



*The
Irish Garden Plant Society*



Newsletter Number 123

May 2012



The Annual General Meeting 2012

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Sat 12th May 10.00 a.m for 10.30 a.m., at Hillsborough Courthouse, The Square, Hillsborough, BT26 6AG.

As always, it will be followed by a series of garden visits on Saturday & Sunday and a meal on Saturday evening. The meal will be held at 8:00pm in La Mon Hotel & Country Club, 41 Gransha Road, Comber, BT23 5RF. See the January 2012 newsletter for details of the gardens to be visited.

If you haven't already booked contact Patrick Quigley, 24 Areema Drive, Dunmurry, Belfast, BT17 0QG. tel: +44 (0) 7801 299263 patrick.quigley@live.co.uk for further information.

A. G. M. Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of AGM 2011
3. Matters arising
4. Chairman's report
5. Treasurer's report
6. Election of Committee Members
7. Any other business

Front cover: *Solanum crispum* 'Glasnevin'. **Photograph:** Pearse Rowe



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Editorial

Spring time and new plants are synonymous, and as Christopher Lloyd said in *Garden Flowers from Seed*, seed sowing is "one of life's big thrills". Many thanks to Stephen Butler for his commitment to the Seed Distribution Scheme, but he needs your help, why not get involved this year, his contact details are on page 18.

Since the discussion document of 2004, *A strategy for the preservation of Irish cultivars*, there has been little news for members on the Irish cultivar programme. The IGPS is fortunate to have the wealth of knowledge gathered by Dr. E Charles Nelson in his book *A Heritage of Beauty* but as this was published in 2000, updated records of new plants and conservation strategies for endangered garden worthy plants are needed.

An example of the progress that can take place is the Kennedy Irish Primroses. "Innisfree" and "Drumcliffe" are now available in the U.S., Japan and Europe. Fortunately Pat FitzGerald Managing Director of FitzGerald Nurseries, in Co. Kilkenny ([www. Fitzgerald-nurseries.com](http://www.Fitzgerald-nurseries.com)) has a very strong interest in both the creation of new cultivars and older Irish cultivars and this is a valuable asset available to the Society. Our National Committee might be encouraged to work with companies like FitzGerald Nurseries to conserve important cultivars no longer available commercially. Perhaps a matter for discussion at the A.G.M.?

Mary

Please send material for the Newsletter to: igpseditor@gmail.com
or Mary Rowe 29 Bantry Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

The copy date for the September 2012 Newsletter is August 4th



Southern Climbers for Northern Walls

By John Joe Costin

When I saw a line of plants growing from hardcore without visible soil or water in a well drained farmyard perched on a promontory of shattered granite on a hill sheep yard in Glen Lonan, Argyll, I thought this was the type of cruelty the Spanish lady who set up a **Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Plants** ached her pains about in the Tribune Herald. The landscape was parched, yet, the growth was luxuriant. The fresh green blue foliage, of its trailing stems splayed over the hardcore, were a perfect foil to its ochre yellow *Nasturtium* flowers. It was my first encounter with the lovely ***Tropaeolum polyphyllum***. Its blue foliage suggested a hotter and drier native habitat. Argyll seemed an unlikely home for it. Its climate is distinctively colder, more humid and its piercing damp winter is not experienced in Ireland. I did not realise the level of plantsmanship that this nonchalant planting masked until I encountered the same plant 18 years later in its native place. It was growing luxuriantly from hot dry cinders that pass for soil at 1500m, in the mountains at Farellones that overlook Santiago, the capital of Chile, a city that sits 500m (1700ft) above sea level. This spectacular area offers easy access to the specialised habitats of high Andean alpine plants. Standing at latitude 33°S with an annual rainfall of 30cm (12") one sixth of that in Argyll, was it possible that the same species grew equally well across a span of 22° latitude in diametric opposite climates, one maritime, the other alpine?

Despite such apparent versatility, this gorgeous plant is scarce in cultivation. Ecologists identify the why. Plants that are easy to grow and which we call weeds have low requirements and high tolerances. It is that challenge of cultivating those plants with high requirements and low tolerances that plant persons relish, establishing from meticulous observations or intuition the conditions required. The cinders on the mountain side and the shattered granite in the yard offer insights on its growing needs. In Chile its rhizomes travel to depths of 60cm or more below the hot surface to a level where conditions are more equitable and where some moisture is available. The well drained hardcore in Argyll mimic these conditions and explain why that colony has survived the vicissitudes of that yard for over 50 years. To grow it in Ireland's moist climate, the key is not filling a trench with hardcore but rather to ensure that it has a drainage outlet. A raised bed is the ideal where the lovely shoots can drape over the sides. It is propagated from rhizomes. I had no expectation of such a dividend. I climbed the mountain simply to get an

overview of the effect of man and see the halo of smog 5 million people generate over their own city. Chile has a rich flora of 5200 recorded species of which 35% are endemic, mostly desert species. Growing here in alpine conditions of extreme winter cold and heat in summer were *Calceolaria purpurea*, *Adesmia viscosa*, *Chaetanthera chilensis*, *Kagenckia angustifolia*, *Leucocoryne violacescens*, *Viviana crenata*, and old favourites, the extraordinary spiny *Colletia cruciata* and *Solanum crispum* the most widely planted of Chilean climbers in Ireland. It was exciting to meet my first Chilean *Muehlenbeckia* splayed across those cinders as an eye catching dense ground cover mat. It deserves to be better known but it has yet to be introduced. I failed to find seed. *M. hastulata* has personality, distinctive small spear shaped leaves and slender, fine, wiry bright red stems. I have seen *Muehlenbeckia* growing at high altitude in New Zealand. It is not pernickety, once the soil is well drained. Its presence here in the cinders maybe a badge to its versatility. When I express admiration for *Muehlenbeckia* gardeners recoil as if I had said roast rat was a favourite meat. *M. complexa*, listed as a climber, has a reputation for legendary entanglements. Nevertheless, I see ornamental values, potential in its daintiness, uniqueness in its chocolate purple minute circular leaves, distinctiveness in its flexible filigree shoots and intricate growth habit and amenability to clipping equal to *Buxus sempervirens* or the Japanese topiary plant of choice, *Ilex crenata*. I know of no better dark edge to frame a bed or form a low hedge or sculpt into a half sphere. I look out on 6 of these, each 1m in diameter, in a bed of golden silica sand.

I was enlightened by a Cockney window box contractor, who introduced himself at a trade show with “I like your gear and some of your tackle would charm my birds”. Querying the precarious parapet of his extreme specialisation he assured me of the contrary. There are, he estimated 500,000 window boxes in the London area. Each was replanted for colour at least twice a year and that it was entirely a ‘bird business’. He explained that there were 3 elements in the design “colour, ups and downs.” He said he was “roger for colour” but was limited in choice of 'downs' to small leaved ivies and 'ups' to *Chamaecyparis l. 'Ellwood's Gold'*. Your ‘small flowering conifer’ *Ozothamnus ledifolius*, he chuckled is an ideal 'up'. His perceptive eye saw that the intricately tangled stems of *M. complexa*, which he called 'Chocolate Strings', was a perfect 'down' replacement for the commonplace ivies. He repeatedly ordered hundreds of each.

Mutisia

Of the 70 known species, 44 are native to Chile where they grow in different vegetation zones. Their range of brilliant and beautiful colours is highly desirable but their scarcity in cultivation might suggest that they are difficult to grow. Forrest lists them in only 5 Heritage gardens. *Mutisia acerosa* grew in

the cinders with *M. hastulata* and *T. polyphyllum*, an encounter that confirmed its need for a well drained growing position in full sun.

Chile is only 140Km (90miles) wide and is framed by the Andes to the east, averaging 3350m (11,000ft) in height. It experiences every known climate along its entire length 4800Km (3000miles). For those who believe that matching plant to location is important, a drive south from Santiago is instructive. They might be perplexed by how restricted and localised optimum production conditions are when measured by crop economics. Chile exploits its southern location to export fresh produce to the northern hemisphere in our winter, dessert grapes are its most valuable crop. South of Santiago you encounter prairies of asparagus, artichokes, sea kale and melon, then table grapes, *Opuntia* for its Barbarian Figs, avocados, native fruits, then the wine valleys, other vegetables, soft and top fruit orchards, cereals and grassland of cattle and dairy farms and then into the forest. Driving from Derry to Cork, entirely through cropped land is an approximation.

The N 5 Transamerica highway runs south through the centre of the country, and provides access to a series of valleys that run east west from the mountains to the ocean. There are 42 National Parks, not contiguous but accessible from that highway spine. Two days travel south is the most northerly temperate rainfall and botanically important, very wet and fertile Chillan valley. Here grow *Azara petiolaris* and *A. celastrina*, *Gevuina avellana*, *Lomatia hirsuta* and *dentata*. *L.dentata* (rare in cultivation because of a quirk), its seeds ripen in April, which no one associates with collecting time. The citrus scented *Laurelia serrata* 35m; *Sophora macrocarpa* in flower and the rare one species, one family, *Aextoxicon punctatum* with its black olive like fruits, a 25m evergreen tree. A specimen grows in the Logan Botanical Gardens Scotland. Here too, were two choice evergreen climbers *Mutisia decurrens* and *Hydrangea serratifolia* that I was to encounter repeatedly over the next three days as I moved south.

Mutisia decurrens

The luminous intensity of its flowers is seen in Gazania. It is an exotic star that if well sited, can form colonies and even grow as an epiphyte. I have seen it once in the garden of Jim Kelly in Malahide. It seems it needs sunshine on its face and plenty of moisture and perfect drainage at its roots.

Further south in Zona Araucana I encountered the gorgeous silky pink flowers of *M. oligodon*, recorded in 3 Heritage Gardens, considered the hardiest species, and the remarkable vermilion of *M. subulata*, recorded in 1 Heritage garden.

Hydrangea serratifolia

H. seemannii is an evergreen climber from Mexico that the late Patrick Forde of Seaforde Nursery introduced me to. It is the nearest species on that continent to this hardier species. It grew to the top of 30m trees and seemed to have the same vigour as its relatives that I had seen in Japan, *H.petiolaris* and *Schizophragma hydrangeoides*. Its flowers are not equal to *H.petiolaris* but its merit is that it is evergreen and it grows in shade. Being evergreen is a considerable plus for a north facing site. It is listed in 3 Heritage gardens. It is not available from continental growers because these evergreens do not have the iron clad constitution that so limits what they can grow. The Plant Finder lists about 30 suppliers for each.

Tropaeolum speciosus

I encountered *T. polyphyllum*'s better known relative, an herbaceous perennial climber that is commonly called the Scottish Flame Flower. In gatherings in Scotland, *Tropaeolum* is a coded warning euphemism to associates in its class conscious hierarchies of the arrival of a common social climber in their midst. It too is a native of Chile, but is found 5 vegetation zones further south as a forest edge plant in the humid high rainfall broadleaved evergreen forests of Zone Araucana. Its native habitat explains why it is so at home in most of the 34 gardens that are open to the public along the west coast of Scotland. Scottish gardening culture promotes the acquisition of plants by exchange. Its ease of propagation from careful root division or root cuttings explains its ubiquity in Scottish gardens. I have never seen a tired or frazzled plant. Its foliage is always fresh and attractive when it is planted in a shaded position or in a north facing aspect. It can grow to 3m in a year and will form a canopy of flowers and foliage over disappointing, disfigured or disowned dwarf conifers or coarse small weeping trees (or what my daughter called upside down trees) such as *Caragana arborescens* 'Pendula' or *Salix caprea* 'Pendula'. It is seen at its most alluring as elegant feminine wisps of scarlet across the masculine mass of a yew hedge.

Despite *T. speciosus* being introduced in 1849 by William Lobb, it is not readily available in the trade. Scarcity may explain why it is not as widely planted as it deserves to be. This arises because it gets lost between the many categories of plants that nurserymen produce. Tree and shrub growers and even the Hillier Manual do not list it because it is not a woody plant. Alpine manuals and growers exclude it because climbers do not fit into their specialised production system. Specialised climber nurseries exclude it and other perennial climbers such as *Eccremocarpus* because they are not woody and do not present well if tied on a cane. Their growth habit is more suited to and better presented, if allowed to scramble up a trellis rather than being crushed and bruised when taped and tied to a cane. Most climber nurseries limit their production range to hardy, iron clad types that are amenable to robust handling on their mass

production systems, namely *Clematis*, *Hedera*, *Lonicera*, *Parthenocissus* and *Wisteria*. All of which are hardy enough to survive a continental winter. However, 80% of our gardens are situated within 16Km (10 miles) of the sea and enjoy a maritime climate where many more could plant the gorgeous range of Chilean evergreen climbers like *Asteranthera*, *Berberidopsis*, *Ercilla*, *Eccremocarpus*, *Hydrangea*, *Lapageria*, *Mitraria*, *Mutisia* and *Tropaeolum*. Their high rainfall environment is home to many Chilean plants we admire. Awareness of this is the key to the correct siting and successful cultivation of plants from this area. The cool shaded humid environment in Zona Araucana gift us beauties with the precise tolerances to thrive in our gardens

Eccremocarpus scaber

If quickness of growth is a primary requirement of the modern gardener, then this plant is under used and is not as well known as it deserves to be. Give it a wire mesh to cling to and it will cover a sunny wall 2-4m in height in a season with its elegant foliage. It behaves like a perennial and consequently suffers, because like ***Tropaeolum*** it falls outside standard production categories. Unlike ***T. speciosum***, it grows in exact opposite niches in the garden in sunny places and well drained soils. It was not in the cinders on the Alpine slopes but it is quite common in the *Zona Centrale* from the slopes of Aconcagua to Valdivia on the coast. It was among the first and earliest plant introductions in 1824. Easy to raise from seed it flowers precociously and profusely until the first frost. Like so many Chilean plants its flowers are tubular, distinctive, attractive and in primary colours. Pure red and yellow forms are available in the trade or as seed. Easy to bruise if trained on a cane, it quickly scabbled over the trellis we inserted in pots to support it. It is a perfect patio plant that has waited for a millennium for the modern sun baked patio to be conceived.

Mitraria coccinea* and *Asteranthera ovata

Both share a close resemblance and both were seen in the same forest Vicente Perez Rosales National Park in Zona Araucana. *Mitraria* is not a climber but is a slow growing evergreen creeper that was seen luxuriating on the forest floor in the darkest gloom. It did not seem possible that it could grow where it did. Its shade tolerance must exceed that of ivy. On Chiloe Island in higher rainfall it grows as an epiphyte on Fitzroya. It is not suited to training on a cane. It is presented to best effect when its branches are splayed on a trellis. It flowers precociously on one year old shoots and a trellis presents its gorgeous orange red tubular flowers to best effect. It starts to flower in May and continues into the autumn. In Chile there are colour and flower type variations which are not yet in cultivation. It must have shade. We found that the foliage bleached and faded in sunlight. It should be a star plant in the high rainfall areas of the south and west coasts. In 2010 a temperature of -15°C killed it here on a north facing wall. Forrest lists it in 12 Heritage gardens. The native Indians drink an infusion made from its leaves and bark. It was in those moist humid forests that

I understood how much *Asteranthera's* neat and glossy dark foliage need those conditions too in order to look its best. On our nursery, grown on a trellis, its foliage bleached quickly in sunlight like *Mitraria* does, and to which it is related. It was not moisture shortage either because grown on capillary beds, the compost is always at field capacity. In the forest like a miniature leaved ivy, it neatly climbed and covered stumps and boles. It has raspberry red flowers in midsummer similar in style to *Mitraria*. It is listed in one Heritage Garden at Ilnacullin.

Berberidopsis corallina

On my desk sits a beautiful cream and coffee oval tray woven respectively from the stems of *Berberidopsis* and *Luzuriaga scandens* which I bought in a native Indian craft shop in Osorno. *Berberidopsis* was first collected in 1860 by Pearce, a Veitch collector. It was never seen again in the wild and was presumed extinct until January 1996, when the local Mapuche Indians who collected stems to weave baskets took local botanists to the location in a deep ravine through a tunnel cut through a bamboo forest to the well concealed spot where they harvested stems. It grew to 10m. It is an endangered species.

There is a close relationship between the flora of Australia, New Zealand and South America. Since 1996 two new species of *Berberidopsis* were discovered in Australia. It is a gorgeous scandent climber and will reward the patient gardener with a show on a north facing wall with its distinctive coral red flowers from July to September against its fine leathery evergreen foliage. It has no thorns and is not related to any *Berberis*. Its superior relatives include *Azara* and *Idesia*. Forrest lists it in 9 Heritage Gardens. There are colour variations that when introduced, will add to the desirability of this climber. It is perfectly hardy. Keith Lamb grew one in deep shade covering an oil tank. The growth was luxuriant in his garden at Clara Co. Offaly.

Luzuriaga radicans

It was in flower in the forest, the most memorable way a plant can introduce itself. This lovely climber, the coffee coloured stems weaving companion to *Berberidopsis*, is not listed in any Heritage garden. Seven suppliers list it in the Plant Finder. It grows abundantly around Valdivia and the warmer northern limits of Zona Araucana. It is another subject for the humid and warm gardens in the S.W and West. It is of the lily family, is related to *Philesia magellanica* and *Lapegeria*. Its heavily scented white flowers are followed by conspicuous orange berries, 2-4cm in diameter. *Philesia* is a remarkable dwarf evergreen shrub with sumptuous crimson tubular flowers. It is grown in 9 Heritage gardens.

Lapegeria rosea

I first encountered it entangled on bushes and trees in the forest in Vicente Perez Rosales National Park which is superbly located on the edge of an

enormous lake in a volcano of equal beauty to Mt Fuji. It was widespread in the area. Locally its stems were used for basket making. No beauty out of flower. In flower it has cachet. It is named to honour Empress Josephine, Napoleon's first wife. Her maiden name was La Pagerie. She was an exemplary tropaeoleon. Born in Martinique to an impoverished aristocrat, when her first husband divorced her because of her lack of sophistication and her provincialism, she moved to Paris, learned the ways of the fashionable world and caught Napoleon's eye. While he was on campaign in Egypt, she did not reply to his passionate love letters, infuriated him when she bought Châteaux Malmaison and her extravagances there made him apoplectic. Her redemption is that she created a magnificent garden and assembled a notable collection of roses. This new plant, the National Flower of Chile had to be exceptional to be worthy of her name. Probably, to maximise its flowering potential it is regularly classified as a conservatory plant. It is not. It is another of Zona Araucana origin that should thrive in our high rainfall, mild winters and the saturated soil that mimic the humus of its native forest floor. However, it is scarce in cultivation and is listed in only 4 Heritage Gardens by Forrest. Mistakenly considered difficult to propagate it is viewed as a subject that would lend itself to rapid multiplication by tissue culture. However, in Chile I was taught the secret. Mascularate the seed pod and perhaps 1% of the seed will germinate, sow the seed pod whole and 100% will germinate. There are many suppliers listed in the Plant Finder and there are other selections available in Chile not listed in it.

Cissus striata

First encountered in the wild in La Campana National Park, near Valparaiso. In the wild the eye-catching high gloss evergreen foliage of its luxuriant growth is seen entangled on trees and shrubs in the gorges and the forests from Coquimbo to Chiloe Island. It is sometimes sold as a house plant in the mistaken belief that it is as tender as its Australian relative *C. antartica*. It is also labelled as *C. ampelopsis*, which may imply the opposite that it is hardier than it actually is. Seeing its ubiquity in Uruguay you could not but admire the elegance of its growth and the distinctiveness of its appearance. It makes whatever plants are adjacent look coarse. That country is warmer than here, so the best we can expect is that it would be happy in sun and heavy shade in wet, humid and milder locations. It will make a screen of Japanese elegance if trained on a wire mesh support. I am surprised that such a distinctive plant is listed in only 2 Heritage gardens, as I have seen it regularly in Dublin gardens.

Ercilla volubilis

I was introduced to this easily recognisable plant by Michael Caplice. He grew it in Powerscourt where it was nailed to a south facing wall. It is a quite hardy, sparsely branched evergreen, noted for its smooth green shoots. It attaches itself like ivy by aerial roots to other plants. However, a proper introduction is to see it in the wild in its native place without the attention of secateurs and

regular coiffures. It is an interesting rather than an eye catching plant. The flowers appearing in May-June are highly scented. It is listed only as grown in Mount Usher. Chilean Climbers have distinctions. They are predominantly evergreen, they come in intense primary colours from the blue of ***Solanum crispum*** 'Glasnevin' to deep yellow, orange, and vermilion, red and rich pinks. There are few in those whiter shades of pale, watery blues and insipid pinks of many climbers from elsewhere. In their diversity those native to forests, and shade tolerant, are prescription perfect to cover and illuminate dark and heavy shaded sunless places and north facing walls. They are more ornamental than the plants most frequently recommended for these positions, such as, ***Hedera colchica*** and helix cultivars. ***Pileostegia viburnoides*** is a 5 star recommendation but is stocked only by exceptional garden retailers. Perhaps we should be more adventurous. Perhaps we should demand what we want rather than accept what is offered. A little bit more Chile, and little less acceptance of the continental offerings.

Everyone in Chile knows where Ireland is. Their great liberator was Bernardo O'Higgins. His name is seen in every city and town, on banks, municipal buildings, schools, plazas and roads. They might add Augustus Henry's name to public place names soon. He wrote in the 1900's that the Chinese gooseberry ***Actinidia chinensis (deliciosa)*** had commercial possibilities. Keith Lamb trialled it in Johnstown Castle, but concluded Ireland lacked the necessary heat. New Zealand was the first to heed his observation. Commercial production commenced in 1948. When I toured Marlborough in 1988 (the centre of production), the many exceptional mansions in the area I was told belonged to 'Kiwi' millionaires. Their research identified the ideal sugar level at which the crop should be scientifically harvested and how to store and transport the fruit to markets in the northern hemisphere. They even taught the world that the best way to eat it was like an egg with a spoon. They gave it a new name the **Kiwi Fruit**.

There was one marketing strategy error however. They did not register the name as a trademark. Its natural habitat is Mediterranean and so, production moved to Spain, Italy and California. Chile was the biggest beneficiary. The thousands of acres of high trellised orchards that supply the northern hemisphere with Kiwi fruit can be seen in the Central Valley. ***Actinida chinensis*** is commercially now the most important woody climbing plant in Chile. Marlborough has recovered. In 1988, I was asked to taste a locally grown wine, it's surprising quality aroused exciting prospects. It was produced from Sauvignon Blanc, the signature white wine grape of Bordeaux. In July 2010 over one weekend the owners of Irish Distillers and Brancott Estate Wines, Pernod Richard purchased 55,000 acres to secure sufficient land to produce the best Sauvignon Blanc outside Bordeaux.



Worth a Read by Paddy Tobin

The first three books in this issue all have holiday connections and brought back happy memories of warmer days, garden visits and wonderful flowers. The first is a little gem of the highest order, “**Mountain Flowers – The Dolomites**” by Cliff Booker & David Charlton. For many years Cliff and David have led flower walks in the Dolomites for clients of Collett’s Mountain Holidays and have – eventually,



some might say – produced the perfect pocket guidebook for the enthusiast. It is small, spiral-bound, made of high quality paper and crammed with the most delicious photographs accompanied by succinct and informative text. The plants are organised by colour and each entry describes the plant’s habitat, it’s flowering time, points out similar species and, with

precise text and splendid photographs, gives the reader a perfect guide to the plants of this wonderful area. All I need is to return and put the book to the test in the field. The book costs £9.95 (with P&P of £1.65) and is available through www.colletts.co.uk. The Alpine Garden Society, Summerfield Books, Natural History Book Suppliers (<http://www.nhbs.com>) and shortly at Waterstones and on Amazon. It is a small investment which would make a holiday in the Dolomites so much more enjoyable.

Beth Chatto’s garden in Essex has long been a place of pilgrimage for those who enjoy gardening at its best and simplest. Hers is not a garden of ornaments and



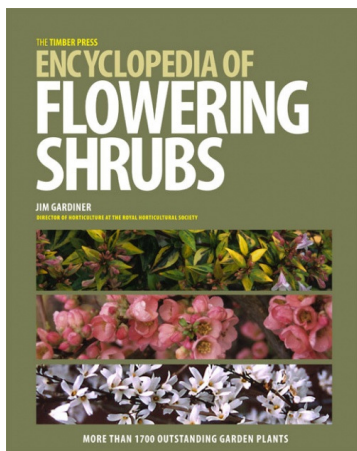
features but one where the perfect plant has been placed in the perfect position and all seems so natural and peaceful. I can still recall the feeling when I first walked into this garden; the feeling of awe and wonder at its beauty and my admiration and enjoyment of the garden has not diminished over the years. Now, I have to hand a book of photographs which has captured the garden in all its beauty and wonder. Rachel Warne, who won the International Garden Photographer of the Year Award 2010, visited the garden many times over the course of a year and her photographs capture the beauty of the

garden through the seasons. The gardens are beautiful and wonderful and the photographs show this splendidly though the winter section is a little weak in my opinion with too many garden-under-snow shots. The foreword is by Beth Chatto and the text, which is very little, is by Fergus Garrett. **A Year in the Life of Beth Chatto’s Gardens, Rachel Warne, Francis Lincoln, 2012, HB, £16.99**

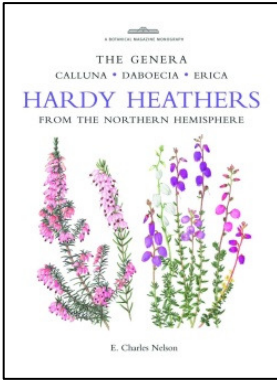
The third of the holiday related books is Katherine Lambert's "**Gardens of Cornwall**". Ms. Lambert's "Good Gardens Guide" has been a stalwart publication and this more detailed treatment of the gardens of Cornwall maintains her high standards. This volume has all one would expect of a guide book. Each garden is well described with historic background and notes of interesting plantings and well illustrated with excellent photographs. More mundane but essential is the clear map at the start of the book which allows the reader to plan visits and also the invaluable section at the back where essential details of the garden are provided – opening times, contact numbers, website addresses and, now so convenient for satellite navigation systems, the postal codes for each garden. It is such little things which make planning garden visits a lot easier. An excellent book, great photographs, well researched and well written; the perfect preparation for a visit to Cornwall. **Gardens of Cornwall, Katherine Lambert, Francis Lincoln, 2012, HB, £16.99**



There are times when I most certainly want more than a picture gardening book but there are also times when a picture book will suit the bill perfectly. Jim Gardiner has gathered together 2,000 images, illustrating 1,700 flowering shrubs, in "**The Timber Press Encyclopedia of Flowering Shrubs**". The text is minimal but is augmented by a substantial table at the rear of the book which gives the essential details for each plant. The author is the Director of Horticulture for all the Royal Horticultural Society gardens in the U.K. He was Curator at the RHS Garden at Wisley for 22 years and was Curator at the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum and held positions in a number of botanic gardens. His book, "**Magnolias, A Gardener's Guide**" was excellent and this volume continues that high standard. The photographs are excellent and the text informative. It contains a wonderful selection for our perusal, enjoyment and inspiration; certainly, the picture painting a thousand words can be well applied here. **The Timber Press Encyclopedia of Flowering Shrubs, Jim Gardiner, Timber Press, London, 2012, HB, £35.**

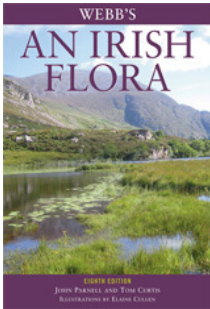


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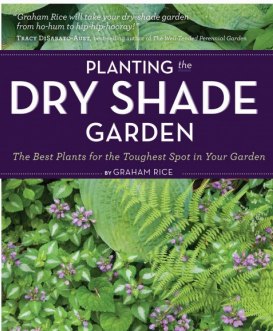


It may come as a surprise, but heathers seem to be making a comeback in popularity as garden plants. However, Charles Nelson's book has little to do with these. His interest, as it has been for many years, is in heathers, *Calluna*, *Daboecia* and *Erica* species, growing naturally in the northern hemisphere. This is a monograph for the botanist, ecologist and conservationist though hardly for the general hobby gardener. Distribution, history, conservation, classification and cultivation are covered in detail. Colour photographs, maps and line drawings augment a precisely written and comprehensive text. ***Hardy Heathers from the Northern Hemisphere*, E. Charles Nelson, Kew Books, 2011, HB £60**

Webb's *An Irish Flora*, first published sixteen years ago, is now in its eighth edition. It has long been recognised as the standard and classic flora of Ireland and has now been updated and includes trees, shrubs and climbers for the first time. If you are keen on our Irish native plants this book will help you identify your finds as well as giving you background information on plant morphology and distribution. There is little to say about this book, really. It is the book for the purpose and that's about it. ***Webb's An Irish Flora*, John Parnell & Tom Curtis, Illustrations by Elaine Cullen, Cork University Press, 2012, HB, 560pp €35**



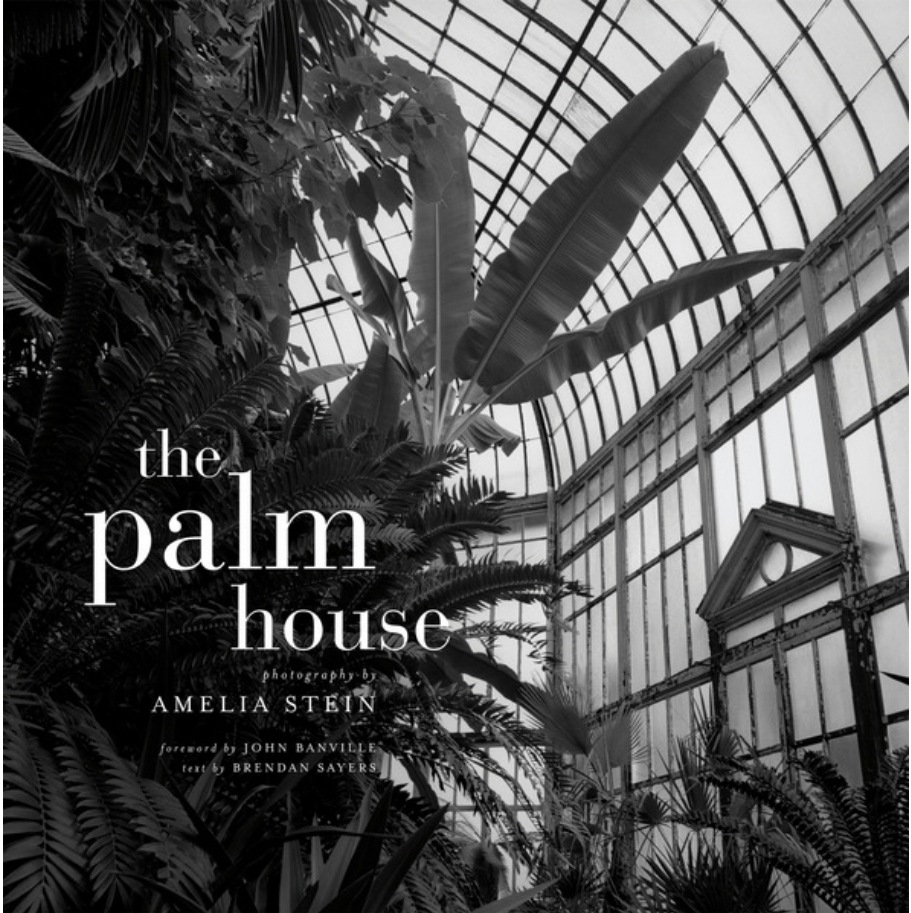
I looked forward to reading this book as several parts of my garden have these conditions, dry shade, where those trees planted as little whips many years ago have grown and now shade their underplanting with their leaves and dry the ground with their roots. Some of the comments in the introductory chapters did not fill me with hope as the advice was to raise the canopy to allow light to enter; add a watering system to alleviate the dry conditions or, more practical, to add lots of compost to amend the soil. Bar adding compost, the other advice was both useless and irritating as it was not what I hoped for in the book. There are five chapters dealing with plants suitable for these conditions: shrubs, perennials, groundcover, bulbs and annuals and biennials; with little of surprise though a thorough treatment of those plants normally suggested for dry shade. ***Planting the Dry Shade Garden*, Graham Rice, Timber Press, 2011, SB, 192pp, £14.99.**





The Palm House, a review

by Mary Bradshaw



“The Palm House” is a collection of duotone photographs by Amelia Stein in a coffee-table format with a foreword by John Banville and text by Brendan Sayers. It is a beautifully evocative representation of the Glasnevin building prior to its recent restoration.

Members will remember the steamy “Walkaround areas“, the arching leaves, the intertwining of various species - not only palms but cycads, vines, banana plants, species like *Dombeya x cayeuxii*, the jade vine and bougainvilleas.

Students will remember the privileged entry to the overhead catwalk, already considered dangerous, the panes of glass that collapsed inward from time to time, the *Dichorisandra* and *Brunfelsia* in full flower, because the Palm House is not just about all the various palms but also many ferns and flowering plants.

The photography is second to none in this book - leaves of *Caryota mitis* outlined against the glass roof, the crumbling paint and woodwork, the tools judiciously placed at the staff entrance, the various bromeliads in their old terracotta pots, the amazing sense of being in a “rainforest” - totally artificially created of course. One cannot but be reminded of the rusted but still evident decoration on the catwalk ironwork, the magnificent sight of overground roots, the emerging fronds of *Angiopteris evecta*, the barrels supporting their precious plants, the barrels themselves sitting atop concrete blocks, the emerging culms of bamboo and the intricate unique leaves of *Encephalartos woodii*.

Amelia Stein’s interest is clearly in the main section, the palms. The two wings, the Camellia house as it was and the Orchid house plants do not really lend themselves well to black and white photography. The interesting flowers and pitchers of *Sarracenia alata* do outline well and the luminosity of orchid *Coelogyne cristata* is well portrayed.

There is a sense of sadness in the last pages as we see that the plants are being moved out prior to restoration and we can see clearly that this work is long overdue. But members and the public know that the Palm House now flourishes as beautifully and densely planted as ever in 2012. This is a testament not only to the architecture and the enhanced horticultural facilities but also to the wonders of sunlight, heat, water, nourishment and skill of the staff who tend it.

The book is beautifully compiled, the photographs carefully chosen, but I have one fault to find - the lack of botanical information on named species. There is room for this, there are pages which, in my opinion, could have been used to explain the plants’ preferences, their success or failure in such surroundings which would have added to the enchantment of the photography.

Contact Lilliput Press at www.lilliputpress.ie for prices and availability.



Cheers to Chiltern Seeds and to the sole survivor of Seed Project 1997/98

by Michael Kelleher

Way back in 1997 a large consignment of seeds arrived from Chiltern Seeds, over one hundred packets of my favourite choices from their very extensive seed catalogue. With these in hand, I then began a serious seed planting project. I took some advice from the quite detailed seed cultivation instructions supplied and used the following method which according to Chilterns -“does have the advantage of at least achieving moderate success with the vast majority of subjects”. I used the following seed sowing method--using plastic pots, seed compost, numbered packets and correspondingly numbered pots, I soaked the pots in water, left them to drain a little, planted the seeds, put pots into clean plastic bags and sealed the tops with tape, (first batch of fifty packets at two pots per packet gives one hundred pots), I continued like so until everything was planted, took a breather, put my legs up and waited. Not forgetting of course, I had to shelve the small greenhouse top to bottom as I used three litre pots. I needed the seedlings to be able to grow on a little without being transplanted and also to prevent drying out as I tend to be away usually for the month of July.

I had some amazing successes, matched by an even more amazing amount of “no shows”. What is even more remarkable is the fact that after fifteen years only one plant continues to grow on in my garden. To make quite a long story short, the following is a brief list of my favourite seed sowing successes in growing something new from seed: *Abelia biflora*, *Acacia dealabata*, *Acacia retinoides*, *Anemone* F1 hybrid “Cleopatra”, *Buddleia globosa*, *Canna indica*, *Clivia* hybrids, *Crinum asiaticum japonicum*, *Davidia involucrate*, *Lupinus aboreus*, *Meconopsis cambrica flore-pleno*, *Papaver* - easily grown splashes of colour. I had twenty four packets, the most scrumptious and irresistible being *commutatum*, *heldreichii*, *laciniatum*, *rheas*, *rupifragum* ‘Flore Pleno’ and various *somniferum* - yes you guessed it already, I had poppies almost growing in my front and rear doors, and poppy seeds coming out my ears, but I religiously chopped the seed pods off and no I did not ‘inhale’. All the above plants and many more, over a period of fifteen years managed to exit the garden, except for one notable exception. The reasons for this were many and varied e.g., *Abelia biflora* grew well but did not flower - not enough high summer temperature, I lost interest in it. The *Clivia* took seven years to flower, a really beautiful all year round interest indoor plant.

Crinum asiaticum took eleven years to flower, flowering in 2008. The *Clivia* and *Crinum* got moved to the unheated greenhouse from the front porch because of a continued infestation of white fly and got killed stone dead by the crazy frosts of winter 2010. *Acacia retinoides* survived because when I wanted to move it out into the fresh air for the summer, it had grown through the pot and into the ground and it was just up and away, no stopping it. It continued on and out through the Perspex roof and up to three metres tall and flowered magnificently, must be one of my very favourite trees, until a moment of complete madness and stupidity when I cut it back too harshly and it never recovered. *Buddleja globosa* - I just remembered or maybe I'd rather forget was another tragedy—I gave it a bang with the lawnmower and that was the end of it, a pity as it was a very beautiful, unusual and garden worthy plant.

The plant still happily continuing to grow on in my garden is *Papaver heldreichii* (*spicatum*). This is a very special plant, quite rare in gardens and rarely found in seed catalogues. Native to Turkey, on limestone screes and rocky mountains 600-1400m, stems 60-75 cms, flowers orange/apricot on short stems the terminal opening first, leaves greyish white with appressed hairs. Flowers in June, flowers just last for one day, but as it continues to grow and flower down along the plant, it lasts for some weeks. This plant just continues to be a source of satisfaction, joy and delight for me over the years. It is an herbaceous perennial and as I write this article is well on its way again this year. It's time that I propagated it and shared it with other gardeners and plants people, I may just do that this year.



Seed Distribution Report 2011 and 2012

By Stephen Butler

Well I can only apologise, but I missed the deadline by a full 12 months for the 2011 report, no excuses, but I was a tad busy last year. We only had 84 requests, the 5 most popular from the first preferences were *Cosmos bipinnatus* (ex Purity) (31), *Nicotiana sylvestris* (27), *Lobelia siphilitica* (20), *Eryngium bourgatii* (ex Picos Blue) (19), and *Tropaeolum speciosum* (18). There were no requests for 3, *Chaenomeles japonica*, *Athamanta turbith* subsp. *haynaldii*, and *Arabis alpina* subsp. *caucasica*.

In 2012 though we had 98 requests, the first increase in many years. Out of 254 seed donations sent in, 16 were not sent out as insufficient name or no seed, and 24 were duplicates – as always a remarkably low number. There was a great difference as usual in the first and last 50 requests, and we ran out of many – there seemed to be generally less seed per donation – apart from an incredible amount of *Fritillaria meleagris*. And considering how hard it is to collect, there was also an amazing amount of *Dactylicapnos scandens*.

The seven most popular of the first preferences were *Meconopsis* Fertile Blue Group and *Rhodochiton atrosanguineum* (23 each), *Gladiolus tristis*, *Primula wilsonii*, and *Nicotiana sylvestris* (20), *Kniphofia northiae* and *Meconopsis betonicifolia* (19). There were no requests for *Allium saxatile*, *Allium subvillosum*, *Heracleum lehmannianum*, *Luzula sylvatica*, or *Athamanta turbith* subsp. *haynaldii*.

Once again a big thank you to all our seed donators, without whom the distribution scheme collapses, and it is very good to see more requests going out – we used to have up to 200. Mind you that's a lot more work for me.....

Seed saving time is already with us again, hellebores and early bulbs are forming seed heads as I write this. New seed collectors are always welcome, just try to get into a routine of cutting off a few seed heads when fully ripe and the first have opened, place them in an open paper bag, write the name on it first of course, and let nature release the seeds in her own time! If collecting explosive seed pods – *Euphorbia*, *Geranium*, or *Viola* perhaps – then fold the bag to keep the seeds in. I use used A4 or A5 envelopes for most, cardboard trays for larger quantities, or even paper carrier bags, the key is plenty of air to dry the seed pods gently and naturally.

Seed donations welcome as always as below.

Stephen Butler
Curator of Horticulture
Dublin Zoo
Phoenix Park
Dublin 8

Comments welcome at stephencbutler@gmail.com.



Regional Reports

MUNSTER

December 6th 2011 “Plant hunting in America and beyond” A lecture by Patrick O’Hara

Patrick O’Hara began his well illustrated talk with pictures of, and views from his garden in Currabinny. He told us that many of the plants to be shown grow successfully in Ireland (at least in the mild SW) and gave us a printed list of over eighty latin names, very useful for letting people mark the plants that interested them - especially those for home growing.

He described his creation of scientifically accurate botanical sculptures in porcelain: he studies plants in the wild getting exact details with sketches, notes and photographs and achieves accurate colour matching by comparing the plants’ colours against glazed plates containing over 4,500 colour shades.

Some of the plants he illustrated have Irish connections. For example beginning in North America, *Romneya coulteri*, which grows in southern California, was discovered by Thomas Coulter from TCD in 1830 and Patrick grows this in Currabinny.

Bartram’s *Ixia (Calydorea coelestrina)* was reported as endangered in N. Florida, (it still is according to Google) but Patrick established that it is abundant, but the flower which opens before sunrise, withers and is then eaten by beetles shortly after sunrise, before the official observers are up!

In America, we were shown *Kalmia latifolia* (the state flower of Pennsylvania), large trilliums (*Trillium grandiflorum*) from the Blue Ridge Mountains and Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*)

We certainly travelled beyond America, first to see plants important to medicine with *Ephedra sinica* (source of ephedrine) studied high in the arid mountains on the Afganistan-Baluchistan border, *Glycyrrhiza uralensis* (source of liquorice) a native of the Punjab, but seen in Yorkshire near Bassetts factory and to China for *Zingiber officinale* (the source of ginger). In Australia we had the tree *Castanospermum australe* (Morton Bay chestnut) used as a source of anti HIV medicine.

Then to Hong Kong, where very near the border with the rest of China, but nearly hidden in scrub, Patrick came across *Rhododendron simiarum*. Via Japan and *Iris japonica* we went to Europe: Patrick was commissioned to produce sculptures of endangered plants for the heads of state attending the European Summit in Dublin in 1990. His *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* (rare in Germany) was given to Helmut Kohl. We ended back in Ireland for *Simethis planifolia* photographed on Abbey Island, Kerry.

We certainly had an interesting ‘world trip’ seeing plants in their natural habitat, an enjoyable December evening.

Graham Manson.

February 7th “Spring Awakens” by Hester Forde

Our own IGPS member Hester Forde started off the New Year with an inspiring talk entitled “Spring Awakens” in which she showed a large number of plants grown in her very special garden called “Coosheen” at Glounthaune Co. Cork.

She opened her talk with stunning shots of her garden on a winter morning as a precursor to the plants which are about to come to life. Every day in early spring, she goes out into the garden to check if anything new has arrived, such as crocuses and snowdrops. She is a self confessed “Galanthophile” and grows a wide range of snowdrops such as *Galanthus* “Lapwing”, “Bertram Anderson” and “Cicely Hall”. Her crocus collection includes *Crocus dalmaticus*, *C. malyi* and *C. chrysanthus* “Zwanenberg Bronze”. She held an open day one weekend in March and we all had the pleasure of being able to see the large collection of snowdrops in its entirety.

The talk continued with great photographs of the vast collection of various plants that she grows in her garden. With her tulip collection, she plants a different colour scheme every year. Being a small garden she has no hesitation in removing any tree, shrub or plant that does not earn its keep or gets too large. I admire her in this regard as a lot of us are reluctant to remove any plant as a result of some misguided sense of guilt at its pending demise.

Over the years she has demonstrated that she is a very dedicated plantswomen with an insatiable appetite for collecting plants. The knowledge that she has gained has enabled her to give very interesting talks to various groups throughout this country and even in England. Anybody visiting Cork should without hesitation visit her garden at “Coosheen” for they will not be disappointed. Hester’s website is www.hesterfordgarden.com

Martin Edwardes

March 6th “Perennials for all seasons” by Gerry Harford.

Well over 30 people attended the talk, given by Gerry Harford of the Camolin Potting Shed, illustrated by c70 slides: a lot was learnt about these most useful plants and good quality perennials were for sale.

Generally, to thrive, perennials need full sun, well drained soil that is wet in summer and dry in winter, and for prolific flowering regular dead heading. Plant division is also helpful. There are, of course, exceptions.

Starting with hostas, we were advised to get our slug killers/repellents applied in March. The hosta “Torchlight” grows 2 ft. high and has some slug resistance. For geraniums the new introduction “Rozanne” gives good ground cover (½ m² per plant) while the cross *G. magnificum* “Blue Blood” reaches 1 m in height, flowers from May to September and thrives in full sun or semi shade.

Gerry continued with *Cynanchum ascyrifolium*, 2 foot high and frost hardy, then 2m. high *Verbascum* “Kynaston”, indestructible lupins and *Salvia nemorosa* “Caradonna” which is good for pots.

We were advised that Irises need good sun the previous season to bake the rhizomes if flowers the following year are to be good.

This review would be too long if I listed all the perennials, but of note may be the new poppies from the USA such as *Papaver orientale* “Manhattan”, and for different plant properties, *Lythrum salicaria* “Lady Sackville” and “Zigeunerblut” which can grow near ponds and does not migrate, *Phlox paniculata* “Anja” and “Laura” which have a scent and do not need dead heading and *Vernonia crinita* which is late flowering, 5 feet tall and self supporting.

It was certainly a good evening with practical advice on these most useful, long lasting plants, illustrated in all their different sizes and habits; a large number from which to choose, ones to suit any specific place in the garden.

Graham Manson.

April 3rd “Woody Wonders” by Ciaran Burke

Ciaran began his illustrated talk on trees and shrubs with a description of the work of The Garden School which offers training for RHS exams, but also non exam courses and free courses for unemployed people. Details may be seen on the web site www.thegardenschool.ie

He advised us to grow plants that come from colder climates than our own to ensure that they do not die in cold winters and disappoint us after years of growth. He did recommend those from Finland (his wife is Finnish!) where the temperature can drop to -40° . In the winter of 2010/11 the temperature dropped to -18°C in Mayo/Roscommon. We in Cork may safely buy plants that thrive in Mayo.

He started with *Ginkgo biloba*, the maidenhair tree, which grows in Finland but is not easy to grow in Ireland, and then to *Abies koreana*, grown for its attractive cones and available in large or small sizes.

For scent, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* smells of candyfloss, the witch hazel *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Strawberries and Cream' looks good and has a good fragrance, the *Magnolia salicifolia* 'Wada's Memory' looks and smells well and *Daphne bholua* 'Jacqueline Postill' has a scent that travels many metres.

Many trees are very big, the birch *Betula davorica* from Siberia has good bark but grows over 20m as does the attractive big leaved walnut *Juglans ailanthifolia* but this can be coppiced as can the elder *Sambucus nigra* 'Black Beauty' and the willow *Salix magnifica* can be pollarded.

The shrub *Paeonia ludlowii* is slug resistant and the sea buckthorn, *Hippophae rhamnoides* fixes nitrogen and is renowned for berries rich in vitamin C and anti-oxidants.

Ciaran illustrated nearly fifty shrubs and trees from which to choose desired properties of size, flowering season, scent, cold resistance, and soil conditions: there is a wide choice for any garden large or small and any area wet, dry, shaded, sunny or frosty.

Ciaran answered questions after the talk and of note was his comment that many nurseries sell trees in pots with the upper soil augmented to look good; this makes the roots too deep. Planting with the top roots just below the surface will give a growth rate many times than for the same plant buried say 4 inches too deep.

The audience certainly enjoyed and learnt a lot from his talk.

Graham Manson.

NORTHERN

December 7th 2011 “Swiss Alps Walks and Flowers” by Paddy Tobin

Memories of the summer of 1980 came flooding back as we listened to Paddy’s lecture and looked at the wonderful slides. Part of our honeymoon was spent in this beautiful area of Switzerland. Paddy and Mary toured the area in 2010 covering Zurich, Berne, Interlaken, Lauterbrunnen and Wengen. Travelling around Switzerland they found very easy. There are lots of cable cars and trains to help you climb the mountains, and then you can take a gentle stroll down again.

Switzerland was looked at with the wonder of a child with beautiful meadows, and cows with bells grazing in the High Alps in summer. One of the trips Paddy went on was to Kleine Scheidegg. It was a beautiful sunny day but the weather there can change very quickly. The view towards the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau is quite unparalleled. On this route is the world famous botanical garden at Schynige Platte where many delights are to be found, such as Leopards Bane, *Geranium sylvaticum*, Garlic Mustard, Alpine Rose, *Trollius europaeus*, *Anemone narcissiflora*, *Pulsatilla alpina*, *Soldanella alpina*, *Viola biflora* and *Gentiana acaulis*. This garden has more than 600 plant species and I have only named a few.

Wengen is a village which is car free and can only be accessed by train from Lauterbrunnen. The mountain station here is the start of many alpine hikes. Wengen’s local mountain is Mannlichen which is at a height of 2,230 metres. The wide plateau allows wonderful views of Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald. As I can recall from our own visit to Grindelwald, we had 3 seasons in one day: summer in the town, spring while on the cable car and winter at the top which was still covered with snow. While in the Interlaken area, and walking above the tree line, specimens of *Gentiana lutea* were to be seen. Paddy noted also that a lot of the plants which he saw would be familiar to people who had been to the Burren in Co. Clare.

Murren had lovely old buildings, all with picture-postcard balconies full of geraniums, which are such a feature of Alpine countries. The Schilthorn is the most famous mountain in this area, at 2970 metres high. There was a woodland area outside the village where there were lots of *Digitalis*, *Lilium martagon* and other woodland plants.

This was a wonderful talk, told with humour and fabulous photography. Paddy spotted his favourite house in the middle of the Alpine meadows – it was for pigs! I wonder if we will hear about him moving house! I have been in Switzerland 3 times and would pack my bag any time to go back. I still haven’t managed to see Edelweiss in the wild but I grew them from seed and they flowered this summer for the first time.

Hilary Glenn

March 22nd “Between a Rock and a Hard Place” by Carl Wright

There was an excellent turn-out and an air of eager anticipation at Antrim Old Courthouse to listen to Carl’s talk on the establishment and development of his wonderful garden in the Caher Valley popularly referred to by the locals as the Khyber Pass near Fanore in the Burren, County Clare

The slides of the cottage and one acre site when Carl (a Devon man who first came to the Burren to Pothole twenty seven years ago) first bought the property gave no indication of the garden he was to create over the next twelve years.

The Cottage, when he bought it in 1999, had been derelict since the 1940’s and the garden, well there wasn’t one!..... just scrub and limestone rock, lots and lots of limestone rock. Over the years he has imported in excess of 1000 tonnes of top soil then riddled it all by hand!

During these twelve years Carl has built substantial dry stone walls, stunning water features, a magnificent stone wall which incorporates a Moon Window some six feet (1.8m) in diameter which features one of several large masonry spheres gurgling water from their tops which he made himself (he wouldn’t say how!) and all designed to reflect the Arches of the Caher Bridge in the rear vista.

The Garden of an acre consists of a ‘front’ garden which is developed to be sympathetic to the surrounding countryside; it incorporates many native species and retains some original hedging. There are ponds hewn from the grykes and fed by the Caher River giving it the desired effect of ‘belonging’ to its locality.

On the other hand in the ‘rear’ garden, which has more privacy, Carl has allowed his planting to be more adventurous with collections of woodland species such as Daffodils, Snowdrops and Hellebores. Native species of Orchids self seed themselves generously, even in the house gutters. He is passionate about *Darmera* and his collections of *Persicaria*, *Aquilegia*, *Iris* and *Arisaema*, he has eighty to ninety varieties/species of Fern, and so the list goes on.

Carl is, I must say, one of the most knowledgeable, witty, and entertaining speakers on gardening I have listened to for some time..... Oh, and to cap it all, he had a local visiting Fox called ‘Edward’ which came to watch and keep him company as he worked in the Garden. Having whet my appetite and I’m sure many of his audience, I have put Carl’s Caher Bridge Garden on my ‘must see’ list of gardens to visit in the not too distant future.

Victor Henry

LEINSTER

December 8th 2011 “Plants with Stories” by Dr. Matthew Jebb

Our Christmas lecture was given by Dr. Matthew Jebb curator of the National Botanic Gardens and was essentially an “homage” to the gardens, their plants and history. It was interesting to hear some fascinating facts about plants which grow indoors and outdoors in the gardens and which we take so much for granted.

Matthew began by showing us some photographs of the tulip beds in full bloom. He reminded us of the 17th century “Tulipomania” and the consternation it caused. What we might not have known was that this kind of economic explosion had already taken place in Turkey and before that in Iran. Today, the Netherlands exports 5 billion tulip bulbs and tulip DNA covers a large part of the planet.

The well-known landmark *Sequoiendron giganteum* in the gardens is multi-stemmed. This is not its natural growth pattern and the supposition is that people took cuttings from the plant in its infancy, causing it to develop multiple stems.

The Curvilinear Range glasshouse is one of the best in Europe. It was used to showcase Turner’s work. All five doors are different. The building is asymmetrical and has twenty one different styles of glazing bars and obvious differences between the east and west wings. Inside, examples of *Protea* (S. Africa), *Banksia* (Australia), and *Lomatia* (S. America) all have similar compound flowers which prove the existence of ancient land bridges across the southern hemisphere and the massive continent of Gondwanaland. Botanists and Plant-hunters had worked this out before geologists! *Abutilon pitcairnense* had been thought to be extinct but now there are fifteen such plants on display in this glasshouse.

Outside, in the native orchid beds we see an example of *Ophrys apifera*, the bee orchid. This plant grows all across Europe and is usually pollinated by wasps, but the variety of wasp needed lives as far away as Poland, so Irish bee orchids self-pollinate. Another plant with Irish connections, *Lilium henryi*, on the herbaceous border was described as “horrendously promiscuous”. It can be visited by twenty different bees per day and eventually, each of its consequent flowers will have a different father. Continuing the Chinese connection did you know that Père David, after whom *Davidia involucrata*, the Handkerchief Tree, is named also sent back the first giant pandas, pickled?

David Moore first described a Mexican cycad in the Palm House in 1854 but the plant was only recognised in Mexico five years ago. Another cycad *Encephalartos woodii*, from S. Africa like almost all cycads is pollinated by weevils. The weevils mate on the cones of the cycad and that is how pollination is effected. These plants have been on the planet for around five million years. Palms are the only successful monocots. Their leaves grow one inside the other like Russian dolls. A tiny filament holds all the leaf-tips upwards to prevent entanglement.

These and many other interesting stories made for a very enjoyable lecture and Marie Cunningham's mince pies, and wine supplied by the Leinster Committee heralded the Xmas season not by angels but by the wonders of the natural world.

Mary Bradshaw

January 26th "The Future of Botany - a personal perspective" by Dr. Trevor Hodgkinson, T.C.D.

Recent discussions in the U.K., and in the R.H.S. have highlighted the problems which will occur when students from the last university to offer Botany degrees (Bristol) will graduate in 2013. Despite a critical shortage of qualified botanists worldwide, botany will soon disappear at degree level in the U.K.

This makes the role of the modern botanist/taxonomist an interesting study and Dr. Trevor Hodgkinson outlined it very well for members on January 26th. 2012.

The Trinity College Dublin Botany Department was founded in 1711 and its herbarium was established by Thomas Coulter in 1840. It contains 300,000 specimens of plants which make up a very valuable historical collection especially in the area of algae and bryophytes. All land plants evolved from green algae. Currently, only 40,000 algae and lichens have been described out of 350,000 and only 250,000 out of 300,000 Angiosperms have been described. Only 1.7 million of the 10 million plant species on earth have been described. It will take at least 500 years at current rates to find and describe the remaining plant species of the world.

Future botanists will develop photographic field guides. Digital images are very important to morphological knowledge. Hand held devices are being developed for DNA sequencing. Future botanists will use DNA and keep most of their plant data on computers. Future botanists will classify plants better and stop changing plant names!

Future botanists will be needed to work in agriculture, energy production and medicine. With a world population expected to peak at 7 billion, work must be done to produce new crops for food and energy and new medicines. Disease resistance, yield and sustainability in growth and land use must be increased. Photosynthesis must be manipulated so that rye grass, rice and wheat can be changed from C3 to C4 crops so that they will then grow more successfully in hot, dry climates. C4 crops can fix CO₂ more efficiently under water stress. Both the anatomy and biochemistry of these plants must be changed.

Botanists must also develop emerging crops e.g. *Miscanthus giganteus* to produce 40 tonnes per hectare of low carbon/carbon neutral alternatives to petroleum and coal. This can be compressed into pellets in stoves or power stations. Botanists will be able to manipulate flowering to develop new crops and horticultural variety, they will understand the influence of climate change on plants.

Bud burst in oaks now takes place about a month earlier than it did in 1950 and the world has heated by 0.6 degrees C. An ash hybrid from France has been expected to move to the north and west by the year 2100. It is currently just moving into Dublin. Future botanists will work to conserve plants. Extinctions right now are happening at the rate of one species per annum. Habitat destruction must also be tackled to prevent even greater loss.

As I pointed out to Trevor at the end of this fascinating lecture, a huge responsibility rests on the shoulders of botanists and taxonomists. I do not see how they will have time to draw breath over the next 500 years, if all this work is to be accomplished!

Mary Bradshaw.



Leinster Summer Lunch 2012

This year the Leinster Summer Lunch organized by Ricky Shannon will be held at Burtown House & Garden, in Co. Kildare, on Saturday June 16th. Please return the booking form as soon as possible.
www.burtownhouse.ie



Spring at Kilmacurragh *by Seamus O'Brien*

Spring at Kilmacurragh brings the usual flurry of colour. Rhododendrons dominate the scene, particularly *Rhododendron* 'Altaclarensis', a foundation cross made by hybridising the Himalayan *Rhododendron arboreum* with a hybrid plant of *Rhododendron ponticum* (or *R. superponticum* as all plants in cultivation should now be called) x *Rhododendron catawbiense*. The cross was first made at Highclere, the seat of the Earl of Carnarvon, in 1826. It was being planted in large numbers at Kilmacurragh following the creation of the Broad Walk to the rear of the house during the 1850s when Thomas Acton inherited the estate. For a century and a half now it has enchanted visitors to the gardens; a towering crimson-pink mass, 10 m over head, interspersed with dark, sombre Irish yews. Janet Acton loved this plant so much that she layered it & repeated it throughout the grounds and to this day thousands flock to Kilmacurragh at flowering time to see her handiwork.

Hybrid Rhododendrons are rare at Kilmacurragh however. Janet and Thomas were primarily interested in the species (mainly supplied by Kew and Glasnevin) and as I write many of Joseph Hooker's Himalayan collections are giving a riotous display. *Rhododendron arboreum* is the finest of these; some of the tender intense red-flowered forms are my absolute favourites, though being the most widely distributed species in the Himalaya it is enormously variable and other plants here vary in shades from white, to pinks and lavender. All form glorious old trees, some up to 15 m overhead. It's amazing to think that while David Moore and his team were raising these seedlings at Glasnevin in the spring of 1850 that Charles Darwin and Florence Nightingale were doing the same in England. Darwin's plants have long-since disappeared, and, despite the ravages of the 20th century on the house and gardens at Kilmacurragh, they still continue to thrive here.

The closely related *Rhododendron arboreum* ssp. *delavayi* is also in bloom here. Our old plant was raised in France by the nursery firm, Messrs Vilmorin, from seeds sent there by the missionary and plant hunter Père Jean Marie Delavay, from the Cangshan Range in north-west Yunnan. Seedlings were forwarded to Kew, and some of these in turn were sent on to Thomas Acton and this fabulous Chinese plant first flowered in cultivation at Kilmacurragh in 1904.

Shortly afterwards it was featured in the Kew publication, *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* (the longest running publication of its type in the world) and no doubt Thomas and Janet celebrated the occasion.

A recent 'find' here is the long-lost *Rhododendron* 'Thomas Acton', a hybrid bred at Glasnevin in the late 19th century by crossing a pale coloured form of *Rhododendron arboreum* with another superb Himalayan species, *R. campanulatum*. It was after a visit to Benmore Botanic Gardens in Scotland, where I saw *R. campanulatum* in bloom, that my suspicions were aroused about an old 8 m tall tree near Kilmacurragh's Bleach Green, labelled as *R. argyrophyllum*, though despite this name there was nothing silver about its leaves. Specimens were duly dispatched to Dr. David Chamberlain at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh who confirmed it was a *R. arboreum* x *R. campanulatum* hybrid – the long lost *R.* 'Thomas Acton'. Thus an Irish cultivar was raised from extinction overnight!



Rhododendron 'Thomas Acton'

Following a near century of virtually no new plants, Kilmacurragh is now entering a happier era and plants are arriving once again from Glasnevin, Kew and Edinburgh – and further afield.

The Double Borders – our 140 m long double herbaceous borders, have been under restoration since 2007 and are now maturing nicely.



A black and white photo of the area taken in 1895 show a range of lean-to glasshouses along its upper length. These fell into dereliction during the 1920s and in their place Isobel Ball-Acton and Sir Frederick Moore created an enormous herbaceous border with many plants supplied from Glasnevin. By 2007 little remained except two of Janet Acton's roses, *Rosa* 'Noisette Carnée' (France, c. 1817) and *R. Félicité Perpétue*' (France, 1827) and a fine old tree of *Enkianthus campanulatus*, purchased by her brother-in-law, Captain Charles Annesley Ball-Acton from the Daisy Hill Nursery in Co. Down in 1910.

The joy of these enormous borders is that in places they are shaded by old spreading trees and further on they are fully exposed to the sun, thus allowing us to grow a large range of plants from woodlanders to prairie perennials in one great sweep. To the rear of one border is the outer wall of the walled garden, south-facing and 4 m tall. Here sun loving climbers flourish and on the walls we have added a range of old fashioned climbers like *Rosa banksiae* 'Lutea' (a cutting from the old plant in the courtyard at Beech Park), *R. 'Alister Stella Gray'* (again a propagation from Beech Park, an early American climber with small double flowers in great masses, ivory in bud, opening to fade white), *R. 'Climbing Cécile Brünner'* (France, 1881).

Among my own favourite roses are the single flowered Chinese hybrids *R. x odorata* 'Mutabilis' (introduced 1896, but an ancient selection) and *Rosa x odorata* 'Bengal Crimson' (aka Sanguinea Group, introduced in 1804, but again

an ancient cultivar), a gorgeous plant I first spotted in the Chelsea Physic Garden, not far from the famous statue of Sir Hans Sloane. A few weeks later I was visiting Helen Dillon who grows it against the rear wall of her house and as a large bush in one of the main garden borders. Where can I get it I asked her? and with her typical generosity I left with cuttings. If I had one rose to bring to that proverbial desert island I think this would be it. 'Bengal Crimson' seems to flower forever, even young rooted cuttings carried blossoms here at Christmas.

Nearby, in old established trees, massively rampant ramblers like *Rosa* 'Belvedere', *R.* 'Kiftgate' and *R.* 'Rambling Rector' are sending out long, vigorous growths and slowly making a bid to cover their hosts.

Woodland-type planting is carried out in various parts of the borders, but primarily at the lower end, nearest to the car park beneath our elderly trees of *Magnolia campbellii*, *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Kilmacurragh', *Embothrium coccineum*, *Cordyline* x *scilloniensis* and a grove of the cinnamon-barked Chilean myrtles, *Luma apiculata*. To the rear is a double avenue of *Dicksonia antarctica*, which, with the myrtles and cordylines, gives an almost rainforest-like effect on wet days.

Some of my favourite plants are here; lots of anemones like *Anemone nemorosa* 'Virescens', a curious plant where the blossoms have been replaced by green bract-like 'flowers'. *Anemone nemorosa* 'Vestal' is a remnant of Isobel Ball-Acton's plantings, dating probably from the 1920s, though it is spread elsewhere in the meadows throughout the garden. This pretty double form of our native windflower always draws a gasp of admiration from visiting gardeners. Irish varieties are here too like *A. nemorosa* 'Leeds Variety' and best of all, *A. nemorosa* 'Robinsoniana', with purple undersides to its petals. Named, of course, for William Robinson, who was a regular visitor here in past times, the colouring is most apparent at night when the flowers close, thus exposing the undersides, or by day when caught on the wind.

In dryer shade, beneath an Irish yew and *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Kilmacurragh', members of the borage family reign supreme, coping with lean, mean, dry conditions. Best of these is *Trachystemon orientale*, a tough European perennial with large bold foliage and 'scorpid cymes' of small blue flowers typical of this family. Beside it is the related *Symphytum ibericum*, a carpeting perennial ideally suited to dry shade. In slightly damper, humus rich soil are various pulmonarias (best of all is *P.* 'Majesté', a dazzling mound of silver foliage beneath sturdy stems of intense blue flowers), *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Langtrees' and the gorgeous North American blue bell, *Mertensia paniculata* var. *subcordata*, whose young foliage emerges sea green and in late spring carries masses of sky blue flowers. *Omphalodes*, another gorgeous group of woodlanders prefer richer conditions and *Omphalodes verna* 'Alba' has

finally formed a decent-sized clump. Plants, as is well-known, are subjected to changing fashions; we grow the lovely *Omphalodes cappadocica* 'Starry Eyes', so popular until a few years ago but now not so frequently encountered.

The periwinkles are also a nice group of old fashioned garden plants and are good in generally tough positions. *Vinca major* 'Alba', a scrap from the private Garinish Island in Kenmare Bay, is slowly making a decent sized clump (they are best seen in a great mass), though I best like the lesser periwinkles like *Vinca minor* f. *alba*, its tidy cultivar 'Gertrude Jekyll' and the double blue *Vinca minor* 'Azurea Flore Pleno'.

Almost 200 five year old bulbs of *Cardiocrinum giganteum* (seed raised on site) were planted into the gardens this spring, most of them in the double borders beneath *Magnolia campbellii*. Trailer loads of well rotted farm yard manure was added to the planting pits; nothing is too good for this glorious lily and it should give a dazzling display in two year's time. Out of flower the giant Himalayan lily is a fantastic foliage plant, and so, to add a contrast, its bedfellows include *Meconopsis paniculata*, *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, *Woodwardia radicans*, *Iris foetidissima*, *Polygonatum multiflorum* and *Hosta ventricosa*, for example. Aquilegias, originally planted as species, have now of course hybridised and produced a range of shades. They self seed a little too much but can be forgiven since they are so in keeping with the old fashioned look of these borders. What a pity *Aquilegia* 'Lissadell Blue' seems to have disappeared. I wrote about this cultivar (anonymously) in the IGPS newsletter (IGPS Newsl. 71: 19. January 1999) when it was doing the rounds in several gardens, for example it was at both Beech Park and in the Mill Race Border at Glasnevin; it was a beautiful plant, though worryingly it hasn't been seen in many years.

The rich, damp heavy soil in this area never dries out, even during times of drought, thus suiting many of the 'newer' woodlanders, one in this range I really like is *Chrysosplenium davidii*, which forms a dwarf carpet of dense green foliage, above which rises bright golden-yellow bracteate flowers. Near it is another of Père Armand David's discoveries from Sichuan, the intense blue *Corydalis flexuosa*, common I know and easily available, but a stunning species and so easy to grow.

In a slighter brighter space, beneath an old 7 m tall *Fuchsia excorticata* grows *Euphorbia* 'Amjilassa', a plant given to me by Fergus Garrett, Head Gardener at Great Dixter, who maintains it's the best of the new spurges. He's right, it has flowered for 12 months solid, revelling in our mild balmy winter. The main border areas are designed to flower when the Rhododendrons are out of season, so there are lots of snowdrops in spring. The very best of these has to be *Galanthus* 'Straffan', which we grow in repeated clumps and, I must agree with

E. A. Bowles who considered it 'the most beautiful of all forms'. It grows well and bulks up rapidly on our heavy, humus-rich soil. Near it are also repeated clumps of *Galanthus* 'Coolballintaggart', though there are several plants in the trade using this name. Our plant, I believe is the real thing, raised in the O'Mahoney's walled garden near Aughrim, Co. Wicklow. It flowers when *G.* 'Straffan' has faded and only reaches half its height. What makes it stand out is the brilliant white of the flowers, far whiter and brighter than the Straffan snowdrop.

At this time of year *Mahonia x wagneri* dominates the centre of the borders. An old hybrid involving two North American species (*M. aquifolium* x *M. pinnata*), it combines the best qualities of both parents, bearing fascicles of richly scented, golden yellow blossoms from late winter into spring. Near it, and of a similar hue and intensity of fragrance, are clumps of *Primula* 'June Blake'. The golden-yellow theme is further picked up by the dainty little 'lesser French double daffodil' *Narcissus* 'Eystettensis'. Erroneously known as the Queen Anne daffodil, this lovely daff has always been rare in gardens and despite its associations with the 18th century Queen it is said to date from the 16th century and has the most perfectly formed flowers of any double daffodil I know. When the *Mahonia* finishes flowering, the season continues with a bush of *Rosa* 'Noisette Carnée' (another of Janet's survivors) that scrambles through it and *Aconitum episcopale*, a herbaceous climbing monkshood from western China, whose scandent stems will be wreathed in deep blue flowers by autumn.

The sunnier parts of the border are designed to be at their best between August and November using taller perennials rarely seen in borders today (because of the need to stake, no doubt). The absolute best perennials here include the giant *Silphium perfoliatum*, an enormous sunflower relative I was lucky enough to see in its wild prairie setting in the American mid-west last summer. This giant, with large dramatic foliage towers to over 3 m and its yellow blossoms, which follow the sun, are carried for months on end from mid summer to the end of autumn.

Near it grows a superb form of *Knautia arvensis*, a selection of our native field scabious that towers to almost 2 m tall. Selected by June Blake in her Blessington garden it has an extra long flowering season and is a dramatic improvement on the wild plant. Other perennials, so good that they have been planted in repeated drifts, include the giant *Rudbeckia laciniata* 'Herbstonne' (2.5 m tall), *Helianthus* 'Lemon Queen' (vigorous and a bit of a spreader, but it gives a great display late in the season), *Crococsmia* 'His Majesty' (a tall, old cultivar with huge flowers and a long season of interest), *Kniphofia multiflora* 'Yellow Cheer' (a giant poker that's at its best in October and November), *Epilobium angustifolium* f. *albiflorum* (the seeds are sterile thankfully), and

Rudbeckia fulgida var. *osullivantii* 'Goldsturn', one of the smaller cultivars at 60 to 70 cm that works well with another great favourite, *Aster* 'Little Carlow'.

Phlox, another old garden favourite have enjoyed a revival of late, which is wonderful since they are such good garden plants. They fit snugly with the old world feel of our borders and are ideal for semi-shaded areas in rich soil. Many of our plants originated from Beech Park, where David Shackleton spent decades gathering long-lost cultivars from cottage gardens in Britain and Ireland. Among my favourites is the true wild form of *Phlox paniculata*, which I got from Helen Dillon. It's a charming plant to about 1.5 m tall, with lovely soft mauve flowers. Christopher Lloyd also grew it at Great Dixter and it is still available (by mail order) on Dixter's catalogue. We grow several exceptionally good plants from Great Dixter in the brighter parts of the border. Currently I'm bulking up *Aster lateriflorus* var. *horizontalis*. Christopher Lloyd famously used this to form low hedges in the Peacock Garden at Dixter, daring and original planting, that surprisingly hasn't been copied elsewhere. Reaching only 60 cm, this rarely encountered perennial has a shrub-like habit with wide angled branches which carry masses of small strawy-white outer ray florets and an inner boss of deep purple florets. At Dixter in late autumn it edges Lutyen's old flag-stoned paths and is backed by various *Miscanthus* and *Schizostylis coccinea* 'Major'.

Beyond the Double Borders is a grassy glade, formally planted to create a vista to lead the eye towards a large Victorian gate that leads to the old Deer Park. Among the plants visitors meet here are the three Glasnevin escallonias, *Escallonia* 'Alice', 'C. F. Ball' and 'Glasnevin Hybrid', all raised of course, at Glasnevin by its Assistant Keeper Charles Frederick Ball, before his untimely death during the Great War. 'Alice' carries on the name of his widow. C. F. Ball was a regular visitor here, he advised on several occasions and wrote a piece on the gardens in *Irish Gardening*. Nearby we have planted *Rhododendron* 'Thomas Acton' and *Acanthus spinosus* 'Lady Moore'. Thus a small corner of the garden grows plants that bear the names of former great Irish gardeners.

The glade leads visitors into the South American Garden where the new focus on planting is primarily the flora of temperate Chile and Argentina with occasional hardy plants from Peru like the curry-scented *Escallonia resinosa*.

One of the greatest recent success stories here has been the olivillo, *Aextoxicon punctatum*, a rare South American tree to 20 m tall. Kilmacurragh now has the only fruiting tree outside of its native Chile and Argentina and it first began fruiting in the autumn of 2010. Its common Spanish name 'olivillo' reflects on the fact that the (poisonous) fruits look like olives when mature. The olivillo is dioecious (individual trees are either male or female) and we are fortunate in that both sexes grow in close proximity to each other. The trees were originally

sent to us from the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh as part of a conservation initiative. Our trees are due to feature in the next issue of Kew's *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* with illustrations by a local botanical illustrator Lynn Stringer. It is 106 years ago since our last plant featured in this famous publication and we are pleased to be able to supply material once again.

Seedlings from the 2007 Glasnevin Chile Expedition are in bloom as I write. *Berberis chilensis*, collected in the Andean foothills is currently smothered in pretty yellow blossoms, set in fiery red-purple newly emerging foliage. *Jovellana violacea* obviously enjoyed our frost free winter (amazing after what we endured during the previous two) and is likewise giving a fine show. In a boggy gully, *Lophosoria quadripinnata*, a giant of a fern, with fronds fully 2 m long and wonderfully blue on the undersides, has finally taken stride and is pushing up vigorous new growths. Every time I see this plant I think of how we fled a forest in southern Chile, having discovered the parent plants were dripping with leeches! Many Edinburgh plants grown here for conservation purposes, have established nicely. The Chilean bamboo, *Chusquea cumingii*, collected by Edinburgh's man in South America, Martin Gardiner, and described by him as being 'as rare as hen's teeth' is throwing up masses of new culms and one of my absolute favourite barberries, *Berberis valdiviana*, from the sub-Antarctic forests of Chile has finally reached a flowering age. This is a giant of a plant and there are good 6 m tall bushes at Coolcarrigan near Naas, at Mount Usher and at Malahide Castle.

The Chinese Garden, on the eastern side of the estate is also beginning to take on an established look. The Chusan palm avenue here is based on one at Kunming Botanical Gardens in Yunnan province, China and is planted with material raised from the 2002 and 2004 Glasnevin Central China Expeditions. These proved ultra hardy during the recent polar winters, unlike seedlings we received from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. These are 'grandchildren' of the original Robert Fortune introduction from eastern China. One Kew seedling did survive and is planted near the pond. Our central Chinese collections are from a far higher altitude and thus better suited to the rigours of the Irish climate.

The Chusan palm walk forms the central access path of the Chinese Garden and around it grows many of our Chinese collections. Visitors will see kiwi fruit vines (*Actinidia chinensis*) racing into yews and oaks, tea trees (*Camellia sinensis*) and newly described species of rowans like *Sorbus gonggashanica* (named from one of Roy Lancaster's collection on Gongga Shan in Sichuan), *Sorbus bulleyana* (named for A. K. Bulley, founder of Bee's Seeds and Ness Botanic Gardens in Cheshire) and *Sorbus coxii*, we grow a grafted plant from the original Forrest introduction which grew in the Cox family's garden at Glendoick in Scotland for a near century before being finally named. It is exciting that new species like this are still entering our gardens.

Behind the scenes, in a glasshouse to the rear of the courtyard, Tasmanian seedlings from our most recent expedition are germinating, some of which have never grown in Ireland before, others like the Tasmanian endemics *Athrotaxis selaginoides* (the King Billy pine) and *Athrotaxis cupressoides* (the pencil pine) have grown here for over a century and a half, but are now elderly and these new wild-sourced plants are welcome new additions we will use in replanting the gardens. It's a busy time at Kilmacurragh with all these new plants coming our way, and it's not just exotics. In our nursery area, over 5,000 seedlings of native trees and shrubs, gathered across the length of Ireland are growing on, oaks from Wicklow to Tullynally, strawberry trees from islands off the Kerry coast and enough hazels to keep the squirrels fed for centuries. In the skies above the gardens the red kite is again a familiar sight having become extinct in this country 200 years ago. Young adults (now breeding locally) with a wingspan of over 1.5 m make an amazing sight, frightening rabbits and small birds for miles around. This year woodpeckers have returned to the gardens (apparently from Scandinavia) and can be heard along the Oak Walk and the Monk's Walk. Hopefully, one of these new residents will make an appearance when the IGPS visit on April 22nd.



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Propagation of Arbutus by Kevin Line

Arbutus are members of the Ericaceae family and comprises 14 species of evergreen trees and shrubs from western Europe, the Mediterranean, west and north America, and south to Central America. I recall admiring the common species, *Arbutus unedo* around the shores of the Lakes of Killarney in south west Ireland in the year 2000. I remember that the specimens that I witnessed at the time were laden with the round strawberry like fruits.

Never since that wonderful visit to those Irish shores have I seen any *Arbutus unedo* holding so many of those bright red fruits. It is not surprising that it is commonly known as the Strawberry Tree. Little did I realise, at that time on the west coast of Ireland that six years later I would be propagating from the National Collection at Barton House Garden in the north Cotswolds.

My experience of propagating seeds of *Arbutus* began with *Arbutus texana*, also known as *arizonica*, and *Arbutus menziesii*. These seeds were sourced from a seed company called Alplains in Colorado, Texas. *Arbutus texana* originates from southern Arizona, New Mexico, and the mountains of Mexico. *Arbutus menziesii* originates from the west coast of North America, and from south California to the extreme south west of British Columbia.

I sowed ten seeds of each species in modular trays, using a John Innes seed compost, in the early autumn of 2007. Seeds were grown with an overnight temperature running between 10 – 15 degrees centigrade. After a period of six weeks, 5 of the *Arbutus texana* started to germinate, and from these original 5 seedlings I have one sole survivor to date.

This lone *Arbutus texana* was planted out into the garden in July 2010, and has currently reached a height of 0.5m. This small specimen has proved how hardy it is by surviving the severe winter of 2010/11. Added to that, it was planted in an exposed position facing east, and without any form of winter protection.

The remaining 4 seedlings of *Arbutus texana* that germinated were lost through the damping off process, and also leaf scorch due to the fact that the seedlings were not protected with shade netting from bright, direct sunshine on the foliage.

Unfortunately, I had no germination from the sowing of *Arbutus menziesii* seeds which were sown under the same conditions as the *texana*.

My trial of propagation methods continued in the late summer/early autumn of 2008 when I took cuttings from the group of shrubby *Arbutus unedo*. These included the cultivars of 'Compacta', 'Quercifolia', 'Roselily' and 'Elfin King'. I did not realise what a testing time I would be in for, in attempting to strike cuttings from this genus. To say that it is difficult is an understatement.

Over a period from the autumn of 2008 – autumn 2009 I took approximately 250 cuttings of these four cultivars of *Arbutus*, and attempted to root them under various conditions within the glasshouse. The RHS recommends taking semi ripe cuttings with the addition of bottom heat from the propagation bench, and so initially I followed these guidelines.

I first tried putting 50% of the cuttings into a medium of John Innes No 1, and the other 50% into an ericaceous compost mixed with sharp sand at a ratio of 5 compost: 2 grit/sand for a nice gritty mix.

I started the process in the propagation unit of the glasshouse where a higher overnight temperature is achieved with the use of a small electric fan heater, running at a temperature between 10 -15 degrees centigrade. The glasshouse was well ventilated on warm autumn days. I placed six cuttings in each 2 litre pot.

I observed that many of the cuttings were affected by the scorching of the leaf tissue, due to the excessive heat and direct sunlight within the glasshouse. The worst affected were those of *Arbutus* 'Quercifolia', the leaf tissue of which is not of the same thickness or waxiness as the other cultivars.

In February of 2009 I continued with a renewed system of propagating from cuttings, this time in the larger cooler section of the glasshouse, placing the pots on an unheated bench. In addition to this, I covered the cuttings with shading material against the likelihood of bright winter days. I tried again.

This method proved more successful in sustaining the foliage on the cuttings. By the summer of 2009 I had managed to root 11 cuttings, 7 of which came from the cool end of the glasshouse.

An interesting factor at this point was that all of the rooted cuttings were from the same cultivar, *Arbutus unedo* 'Compacta'. One of these has now produced 14 small green juvenile fruits. This particular cultivar is bushy, dense, and has twisted branches. I was not successful, however, in achieving a 100% success rate from the eleven rooted cuttings. To date, I now have two remaining.

I learned from this experience that most *Arbutus* definitely do not like being over watered in the pot. And this, I now understand, was the main cause of the other losses. On the 'Compacta', I have noticed that there are signs of black spot to which, I gather, *Arbutus* are prone.

Twelve cuttings were taken from each of the *Arbutus unedo* 'Rubra' and *Arbutus x andrachnoides*. These were placed in the propagation end of the glasshouse on an unheated bench covered with shading material.

The autumn of 2009 took me on to my next stage that of picking the strawberry like fruits from the *Arbutus* species/cultivars in the garden. To date, this has included very good results with the *Arbutus* 'Elfin King', which have proved to be the most successful. Also, I have two woody specimens of *Arbutus unedo* that stand at almost 0.5 metre in 2 litre pots. These fruits were taken from a mature tree in the garden.

I collected the ripe fruits in late autumn. I soaked the fruits in boiling water, adding just a little cold water to reduce the temperature, and left them for 24 hours. After this, I gently squeezed them open. On average, the marble sized fruits each contained approximately 20 small seeds. The riper seeds were a darker colour, compared with those of the whiter, softer, unripe seeds. I wanted to sow them all to widen the experiment.

I sowed the seeds into sterile, modular trays, filled with John Innes seed compost, making small holes with a split cane, just large enough to cover the seed. I found that it was easy to separate the seed from the fleshy fruit by dipping my fingers into some grit sand. This made them easier to handle. I also sowed some of the seeds still coated in their fleshy fruit, by scraping them on to the compost within each module.

My theory was that the added moisture of the seeds still surrounded by their fleshy fruit would assist in inducing germination. I sowed approximately 40 seeds of the *A. unedo* which came from two fruits. I wanted to experiment under varying temperatures. I placed one tray in the cool end of the glasshouse where temperatures fluctuated, and dropped to a minimum of 6 degrees centigrade at night. The other tray was positioned in the propagation end, running at an overnight temperature between 10 – 15 centigrade.

Germination took about 6 weeks. I managed to achieve six seedlings which all germinated from the tray placed in the propagation end. A further two weeks later all six were pricked out into appropriate sized pots to be potted on. Once again, I had some losses, numbering four this time. Although I watered sparingly during this delicate stage, these particular losses were due to the stems damping off.

***Arbutus* ‘Elfin King’ (sowing the fruits)**

The process for sowing these was exactly the same as with the *A. unedo* although on this occasion I decided to place all of the sown seeds in the propagation end with an overnight temperature of 10 -15 degrees centigrade.

I sowed six average sized fruits, totalling 120 seeds. These seeds were sown from the collected fruits in the late autumn of 2010.

‘Elfin King’ is clearly very free germinating, or so it was for me. I achieved two thirds germination success, with a total of 80 seedlings. However, further casualties resulted in 42 plants remaining which, at the time of writing, in December 2011, are in one litre pots in the cool end of the glasshouse. I had to move them from the propagation end, because some were being nibbled by mice, who obviously found them tasty, but not enough to pursue them into the cooler end.

Plants are covered at night with horticultural fleece, and are being placed close to a heater on constant motion over night. The tallest of these plants is 200mm. I estimate that they will be ready to plant in the garden in the late spring of 2013.

***Arbutus* ‘Atlantic’**

This is a very interesting comparison to the ‘Elfin King’ insofar as the same number of seeds was sown under the same conditions, but the result was a very low germination rate. Six seeds germinated, and I am now left with one very small *Arbutus* ‘Atlantic’. (Why was this?).

Further sowings of *A. texana* (imported seed from Alplains, Colorado). These were sown at intervals from December 2009 – May 2010. I sowed three batches of 14 seeds. All the seeds were again placed in the propagation unit running at 10 – 15 degrees centigrade. From each batch I had just one germination. The three plants are now in one litre pots.

All of the cuttings and seedlings of *Arbutus* are grown on in ericaceous compost. A recent, encouraging development has been my germination of *Arbutus* x *andrachnoides*, which was collected personally by the owner of the garden Mr. Hamish Cathie.

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Tulipa 'Molly Bloom'

The Dutch Embassy in Dublin organised a Tulip Naming Competition to name a new cultivar of tulip specially bred by Jan Ligthart from the Netherlands, in honour of Ireland. A jury chaired by Professor Mary McAleese chose the name from over five hundred entries for the lilac and white tulip. The winner was Mary McClure of Limerick, she named the tulip 'Molly Bloom', and her prize was a trip for two to the Keukenhof. The tulip was baptised at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin on March 29th.



Mary McClure and Jan Ligthart. Photograph by Paul Garry



The Irish Garden Plant Society



Arbutus unedo

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