

Irish Garden Plant Society



Newsletter
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Copy for the April issue as soon as possible and by **5th March** at the latest.

Cover: The Great Palm House of the National Botanic Gardens on a winter morning. Photo courtesy of Marie Hourigan of the National Botanic Gardens. Grateful thanks to our Horticultural Advisors, Stephen Butler and Brendan Sayers.

Welcome

Imagine reading that a plant is “probably extinct” and realising that it is growing in your own garden? This is what happened to Jane Powers. Read her fascinating account on page 19 and discover how *Primula* ‘Julius Caesar’ came within a whisker of being lost for good.

The importance of conserving our Irish plants is the theme of a thought-provoking article by Caroline Elliot-Kingston about the unique collection of Irish apples, the Lamb Clarke collection which is named for the two people responsible for first finding them and then securing them a home at University College Dublin. Astonishingly the collection had to be saved not just once but twice!

It is a pleasure to have two Honorary Members write for us. Charles Nelson recalls the significant day 20 years ago when his book, *A Heritage of Beauty*, was published while Brian Duncan tells us about his life-long love affair with daffodils. Despite the decades Brian continues to breed, show and judge daffodils; his particular interest these days is miniatures which are, of course, becoming highly fashionable.

Enclosed with this issue is the annual seed list. A big thank you to the members who assiduously collected the seed and to Debbie Bailey who

has compiled the list and will be parcelling it up into little packets of promise for us to order, free of charge apart from a sae.

Stephen Butler takes a light-hearted look at some of trickier situations he has encountered while dealing with seeds over the years. Meanwhile Brendan Sayers has written a timely article about what can go wrong. I am sure we have all experienced the disappointment of finding that one of our purchases turns out to be either a wishy-washy version of what it should be or the wrong plant. Brendan calls them interlopers and imposters. He has some important advice for us to follow.

This time last year none of us could have guessed how 2020 was going to turn out. Spring always gives gardeners hope – may all our hopes for something much better in 2021 come true.



Maeve Bell

Editor

PS - For information about the 2021 AGM, please see page 5.

Meet our Contributors

Stephen Butler retired recently as Curator of Horticulture at Dublin Zoo. He takes the lead in all matters to do with Irish Heritage Plants.

Brian Duncan has spent more than 50 years breeding daffodils and has won the Engleheart Cup more than 20 times. He is an Honorary Member of the IGPS.

Dr Caroline Elliot-Kingston is Head of Horticulture, Landscape and Sportsturf Management at the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science.

Berkley Farr gardens in the Co Down countryside and is a long-standing member.

Barbara Kelso is a garden designer and a former member of the Northern Committee.

Drs Nicola and Peter Milligan garden at Mount Stewart on the shores of Strangford Lough in Co Down and are past members of the IGPS Northern Committee.

Billy Moore gardens in Dublin and is a member of longstanding. He has been involved with the AGS, Dublin Group, since its foundation and edits their newsletter.

Rae McIntyre is a retired teacher, a keen gardener and long time contributor to the Newsletter.

Dr Charles Nelson VMM FLS is one of the Society's Honorary Members having been its first Chairman (1981–1984) and editor of *Moorea* vols 1–10 (1981–1993).

Seamus O'Brien manages the National Botanic Gardens, Kilmacurragh, Co. Wicklow; he serves on two important committees of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Jane Powers is an author and garden writer living in Dun Laoghaire; she was an active member of the Society's Committee for many years.

Brendan Sayers is Glasshouse Foreman at the National Botanic Gardens and has spent almost 30 years working there; he specialises in orchids.

Paddy Tobin, a former Chairman of the Society and Editor of the Newsletter, lives in Waterford and is in charge of the Society's website and Facebook page.

Jenny Constable, Rosemary Maye & Eileen Sung are members of the Society.

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While every effort is made to ensure that content is correct at the time of printing, views expressed in the articles are those of the author(s) and may not reflect those of the Society. Any factual errors will be corrected as soon as possible.

A Note from the Chair

It was very disappointing that we had to forego the 2020 AGM; our hopes of hosting an autumn event were dashed by the stop start series of lock-downs. At the time of writing, your committee can confirm that the intended two day AGM event in early May organised by the Northern region will not go ahead, but we are working on a plan to **hold the AGM before the end of May**, online if necessary and as a one day event if at all possible. Further details will be notified just as soon as government guidance permits.

With a brief exception, in recent times we have published three Newsletters a year rather than four. However, after lockdown started and it was uncertain if there would be any visits, an extra 'Summer Special' was agreed. Over the year we had some great material with more than thirty contributors submitting excellent articles and photographs. My sincere thanks to Editor Maeve Bell and all those who helped make it happen, a great achievement. We need you to keep those articles, snippets and photos coming, not just for the Newsletter but also for the website and our ebulletins.

Despite being prevented from doing all the things we had planned last year, there was still much happening behind the scenes which we hope

will bear fruit this coming year: the production of *Moorea* is progressing well, the conservation programme headed by Stephen Butler continues to develop with collections of Irish cultivars increasing, we are currently booking speakers for **online talks, see page 39**, and our garden volunteers will shortly return to plan their planting for the coming year.

In the autumn the Society purchased some new, unnamed seedling daffodils from renowned breeder Brian Duncan; they are being named for Charles Nelson who played such an important part in founding the IGPS, Lisnacloskey to mark more than 30 years since our garden partnership began, and two historic Irish gardens which have a long association with the Society, Kilmacurragh and Birr Castle. We have applied to register the names with the RHS. More on this in the next issue.

A degree of uncertainty still prevails over our events but let us hope we can see more of each other than last year. Until then I sincerely wish you all a very happy and a very safe new year.



*Billy
McCone*

Chairman

Rescued Twice! The Lamb Clarke Irish Historical Apple Collection

by Caroline Elliot-Kingston

The cultivated apple (*Malus domestica* Borkh.) has travelled far from its place of origin thousands of years ago in Central Asia. Lack of written records limits detailed knowledge of apple introduction into Ireland but evidence of early introduction is provided by ancient placenames that incorporate the Irish words for apple (úll, abhall) or anglicised versions of same (ool, owl, oul), e.g. Oulart in Wexford, Knockullard in Carlow and Ballyhooly in Cork. Brehon Law lists apples among the *airig fedo*, i.e. noble trees. In 1598, Fynes Moryson, secretary to Lord Deputy Mountjoy, provides the first definitive record of “fine old Irish varieties” in Kilkenny, confirming the presence of indigenous apple varieties.

The UCD Collection

Recognising that local varieties of apples were dying out due to a commercial desire for uniformity in fruit, Dr John George Dalkeith (Keith) Lamb [an Honorary Member of the Society. Ed] collected 52 old Irish varieties from 1945 to 1949 as part of his doctoral research into apples of Irish origin. He established the University College Dublin (UCD) collection at Albert College Glasnevin, then part of UCD, in what is thought to have been the first native apple collection in the

world. Edward J Clarke, Professor of Horticulture at the time, maintained the collection from 1953 until it was removed in error in 1970. Fortunately, copies of the trees had been sent to the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale Farm in Kent prior to that. Former Professor of Horticulture, Michael J Hennerty, worked ardently to reinstate the collection. In 1994, shoots of Irish varieties, complete with EEC plant passport, were sent from Kent to Belfield. The collection was monitored in an isolation glasshouse for two years to confirm the absence of fireblight disease, grafted onto M9 rootstocks, and planted out in a new heritage orchard at Rosemount Environmental Research Station. It was named the UCD Lamb Clarke Irish Historical Apple Collection to honour the two men who created and curated it.



UCD Lamb Clarke collection

The collection was inaugurated by President Mary Robinson in 1997 and clones of each variety were sent to the Irish Seed Savers Association (ISSA) in Co Clare and Loughall Agricultural Research Centre in Co Armagh. Prof Hennerty, a prolific writer of more than 180 papers and articles, wrote a book *The Heritage Apples of Ireland* published in 2014 by the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM) that includes a taxonomic key, descriptor, history and photographs of 68 different Irish heritage apple varieties. This book is out of print but an updated edition is planned. David Brogan, Technical Officer, and I are responsible for the orchard now.

Varieties

Some of the oldest varieties in the UCD orchard include Brown Crofton (1802) whose first record appears in John Harvey’s nursery catalogue of 1835, and was reported by Lamb in 1951 as growing in Sligo, Roscommon, Westmeath, Offaly, Dublin and Wexford. Irish Peach (1812) was raised in Ireland, possibly Sligo, and mentioned by Dubordieu in 1812 in his Co Antrim survey. It was introduced to England around 1820 by Robertson of Kilkenny and named as one of the twelve best dessert apples by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) in 1888. Ecklinville Seedling (1820) is said to have been raised by gardener Logan at Ecklinville, Portaferry, Co Down in 1820 and was listed as one of the

twelve best culinary apples by the RHS in 1888. Ard Cairn Russet (1890) was discovered in Cork by Baylor Hartland; it received the RHS Award of Merit in 1910. Other descriptive varietal names include Cavan Wine, Leitrim Red, Bloody Butcher, Munster Tulip, Glenstal Cooker, Sam Young, Irish Molly, Sheep’s Snout, Finola Lee and Ballyvaughan Seedling, among others.



Gibby’s apple

Important collectors

Anita Hayes founded the ISSA in 1991 in Carlow. Now based in Scariff, Co Clare, the ISSA focuses on preserving heirloom food crop varieties, including Irish heritage apples. Annie MacNeice began saving old Armagh apples in her garden in the late 1940s while her son, Peadar MacNeice, began collecting in 1970 and established the Armagh Orchard Trust in 1995, housed in the walled garden at Loughgall Agricultural Research Centre in Co Armagh. Many endangered apple tree varieties were

collected that otherwise would have been lost. UCD, ISSA and Loughall cooperated to definitively identify and preserve apple varieties of Irish historical importance. Those wishing to purchase Irish heritage apple trees can do so from Irish Seed Savers further conserving Irish varieties.



Kilkenny Permain

Identification and research

Currently, the UCD Lamb Clarke collection comprises 97 varieties. Recent DNA analysis of all 260 trees was undertaken in partnership with ISSA and Gwyneth MacMaster of UCD, funded by DAFM. Some varieties were found not to be of Irish origin. Only three of the 68 varieties listed in *The Heritage Apples of Ireland* are missing; these will be supplied by ISSA, and any Irish varieties at UCD but not at ISSA will be provided to them, thus ensuring full duplication of the Irish heritage collection at both locations.

The UCD heritage orchard is an important and valuable resource for our Level 8 Horticulture Degree. It is extensively used in undergraduate teaching and practicals including pruning, grafting, budding, harvest index, varietal yield and sensory tests, and for postgraduate research involving pollination and sustainable crop production. It is used effectively in community outreach and is enjoyed by students and staff alike.

Importance of conservation

Today the orchard is a vital repository for conserving our cultural and genetic heritage. Genetic diversity, conserved in properly managed field collections, provides access to living material for use in education and research in physiology, horticulture, breeding, conservation, molecular and evolutionary biology, and public interest. UCD is committed to protecting and nurturing this valuable collection for future generations, for biodiversity, and for additional research.



Ballyfatten

Trillium – a star of the woodland garden

by Billy Moore

For me and for many others, trilliums are the aristocrats among woodland plants and, for its pure, quiet beauty, *Trillium grandiflorum* is probably the queen and should be in every garden. There are many other garden-worthy species and hybrids in the genus that are worth looking out for including the diminutive *T. rivale* which has white flowers often with pink markings which is dead easy, takes up little space and is a delight; I wouldn't be without it. But in this short piece I want to sing the praises of one of its cousins, the more flamboyant *T. chloropetalum*.

The form of this plant most often seen has striking maroon or purplish-red, scented flowers over green foliage with chocolate marbling. It is a very variable species in the wild and in cultivation; the flowers can vary from white through yellow, pink, liver-brown, purplish-red, to a rich purple and many shades in between. The marbling on the leaves can vary also, in some clones almost competing with the flower for attention. As well as the variation within the species, it also hybridizes with *T. albidum*, another beauty, which can add to the confusion making identification difficult sometimes. It is a Californian native and thrives in a humus rich, reasonably free-draining soil in light shade. It can also be grown in a pot. It is fully hardy and not too much

troubled by pests and diseases although it can be damaged by molluscs. It is rhizomatous and grows to about 60cm tall and in time makes a substantial clump. It is easily propagated by seed, although it's a slow process, taking five to seven years to flower, and by division of the rhizome. Plants are seldom seen in garden centres but are available by mail order. I grow seven or eight specimens in various parts of my garden, and I wouldn't be without them.



Trillium chloropetalum

Apart from the form with maroon/purple flowers, plants with the other colours mentioned are seldom seen. Around the year 2000, I think, I was given a couple of seedlings of *T. chloropetalum* by that great Northern Irish gardener, Bob Gordon. Bob got his trilliums many years ago from the late Dr Keith Lamb and planted them in his woodland. Originally the plants were the standard colour but, as they

seeded around, over time colour variants appeared, the first being a dingy white which had no appeal but, later, plants with greenish yellow flowers appeared. The seedlings that Bob gave me came from close to one of these plants.

I planted them in the garden and in a few years they flowered, all but one being the usual colour. That one, however, was a clear yellow and is a really beautiful plant and very unusual. By 2013 the plant had bulked up a bit and I decided to pot it up to bring to one of the AGS shows in 2014. It was at its best for the Ulster Show that year where it was judged best plant in the Show. It was also assessed by the Joint Rock Committee (AGS, RHS and

SRGC) which sat at the Show and which gave it an Award of Merit and invited me to name it. As a tribute to my good friend Bob, I chose to call it *Trillium chloropetalum* 'Bob Gordon' and it is now registered under that name with the RHS. Over the past few years I have given bits to a number of good growers and it is my hope that in the not too distant future it will become available commercially. I attach a photo of it as well as one of a nice clump of one of the more normal forms which has given me great pleasure each spring over the past ten plus years.

[This is an extended version of an article which first appeared in the joint RHSI/IGPS ebulletin in spring 2020]



Trillium chloropetalum 'Bob Gordon'

My Love Affair with Daffodils

by Brian S Duncan

Was I interested in gardening when very young? I remember hearing about the 'Pheasant's Eyes' being open in the orchard and I also witnessed my father and elder brothers going to a derelict farmhouse on an out-farm to dig hundreds of daffodils that were planted around our new house. I now know that the bulbs were *Narcissus* 'Van Sion', also known as *N. 'Telamonius Plenus'*, that reliable old double that naturalises so well and is still to be found in many hedgerows throughout Ulster around St Patrick's Day. Apart from those early memories I don't think I even noticed a daffodil until I planted some in 1962.

At Greenmount College I took an interest in identifying grasses and their Latin names and I was fascinated to learn about plant breeding and about how better plants could be created by deliberate hybridising.

It's often said that we never know where a step may lead. My life changing step was into a restaurant in Enniskillen where I spotted and joined Alan Smith who had been a fellow student at Greenmount. Since then, Alan had been to Reading University to study horticulture and I'd been to Nottingham to study dairying. The happy outcome was that Alan kindly offered to design the

garden for me; he even ordered the plants from the Donard nursery and helped me plant them. Alan left me to get some daffodils to fill in spaces between shrubs and I ordered from the cheapest source I could find. I remember some of the varieties — 'Unsurpassable', 'John Evelyn', 'Fortune', 'Mrs R O Backhouse' and 'Trevithian'. I even bought half a stone of other bulbs from a cut-flower grower nearby who was selling up.

Having planted shrubs and trees with strange sounding Latin names, curiosity set in and I started taking photographs as each developed and flowered. One evening a year or so later when Alan and his wife visited, I showed Alan a picture of a yellow trumpet daffodil and proudly asked: "What do you think of that for a good daffodil?" Alan hesitated a moment and then said: "Well, I've seen better". Surprised and a bit miffed, I asked: "But what could possibly be better?" Alan responded: "It's got



a weak stem, the pose is bad, it's hanging its head, it's a wishy-washy colour, the petals are warped and twisted and they have nicks, the trumpet is out of proportion and I suspect it has Yellow Stripe disease!"

By now certainly miffed, I asked, maybe with a hint of sarcasm, how **he** came to know so much about daffodils. Only then did he tell me that he had worked as a student for the famous daffodil breeder, Guy L Wilson in Broughshane, and that he had gone to RHS Shows in London to help set up exhibits. As the conversation progressed, Alan provided me with addresses of several suppliers of these 'wonder' daffodils. I did not want to be immediately disloyal to the daffodil I'd so proudly presented for admiration — but the damage had been done! I had to see some of these better daffodils that Alan had talked about.

Accordingly I sent for catalogues, studied the different sorts and eventually ordered one bulb each of twelve varieties (at half a crown each/ total £1.50) representing different forms and colours, e.g. yellow, white and bicolor trumpets, large and small cups in a range of colours, and a double. I selected only those that had either FCC or AM awards from the RHS. When these bulbs flowered in the spring I understood. Alan was right. It was like the difference



N. 'Premiere' Brian's first introduction

between a cart horse and a race horse. Pedigree mattered. These new daffodils had elegance and style, perfection of form, symmetry, great substance, smooth texture, intensity and clarity of colour, and most were free from the niggly nicks and faults that Alan had so brutally attributed to 'my daffodil'. I was well on the way to becoming a convert.

By this time, 1963, I was Hon Sec of the Omagh Gardening Society and responsible for finding speakers. On Alan's suggestion I invited Tom Bloomer, (a very successful amateur breeder from Ballymena who had won top awards at RHS Shows in London) to act as judge and speaker at the Society's spring daffodil show. The handsome and debonair Tom rolled up in a snazzy red Alfa Romeo sports car and at the meeting he displayed a range of his daffodil seedlings, the likes of which had never before been seen in Omagh. He demonstrated how to stage daffodils for show and talked a little

about the unique history of daffodil breeding in Ireland. To cap it all, flowers from my twelve bulbs won eight of the twelve classes. Keeping me modest, Tom pointed out that I was only competing against 'store-bought bulbs'!



N. 'Camilla Clara Kate'

After the meeting I must have peppered the poor man with a thousand questions. The old fascination with hybridising from Greenmount stirred again. Here was a man who was able to hybridise and breed new varieties of plants without expensive facilities, something I had never even hoped to be able to achieve but it was now a possibility. Tom showed me how to pollinate. I was hooked; Tom became my mentor, guide and father-figure friend. I'd joined what Guy Wilson had dubbed the 'Yellow Fever' fraternity. As I got more involved in hybridising,

I quickly learned that perfection is always ahead of us and that several generations of plants may be required to achieve any particular goal. It is often a case of one step forward and two steps back.

Because of daffodils, our lives have been enriched by un-dreamed of travel and by making many friends around the world. Over the years my wife Betty has willingly hosted and enjoyed many dozens of guests from many different countries. In turn we have often enjoyed the hospitality of friends in America, Australia, New Zealand and Holland. Betty has been very tolerant and a great supporter in my passion for daffodils; maybe it could be labelled as OCD. Indeed, it has even been suggested it should be ODD — Obsessive Daffodil Disorder! There is still so much to do, the pursuit is never ending. And that's another story.



N. 'Fantine'

A Red Letter Day Remembered

by Charles Nelson



Twenty years ago on 3 February 2001, the IGPS published *A heritage of beauty*. The garden plants of Ireland. An illustrated encyclopaedia. The guest speaker was Professor Gren Ll. Lucas. While sorting out the accumulated papers of the last quarter of a century, I chanced upon a “transcript” of the remarks I made in response to Professor Lucas, and as the history of *A heritage of beauty* was recently a topic in this Newsletter, it seems appropriate, after almost exactly 20 years, to print an extract from them.

There is a little history to tell about the origins of the book which Professor Lucas has so eloquently launched. In the summer of 1979, a visitor called at my office here in the National Botanic Gardens. She was an artist and had a particular enquiry: “Could anyone help me to find out what garden plants were of Irish origin so that I can paint some of them for a book that I am working on?” At that time I was editing *Irish*

gardening and horticulture, the book which the Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland was to publish later that year, and as it contained a chapter by Jim Kelly (then at An Foras Táluntaís Kinsealy Research Centre) on exactly this topic, I had not much difficulty in naming a clutch of plants that would fit the bill. As you all may guess, the visitor was Wendy Walsh.

That visit started our collaboration and sparked an obsession — I cannot think of any other suitable word — the recording of Irish garden plants. I won’t bore you with the details, suffice it to say that it involved many hours of tedious searching through dusty books and nurserymen’s catalogues. In this work, much of which was done during the 1980s, I was often aided by my colleagues here in Glasnevin. At the time, I merely started to compile a slip-card index (those were pre-computer days at Glasnevin), gather photocopies, and begin the process of learning about Irish cultivars.

Meanwhile, in July 1981, inspired by the work of the recently established NCCPG [now known as Plant Heritage: Ed], the Irish Garden Plant Society was formed, and one of the first actions of the new society was to publish a newsletter in which search

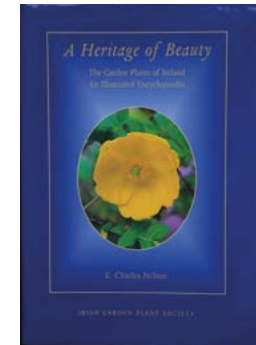
lists — for Irish primroses, *Dierama* cultivars and some roses — were included. There was also a note from Mary Forrest asking for information on a *Rhododendron* named ‘Mrs Darley’ (now called ‘Fernhill Silver’), and a plea for old nurserymen’s catalogues.



Primula ‘Lady Greer’ photo courtesy of Brendan Sayers

The ultimate blossoms of these events are contained in *A heritage of beauty*. I hope now that, finally, the records of Ireland’s own contribution to our garden flora are published and available to all, that a new chapter in Irish gardening will be opened, one in which many more gardeners learn to appreciate the richness of our inheritance. It should be a matter of pride, north, south, east and west, that Ireland has produced some exceptionally fine cultivars. And that pride, I hope, will often be converted into action to conserve at least the

best of what we still grow. But a word of caution is needed — *A heritage of beauty* is a source-book, a gathering of prunings. Just as a load of cuttings does not comprise a mature garden,



A heritage of beauty: photo courtesy of Adrian Bell

this work is not a comprehensive flora containing detailed descriptions that will enable everyone to identify plants. Sometimes the only record we have of a cultivar is a name; sometimes attached to a name may be a few, inadequate details — “blue, 12 ft”. Rarely, very rarely, are detailed, exact descriptions traceable. So please don’t be lulled into thinking that because a plant is included in *A heritage of beauty* it can be identified. Please do not assume that every white peony has to be ‘Emodoff’, or every Ribena-coloured *Dierama* is ‘Blackbird’, or every snowdrop growing at Straffan is ‘Straffan’ — almost certainly they are **not**. Identification of old cultivars remains exceedingly difficult and I for

one do not like to restore names to unnamed plants without a great deal of information.

But I must not preach. John Charles Lyons of Mullingar ended his little book about growing tropical orchids, the one he printed and published himself in 1843, with these remarks:

“It is true much of the information these pages contain might be collected from other and highly valuable sources, but they are not always within the reach of practical men, or even amateurs, and if they were, the time which would be necessarily occupied in searching for, and collecting the information, would be a matter of serious consideration to many.”

That is exactly how I view *A heritage of beauty* — there may be omissions (new plants are continually being named) and errors for which I offer my apologies, but you need not spend your time in dusty libraries, because in one book is now collected as much as I could find about Irish garden plants. You can stay in your gardens, enjoying yourselves — and propagating.

It is fortunate that *A heritage of beauty* allowed me to indulge many of my interests – gardens and their plants, of course; botanical art and photography; historical and biographical research; botany; books and bibliography. In offering you the results of my endeavours,

I am reminded that a twelfth century author, Judah ibn-Tibbon, wrote: *Let your bookcases and shelves be your gardens and pleasure-grounds. Pluck the fruits that grow therein, gather the roses, the spices, and the myrrh. If your soul be satiate and weary, change from garden to garden, from furrow to furrow, from sight to sight. Then will your desire renew itself and your soul be satisfied with delight.*

It was a long job, now complete. My thanks to all the sponsors, patrons and subscribing members who have supported the publication, to Brendan Sayers and Tony Moreau for managing the undertaking from start to finish, my family for allowing me time to work on the project, and the Society for its courage, support and faith which has resulted in a truly handsome book.



Iris 'Kilbroney Marble' photo courtesy of Paddy Tobin

Happy Memories of Seaforde Nursery

by Berkley Farr

The Society's visit to Seaforde estate and gardens in 2019 brought back fond memories of the former nursery in the walled garden run by Patrick Forde in the later decades of the last century. Rhododendrons were a particular speciality, including varieties discovered by Patrick during expeditions to the Far East. The nursery was a treasure trove of interesting and rare trees and shrubs. Advice and guidance was available and there was the excitement of being introduced to an unusual shrub just waiting for a new home in one's own garden.



Cornus controversa 'Variegata'

There are good reasons for buying plants from a local nursery with similar climatic conditions. Seaforde and my own area of Inch are in

County Down drumlin country on the leeward side of the Mourne Mountains and are close to the sea without having the disadvantages of being too close. I recently came across a diary entry of a visit in 1985 when I purchased *Eucalyptus gunnii* and *Eucryphia x intermedia* 'Rostrevor' as well as a couple of shrubs for £11.50. They have exceeded all my expectations and few items of expenditure could have given such continuing pleasure over this length of time.

Often plants are bought without knowing where they will be planted. In the closing down sale at Seaforde, I bought a small *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata', the wedding cake tree, for £3 although at that stage I wasn't planning on getting married. It remained under a foot in height in its pot for a few years before I planted it in a spot which was too rocky and not to its liking. After I married Mary in 2002, we decided it should be moved to a new part of the garden reclaimed from a field. It happened to be where a cattle trough had been located. Despite being on the north side of the house, it has grown at a great rate to a height of some twenty feet with five horizontal layers, and contrasts well against the shaded wall especially when viewed from across the field.

Grow an Irish Plant

by Seamus O'Brien, Jane Powers, Brendan Sayers & Paddy Tobin

***Galanthus* 'Straffan'**

When I was a child, a programme of traditional Irish music and song wrapped up with "If you feel like singing, **do** sing an Irish song". I feel the words could be rehashed to "If you feel like growing a snowdrop, **do** grow an Irish snowdrop" and heartily recommend you give *Galanthus* 'Straffan' a try.



Galanthus 'Straffan'

It is undoubtedly the champion of Irish snowdrops, one of the oldest of snowdrop cultivars, and arose at Straffan House in Co Kildare. It is a hybrid between the common snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, and the Crimean snowdrop, *Galanthus plicatus*, which was most probably introduced by Major Eyre Massey, presumably towards the end of the Crimean War in the early 1850s. Frederick Bedford was the gardener at Straffan House and is credited with tending the bulbs and distributing them.

It has that uncommon habit among snowdrops of producing a second scape from each bulb and, as this comes a little later than the first flower, a clump of 'Straffan' remains in flower for considerably longer than most snowdrops. 'Straffan' has stood the test of time and remains a favourite with snowdrop lovers round the world. Quality and good taste will always outlast fashion! **PT**

***Luma apiculata* 'Glanleam Gold'**

Since Victorian times, the Chilean myrtle has seeded itself in millions at Glanleam, Co Kerry; in places their wonderful cinnamon trunks soar over 60 feet high. The rust-coloured bark, flaking to reveal creamy-white patches beneath, is one of the most charming features of this evergreen tree; the clouds of white blossoms are an added bonus in late summer while in autumn these are followed by edible purple berries that are gorged on by hungry blackbirds.

In 1957, when the Glanleam Estate on Valentia Island, Co Kerry was owned by Colonel Richard J Uniacke, his wife Peggy spotted a single variegated seedling, a sport among thousands of ordinary green-leaved seedlings. She dug it up, replanting it in a safe place just off the Broad Walk near the house, removing any green

reversions. It still grows in the same place and has long-since proved to be a first-class shrub or small tree. For year round interest it's hard to beat, the leaves are grey-green in the centre and splashed with a creamy yellow margin. I rate it as one of the best small trees for modern gardens and it is widely available. **SO'B**



Luma apiculata 'Glanleam Gold'

***Omphalodes cappadocica* 'Starry Eyes'**

The ability of some gardeners to spot an unusual trait in a plant is a known fact. Maybe the particular trait has to do with the plant's stature, flower or leaf colour or its ability to fruit well. It is from here that we get our garden cultivars. In the case of *Omphalodes cappadocica* 'Starry Eyes', it was Mrs Eithne Clark who, in the early 1980s, identified this unusual form of the navelwort or blue-eyed Mary in her Dublin garden. Unlike the usual navelwort which has a tiny white-eye in a whole blue flower, the plant Eithne Clark brought to Charles Nelson at the National Botanic Gardens, had an edge of white to

each flower.

Omphalodes cappadocica is a great addition to the spring garden and 'Starry Eyes' is even better. However, as a plant which seeds around, the seedlings will have flowers of whole blue or possibly a shade of lavender, all with a white eye. To keep the cultivar pure, vegetative propagation is a must, Fortunately, unlike some cultivars, it is very easy to identify any stray seedlings from the white-edged flowers of 'Starry Eyes'. It is widely available and well worth seeking out. **BS**



Omphalodes 'Starry Eyes'
photo courtesy of Stephen Butler

***Primula* 'Julius Caesar'**

The words: '...and now it is probably extinct' kindled a tiny fire of excitement when I read them twenty years ago. They referred to *Primula* 'Julius Caesar' in Charles Nelson's encyclopaedia of Irish garden plants, *A Heritage of Beauty*. The Juliana primula, with wine flowers and bronze foliage, had been bred by Winifred Wynne sometime in

the mid-twentieth century and had disappeared from horticulture.

Except that it hadn't. 'Julius Caesar' was alive and well in my garden. Winifred Wynne, who lived with her sisters at Tigroney House in Avoca, Co Wicklow, was related to my friend, Katie Donovan, the poet. When Katie told me about the primrose in the late 1990s, I was intrigued, as I was going through a primula phase. Katie's father, Richard Donovan, a second cousin of the Wynne sisters, had been quietly minding the cultivar for decades in Co Wexford. I was delighted to receive a plant, which I gradually distributed to other gardeners.

Later, in 2001, Richard told me that he had no doubt that his 'Julius Caesar' was the real thing: 'We kept it going because Winifred was so proud of it'. He remembered her 'experimenting with plants' in the 1930s and 1940s.

In the 1920s, the Wynne sisters took over Avoca Woollen Mills (now Avoca Handweavers), producing blankets and fabrics with a unique blend of bright colours. At the yearly Spring Show in Dublin, a corner of the woollen mill's stand was given over to Winifred's plants. She died in the 1960s and is buried in the graveyard at Avoca. **JP**



Primula 'Julius Caesar' photo courtesy of Paddy Tobin

Snowdrops at Glenveagh Castle

Photo by Sean O Gaoithin



Plant Combinations with an Irish Twist

by Barbara Kelso

Whenever it comes to creating a planting design for a client's garden, I am both excited and fortunate to have an array of plants in nurseries and garden centres to choose from. The trick to creating a successful garden, however, is to stop considering individual plants in isolation from one another and to start visualising them in harmonious and interesting combinations, bringing the garden to life with their colour, scent, texture, form and year-round impact. To list my favourite plants would be extremely difficult as I have so many; however, I can easily list several of the Irish Heritage Plants used in my designs.

I first came across *Pseudowintera colorata* 'Marjorie Congreve', an evergreen shrub, about 12 years ago on a visit to Mount Congreve in Co Waterford. It had been discovered in this fabulous garden by the owner, Ambrose Congreve, and he named it after his wife. The common name is the New Zealand Pepper Tree, although it is really a slow-growing shrub to around 1.5m. The oval leathery leaves emerge a beautiful shrimp-pink, with soft yellow-beige tints and crimson-bronze edges as the leaves mature. The best leaf colouring is produced in a sunny but sheltered aspect.



Pseudowintera colorata 'Marjorie Congreve' (top right of photo) with *Acer griseum* and ferns

In a client's garden, I planted one near an *Acer griseum* where the colour of the shrub's leaves picks up the warm tones of the tree's bark and also that of the golden-bronze Copper Shield ferns, *Dryopteris erythrosora*. In my own garden, I have a *Pseudowintera colorata* 'Marjorie Congreve' planted beside my deep burgundy-leaved *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood'. The colour of the leaves complement each other as well as giving contrasting in texture and shape.

Some other Irish plants which I like to use because they give good evergreen structure and

have some interesting decorative attributes are listed below.

Ilex x altaclerensis 'Lady Valerie' — an easy to maintain shrub with yellow and green variegated glossy twisted leaves and in autumn/winter shiny red berries. The bright colour of this holly's foliage will cheer up a semi-shaded area and it enlivens nearby plain green-leaved plants.

Mahonia x media 'Winter Sun' — with bold jagged foliage and striking golden-yellow racemes of fragrant flowers, this large shrub is one of the most imposing winter-flowering plants. It can grow in sun or shade and makes a good background plant. Try to position it to enjoy the delicious lily-of-the-valley scent and to watch the birds feed on the deep purple berries.

Azara microphylla 'Variegata' — has small, variegated glossy leaves, dark green with cream edges, arranged in fan-like sprays and tiny, yellowish-green, highly fragrant vanilla-scented flowers in spring, very attractive to bees. This box-leaf azara grows into a large upright shrub; however due to its growth pattern, it is also excellent fan-trained against a wall.

Penstemon 'Evelyn' — a bushy compact perennial with narrow, textured green leaves and masses of small tubular pastel rose-pink flowers produced from summer into autumn. Team it up with another long flowering perennial, maybe in a

contrasting colour such as blue *Geranium* 'Rozanne' or lavender-blue *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low'.

Osteospermum 'Lady Leitrim' — a long blooming perennial which flowers from late spring into autumn, the blushed-white daisy-like flowers deepen to pink with age and they have metallic blue-mauve backs to the petals. Plant in a sunny position along the edge of a path or at the front of a border and watch the daisy flowers open and close depending on the light. Maybe you could combine some of these lovely Irish plants with your existing plants to enhance your own garden.



Acer palmatum 'Bloodgood' *Pseudowintera* 'Marjorie Congreve'

Plants with Minds of Their Own

by Rae McIntyre

About twenty years ago I discovered a tree seedling about 20 centimetres tall growing in the corner of a bed in the yard. The leaves were purplish and I thought that the tiny tree was a purple hazelnut. A few years passed and it grew and flourished before I realised that it wasn't a hazelnut but a purple-leaved filbert, *Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea'. I have absolutely no idea where it came from. About half a mile from where we live there is a thicket of hazels but there are no purple-leaved ones. Hazel catkins are yellow while the filbert's are pinkish and the nuts are larger, longer and red-tinted. I am incorrigibly curious about other people's gardens but nobody else in this part of the country has a purple-leaved filbert. Possibly a squirrel was to blame, or even thank, but I never see any. It remains a mystery.



Corylus maxima 'Purpurea'

Many years ago at Greenmount Garden Fair, when it was still in existence, I bought a rambling rose labeled as *Rosa mulliganii*. I was told that it could easily climb up a tree but I wanted it to cover the west-facing wall of a defunct farm building. It did but it needed to be clipped and kept in order at times because it was beside a path and was dangerously thorny. Some distance away, at the bottom of the garden, there are trees and shrubs that have grown rampantly in the rain. One of the shrubs is an elder, *Sambucus racemosa* 'Sutherland Gold', with very attractive gold foliage and I noticed, two years ago, that it was liberally bedecked with small white flowers. Close inspection revealed that the flowers came from a young *Rosa mulliganii* and that it had grown as tall as the elder. They made a lovely pairing because the yellow stamens of the rose perfectly matched the shrub's leaves. My imagination went into overdrive and I envisaged the rose wondering where it could be seen to the best advantage and then transmitting seeds halfway across the garden to the elder.

Nurseries sometimes misname plants and that happened with a white rose I bought in a Hampshire nursery. It was labeled *Rosa* 'Little White Pet' but it's no more a little

white pet than I am. I planted it in the white garden beside a *Eucryphia milliganii* which is commonly known as the dwarf leatherwood; mine is 4 metres but it can grow to more than 10. 'Little White Pet' has turned out to be a climber and, not only has it scrambled to the top of the eucryphia and beyond, but it is now entwined with *Hydrangea serratifolia*, the climbing hydrangea. The rose is a better match for the eucryphia because both flower at the same time and have pure white flowers.

Just inside the garden gate there's a triad of self-sown plants. The green foliage is that of a *Daphne bholua*

which is always a most welcome plant. The parent daphne is not far away. The spiky blue-purple flowers growing through it are linarias. I started off growing these plants with a *Linaria purpurea* 'Canon Went' which was a pale, rather wishy-washy pink; it was not exactly an ecclesiastical colour. Anyway 'Canon Went' went and all the little linarias that have since dotted themselves over the garden are in shades of blue. I'm not sure what the third plant is and the woman who gave it to me didn't know either. It looks like a white form of the geranium relation pink 'Herb Robert' and is an innocuous little plant.



White rose climbing through *Eucryphia milliganii* photos courtesy of Paula McIntyre

Imposters and Interlopers

by Brendan Sayers



Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) when project planning; while seeds can be an opportunity, some recent occurrences have highlighted two threats that we as gardeners of heritage plants have to guard against. Each of our Irish cultivars originated as an individual plant, was propagated and spread around with a history that attaches itself to an Irish gardener, garden or place. If we are lucky, we have a full description of the plant and possibly a herbarium specimen or an image for reference so we can provide proof of identity when needed. These references are very desirable, however we are not lucky enough to have them in all cases.

At this time of year, thanks to Debbie Bailey and the Society's seed savers, the Society's annual seed list arrives providing us with options of small, variously shaped containers of potential. Growing from seed is becoming all the more topical as we address sustainability and food shortages on a global platform. On the smaller scale growing from seed produces seedlings with a certain amount of variability which raises the opportunity for new Irish Heritage Plants to occur. [see Billy Moore's article, page 9 Ed.]

However our current Irish Heritage Plants are a group of plants with their own genetic makeup, and each plant has a uniqueness that can be maintained only by asexual propagation such as root and stem cuttings, division, layering or grafting but **not** seed because this would not maintain their specific identity as each seedling has its own uniqueness. Organisations find it useful to do a SWOT



Roscoea humeana 'Two Tone' with rogue seedlings

The first threat is from the cultivar itself and its ability to set and disperse seed. If the method of dispersal is one where the seeds fall close to the parent, our distinct cultivars may be at risk. Seedlings with a different genetic makeup from the parent plant can germinate and grow together with the parent. In time the seedling may out-compete the parent or a division may be of the seedling rather than the cultivar. The image of *Roscoea humeana* 'Two Tone' growing in a pot shows seedlings around the edge and another up against the stem of the mother plant with the potential to confuse. Clearly interlopers! Best practice is for Heritage plants to be deadheaded before they seed, not always possible but best to try.

Threat two is the mislabelled plant. Many nursery owners and their staff may not have the knowledge about cultivars of all the plants they sell and may 'learn' what a cultivar looks like from a mislabelled plant. It could also be a gardening friend who is the confused source. Compounding this problem is the amount of image-sharing on various electronic platforms, so much so that the images of the imposter may outnumber that of the true plant. To illustrate I use the recent occurrence that prompted this writing, two images of *Penstemon* 'Beech Park'. The one labelled in the photograph is the correct cultivar; unfortunately, the imposter is being sold in Ireland as

the former.



Penstemon 'Beech Park'

Best practice for those growing seed derived from named cultivars is to make it very clear on the label that it is **not** the cultivar that is being grown. An old way of labelling plants derived from cultivars was to label them ex *Roscoea humeana* 'Two Tone'. I prefer *Penstemon* (seedling from 'Beech Park') as the bracketed words are distinct enough not to get lost when writing a duplicate label.



The Imposter!

Growing Irish Apples

by Peter and Nicola Milligan



Malus 'Irish Peach in bloom

Whether the old saying that “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” is true or not, we would argue that there is great pleasure to be had from picking and eating your own fruit. Many of the varieties provided by modern supermarkets are selected for their ability to withstand automated picking and transportation over long distances. So we opted to select old varieties chosen for their flavour and to provide fruit over as long a season as possible without using modern storage techniques.

Whilst we have many varieties that most people would recognize such as *Malus* 'Bramley's Seedling' (Nottingham 1809) and *M.* 'Blenheim Orange' (Oxford, 1740), we managed to find some good older varieties that are not as common, e.g. *M.* 'Ashmead's Kernal' (Gloucester,

1700). This apple, *M.* 'Ashmeads Kernel', has been winning taste tests for centuries. It has a firm crisp flesh that is very juicy and sweet with a beautiful aromatic flavour; we cannot recommend it highly enough!

Of course we had to have some Irish cultivars and this posed a problem as not many nurseries were providing such trees. At this time we were members of the Northern Committee of the IGPS and, as part of the development of the garden at Lismacloskey in the Ulster Folk Museum, it was decided to introduce some Irish apples trees. As we were in the process of sourcing trees for our orchard, we agreed to seek out some for Lismacloskey at the same time.

Among our Irish favourites are *M.* 'Irish Peach' (sometimes known as *M.* 'Early Crofton' as it is thought to have originated in Sligo as part of the Crofton collection). This is a fine desert apple described as having fruits that are small and round with a smooth pale yellow skin sometimes marked with dark red stripes. We think *M.* 'Irish Peach' is a real beauty in terms of colour and taste; it is the first Irish variety to ripen usually ready by the end of August or by mid-September and has a real tang. *M.* 'Lady's Finger' (we obtained this as *M.* 'Lady Fingers of Offaly' as this variety is common to Offaly & Monaghan) is another good desert apple which is described as firm and sweet with a noticeably oblong shape. It is ready for picking in October.

An interesting article in The Irish Times (October 2016) reported that “...an important event that changed the course of Irish apple

growing occurred in 1937 when the Irish government encouraged Irish farmers with state-funded grants to remove their Irish apple trees and replace them with modern varieties developed in the UK and elsewhere”. It is reasonable to assume that this event led to the loss of Irish cultivars in the wider horticultural arena as nurseries would stop selling Irish cultivars if they were not in great demand. Fortunately changes in the attitude of the gardening public — a desire to have fruit with flavour and a range of varieties — rather than the restricted range of apples available in the supermarket has led to a resurgence of Irish cultivars. Nowadays, thanks to the work of the Irish Seed Savers Association, a great range of Irish apple trees (cider, crab, culinary and dessert varieties) are available from this organization. To see the list of the trees they offer, visit www.irishseedsavers.ie You should find something to suit every taste.



Malus 'Lady's Finger'

All fruit trees have a pollinator requirement. The modern apple flowering period is broken into seven groups numbered 1-7. In general a variety will be pollinated by trees in the same flowering group and those in adjacent flowering groups, e.g. Group 4 is pollinated by Groups 3, 4 and 5. The only exceptions are the triploid varieties — those that are sterile and require **two** pollination partners for good fruit set. For example, both *M.* 'Bramley's Seedling' and *M.* 'Blenheim Orange' are triploid.

The final size of your tree is determined by the rootstock. We wished to have reasonably sized trees that would not require the purchase of a 'cherry picker' to gather the crop. We considered the choices and rejected the use of dwarf rootstocks (M27: extremely dwarfing, M9: very dwarfing and M26: dwarfing) as we wished the trees to reach a reasonable height and, well, to look like real apple trees. Trees grown on a dwarfing rootstock do not look the part. Obviously, we wished to avoid the other extreme and so rejected MM111 and M2, the very vigorous rootstocks. This left us the middle ground, MM106 which makes a good 'bush' tree around 12-15 feet in height and spread.

If all the space you have is a sunny fence, cordons, fans and espaliers will provide a good crop, or even use a step-over form as bed edging. So go ahead, select varieties that you like the

sound of, choose suitable pollinators and a rootstock that suits your garden, then plant, sit back and await the wonderful taste of your own freshly picked fruit.

The varieties growing in the Lismacloskey Rectory Garden are:
Blood of the Boyne
Irish Peach
Kerry Pippen
Scarlet Crofter



Misadventures of a Seed Saver

by Stephen Butler

Collecting seeds is easy, with a great advantage that it reduces self-seeding, something I did not appreciate until veritable lawns of seedlings popped up where not wanted. But cleaning the seeds, that's a different story. Many are easy: into a paper bag, let dry, shake a good bit, and there is nice clean gathering at the bottom. How about *Cynara*? A giant thistle, with armed seed heads that need approaching with 2 pairs of pliers. Or Mallows with hairy seed cases that cause drifts of irritant hairs to float around — clean in the fresh air with a good cross wind.

A few *Arisaema* were collected, a poisonous seed head as one friend found out when, against my better judgement, he tasted some of the juice of one seed pod...and 30 minutes later had me checking the poison books. His throat was tightening and he was hardly swallowing. The fleshy fruits are full of crystals of calcium oxalate, basically like wee glass shards. He survived without medical aid but was sore for days. Thinking it would only affect internal organs, I cleaned the seeds in water removing the fleshy bit. With bare hands. With the seeds on paper to dry, I noticed the soft skin between my fingers was itchy... and it stayed itchy for 5 days, not quite painful, but annoying, with those tiny crystals imbedded in the skin.

Helleborus argutifolius was cleaned too soon when still slightly moist, the seeds did not want to come out, so a thumb or fingernail pushed gently popped them out nicely. A member of the buttercup family...contains the irritant ranunculin. Cue a few days of the flesh **under** some of my fingernails being intensely itchy, and totally unscratchable.

Maybe though the worst was not painful in the normal way. Seed was collected from *Salvia sclarea* var. *turkestanica*, a wonderfully architectural plant, with masses of insect friendly flowers as you'd expect from a sage. But, and it's a big but, it stinks to most people, though amazingly some people like it. A football team's changing room maybe? At the zoo, it caused the maintenance team to be called to check the drains three times one summer. Animal team members wondered why they could smell the gorillas from the far side of the lake. Worse, at home, I once put some seed heads in my garage. Up high on a shelf within 10ft of the outlet for an extractor fan for a downstairs toilet, located the other side of the wall, in my mother-in-law's bedroom. The aroma travelled easily through the fan when off. Not popular!

Worth a Read

by Paddy Tobin



Jane Powers' **An Irish Nature Book** is a gem of a book, a perfect read for the Irish nature enthusiast. Jane, a long-time IGPS member, has been the gardening correspondent for *The Irish Times* and for *The Sunday Times* and, in recent years, has contributed a nature column to *The Times* of London. Some of these nature notes have been used in the book, supplemented by a large amount of new material.

There are 365 short nature essays, one for each day of the year and so arranged by date and month, with entries relevant to the time of year, recording Jane's experiences, insights, research and comments. These include entries on birds, flowers, trees, animals, insects, bees, seaweeds, butterflies, moths, fungus, garden visitors, rare and unexpected migrants and everything and anything which caught Jane's attention, all presented in her wonderful prose and

accompanied by Robert Vaughan's beautiful line drawings throughout.

This is a book which draws the reader into a world of beauty, enchantment, awe and amazement; a book which will delight, attract and inspire an interest in nature and will lead to an appreciation and a love of nature in all its manifestations.

[*An Irish Nature Year*, Jane Powers, Illustrations by Robert Vaughan, William Collins, 2020, Hardback, 266 pages, £14.99]



Sissinghurst, The Dream Garden by Tim Richardson is the best gardening book I've read in ages! With this book Sissinghurst has received what it so deservedly merits, an author whose writings do it justice. Reading Tim Richardson's book has been an enjoyment comparable to visiting the garden itself. Both are simply superb. [Frances Lincoln, London, 2020, Hardback, 224 pages, £30]



Some Snowdrops, A Photographic Ramble contains a personal selection of the snowdrops which particularly appeal to Anne Repnow, a German snowdrop enthusiast, and range from old, long-grown, well-tested cultivars to more recent appealing introductions, a total of ninety. Each is beautifully photographed and accompanied by a short description. A beautiful and fascinating book. [Davidia Press, Augsburg, 2020, Softback, 104 pages. €25]

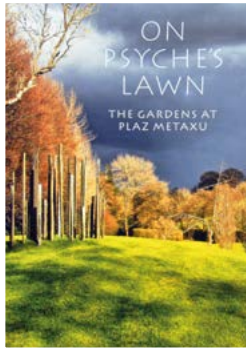


Britain's Orchids by Sean Cole and Mike Waller is an exciting and different addition to books on our native orchids as it is directed exclusively at assisting identification. It contains guides to identification of the plants while in leaf, while in flower and when in seed. Each section is illustrated with an enormous selection of excellent photographs and outstanding botanical illustrations by Sarah Stribbling — I know of no other book so generously illustrated or better furnished with photographs. An outstanding identification guide. [Princeton University Press in association with The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, 2020, Softback, 288 pages, £20]

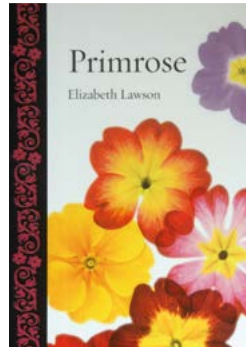


Thinking The Plant, The Watercolour Drawings of Rebecca John is a wonderful story of how Rebecca, from a family of artists, came to art in middle life and how her career developed. Life events and artistic progress are charted in a journal style and all illustrated

with a lavishly comprehensive range of her work. This is a wonderfully honest insight into the work of the artist. Highly recommended. [Pimpernel Press, 2020, Softback, 168 pages, £30]



On Psyche's Lawn, The Gardens at Plaz Metaxu, by Alastair Forbes, is the most extraordinary account of the making of a new garden in Devon. This book is a discussion of philosophy, literature, classical and mythical gods and gardens and the interaction between them – and how a garden can represent these personalities and thoughts. It is important to say that, from the purely horticultural view, the author has created a marvellously beautiful garden, a joy to behold and worthy of great praise and admiration. An extremely interesting book. [Pimpernel Press, 2020, Hardback, 304 pages, £50,]



Primrose, by Elizabeth Lawson, deals with that most democratic of garden plants, a plant of common places and of the common person yet one which has endeared itself to generations of gardeners. The author tells the stories of the great plant hunters who introduced so many of our garden primulas and also of the hobby primula growers, those who bred the gems that are the auriculas. Primulas also have their place in literature, music and even politics. [Reaktion Books, London, 2019, Hardback, 288 pages, £16]

Around the Regions

South Belfast Ramble

In early September about 60 of us visited three gardens in small groups of 10 at a time. Being used to having a huge space to fill with plants, I was intrigued that the first garden was the polar opposite of mine. Adrian Walsh's city garden has a unique charm and is filled with variety and interest. The side entrance is planted in a woodland style with ferns, *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost' and one of my favourites, *Podophyllum versipelle* 'Spotty Dotty'.

What I hadn't expected in this smaller space were the trees. A mature multi-stemmed silver birch took centre stage while a stunning *Eucryphia x nymansensis* was covered in pretty, white saucer shaped blooms. In fact when I commented on it, Adrian said the petals had just recently started to fall carpeting the garden with confetti-like petals. There was a lovely contrast with the dark purple leaves of a *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' underplanted with Joe Pye weed. My eye was drawn to a simple yet highly effective centrepiece of a large water-filled pot surrounded entirely by a perfect rectangle of box hedging.

The variety of plants was delightful and every corner of the garden was used to give you the impression of being enveloped in nature.



Adrian Walsh's water feature

Leaf shapes contrasted beautifully with one another from the arching fronds of *Dicksonia antartica* to the slender, upright *Miscanthus*; hostas, grasses, black bamboo and clipped box all vied for attention while late colour was supplied by Japanese anemones, dahlias, *Helianthus*, *Ligularia* and elegant leaves of a *Canna*.

It's a garden one is tempted to linger in as the planting surprises and delights you as with the tiny autumn crocus under the silver birch. Well-placed stone carvings added to the garden story and I loved the simplicity of one corner with a lantern, round stones and pony tail grasses. A welcoming garden with interest in every season, it was a real pleasure to visit. Rosemary Maye

Our second visit of the morning was to Maureen Reid, a keen plantswoman, whose garden is a south facing, compact urban space boasting a wide variety of plants and making the very best use of the space and shape. Maureen explained that, unlike the first garden just down the road which is on clay, her soil is sandy. Previously the site had been part of a golf course and her garden a bunker!



Maureen Reid under her *Magnolia*

It was helpful to see the original plan for the garden which she had kindly hung on the garage door. Plants that were already in situ form the backbone, such as the huge *Magnolia*, possibly *M. soulangeana*, planted in 1925, a large *Eucryphia* now pruned and growing happily as a shrub, and rhododendrons in new positions. There are many features including a seating space, a bird bath and a semi-circular wooden pergola. This for me was the stroke of genius in the plan; to utilise the rather odd-shaped corner for a shed. The pergola hides just enough of the shed, and the clever planting of trees in this area draws the eye — an *Acer* 'Sango-kaku' and right in the corner *Sorbus* 'Joseph Rock', a lovely combination.

The garden contained a wide selection of plants and clever colour combinations which can be seen from the winding pathways of blue slate with a natural pond along the way. Plants such as rudbeckia,

lavender, rosemary, agapanthus, dianthus and shocking pink cosmos were planted in the borders while a low wall was covered with the lovely *Persicaria vacciniifolia* in full flower, an ideal choice. I loved the colour combination of one small bed with *Penstemon* 'Garnet', *Potentilla* 'Monarch Velvet' and an unnamed miniature acer, the reds and blacks combining well.
Jenny Constable

Maeve Bell's red brick detached house and its expansive garden is one of two built in 1925 tucked away up a lane. Then, they would have overlooked pastures on the edge of Lagan Meadows. Now, the west-facing site is an oasis with imaginative design and unusual plants, many of Irish interest.

At the front, a simple lawn set off the gleaming white bark of a multi-stemmed *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* in a circle of clipped box

and cobbles. An arch in the pergola led to mixed borders, 3 metres deep in places, interspersed with circular lawns, paths and well-positioned seating areas. At the far end, a rustic bench under mature beech trees looked back into the borders. As you sit, the flaming foliage of *Acer* 'Osakazuki' was just starting its autumn display fringed on the right by *Aster x frickartii* 'Mönch', to the left the peeling cinnamon bark of a graceful *Acer griseum* rose from a flush of *Hylotelephium* 'Herbstfreude'. Hydrangeas were in full bloom, including a mophead in mixed pinks



Acer griseum with sedum and *Agapanthus* 'Patent Blue'

and blues, a lace cap, and a young oak-leaved cultivar. *H. paniculata* varieties included 'Limelight', 'Vanille Fraise' (nicely strong-stemmed pastel flushed with pink and cream) and 'Kyushu'. Here, another pergola draped with sprawling deep red

clusters of *Berberidopsis corallina* framed a flourishing young *Dicksonia antarctica* and screened the tidy compost bays while a mask sculpture rising between double hedges created a focal point and a dash of humour.

Tall, spikey red dahlias clashed with the small purple pompoms of *Dahlia* 'John Markham' alongside waving clouds of late-season purple *Thalictrum* 'Hewitt's Double'. Another Irish cultivar was *D.* 'Matt Armour', a single red from Glenveagh Castle. Finally seedheads of *Dierama pulcherrimum* arched over steps to a paved patio, where a cascade and pool were fringed with ferns, bamboo and euonymous.
Eileen Sung

Rowallane Gardens

There wasn't a cloud in the sky on the morning of 1st October when some members of the IGPS went on a DIY visit to Rowallane Gardens, Saintfield, Co Down. In full compliance with the regulations, each member made an individual booking and the visit was self-guided using the excellent handout prepared by head gardener, Claire McNally, which was circulated in advance.

Essentially an informal garden carved out of fields enclosed by stone walls, Rowallane's Walled Garden is about the only element of formality and the obvious place to

start one's tour. Some of the treats on Claire's list included a towering *Salvia concolor*, *Itea ilicifolia* with its dangling green tassels, the original *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* 'Rowallane' where the leaves were turning crimson, *Rhododendron thomsonii* which was covered in deep red blooms despite it being autumn rather than spring, and the unusual *Colquhounia coccinea* with white downy undersides to its leaves and dramatic scarlet-orange flowers. Colour was guaranteed by an excellent range of herbaceous plants with autumn interest including deep blue aconites, the airy wands of *Actea* 'Black Negligee', and huge stands of

white Japanese anemones and *Phlox paniculata* 'Mount Fuji'.

The Outer Walled Garden is home to a stunning collection of hydrangea, including *Hydrangea aspera* subsp. *sargentiana* with its large leaves and *H. aspera* Villosa Group but perhaps the star of the show in this area was the rarely seen *Eucryphia moorei* festooned with white blossom.

From here members spread out and enjoyed the early autumn colour from the eclectic selection of trees and shrubs distributed through the other areas of the garden.



Rhododendron thomsonii flowering in October photo courtesy of Maeve Bell

Society Snippets

Crocsmia: further information

Following the publication of A Touch of Africa in Ireland by Peter and Nicola Milligan in the September issue (Issue 150), Mike Snowden, Head Gardener and Property Manager at Rowallane Gardens in Saintfield, Co Down from 1981 to 2000 and an Honorary Member of the Society, got in touch with some further information about the identification and naming of the three Rowallane cultivars.

Mike writes:

I arrived at Rowallane in March 1981. I had been asked by John Sales, the then Head of Gardens for the National Trust, to take on a total restoration as the garden had declined. Shortly after my arrival I noticed that a large clump of *Crocsmia masoniorum* in the walled garden had produced a yellow sport. I separated this out and lined it out in a nursery bed to see if it remained true. This nursery lineout over a period of time also produced C. 'Rowallane Orange' which again I culled and lined out separately. A third sport appeared in this group, C. Rowallane Apricot'. Again I separated this sport and lined it out to grow on; this also proved to be stable. Once these had increased sufficiently, I gave specimens to Gary Dunlop [of Ballyrogan Nurseries, now sadly closed. Ed] to add to his

collection. I also gave specimens to Adrian Bloom, and to Holden Clough as they had crocsmia collections and I passed some on to local nurserymen and other gardens.

There is also further information about what Peter referred to as 'the mystery' surrounding C. 'Malahide' (syn 'Comet'); this is being followed up and should be available for the next issue.

Online lectures

There will be at least **one online lecture a month in January, February and March**. The first will be on **Thursday 21st January** when Rosemary Maye will give a talk called The Greedy Gardener in which she will focus on having colour in the garden at every season of the year. Rosemary says: "Seventeen years ago we were enticed to a romantic old house in the countryside but there was no colour in the garden. I love colour and immediately set about planting. Join me on a year's journey in my garden." Members will receive an email inviting them to register for the Zoom lecture; once registered, details of the code and password will follow.

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