immediate action is needed to ensure their preservation

Endangered (EN) - Cultivars that have very low numbers and where action is needed as soon as possible.

Vulnerable (VU) - Cultivars where numbers are low but where action can be delayed once their numbers are being monitored and their status remains stable.

Near Threatened (NT) - Cultivars that are stable and well distributed and where the only action needed is their periodic monitoring.

Least Concern (LC) - Cultivars that are so well established in cultivation that even periodic monitoring is not necessary.

CATEGORY TWO

Cultivars not known to be in existence

Data Deficient (DD) - Cultivars that have been assessed and where no category can be given.

Extinct (EX) - Cultivars that are known to be or proposed extinct.

The IGPS needs detailed criteria for plants to be included in a category and will also need to have a panel of experts that can verify cultivars or call on outside expertise to do so.

Plant Heritage

In 2020 the Irish Garden Plant Society re-joined Plant Heritage (formerly the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens, NCCPG) and applied for National Collection status for the Irish Heritage Plants that are grown by IGPS members and in public and private gardens. This application was accepted as a Dispersed Collection as it is spread over so many gardens.

IGPS plant records are now on the Plant Heritage database Persephone 2 but confidentiality of where plants are grown is still maintained by the IGPS.

This has several benefits: it

- Is cross referenced to RHS records e.g., *RHS Plant Finder*,
- Gives the conservation status levels for many cultivars,
- Is in safe permanent 'cloud based' storage,
- Is accessible (with prior permission) to more than one person,
- Is updatable by more than one person (with prior permission),
- Allows easy access to the 700 National Collections, where we may find at risk IHPs,
- Facilitates IHPs becoming better known – many have never been listed within e.g., *RHS Plant Finder*,
- Provides publicity for IHPs, Irish gardens and horticulture.

Plant Heritage also applies conservation categories close to those of the IUCN, as follows.

- CR - Critical
- EN – Endangered
- VU – Vulnerable
- THR - Threatened in cultivation
- LC – Least Concern
- NT – Not Threatened
- PG – eligible for Plant Guardian
- DD – Data Deficient (no reference pre-2005 for being grow or sold)

Plant Heritage has the similar aim of the preservation of garden plants but is a much larger organisation with substantially more resources than the IGPS. For the year 2022 they had a membership of over 3000, an overall income of £498,189 and 6.21 full time staff posts (based on a 37.5 hour week), one of which is funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund. Currently the IGPS has no full or part time paid staff and relies heavily on volunteers.

It would be preferable to have the same criteria in use by both Plant Heritage and the IGPS but for the present this is not feasible. The criteria used and their application can be revisited in future revisions of this document.

IUCN categories and criteria used for each by Plant Heritage and IGPS

IUCN Category	In full	Plant Heritage criteria	IGPS criteria
EX	Extinct	Not found after decades searching	Not found after decades searching
CR	Critically Endangered	Not known in cultivation or trade	Known from less than 2 locations or sources
EN	Endangered	1 or 2 known locations	Known from between 3 and 5 locations or sources
VU	Vulnerable	3 or more known locations or sources	Known from between 6 and 10 locations or sources
NT	Near Threatened	available from less than 3	Known from between 11 and 20 locations or sources
LC	Least Concern	3 or more known sources	Known from more than 20 locations or sources
DD	Data Deficient	No data available	No data available

THE IGPS CATEGORIES AND CRITERIA IN MORE DETAIL WITH EXAMPLES

CATEGORY ONE - Critically Endangered (CR)

Cultivars where immediate action is needed to ensure their survival

***Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Newryensis'**

The knowledge of its present status and as entered in *A Heritage of Beauty* is; 'Very rare, a single tree in the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, seems to be the solitary, surviving specimen.'

Critically Endangered (CR) applies as there is only one known specimen extant. The criteria for inclusion in this category are cultivars that are known from less than 2 locations or sources.

In Spring 2023 scions from this tree were successfully grafted at Teagasc, Ashtown, Dublin and are being grown on by a member for future distribution.

CATEGORY ONE - Endangered (EN)

Cultivars that have very low numbers and where action is needed as soon as possible.

Primula 'Julius Caesar'

Listed for five growers on the IGPS excel sheets and not listed on the *RHS Plant Finder*. The plant is in cultivation in Ireland but not in enough numbers to allow us to be confident of its continued existence.

The criteria for inclusion in this category are cultivars that are known from between 3 and 5 locations or sources.

CATEGORY ONE - Vulnerable (VU)

Cultivars where numbers are low but where action can be delayed once their numbers are being monitored and their status remains stable.

***Zelkova carpinifolia* 'Glasnevin'**

Zelkova carpinifolia is well known from the large and striking specimen growing close to the Herbarium at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin. It is one of the most notable trees in Ireland. In 2022 Jan Ravensberg of Ravensberg Nurseries received scion wood from the tree at Glasnevin and grafted approximately a dozen young trees. He marketed the trees under the cultivar name 'Glasnevin'. The IGPS has obtained and distributed 6 trees to large public and private gardens, Ardgillan Castle and Gardens, Birr Castle Demesne, Blarney Castle and Gardens, Castlewellan Forest Park, Hillsborough Castle and Gardens and Malahide Castle and Gardens.

The criteria for inclusion in this category are plants that are known from between 6 and 10 locations or sources.

CATEGORY ONE - Near Threatened (NT)

Cultivars that are stable and well distributed and where the only action needed is their periodic monitoring.

***Deutzia purpurascens* 'Alpine Magician'**

Listed for 19 growers on the IGPS excel sheets and 1 UK nursery.

The criteria for inclusion in this category are plants that are known from between 11 and 20 locations or sources.

CATEGORY ONE - Least Concern (LC)

Cultivars that are so well established in cultivation that even periodical monitoring is un-necessary.

***Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata'**

Taxus baccata 'Fastigiata' is so popular a garden plant, both on and outside the island that the possibility of it being moved to a higher category is almost inconceivable, especially considering the fact that it originated in the 1740s.

The criteria for inclusion in this category are plants that are known from more than 20 locations or sources.

CATEGORY TWO

Cultivars not known to be in existence

Data Deficient (DD) - Cultivars that are not located but may possibly turn up.

***Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Pyramidalis'**

Plants placed in this category need to be searched for in a very definite manner. The most probable location for these 'lost' cultivars would be in old collections and in specialist plant collections (possibly Plant Heritage collections). Locating them will be time consuming and could have a poor success rate. A possible example is *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Pyramidalis', which is not listed in *Trees and Shrubs Cultivated in Ireland* and neither is it listed in the *RHS Plant Finder*. It does not appear in the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin catalogue of plants. It is highly possible that this cultivar is extinct but much more information would need to be compiled before the category of **Extinct (EX)** could be applied.

EXTINCT (EX) - Cultivars that are known to be extinct.

***Nerine* cultivar seedlings**

From *A Heritage of Beauty*, there were two major series of *Nerine* cultivars raised in Ireland. The earliest seem to have been a set of seedlings produced at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin; these are all extinct, having been wiped out in a severe frost in 1930.

THE STARTING POINT FOR CONSERVATION CATEGORIES

The plants included in *A Heritage of Beauty* were those known to the author at the time of publication in 2000. The purpose of the book was to list the available information on Irish cultivars and not to give them a conservation status, though comments regarding their conservation status are occasionally included and provide a good starting point for the Society's work.

On occasion there may be organisations or individuals with the knowledge that allows the status of an individual cultivar to be reassessed and all efforts should be explored to have a consensus of views on cultivars where **Extinct (EX)** is being applied.

As work progresses through the plants listed in *A Heritage of Beauty* and those cultivars added since publication, IGPS will build a body of information on our IHPs. Those applicable will be added to the Persephone database as elements of the Dispersed Collection of IHPs. This database, over the years, will allow for easy monitoring of the conservation status of each cultivar and allow cultivars to be moved from categories. For example, plants found to be decreasing in the number of nurseries offering the plants for sale or grown by members could be moved from Least Concern (LC) to Near Threatened (NT) or even Vulnerable (VU).

THE WAY FORWARD

The Society should commit to a strategy that will allow it to move forward in a uniform fashion. Unfortunately there is no organisation that will do this work for the Society. This role should become the leading focus of the Society and every opportunity should be harnessed for the completion of this aim. In October 2023 the National Executive Committee approved and adopted this second version of the strategy. A working group within the IGPS, the Irish Heritage Plant Working Group, will oversee this work.

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with input from the Irish Heritage Plant Working Group; Maeve Bell, Stephen Butler, Mary Forrest, Billy McCone and Peter Milligan.

Irish Garden Plant Society, 20th October 2023

References:

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Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Kalani Seymour for information on Threat Categories and Criteria used by Plant Heritage.