



*The Newsletter of the
Irish Garden Plant Society*



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Front Cover Illustration:

Crocosmia masoniorum ‘Rowallane Yellow’

This is one of the many excellent plants which bear the ‘Rowallane’ name and is certainly an excellent plant for the garden. It is a fantastic plant with arching spikes of outward-facing, rich amber-yellow flowers on tall elegant stems, flowering in July – August. In A Heritage of Beauty, Charles Nelson reports that it arose at Rowallane, Saintfield, Co. Down as a sport among plants of Crocosmia masoniorum in the 1970s and was introduced by the National Trust having being named by Graham Stuart Thomas.

With such background and beauty it is surely worth a place in your garden!



Editorial

“Getting Things Moving”

I was absolutely delighted to have been told recently that the last meeting of the National Committee was given over to *“getting things moving about Irish cultivars”*. This is the central work of the Irish Garden Plant Society and I am very heartened that the National Committee are taking a leading role in promoting it, taking a position of strong leadership and keeping in front of members what it is we are all about.

The committee has identified twenty plants of Irish interest which they feel deserve our attention. Their first move in this work is to include a flyer with this newsletter listing these twenty plants. You are asked if you grow these plants in your garden, to tick against the plant name on the flyer and to post it back to the committee. An addressed envelope is enclosed to make this all the easier for you.

This is a very simple way to forward the work of the IGPS and I ask all members to mark their lists and drop them into the post within the next few days. All members can probably boast of green fingers but I know that, like myself, many of you also have very long fingers. If you leave it for the weekend or next week the danger is that it will slip your mind entirely and be forgotten. This is a quick and simple task so get to it immediately and be active in promoting the conservation of Irish plants.

“What will happen then?” you ask. With the replies to hand the committee will be able to identify which of the plants on the list are most in need of our care and attention. For those plants most in danger, plant holders may be approached for propagation material so that the plants can be bulked up. Don't get worried about this. Nobody is coming with spade and fork and a collection of plastic bags to devastate your garden. In fact we all underestimate the potential for increase of our plants by even the simplest of propagation methods. Of necessity some years back, a large area added to the garden and a shortage of cash to furnish it with plants, I dug up three old hosta plants and through careful division turned them into one hundred and thirty which all thrived and bulked up and have since even divided some of them further. Remember Lady Moore's saying that the best way to keep a plant is to give it away. In this way it will be grown in other gardens and will always be available for you should you lose yours.

The committee will then approach various members to *‘adopt a plant’* so that we will know that such-and-such a plant is in the caring hands of one of our members and that this member will propagate it as appropriate and hopefully pass it along at plant sales and through the normal giving of plants to friends etc.

This is an excellent project, beautiful in its simplicity and ease of management, requiring only a very little effort on the part of members. I recommend this project to you unreservedly, cannot

praise the National Committee enough for their leadership and proactive approach to the conservation of Irish plants and urge all members to become actively involved.

In similar vein to the above I have some good news to report which shows how, when people get involved, great progress can be made towards achieving the aims of our society. You may recall a call for a show of interest from people interested in snowdrops of Irish connection in an earlier issue – the response was fabulous. Research is progressing very well, sources have been identified for various Irish cultivars and several very interesting and scarce snowdrops have been most generously given. Also, some previously unrecorded cultivars have surfaced and will add both to our knowledge and also go into the collection at Altamont Gardens under the care of Paul Cutler, Head Gardener, who has already established a very interesting collection which can be viewed during the Altamont Snowdrop Week each year when Paul gives excellent guided tours of the collection, pointing out the distinct features of the various snowdrops (yes, they are all different!) as well as giving very interesting background information and histories of the various cultivars.

Many people have been very helpful with this project but I wish particularly to express appreciation to Mr. Chris Sanham in England for the enormous amount of research he has conducted and the information he has passed on for this project. Chris has access to many holders of large collections of snowdrops in England and has corresponded tirelessly with them seeking information on various snowdrops of Irish connection. His contribution has been invaluable and is deeply appreciated. Chris has applied for National Collection status for his snowdrop collection under the auspices of the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG) and will have his collection assessed this spring. I have no doubt that he will be successful in his application and wish him every success.

A similar success story followed on the request published in the newsletter for white-fruited strawberries. A very kind lady living in Belfast had these growing and very kindly passed them on. I won't mention her name as I don't want to put her in the way of receiving too many requests. I will say that she travelled all the way to Clonmel, where I met her, and she gave me some very healthy plants. These have thrived in my vegetable garden under my loganberries, fruiting and sending off their runners. The fruit is small, very like the wild strawberries or alpine species but white fleshed and perhaps not quite as strongly flavoured as the usual cultivars. However, it is certainly an interesting plant and a novelty in the garden. So, don't seek to find out who the kind lady in the North is; you can contact me, say next autumn when they have bulked up a bit and I will gladly pass them on to you.

Let me reiterate my delight and best wishes to the National Committee for getting things moving.

Now, members, get involved!

Get ticking those boxes!

Get them into the post immediately!

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'The Poor Relations' / 'An Clann Bocht'

by Peter Milligan and Nicola Milligan

In September 1819 John Keats wrote what many consider to be his most famous and beloved work 'To Autumn'. For us, the opening lines

*"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;"*

conjure up the perfect image of autumn and it is inevitable that at this time of the year one's thoughts turn to the end of the gardening year (if the gardening year ever ends).

My wife Nicola and I have a great love of gardening and a strong interest in hardy herbaceous perennials. It could be argued that it is easy to love flowering plants and their woody counterparts. We have their flowers, frequently scented, or the diversity of leaf shape and colour to entertain us throughout the year. In general, great interest exists in these plants.

In this article we want to focus on a group of plants that do not seem to share the limelight to the same extent as their more showy neighbours in the flower beds and borders. Frequently grown out of sight, in a more secluded part of the garden, these plants lurk in the background like poor relations – there but hidden away in the kitchen garden – the fruit and vegetables grow. And this time of the year, late summer and early autumn, is a good time to consider the kitchen garden as its bounty matures, ripens, and is harvested.

But why should we have an interest in growing fruit and vegetables? A visit to just about any supermarket will reveal row upon row of canned produce. We will be assured, by means of advertisements, that the contents of these cans were processed and packed within hours of picking thereby ensuring their freshness, goodness, etcetera. A short walk within the supermarket will take us from the canned produce to the chilled cabinets where we will find all sorts of 'fresh' produce from every corner of the world. But how 'fresh' is this material? Check the apples, pears, lemons, and limes and they will be covered with a fine layer of wax – is this natural or fresh? And look closely at the fruit and vegetables on display – the apples will be remarkably similar in terms of size and colour, as will the tomatoes, in fact most of the produce will show remarkable uniformity but is this natural? Finally, and very importantly, what about the taste – is it good or poor?

How can fruit and vegetables grown on the other side of the world, and shipped to Ireland in chemically controlled environments, compare with produce picked fresh from your own garden? In addition, we know what we have put on our plants both in terms of sprays and fertilizers – can you say the same of the shop bought items? I do not wish to enter into a discussion concerning organic versus non-organic growing procedures or to argue the ‘pros and cons’ of modern retailing. Such topics can produce tempers hot enough to heat a greenhouse and set neighbour against neighbour. For us the choice is simple – we wish to grow as much of our own fruit and vegetables as we can. To choose which varieties we will plant and to select for flavour and texture and not on how ‘good’ the product looks.

A television series entitled ‘*The Victorian Kitchen Garden*’ [1] provided the impetus to consider growing older, heritage varieties. In this series, a gentleman called Harry Dodson, showed how the kitchen gardens of the Victorian estates were run and the truly amazing range of fruit and vegetables such a garden could produce. Mr Dodson, who had been the head gardener at the Chiltern Foliat estate in Berkshire since 1947, was one of the few remaining head gardeners who had been trained in the old Victorian manner. The programme was a joy to watch and one of the books that came from the series, ‘*Harry Dodson’s Practical Kitchen Garden*’ [2], condensed a great deal of Mr Dodson’s experience in growing fruit and vegetables into two hundred and twenty-four pages. It is a great read.

So we decided to grow as many old, heritage varieties as we could as we believe that these cultivars have retained a range of flavours and textures that can not be matched by the mass produced, frequently flavourless, F1 offerings of the supermarkets.

The next question was where we could obtain old cultivars. Fortunately a number of sources are available. The Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA) – now called Garden Organic (<http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>) – offers a heritage seed service to members. It is important to note that you can not buy packets of seed from the HDRA. You join as a member and can request a number of packets of seed free – typically six packets of seed can be requested with the option of a further free ‘lucky dip’.

In addition Thomas Etty Esq. (<http://www.thomasetty.co.uk/>) provides heritage varieties (or as the 2007 catalogue describes their service they offer “*heritage, unusual and regional vegetable seeds*”). The Lost Gardens of Heligan [3] in Devon offer a small range of old cultivars marketed under the title “The Head Gardener’s Choice” and, more recently, established seed companies such as Mr Fothergills (<http://fothergills.co.uk/>) and Unwins (<http://www.unwinsdirect.co.uk/>) are offering heritage lines alongside modern cultivars.

Last but not least, within Ireland we have the Irish Seed Saver Association (<http://irishseedsavers.ie/>) which offers heritage vegetable seeds, and potato and apple cultivars, to members.

Armed with this information what do we select and grow. The simple answer is nothing fancy. In our vegetable plot we grow standard, basic, vegetables: potatoes, peas and beans (broad beans, climbing French beans and dwarf French beans), and what I have always called the ‘soup vegetables’ - leeks, celery and parsley. Nicola grows beetroots, onions, shallots and garlic in small raised beds. Sweet peppers are grown in pots in the greenhouse, along with tomatoes.

This year pea varieties include ‘Carlin’ (a pea that dates back to the 16th century and traditionally eaten in Northern England on the Sunday before Palm Sunday), ‘Magnum Bonum’ (the origins of this pea are obscure but it appears to date from the 1860’s) and ‘Champion of England’ (bred by William Fairbeard in 1843 and sometimes referred to as Fairbeard’s Champion of England) all obtained from HDRA and ‘Alderman’ (introduced by Laxton’s in 1891) from Unwins.

Bean varieties include climbing French beans ‘Cherokee Trail of Tears’ (a prolific bean with a deep pink flower – carried by the Cherokee Nation when they were displaced from their home lands in the 1830’s), ‘Mrs Fortunes’ (a mid 20th century bean – named for a Mrs Doris Fortune who obtained the beans from a retired Head Gardener from Windsor – it is believed that the beans were a favourite of the Royal Family), and dwarf French bean ‘May Beans’ (derived from Normandy and dating from the 18th century these beans are named after the custom of sowing them in the month of May) all from HDRA/Garden Organic. Unwins provide ‘Red Epicure’ and our local seedsman, Walkers of Newtownards, provide broad beans ‘Bunyards Exhibition Long Pod’ (introduced in the early 1900’s) and a more recent introduction ‘Witkiem Manita’.

All of the peas and beans were sown in pots and ‘started off’ in the conservatory. Subsequently, they were moved to a cold green house and thence to the garden. Similarly, the onions, all grown from sets, were planted in deep seed trays and once top growth was evident, and the weather suitable, they were planted into small raised beds. This technique seems to work well and the larger, rooted sets seem to resist the attempts of the local bird population to unearth them.

The peas have produced excellent results in two ways. Firstly, the flowers have been beautiful varying from a bright white to colourful deep pink. Secondly, the varying tastes have been wonderful from the quite ‘meaty’ texture of the ‘Magnum Bonum’ to the very sweet ‘Champion of England’. A word of warning – all of the old varieties are tall growers and will need staking – ‘Champion of England’ reached eight feet, flopping over the top of the netting and almost reaching to the ground on the other side!

Unfortunately the growing conditions this year prevented a good yield from the broad beans. However, 'Red Epicure' has proved its reputation of being one of the best flavoured broad beans of all time, producing superb burgundy-coloured beans of magnificent flavour.

The French beans – dwarf and climbing - were started indoors in cells and grew away well until planted into our dismal summer, where they sat looking quite miserable for some time. However, they have of late begun producing prolifically. If ever there was a crop ideal for a window box it is the dwarf French beans that in a normal year produce a prodigious crop for little effort after the early indoor pampering, and even in a poor season such as this give sufficient for many tasty meals.

The greenhouse crops fared little better than the French beans, with the dismal weather and lack of light wrecking havoc. Only this week – the last in August - has the first tomato, 'Harbinger', ripened, with the flavour well worth the wait. Time will tell whether we will manage to get a ripe 'Pink Brandywine', as they are large beefsteak tomatoes. The peppers have come to naught, remaining sad things with nary a pepper in sight. Perhaps my dream of having a large Eden-esque dome over the whole garden isn't such a good idea after all! This year the white onions, 'Stuttgart Giant', have done well producing large, healthy bulbs with a sweet flavour but the red onions have been slower to swell and have yielded a poorer crop. The shallots, 'Dutch Yellow', have fared very well and produced good sized, and very tasty, bulbs. The 'Bulls Blood' beetroot have produced tender tasty roots of superb flavour and colour, delicious freshly boiled and served in a little vinegar. Time got away from us this year, so that the main carrot season was missed. All is not lost, though, as plans are afoot for a late sowing of carrots in a tub, which will be 'green-housed' in the hope of a crop of baby fingers fresh for Christmas! The carrots, 'Early Nantes', are chosen as they are a short rooted variety which suits tub culture.

It is impossible to talk about vegetable growing in Ireland and not focus on a staple element of our diet, and both local horticulture and agriculture – the potato. This year we are growing eight varieties including 'Dunbar Rover' (a second early introduced in Scotland in 1936), 'Edzel Blue' (another Scottish second early introduced pre-1915), 'Pentland Ivory' (a Scottish early maincrop introduced in 1936), 'Red Duke of York' (a sport of Duke of York introduced from the Netherlands in 1942), 'Winston' (introduced by Jack Dunnett in 1992 - this is unusual as it is noted as a first early baker), and 'Yukon Gold' (introduced from Canada in 1980 this is a second early baker). As potatoes take up a lot of space we cope with growing a large number of varieties by growing fewer of each one. In this way we have the pleasure of tasting a good range of potatoes and, as most of the cultivars mature at different times, ensuring that we avoid a glut at any given time. This was especially true, this year, of Yelthom Gipsy, with the entire crop fitting in the palm of one hand: we will try it again, though,

where a better year may produce a better crop, or at least prove that the cultivar just isn't suitable for our damp Irish climate – and thereby prove the importance of the retention of local cultivars.

We grow all of our vegetables in two outdoor sections. As we have all too healthy rabbit and pheasant populations one area is fenced (we grow the peas, beans, celery, parsley, etc. in this area) and in the unfenced section we grow the potatoes and other vegetables which do not seem to be as attractive to our furry and feathered neighbours. We use a simple rotation system in which the various vegetable groups follow each other around a four bed model. The sections are manured as required every year with some farmyard manure and additional toppings of bone meal, 'blood, fish and bone', and 'hoof and horn' as required.

Spraying is kept to a minimum but blight warnings bring about a spraying regime, based on Dithane 945, applied to the potatoes every ten days and the persistent presence of any of the aphids will result in a spray with Doff insecticide. In the past, when spraying was necessary, I preferred to use a natural compound such as pyrethrum or derris (these occur in nature and break down quickly) but many of these compounds have disappeared as a result of the seemingly endless flow of regulations emanating from Brussels. However, I am assisted in pest control by a specialist, but she is somewhat wayward insisting on eating worms as well as the pests!

On an Irish note it has to be mentioned that many fine potato cultivars were raised here, in Ulster, by the late John Clarke of Co. Antrim. Known, appropriately, as the 'Ulster' series these included 'Ulster Chieftain' (1938), 'Ulster Prince' (1947) and 'Ulster Sceptre' (1963). They are all first earlies and are best eaten early and freshly lifted. There is little to compare with these excellent potatoes, lifted, rinsed, steamed in their skins, and served, bursting from their skins, topped with a knob of butter. When I was a child I can recall such an offering earning the highest accolade of all – they would be referred to as 'wee balls of flour'.

As usual I can not let the opportunity to mention a few books pass by. In addition to the texts mentioned above I would recommend '*Heritage Vegetables*' by Sue Strickland [4], '*The Heligan Vegetable Bible*' [5], and '*The Potato Book*' by Alan Romans [6]. These are good sources of information on heritage cultivars. On a general note you may enjoy '*The Gourmet Gardener*' by Bob Flowerdew [7]. Mr Flowerdew's book is excellent as it details his own experiences with growing fruit and vegetables. In addition, Mr Flowerdew provides a list of old cultivars, as well as the newer varieties, and having grown both can give factual guidance on growth and flavour. If you are an absolute beginner in the vegetable garden then an old series, produced in the 1970's provides an excellent introduction. '*Grow Your Own*' [8] was produced as a part-work, i.e. an issue was published every week over a two year period. Typically each issue dealt with a specific fruit or vegetable giving good guidance on cultivation, choice of

cultivar, etcetera. Another old book, ‘*Adam the Gardener*’ [9] contains material originally published in the pages of the Daily Express. It is a pleasurable read providing guidance on flower, fruit and vegetable cultivation on a weekly/monthly basis. The material presented is still applicable to day which says a lot for the writers.

So, as we enjoy the autumn and note the approach of winter, go into the garden, identify a suitable area for some vegetables and do a little winter digging to prepare the soil for cultivation. Not only will the exercise do you good (or so my doctor tells me) but you can work in the knowledge that next year you will be ‘growing your own’ and subsequently enjoying the great taste and pleasure that comes from producing and eating you own vegetables. And, try to grow something with an Irish connection – perhaps you can ‘suggest’ that a suitable Christmas present would be a subscription to the Irish Seed Saver Association. In any event try to grow an Irish variety – we have a rich and varied vegetable heritage and what could be better than the aforementioned staple food of old - the potato. Try and find some ‘Dundrod’ (a first early, bred by John Clarke and introduced in 1987), ‘Malin’ (an early maincrop introduced in 1999), or the well-known ‘Rooster’ (another early maincrop introduced in 1993). Our recommendation, perhaps we should say our Irish choice of the year, would be the aforementioned ‘Ulster Chieftain’.

We are rightly proud of our flower and shrub heritage. It is time that our fruit and vegetables came in from the cold, so to speak, and enjoyed the limelight. So open your arms and welcome the ‘poor relations’ back to the family table.

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Weeds or What

by Rae McIntyre

There are some plants in my garden that have weedy propensities even though they are classified as garden plants. A few, like the herbaceous *Darmera peltata* and the tree *Pterocarya fraxinifolia* were expensive to buy initially but, because of their space invading tendencies, are almost weeds. Yet all the plants I am about to describe have something going for them. Nearly all are species.

One of the most rampant is *Alchemilla mollis* or Lady's Mantle. *Alchemilla mollis* is a plant that I remember from childhood because my Co. Tyrone grandmother grew it in her garden. She loved its diamond dewdrops but she was also aware of its highly fecund nature so she cut off the flower stems and used them in jugs of cut flowers before they could seed themselves everywhere. I used to allow it into borders but found it difficult to keep in check. Now it's mostly confined to the stone steps up to the barn in the redundant (since 1950) farm buildings. I'd like to have pots of pelargoniums on every step like they have in France but *Alchemilla mollis*, which has seeded itself into every tiny fissure, is in complete control and cascades down the steps like a foamy, lime green waterfall. Even *Meconopsis cambrica*, the Welsh poppy and a very diligent self-seeder, has been ousted from here although it appears throughout the garden especially among choice rhododendrons.

Arisarum proboscideum, the mouse plant, is an invasive little beast although it's confined to one place that used to be a peat bed in the early 1980's but has since collapsed. Beneath dwarf rhododendrons it covers the ground along with *Arum italicum* 'Pictum' and self-seeding *Erythronium* 'White Beauty'. I don't want to use weed killer near these last two so I dig out as much mouse plant as possible every spring but it's a survivor. Anyway I don't think I want to be rid of it completely because it has a certain charm. The first time I saw it was on the rock garden at Rowallane but had to wait for a couple of years before I managed to buy a plant. The Rowallane one was kept in check but when planted here it quickly revealed its thuggish tendencies.

Borago laxiflora has leaves that have the same texture as the face of a man who hasn't shaved for two days. There's nothing coarse about the flowers though because they are little bells in a beguiling shade of pale blue. Actually they closely resemble *Sollya heterophylla* otherwise known as the 'Bluebell Creeper' and a native of Australia. However it is a rampant self-seeder, especially in gravel paths, so I dig out all the little

seedlings and plant them at the base of a thorn hedge where they seem perfectly happy. They can even climb up into the hedge.

I don't remember ever introducing *Borago officinalis* into the garden but it's there and seeds itself about the stackyard, especially among the stones that edge the beds and borders and seems so firmly embedded that it's well-nigh impossible to remove. Its flowers are that magical shade of pure blue that hasn't a trace of mauve in it and it attracts all kinds of beneficial insects so it's allowed to stay.

Darmera peltata, the Umbrella plant, thrives in squelchy soil. The heads of pale pink flowers are borne on hairy stalks in late April and May. Later the leaves appear and these expand all through the summer. The leaves, which are much bigger than dinner plates, are the size of serving platters being 45 – 60 cm in diameter. These turn to hectic shades of red in the autumn but in some years autumn begins earlier than others. This year the huge leaves had red margins on July 20 and I hate this early sign of autumn especially when, to date in mid-August, we haven't had much of a summer.

Darmera peltata spreads by underground rhizomes. I now have two very large colonies in a damp border in the stackyard and stupidly planted some in the main garden beside the pool. Frankly I am sick looking at the big lummoxy leaves with their autumnal shadings and think of flowers I could be growing instead. I am going to give much of it away except for one colony in the stackyard where marestail has sneaked in among the leaves. Not even my worst enemy deserves to be inflicted with that.

Rodgersia podophylla, like the darmera, is a member of the saxifrage family. The two have in common a fondness for damp soil, an capacity for spreading themselves and a tendency to celebrate autumn prematurely. At least the darmera can be relied on to flower. *Rodgersia podophylla*, in spite of being a damp-lover, only flowers here in hot dry Julys, like that of 2006. There wasn't even a hint this year of a bloom and the leaves have been deep crimson since mid-July. Unfortunately I feel sentimental about it because it was one of the first plants I grew in the garden but I'm going to have to steel myself to getting rid of most of it.

Filipendula rubra is another plant that thrives (and how!) in damp soil. I first saw it in the Lily Wood at Mount Stewart and was so taken with it that Nigel Marshall, head gardener at the time, gave me a plant of the 'Venusta' form the following autumn. What I didn't take into consideration, when I was smitten by the plant, is that Mount Stewart is nearly 80 times as big as this garden which doesn't have the space for takeover plants. *Filipendula rubra* 'Venusta' grows at least 2 metres tall and flowers abundantly. The flowers start off bright pink but fade with age to wishy-washy pink then pinkish-brown and wave about in the wind. In one encyclopaedia I have it says that this plant is 'best suited to a large, semi-wild area or lakeside'. I would agree wholeheartedly so most of it is going to be removed elsewhere. I shall still keep one

clump for sentimental reasons and, no doubt, will be complaining in a couple of years hence about what a spreader it is.

Many geraniums seed themselves around but the native meadow cranesbill, *Geranium pratense* is the self-seeder par excellence. It didn't use to be but this past two years it has been appearing all over the place. It has very pretty blue flowers that harmonise with an awful lot of other flowers and it doesn't become mildewed here like it does in drier gardens. However, it's a tall, robust plant that has no qualms about plonking itself in beside something smaller and smothering it. It has done this with, among others, a hybrid cousin 'Victor Reiter' and also a little clump of *Leucojum autumnale*. When a plant like *Geranium pratense* seeds itself everywhere it really does become weedy but its flowers are the colour of the sky on hot days.

I have never, to my knowledge, planted the common montbretia of roadsides in the garden but it's there in two clumps and, even though I have removed them many times over the years, a few always persist to fight another day. Sometimes I wonder if hybrids of crocosmia can revert to this one in the way that schizostylis hybrids can be pink one year and then ordinary red *Schizostylis coccinea* the next. The whole genus crocosmia greatly appeals to my unquestionably vulgar tastes and I am always adding to my collection. The fiery reds, oranges and yellows blend with the warm colours of different hemerocallis, *Lilium pardalinum*, *Lilium tigrinum*, *Cautleya spicata* 'Robusta', and the fading terracotta flowerheads of *Euphorbia griffithii* (another semi-weed) in one border. Incidentally it was a photograph of this border that was shown in the July issue and looked an absolute mess in black and white. Believe me it is much better in full colour.

Poor *Pterocarya fraxinifolia* has had a pretty raw deal in the damp border in the stackyard where it has been for at least twenty years. This Caucasian wingnut has longer fronds of pinnate leaves than the ash which it resembles and, in climates hotter than ours, produces long, pendent spikes of catkin-like fruits. I have a dreadful confession for a supposedly devoted gardener to make. For several years this tree was engulfed by a very vigorous *Salix sachalinensis* 'Sekka' and I actually forgot about it. It was only when the willow was cut back to size that the *pterocarya* emerged, listing forwards trying to reach the light and surrounded by a host of suckers. The parent looked so deformed that I removed it and the smaller suckers and kept only the largest one to grow into a tree. Still suckers appear.

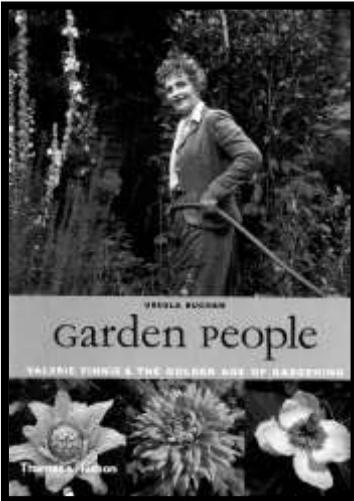
Many of the plants I have described are in the same damp border along with other things too numerous to mention. A main project for this winter is to have the faulty drains in the adjoining field repaired and then to remove the invasive plants. There are still rhododendrons in the main garden that are suffering from overcrowding, so they will be moved to the cleared space for me to make yet another new rhododendron border. I look forward to that.



Leaves from a Sunlounger V11

by Charles Nelson

Garden People. Valerie Finnis and the Golden Age of Gardening was published earlier this year, around the time of the Chelsea Flower Show, that is some seven months after the death of Valerie Finnis (see *IGPS newsletter* 103: 22 - 24). It is an evocation, as the subtitle suggests, of an age that has passed; golden ages are always gone. *Garden People* is, to my mind, a humorous book, even a mischievously affectionate one.



Finnis (as she was always called by those who knew her very well) was a professional gardener, a trained horticulturist, and a consummate plantsman. Quite late in her life, after almost three decades teaching at Waterperry Horticultural School for Women near Newbury in Oxfordshire, she married Sir David Scott, so that in recent times when Valerie Finnis was mentioned, “Lady Scott” was respectfully appended – Valerie Finnis (Lady Scott); surely a unique form of address.

In addition to her skill as a plantsman, Finnis was an expert photographer. As recounted by Ursula Buchan, she acquired her first good camera in 1955, and during the next forty-odd years she photographed plants and plantsmen, accumulating some 50,000 2½in transparencies. What tales those

transparencies tell! What glorious flowers they portray!

So this book has at its heart Finnis’s photographs of plants and people, a record of gardening from the (nineteen) fifties into the nineties. She was never interested in photographing gardens or part of gardens, as Ursula Buchan notes; there are usually people in her garden pictures, but she only ever took one image. Most of the photographs selected for this book were taken in Britain, and many portray the “famous” professional and amateur gardeners of that period, with a seasoning of “the great and the good” of the Royal Horticultural Society. There are lots of her beautiful portraits too, luminous bouquets and individual flowers.

Finnis was a not-infrequent visitor to Ireland, as this book shows, often as a lecturer or judge of alpine plants which were her acknowledged speciality. During these visits she

trained her camera on some of our notable gardeners: Mrs Vera Mackie of Guincho in County Down and Richard Annesley at Annes Grove in County Cork, for example. One of her photographs of Lord Talbot de Malahide makes me want to hear the conversation. “Would you mind standing on that stone, so we can see you nicely brushed suede shoes and immaculate trouser turn-ups, please? Hold it there, Lord Talbot ...” Click – he looks most uncomfortable, and is obviously dressed for garden-visiting. Who else would ever carry around a leather-backed ledger when conducting a visitor around? Mrs Mackie is a lot more practical looking, spade in one hand, secateurs and trowel in the other, as if she is just on the way to dig up a plant for Finnis to treasure.

There are other Irish gardeners in view, although not in Ireland. A whole page is devoted to a photograph of Rhoda, Lady Birley, in her garden at Charleston Manor, Sussex. She was a Lecky Pike from County Carlow before marrying the “fashionable society portrait painter” Sir Oswald Birley. This photograph has to be one of Finnis’s most mischievous. Lady Birley is dressed in pale brown corduroy slacks, blue blouse and green cardigan and is “rakishly wound in scarves” of various hues, topped with a dilapidated straw hat. Her footwear is – well, to be polite, an impracticable pair of embroidered indoor slippers. Lady Birley is poised with one slippered foot in the herbaceous border among some gladioli, carrying in one hand a pair of rather new “parrot-bill loppers”! You don’t need such a vicious instrument to tend geraniums and gladioli. She seems as if she has just been weeding – there’s a very healthy groundsel in her other hand, freshly pulled – yet, as a second photograph evidently taken that same afternoon tells, Lady Birley had just come out of her office where she had been signing cheques. And, the hat! It’s already toppling off her scarved head, and any bending of Lady Birley towards the ground to do anything as strenuous as weeding is likely to precipitate it into the border. Finnis was mischievous, adored outrageous hats and gossip, as this photograph undoubtedly confirms.

Returning home, so to speak, Finnis was a very great friend and mentor of the late David Shackleton; I often heard him talk about her and about her plants, many of which he grew. There is no solo “portrait” of him in this book, only three “snaps” of him, two in the company of E. B. Anderson (one as they participate in an RHS Committee deliberation, and one in Anderson’s garden) and one with Lord Talbot (who this time is kneeling, with papers and ledger, on the lawn). And there are two splendid pictures of the other person who had a great influence on David Shackleton, Lady Moore. She is shown making a note in a small notebook, with *Carpenteria californica* (just finished) behind. She’s not dressed for gardening, only for showing Finnis around Willbrook, with a wicker basket to hold any plants that she will give to the visitors (for David was, presumably, also in attendance). The second, and most interesting photograph, is of Phylis Moore, late of a winter’s evening (*Jasminum nudicaule* in bloom), leaning on her spade listening to something her sister is saying. There are trugs on the marble table behind (one with plastic bags in it – more shared treasures, perhaps

Paeonia ‘Phylis Moore’?) and a bonsai in a china dish at her feet. Lady Moore is in a stout, warm coat and has on her gardening gloves – a practical gardener in sensible shoes, affectionately portrayed. There is no need to wonder what she has been, or will be, doing, nor to try to imagine the conversation. She certainly exemplifies, for Irish gardens, “a golden age for the ‘plantsman’ ... the 1950s and 1960s.”

Finnis’s photographs are accompanied by informative captions and narrative text by Ursula Buchan. There are “potted”, but not always accurate, biographies of the main characters by Dr Brent Elliott, and Anna Pavord’s tribute to Finnis from *The Independent*. But the photographs are paramount, and they contain much that illuminates the last half of the last century. It is a charming confection of a book, a colourful mirror on a golden age without doubt, and a joy.

I commend Garden people. Valerie Finnis and the golden age of gardening by Ursula Buchan (Thames & Hudson. ISBN 978-0-500-51353-8. UK£16.95) wholeheartedly, especially for reading by the fire on a winter’s evening when golden ages always glow more warmly.



Valerie Finnis



Seed Distribution Scheme

by Stephen Butler

I don't think I need comment on the weather this summer. All I know is that since we finished our Asian Rainforest for our Elephant Exhibit – called the Kaziranga Forest Trail after the Indian National Park – it rained so much we had fairly good imitation with Brahmaputra Rivers on our paths and down some of our steps – but great peace and relaxation because we did not have to consider irrigation for weeks! And after laying 5km of seepose as well – no doubt we'll need it some time.

I have not had a great year for seed collecting. Obviously the persistent damp caused much seed to rot, but worse I think was the lack of pollinators. A lot of plants just don't seem to have set as much seed as usual. This may be due to lower bee numbers (Varroa is still a problem, so honey bee numbers are still down remember.) but I think mainly down to just less insects around than normal. Does any one else feel the same??

Trying even to collect seed was harder, often the seed heads were damp, but my usual tricks for that is laying them in shallow cardboard trays, or large open paper envelopes, to dry. I had great fun with shrubby Euphorbias this year, picking the seed heads once they had started to dehisce, and enclosing them in a cardboard box. If set in sunshine the heat caused them to dehisce quicker, with some force, and we had the gentle patter of seeds all day – a tad surprising for any non plantaholic visitor though. I now have *E. mellifera*, *stygiana*, and *x pasteurii*, so the worry there is what do I get as they are open pollinated and will hybridise happily.

Anyway, we will carry on as normal. I don't doubt that our members will as always surprise me with their ingenuity and determination, and yet again we'll have a great list.

All donations as usual please to:
Stephen Butler
Curator of Horticulture
Dublin Zoo
Phoenix Park
Dublin 8

Many thanks in advance!
Stephen Butler, Seed Distribution Coordinator



Diary of an I.G.P.S. Seedsaver

by Brenda Branigan

Since I retired from full time work I have been collecting seed to send to Stephen Butler. I am not a horticulturalist or a qualified gardener, but I am an improver at seed collecting.

It's not easy. Sometimes, the seed I send in no one wants; other seed is totally unacceptable, i.e. not to be propagated or passed on. I try not to get disheartened and occasionally manage to get some seed I have collected into the top 10.

Some seed is easy to collect; it bunches on top of the stem and is ripe all at the same time. Some is hard and can only be gathered a little at a time. Some is tedious, as in *Stipa gigantea*. I like to leave the stems for winter interest so I spend hours plucking the seed out. I wasn't going to bother this year but then saw it listed as a top request so out I went and gathered it. Some is ready for packing and labelling when gathered. Others I pick and lay on plastic trays until ripe. Some I cut and put the whole stems in a paper bag and wait for the seed to drop out itself. I try not to send too much chaff and to have seed in the packets but I no longer beat myself up about not being perfect.

I noted that in January Stephen said that the variable weather in 2006 made it difficult to get good seed.

What about 2007? I am writing this on August 6th. We have a rain gauge and yesterday we had 46mm of rain. So finding good seed is almost impossible at the moment.

The number crunching is interesting. I did not know that I was one of only 25 who sent seed and that was an increase on the previous year. And yet 32 members requested *Baptista australis*. I am sure there are more people who could send in seed. Just because you got something special last year doesn't mean no one will want it next year; after all *Tropeolum* was in the top 10 two years in a row, so try and collect some seed from successful propagation and send it to Stephen. He has asked for unusual plants but when you have something for some time you don't think it is unusual any more. So save from your favourites as they could be unusual to someone else.

My list will be much shorter than last year as I was away for April and May so could not collect spring bulb seed.

One of the seeds I will be sending this year will be from the *Wellingtonia gigantea*. The seed is hard to collect as the cones only fall when ripe. But I had two beautiful trees cut down last year by the E.S.B. as they were near overhead cables. I won't be growing any more of them. I am only planting things that will never reach any height as it is really horrible to see such beautiful specimens felled. However, I gathered the unripe cones and am sending the seed to Stephen. I hope someone will want some and can grow this lovely tree – well away from overhead cables.

Note: the trees were there before the cables!



Two attractive seeds at this time of the year: On the left Arum italicum and on the right Triostemum pinnatifolium



La Mortella – an Italian Masterpiece

by Mary Kate Power

On the day that William Walton, the English composer, first met his future wife, Susana, in her native Argentina he proposed. It was a romantic beginning and the beginning of a great love story but also brought together two people who went on to create one of the most beautiful gardens of Italy which is now world famous.



Looking along the central axis of The Valley garden, colocacia esculenta in ponds to the left and right of the fountain.

After their marriage they soon moved to London but only a year later, in 1951, moved to the island of Ischia in the Bay of Naples where William Walton hoped to find the peace and quiet he needed for his work. They purchased a most unpromising site above the town of Forio and went on to develop it into a garden paradise full of exotic and beautiful plants. While nowadays the island of Ischia is the destination of a great number of tourists at the time the Waltons arrived it was a bare, dry volcanic island out

from a Naples which had not yet recovered from the destruction of the Second World War. The water supply on the island was of such poor quality that the teeth of all the children were black from its mineral content. It was some time later that a water pipe was laid on the sea floor from the mainland. The site chosen by the Waltons for their Eden was a quarry and initially the garden was developed on the quarry floor, now referred to as 'The Valley', the area which nearest approached being level while above this the sides of the quarry rise almost vertically.



A contrast in plants: the beautiful and soft blossom of Brugmansia suaveolens 'Rosea' on the left and the viciously thorned trunk of the Argentinean tree, Chorisia speciosa on the right.

In 1956 Russell Page was asked to assist in the design of the garden. At the time he was at the height of his fame and demand in Italy and was engaged by the rich and famous at the rate of £100 per day. Apparently this rate was quite a worry for William Walton and when Susana told Russell of this worry he told her that this could be settled when the garden was finished. Of course, a garden is never finished and it appears this is how the account still stands. Susana has described Russell Page's design for the garden as very simple, so simple that you don't see it but somehow it is also very harmonious and though it is not obvious how this has been achieved it is certainly the case. This first phase in the garden's development, The Valley Garden, took about seven years.

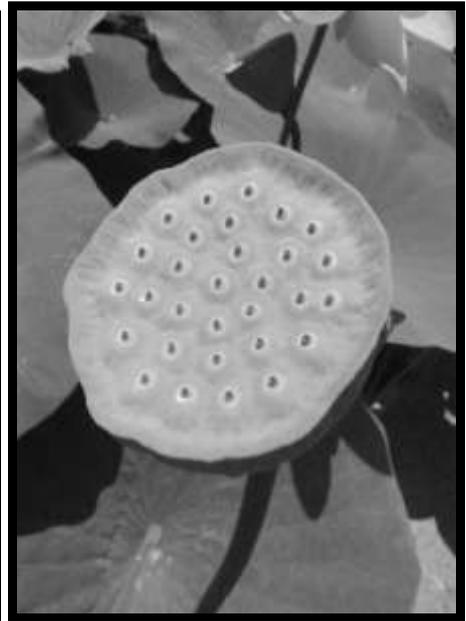
On entering, an opening in a hedge gives a view along the central axis of the garden running from a small pond with fountain and lush planting along a central pathway with a small rill along its centre to another small pool and on to a much larger pool with a very impressive range of aquatic planting. It is a plan which although it gives a direction to how one should proceed through the garden and gives it a structure, lies very lightly on the garden, does not threaten in the least to dominate the garden and leaves the limelight to the planting. And what planting! It is truly exotic, flamboyant and eclectic as collections of tropical and subtropical plants from all over the world thrive in the garden and provides anyone with an interest in plants with a location in which to spend the most enjoyable day imaginable.



Attached to the trees in The Valley Garden were pitcher plants and stag's horn ferns.

The addition of water in the form of ponds and rills has allowed the cultivation of a range water plants such as papyrus, lotus flowers and exotic water lilies. The original plantings here have achieved quite a size with mature trees and shrubs giving a very enclosed atmosphere and shade from the hot sun; the ponds and rill providing a moist air and with an under-planting or groundcover of plants which we would consider house plants here, a huge range of begonias in the main, one almost feels as though this were a tropical jungle. There is the extraordinary *Chorisia speciosa* tree from Argentina, its trunk bigger than my arms could encircle and studded with giant spikes which were painfully sharp and its crown perhaps fifty feet up in the canopy. Strelitzias grew to forty feet or more; brugmansias obviously thrived here and grew to perhaps ten

feet and were in a variety of colours. One pond contained a huge planting of the papyrus reed which we associate with ancient Egypt, paper making and even boat making as well as a magical planting of the lotus plants whose seed heads reminded me so much of the rose of a watering can, much more refined of course.



There were large plantings of the beautiful lotus plants in the ponds. Left the delicate petals of the bloom caught in the sunlight and right, the seedhead which reminded me so much of a watering can rose.

When William Walton was on a tour in New Zealand he sent a collection of tree ferns and this was the beginning of an interest which has continued in the garden where the damp and shade of the Valley Garden obviously suits them perfectly. Another widely planted species was *Colocasis esculenta*, generally in shallow ponds but also in large pots; the black-leaved cultivar *Colocacia esculenta* ‘Balck Prince’ given pot treatment generally. It was particularly striking to come on a large tree and find the trunk furnished with fabulous specimens of the pitcher plant and the stag’s horn fern all growing in robust good health and obviously liking the conditions provided for them.

The Waltons built their house at the end of The Valley garden, a large flat-roofed and strongly square building which the locals referred to originally as ‘The Barracks’. Now, however, the house is hardly visible as the planting around and on it have almost obscured it completely. It could best be described as a garden house, certainly no longer a house in a garden; it is part of the garden.



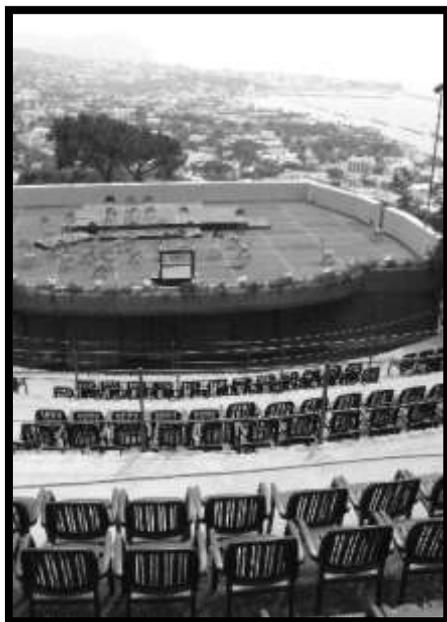
On the left the house which is now on the centre of the garden; note the size of the strelitzias beside the car. On the right, the rock in which William Walton's remains are interred.

The original and central axis of the garden, when viewed on a map of the garden, now seems to be quite a small part of the whole. This reflects the great interest Susana Walton has in gardening and also the love and care she has lavished on this place over the past fifty years. The sides of the quarry have been long since been developed and planted. Building the steps up the sides of this quarry must have been frightfully difficult work as they are near vertical in some places.

The upper parts of the garden were later developed and again water was incorporated with a large pool and stream providing conditions for the cultivation of further plantings of exotic water plants. The visitor can stroll through various garden pavilions, walk under the pergolas, visit the glasshouses, the Orchid House the Thai Tea House and The Temple of the Sun. The tropical 'Victoria House' is one of the most photographed locations in the garden as it houses the giant water lily, *Victoria amazonica* as well as a collection of beautiful orchids.

The upper garden is also the final resting place of William Walton. After his death his widow had his ashes interred in a large rock on a ledge high above the garden. Susana has continued her development of the gardens since her husband's death in a fun, capricious and rather quirky manner. The last areas of the garden which have been developed can appear somewhat jarring to the lush and full growth of the older parts

with, for example, a pool of bright blue stone holding statues of a large fish and well-appointed lady. I have read of these recent developments being described as ‘classy Disneyland’. Perhaps with the growth of plants it will mellow somewhat.



The open air theatre and the Thai Tea House, both of which have panoramic views over the island and the surrounding sea.

As well as attracting lovers of gardens La Mortella also attracts those with a love of music. There is an outdoor recital area high in the garden as fully and permanently appointed as many an indoor venue where musical events are held frequently through the season. It struck me as having the great advantage that if the music did not appeal there were always great views. You may gather that I went for the garden.

I spent a day walking around the gardens at La Mortella though, of course, I did stop for lunch in the restaurant which is situated on the cliffside overlooking The Valley Garden and only wished the day was long enough and I had energy enough to start all over again to enjoy the beautiful atmosphere and exotic planting which was here.

In one of the newer areas on top of the cliff is a shallow circular pond rimmed with a dark polished stone and with a small central fountain also of polished stone. The surround of the pond has the following inscription: *“This green arbour is dedicated to Susana who loved tenderly, worked with passion and believed in immortality.”*



Regional Reports

Northern Ireland

Picnic at Rosemount, Greyabbey, Saturday 21st July

We were welcomed to Rosemount by Daphne & Bill Montgomery and for once it was actually dry for our picnic. After lunch Mrs Montgomery took us on a tour of the policies. The house was built in 1762 & the garden & grounds were originally designed by Nevins. A typical 18th century lay out with a vista, the lawn sweeps down to a ha-ha with the ruins of the original Cistercian Abbey at the bottom of the field. When Daphne & Bill took over the house in the 1970s this view was completely blocked by thick laurels, these were removed not only revealing the Abbey but also the old granary wall to the right of the house the front of which was an ideal site for an herbaceous border. This was planted with a mix of shrubs & perennials. Among the plants commented on was a pretty little double geranium, *pratense plenum violaceum* & the vivid blue *Salvia patens*. On the far side of the lawn behind a spectacular old luscombe oak there were more mixed shrub & herbaceous borders. Echiums obviously thrived in this corner & the camellia walk had been taken over by a forest of their seedlings.

We then walked down to the walled garden; firstly a vegetable area with masses of artichokes, lettuce, spinach, beans, etc. & espaliered red currants along the wall with the largest, reddest berries I have ever seen. On along a lime avenue with an orchard on each side which was planted with old Irish varieties of apple trees. The far wall of the garden provided a perfect setting for climbing roses & old English roses grew in profusion in the herbaceous border in front of the wall along with a variety of plants with interesting & contrasting foliage; macleaya, ligularia, rudbeckias, *Impatiens tinctoria*, *Nepeta* 'Bramdene' to name but a few.

Back up the hill to the amazing collection of Southern Hemisphere plants, the highlight of the garden, which was begun about fourteen years ago after a visit to Chile.

Edinburgh Botanic Gardens now use this garden as a holding place for some of their rare plants. It is obviously a perfect situation for these exotic plants, most of which were thriving; different species of fuschias, olearias, embothryums, an interesting *Escalonia pulverata* flowering beautifully, *Agapanthus africanus* and many others with impossible sounding names!!

It is wonderful that we have such an fascinating & rare collection of plants here in N. Ireland and Mrs Montgomery is such a fount of knowledge and enthusiast for her project.

Andrena Duffin

Drumagarradh Lodge, 15th August

The weather on the evening of the 15 August was more reminiscent of February. Cool with threatening cloud and a rainbow in the distance, as we motored towards Doagh, County Antrim, destined for a visit to the garden of Roy and Fiona Simpson at Drumadarragh Lodge. We turned in the gates over the cattle grid, a feature from the past when animals would have been driven along the road, up the steep curving drive through dense greenery, eventually arriving at the house.

Here a group of fellow gardening enthusiasts suitably wrapped up and carrying umbrellas were gathered around the open garage. As we joined the group we noted an *abutilon megapotamicum* against the garage wall and wall baskets with formium leaves woven through the wirework, an innovation which was pleasing to the eye. Greetings and chat and moans about the “summer” as we waited for one or two others to join us. We split into two groups, about 10 in each with Fiona taking the first group and Roy following on with his.

As we moved into the garden Fiona pointed out the first tree they had planted, a Hornbeam, now a fine specimen at the top of the lawn, where the tall Beech hedges screened the main garden. Behind this a winding paved path took us through beds with shrubs and notably a number of fine young specimen trees, *Cedrus deodara*, *Liriodendron fastigiatum*, *Nyssa sylvatica* and a lovely specimen of *Abies koreana*, with striking conical violet waxy cones some 4” high. We discussed whether this might be a distinct form.

The group were then guided to a large pond well stocked with waterside and bog plants. Particularly striking when we were there was the blue pickerel weed, *Pontederia cordata*. The pond was screened by dense trees, with a foreground of shrubs. Particularly showy that evening was a specimen of *Viburnum opulus* *Xanthocarpum*, the yellow berried guelder rose.

From here we entered a series of individual gardens with high-hedges, necessary to give shelter in such an exposed situation. Their benefit was immediately obvious as there was a marked difference in conditions here as it was an overcoat warmer once inside. Each garden was themed with Alpine, Gravel garden, shrub and herbaceous all represented. A linking path created a view towards the house and we emerged to views across the countryside which were quite dramatic in the low light of the evening. Crossing the front of the house and the drive we entered the vegetable garden through an arch with trained fruit leading to a charming potager. This again was surrounded by a high hedge for shelter and was centred on a small greenhouse with paved areas

between productive beds dedicated to individual crops. The garden also had a seat, though I doubt if either Fiona or Roy had much time to sit on it. The two groups merged together for more chat and to thank Roy and Fiona for a very interesting and pleasant evening, sharing their distinctly individual approach to their garden.

Mike & June Snowden

Munster

Visit to Mount Congreve Gardens, Waterford, September 8th



A view across the ground to the house at Mount Congreve

In the July issue of the newsletter we had a very comprehensive account by M. White and P. Tobin on Mount Congreve in County Waterford. We in the Munster branch of the IGPS were very fortunate to pay a visit there on September 8th. Any words of mine to further describe Mt. Congreve would be inadequate and unnecessary. It would be preferable to reread the article in the July issue which makes for very meaty reading.



The Munster group at Mount Congreve



The Walled Gardens at Mount Congreve with herbaceous borders in front of the glasshouse

Mount Congreve is more usually visited in the Spring. The colour then is spectacular with more than 'two thousand different rhododendrons, six hundred camellias, three hundred Acer cultivars, six hundred conifers, two hundred and fifty climbers and fifteen hundred herbaceous plants and many more tender plants within the Georgian glasshouse in the walled garden.' (M. White)

We were delighted with the late summer display, with the swathes of herbaceous perennials in thrilling colours, with the breath-taking display of roses and with the glorious vistas over the River Suir. One could go on and on. The day was warm and balmy. We enjoyed a picnic, one of the few this summer! We were happy to be back in harness after the summer break.

Michael White, Garden Curator at Mt. Congreve is extraordinarily generous with his time. His knowledge is prodigious and very easily carried and we left him and Mount Congreve vowing to return in the Spring.

Theresa Murphy

Leinster

Mary Waldron Thursday 26th April lecture on Narrow Meadow Mullingar and visit to Narrow Meadow on June 23rd.

Mary Waldron's lecture at the National Botanic Gardens was an introduction to her garden at Narrow Meadow Mullingar Co Westmeath. A visit to the garden by the IGPS was planned for June. She mentioned that a favourite book was *A Gardener Obsessed* by Geoffrey B. Charlesworth, a book of 'observations reflections and advice' that would be of particular interest to Alpine gardeners, and that title would also aptly describe Mary.

When it comes to plants she has favourites for all seasons, plants that grow well in her midlands garden. For spring she recommends *Erythronium japonicum* 'Joanna' as it grows particularly well, *Narcissus* 'Park Springs', and *N.* 'Ambergate' and, with a little cossetting against the worst of the winter wet and cold *Myosotidium hortensia*. A more robust grower is the white *Trillium chloropetalum*. *T. erectum*, grown from seed by Mary took eleven years before producing its first flower. *Podophyllum hexandrum* flowering in late spring is another good grower at Narrow Meadow, and *Arum creticum* produces flowers in abundance. For autumn, high performing plants include the beautiful large flowered *Crococsmia x crocosmiiiflora* 'Star of the East', the last and the longest crocosmia to flower, *Hydrangea aspera* Villosa Group, and *Leucojum autumnale* that was also grown from seed.



Enjoying the visit to Mary Waldron's garden.



A View from the garden onto Lough Owel

With a large garden there of course were many favourite trees including *Davidia involucrate*, *Ilex x altaclerensis*, *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' and for autumn colour Mary grows *Quercus dentata* 'Carl Ferris Miller'.

When we visited the garden in June we realised that of course Mary's slides at the NBG had shown a tiny fraction of the wonderful plants she grows. The garden is on an elevated site overlooking Lough Owel. Gravel paths wind gently through the garden with large restful areas of lawn stretching between. There is a well stocked vegetable garden and large mixed borders with plants of every hue, the blue of *Baptisia australis*, red *Rosa moyesii*, yellow *Rosa* 'Graham Thomas', purple *Roscoea*, and *Dactylorhiza elata*. *Stachyurus* grow readily in the garden and Mary grows two varieties of this deciduous shrub *Stachyurus chinensis* and *Stachyurus salicifolius*.

Trees added maturity and dappled shade as well as beauty. Among them were *Eucryphia x intermedia* 'Rostrevor', *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aspleniifolia' and a *Liriodendron tulipifera* 'Aureomarginatum' that flowered for the first time this year. There is *Taxus baccata* 'Summergold' bred by Jan Ravensburg at Clara Co. Offaly, and a large *Taxodium distichum*. As with other well-known gardens of the midlands where there is an enthusiastic gardener the range of plants that can be grown is limitless.

Mary Rowe.

"Warble Bank" July 14th

The Leinster group visited Anne Condell's garden in Newtownmountkennedy on Saturday, July 14th. This lovely hillside garden opens every Sunday in June and July for the Wicklow Gardens Festival.

Warble Bank has been in continuous cultivation for over a hundred years. Anne has been gardening here for 25 years. She has introduced many herbaceous plants so that the garden is more ornamental than formerly. Rose trellises are used to give structure and apple trees were planted to give shelter as well as fruit. Herbaceous borders are well established and the vegetable areas are to be found among the borders.

The sun shone on the many Veronicas, Salvias, Campanulas, Verbascums and Astilbes as we strolled through the borders. Anne has a good collection of Penstemons. *Penstemon* 'Bodnant', *P.* 'Sour Grapes', *P.* 'Frosted Skies', *P.* 'Glaber' which has a mauve/blue colour and performs better in shade and *P. watsonii* which has a smaller flower, were all on display.

I am always attracted to a blue palette in a garden and there was much here to draw the eye. Notable were *Salvia corrugata* which flowers all through the winter at Warble

Bank, a double-flowered *Geranium pratense*, *Nigella* 'Miss Jekyll', *Campanula lactiflora* 'Prichard's Variety', *Eryngium oliverianum*, *Aconitum* 'Newry Blue' and A 'Stainless Steel'. Continuing with darker shades there was a black Mulberry in fruit, *Antirrhinum* 'Black Prince', dark purple *Linaria*, also a dark purple *Nicotiana*, *Buddleia davidii* 'Black Knight' and *B.* 'Empire Blue' with violet blue flowers and orange eyes. *Salvia guaranitica* also proves hardy in this corner of Wicklow.

But, lest you think this is an entirely blue garden, there were many other delights to charm us- *Campanula takesimana* 'Elizabeth', *Rosa* 'Belvedere', *R.* 'Sanders' White Rambler' *R.* 'Felicite Perpetue' a very strong *Desfontainea spinosa*, a twenty year old Ginkgo, *Leucanthemums*, a lovely dark red *Echinacea* 'Art's Pride', *Dierama* species, and a beautiful *Romneya coulteri*.

All these plants had been welcomed in and made at home on a Wicklow hillside with a lovely backdrop. Anne welcomed the IGPS too with tea etc and, if you missed her garden this time you might visit in 2008 during the Wicklow Garden Festival. Tel. 01 2819298.

Mary Bradshaw.

THAT QUIZ!

You may be familiar with the old joke "Tomorrow has been cancelled due to lack of interest". Well, something similar has happened to the Leinster Committee's attempt at fund-raising. What happened? Regrettably, there were not enough entries to justify the prize money. Entrants will be reimbursed in due course. Leinster hopes to raise some money in our Annual Plant Sale on 14th October, doors open at 11.00 a.m. at the usual venue, Our Lady of Dolours Church, Glasnevin, (opposite the National Botanic Gardens). Please bring the extended family, neighbours, etc. to support the organisation. See you there!

Mary Bradshaw.



Looking Ahead

Northern Fixtures

OCTOBER 6 - ANNUAL PLANT SALE, Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, Cultra, Co Down; 12.00-3.00pm - deliveries from 9.00am.

Plants & volunteers wanted. Contact Peter Milligan on 028 4278 8739.

We are settling in at our new location and hope to continue with our successes of the past two years. Again we are likely to attract larger numbers than usual because of the location - please start propagating early !!! Get seed from the IGPS Seed List and start sowing! **GOOD-QUALITY PLANTS ONLY PLEASE.**

OCTOBER 18 - THE CLOTWORTHY LECTURE, Clotworthy Arts Centre, Antrim; 7.30pm. *'Emblems in Arcadia – the Meanings Behind 18th century Gardens '*, Richard Wheeler, Curator, Gardens and Parks, National Trust. Representations of the great gardens of the Whig ruling class are often vibrant animated landscapes. Characters cross the stage as both actors and audience; gardeners are a quasi Greek Chorus. Richard explains the personal and political morality in the statues, inscriptions and buildings of these magnificent gardens. Refreshments provided. Members free, non-members £2.00. Joint with Antrim Borough Council.

NOVEMBER 14 - LECTURE, Lagan Valley Island Arts Centre, Lisburn; 7.30pm. *'Daffodil Breeding in Northern Ireland'*. Brian Duncan is a well-known local daffodil breeder and exhibitor, and judge at the Chelsea Flower Show. He will trace the history of daffodil breeding in Ireland from 1885, and the development of the industry in Northern Ireland, where in the 21st century, there is still a vigorous network of enthusiasts and breeders of world-wide renown - we can no doubt expect to hear of all the newest varieties. Members free, non-members £2.00.

DECEMBER 5 - THE MALONE HOUSE LECTURE, Malone House, Barnett's Park, Belfast; 7.30pm. **'Botanical Travels in Northern Patagonia'**, Liam & Joan McCaughey. It was 2003 when Liam & Joan last presented a talk for us on their American travels. This time they will recount their travels in South America, guiding us through some geology, fauna, and the flora of Northern Patagonia. Free. Refreshments provided. Joint with Belfast Parks.

Leinster Fixtures

Thursday 4th October

'Denver Botanic Garden: Gem of Western America'

by Panayoti

Thursday 15th November

'Agapanthus to Watsonia' African Plants for an Irish garden by Martin Walsh

Thursday 29th November

'Adventures of an Irish Botanist' by Matthew Jebb

Thursday 17 January

'Through the Windowpane' by Brendan Sayers

A lecture on the the ongoing work in the glasshouses in The Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin.

All the above lectures are in the Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin at 8pm

Munster Fixtures

All meetings are held in the SMA Hall in Wilton, Cork starting at 7.45pm

Please note that the December talk is a week earlier on the Friday, 30th November and the January talk is a week later on the Friday 11th of January.

Friday 2nd November.

Phil Boyce: "Gardening for All Seasons"

Phyl and Dick Boyce are the owners of the award winning Boyce Gardens in Foynes Co Limerick and are the authors of "Gardening for all seasons." The book is a very good guide of how to garden in difficult circumstances, so we can expect good practical advice in the talk.

Friday 30th November

Sylvia Norton: "Lathyrus Cousins of the sweet pea"

Sylvia Norton is Chairperson of the Lathyrus society of England.

Friday 11th January

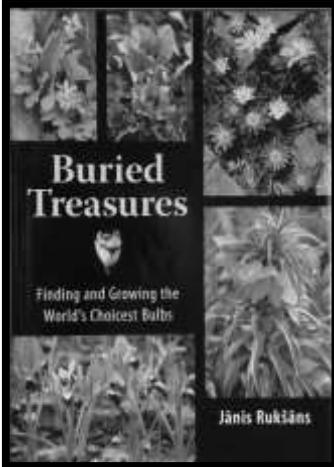
Miriam Cotter: "Dreaming of a hot summer!"

Miriam will take us out of our winter blues with a talk on plants that will thrive and delight us in a hot summer. Miriam is Chairperson of the Alpine and Hardy Plants Society.



Worth a Read

by Paddy Tobin



Buried Treasures, Finding and Growing the World's Choicest Bulbs is written by Janis Ruksans, a highly acclaimed and admired bulb collector, grower and seller living in Latvia. In this book he tells us of his many adventures when searching for new plants and seed. This he did mainly in many visits to Russia and in latter years to Greece.

The overwhelming feeling with which I am left after reading the book is that the writing style and vocabulary is somewhat stilted, something which is perhaps to be expected by a book written by a non-native English speaker. As a result I found it an uncomfortable read quite often. However, one could not but admire the degree of interest and commitment to the collection, growing and sale of bulbs which

Janis Ruksans displays. The general content of the book presents a fund of knowledge and experience from which the avid gardener will certainly benefit. This is definitely a book for the enthusiast, the knowledgeable enthusiast, as it deals in the main with a selection of plants not very common in cultivation with a particular emphasis on juno irises.

I have read several books similar to this one; books which describe the search and location of new plants, the subsequent attempts at growing these, their propagation and distribution and have found that my enjoyment of each book was in proportion to my knowledge of the plants being discussed.

There were large sections of this book where the level of new information overwhelmed my enjoyment of the book. Other sections in which the plants were more familiar were far more enjoyable. With this in mind one might well consider one's own level of expertise before investing in this book as it is quite pricey, £30. (Just in case you now infer that my having the book means I consider myself an expert gardener let me inform you that I received it as a present.) On the other hand, this book will certainly broaden and add to most people's knowledge of plants and gardening, perhaps an opportunity not to be ignored in these days when we have a multitude of

magazines and television programmes which add nothing to our knowledge and very little to our enjoyment of gardening.

Lacking in the book, I felt, was more general background information on the places visited during plant collection. I find it interesting to read of the culture, traditions and way of life of the local people where the plant collector is working. There is little of this type of information in this book making it a one dimensional read. An encouragement received from reading the book was to read of the many, many bulbs which had died on the author. It seemed to be the fate of many of the collections. Perhaps the message is to persevere in one's attempts to grow any new plant and, should it fail, to learn the lessons of the failure and avoid these pitfalls on subsequent attempts.

So, in summary: I found the style of writing quite poor, the syntax awkward and reading uncomfortable. There was considerable information on bulbs though I think the cultural suggestions had little relevance to growers in areas other than Latvia as the climate there is so very different to what pertains here, for example. Good, not great. A big annoyance was the layout of photographs; instead of being positioned near the text which they were meant to illustrate they are gathered into two sections of the book. This results in the reader flicking back and forth regularly to view the plant being described in the text.

In a note on oxalis I noticed that Harold McBride was described as being from Scotland. Now while I have no doubt the Scots would welcome him with open arms I believe there would be strong reluctance to allow him to move. [*Buried Treasures, Finding and Growing the World's Choicest Bulbs, Janis Ruksans, Timber Press, Oregon, 2007, HB, 384pp, £30, SB425.R85 2007*]

Gardens of Europe, A Traveller's Guide

Charles Quest-Ritson already has a number of excellent books to his name, my favourite being *The House & Gardens Book of Country Gardens* from 1998. His translation of The RHS Encyclopaedia of Roses into Italian won the Grinzane Cavour prize. It is as editor of the RHS Garden Finder that he may be most familiar to readers. His latest book, ***Gardens of Europe, A Traveller's Guide*** shows once again his great research ability, his attention to detail, his precise, clear and informative writing style and his ability to make what is essentially a list a most enjoyable book.

My first reaction on receiving this book was that it was a pity I hadn't received it earlier. I had just returned from a holiday in Italy and had I read the book before travelling I have visited several other gardens in the area. My first dip into the book then was to read what it had to say of the gardens I visited while there. A large and clear map of Italy with the gardens numbered and a clear listing of the gardens beside it made navigation to the appropriate pages very easy. The account of La Mortella on Isola d'Ischia in the Bay of Naples is precise, concise, and informative in a few words



though I felt it lacked the enthusiasm and deep admiration which was my reaction when visiting there. Perhaps this is a fair approach, keeping the description accurate but impartial, something which can be seen as giving a certain reliability to each garden report. Better to have accurate information by which to plan when travelling abroad than following the personal likes and dislikes of an author.

A look at the gardens listed for Ireland might perhaps indicate the general level of cover given to other countries. Fourteen gardens are listed: Glenveigh, Mount Stewart, Rowallane, Annesley Gardens & Castlewellan, Talbot Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Powerscourt, Mount Usher, Altamont, Birr Castle, Derreen, Fota, Mount Congreve and the John F. Kennedy Arboretum. A visitor travelling from abroad

who visited some or all of these gardens would certainly have been directed to locations which are most commendable and which would certainly give an excellent taste of Irish horticulture. Imagining the same thoroughness is applied to other countries I believe that here is a book which every garden tourist would find useful, reliable and a great help in planning a holiday abroad. Where, however, is Helen Dillon's garden? Surely a garden of such international renown should warrant an entry. Of necessity, I suppose, such a book has to stop in its coverage somewhere but from, an Irish perspective, it stopped a little too short here.

The list for Great Britain extends to one hundred and thirty gardens. I suppose when I have visited them all I might again comment on the pity that such and such a gem had been omitted and I'm sure those of other countries could make similar comments. On reflection, this is really an unfair comment. The author has chosen the best and described them well. Of course others might be included but that would require a book perhaps twice the size. Gardeners are rarely satisfied.

The countries of Western Europe, as one might expect given their proximity for the presumed readership of the book, have larger entries than those further afield. Thus Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Great Britain & Ireland, The Netherlands & Belgium and Scandinavia have fuller coverage than North-east & Eastern Europe, Central Europe and South-east Europe. In all over 600 gardens are described with details of their location, opening hours and contact information and all this illustrated with excellent maps and over 500 photographs and though most photographs are small they are well taken and very well chosen to succinctly give an excellent flavour of each garden illustrated. An appendix gives a listing of gardens by plant interest while a second gives a glossary of garden terms.

This is an excellent and valuable book and will be of tremendous assistance to enthusiasts travelling the continent with garden visiting in mind. [*Gardens of Europe, A Traveller's Guide, Charles Quest-Ritson, Garden Art Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2007, HB, 382 pp, £25, ISBN 10: 870673 55 7 ISBN 13: 978-1-870673-55-6*]



Room outside – A New Approach to Garden Design is the latest offering from John Brookes, probably the most influential garden designer of our times. It can be said without fear of contradiction that his influence is worldwide and yet his philosophy and approach to garden design is suited to the smallest and most humble as well as the larger and more expansive garden. It was he who first used the phrase, ‘Room Outside’, and it has since been adopted and applied by many others. The very essence of his garden thought is that the garden is an extension of the home and must be designed to be both beautiful and practical for the family. Although it seems inadequate to me, my best compliment for John Brookes’ designs

is that I feel he always makes a garden in which one can live comfortably. His are gardens designed with people in mind as they combine practicality with interesting design and excellent horticulture.

A large part of his career has been as a university lecturer in garden design and the teacher in him does come through in the very organised manner in which his material is presented in the book. He takes readers from an introductory chapter on the evolution of garden design and use, which gives an excellent background of information to novice garden makers, before leading them to assess what it is they want, what they have already and onto making a start on the making of a garden. Later chapters; there are 15 in all; deal with every aspect of making a garden that one needs to successfully create a pleasing and successful addition to the home. Throughout, the book is illustrated lavishly with 300 photographs and 250 diagrams which are not only beautiful and inspiring but have also been carefully chosen to show the reader clearly what the author is discussing and suggesting.

As with previous books by John Brookes, this one is difficult to fault. It is quite simply excellent and brings the ideas he first introduced over forty years ago right up to date. [*Room outside – A New Approach to Garden Design, John Brookes, Garden Art Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2007, HB, 278pp, £29.99, ISBN: 978-1-87067-352-5*]



The Newsletter of the Irish Garden Plant Society

The Irish Garden Plant Society

The Aims of the Society are:

- **The study of plants cultivated in Ireland, and their history.**
- **The development of horticulture in Ireland**
- **The education of members on the cultivation and conservation of garden plants.**
- **To research and locate garden plants considered rare or in need of conservation, especially those raised in Ireland by Irish gardeners and nurserymen.**
- **To co-operate with horticulturalists, botanists, botanical and other gardens, individuals and organisations in Ireland and elsewhere in these matters.**
- **To issue and publish information on the garden plants of Ireland and to facilitate the exchange of information with those interested individuals and groups.**

Correspondence:

*For membership information, general correspondence, enquiries etc:
The Irish Garden Plant Society, c/o The National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin,
Dublin 9.*

(Please note that staff at the Botanic Gardens cannot take telephone enquiries about the IGPS. They simply facilitate by providing a postal address for the convenience of committee members.)

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