

# Irish Garden Plant Society

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*Newsletter – January 2025*



# Irish Garden Plant Society

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Copy for the April issue as soon as possible please  
and no later than **1 March**.

Cover:

***Galanthus 'Castlegar'*** courtesy of Paddy Tobin.

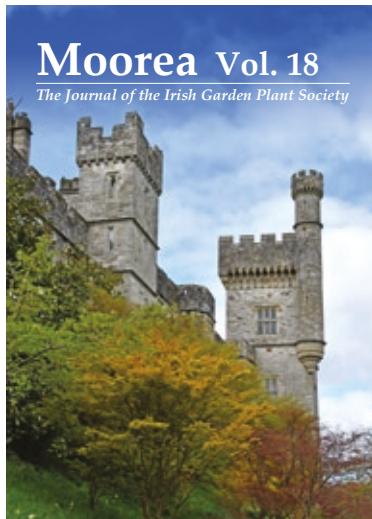
See [www.irishgardenplantsociety.com](http://www.irishgardenplantsociety.com) under Irish Plant Portraits.

My thanks to the team, especially Rob Evans, horticultural adviser Brendan Sayers and copy-editor Pat Carroll.

# Welcome

**How lovely to be able to start the year by offering congratulations to several of our members. First, well done to everyone involved in producing the latest volume of our journal, *Moorea*; its arrival brightened the distinctly chilly early days of January. Our congratulations also go to Thomas Pakenham on the publication of his latest book, *The tree hunters* (see page 23); to Paul Smyth, whose contribution has been recognised by our friends in the RHSI by naming a new Brian Duncan daffodil for him (see page 19); and to Paul Maher, who has undertaken masterly detective work to confirm the pedigree of a special Irish nasturtium, *Tropaeolum majus* 'Margaret Long' (see page 5).**

While the *Tropaeolum* blooms in summer, there are some wonderful Irish plants at their best in winter



and early spring. *Galanthus* 'Castlegar', which flowers as early as December, is featured on the cover; *Garrya x issaquahensis* 'Glasnevin Wine', with its delectable tassels, introduces the section on coming events; and Áine-Máire Ní Mhurchú has excellent suggestions for Irish plants that will suit a seasonal container (see page 21).

A new year is associated with fresh starts. Why not make this the year you get more involved by volunteering to help on an IGPS committee? 'Dates for your diary' sets out an interesting and varied programme for the coming months, including plans for a very attractive AGM weekend in May. This, and everything else that happens, is thanks to a fellow member. Put very bluntly – no new volunteers, nothing will happen. Yes, it takes a bit of time and effort, but it also brings interest and the opportunity to meet great gardeners and to make friends.

The April issue will be my last as editor. Please offer to take over if you possibly can – there will be a big welcome and lots of help.

*Maeve*

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# *A note from the Chair*

**Welcome not only to a new year but the second quarter of the twenty-first century! January can be a busy time with new members, so welcome to those who are receiving their first *Newsletter*.**

*Moorea*, the Society's journal, was posted to members a few weeks ago; I hope you enjoyed reading it and will return to it again and again. *Moorea* is the only journal in Ireland devoted to Irish garden plants and Irish garden history. We are justly proud to have published 18 volumes so far.

We look ahead to lectures, both in person and via Zoom; 'Dates for your diary' (on page 30) and our website have further details. The AGM weekend, a highlight of the Society's year, takes place in Galway and Clare this May; details are on page 26 and booking opens on 1 February.

At the AGM, David Grayson, Honorary Treasurer, and I finish our four-year terms of office. As mentioned previously, there are further vacancies on the National Executive Committee – for Honorary Secretary, Vice Chairman, Munster representative and a further member.

The Leinster and Northern committees also need members to join them in the organisation of lectures, plant sales and garden visits. Members in Munster and Connacht might consider re-establishing a regional committee; you will have my support in doing so.

Following the April issue Maeve Bell will vacate the *Newsletter* editor's chair. We all enjoy the seed list in the January issue, but, having completed eight years in the role, the present coordinator, Debbie Bailey, wants to pass on her seed-sorting duties.

If you have time to give or expertise to share with your fellow members, please, please consider volunteering to fill vacancies. With the volunteering comes some work, but also fun and camaraderie. Do get in touch with me, [Mary.Forrest@ucd.ie](mailto:Mary.Forrest@ucd.ie), or via the other emails listed on the back cover.

I look forward to meeting many of you at this year's events.



Mary Forrest, Chairman





# *The search for a special nasturtium*

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*Paul Maher*

# *The search for a special nasturtium*

Paul Maher

It might have seemed like a bold step for Sir Frederick Moore, Keeper of the Royal Botanic Gardens Glasnevin, to embark on a plan to allow female students to join the horticultural training course there, but in 1898, without clearance from a higher authority, he did. He had been involved in setting up a training course for female students at Alexandra College Dublin in 1890 and sought permission to lecture there, so he must have recognised the need. No doubt through his links with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew he was aware that two female students had commenced work as gardeners there and gained comfort from this precedent.



**Sir Frederick Moore**

The first two Lady Gardeners, the title bestowed on them, started their practical training at Glasnevin in June 1898. They were Gertrude Webb and Mary Graves, and it was the beginning of equality of opportunity for the training of female students in horticulture.

Margaret Long arrived to train at the National Botanic Gardens (NBG) Glasnevin in August 1934. Lady Gardeners did the same work as their male counterparts with the exception of grass cutting with scythes, but carried out extra duties such as seed cleaning, an integral part of botanic garden work. She completed her training and went on to have a career in horticulture in Ireland. Without doubt she was a keen plantswoman, as, in 1987, she spotted an apricot-coloured variant on the deep red *Tropaeolum majus* 'Hermine Grashoff' growing in her mother's garden. She propagated the variant and it was from her efforts that it is in our collections today. She clearly had the ability to manage the plant; unless a very keen eye is kept on it and cuttings inserted well in advance of winter frost, you will lose it.

Nicky Kyle, plantswoman and organic grower, became aware of the existence of the plant. She sought and got some cuttings through a friend of Margaret Long,

propagated them and grew them on. Recognising that it was a garden-worthy plant, she brought it to Dr Charles Nelson, then taxonomist at Glasnevin, suggesting that it should be named as a distinct cultivar. Charles asked about naming it 'Nicky Kyle', to which Nicky replied no, it should be named after Margaret Long (N. Kyle, pers. comm., May 2024), so it was named *Tropaeolum majus* 'Margaret Long'.



**Margaret Long**

In 2012 Dermot O'Neill, gardener, author and TV personality, arrived at NBG Glasnevin carrying a plant of *T. 'Margaret Long'* that he had purchased at the Tatton Park Flower Show in the UK. He presented it to Brendan Sayers, Glasshouse Foreman, so NBG Glasnevin had the plant in its collection. I can remember listening to the Mooney show on RTÉ radio around that time (Dermot featured on it quite frequently) and hearing him tell the

story of finding *T. 'Margaret Long'* and bringing it to Glasnevin.

While researching the story of the plant I contacted Derek Mooney and his team to try to locate an audio recording of the interview. However, their archive is no longer complete and nothing could be found. I was interviewed for the Mooney show about the search for information. The show was recorded in advance of transmission; however, my interview took place on Monday 20 May 2024, the very day Charles Nelson passed away. I had mentioned him and the work of the IGPS several times. As yet, the interview has not been broadcast.

Dr Nelson's wonderful publication *A heritage of beauty* (2000) documents the story of *T. 'Margaret Long'* and notes that 'the cultivar *T. 'Apricot Twist'* – "a real cracker" – released by Thompson & Morgan (Young Plants) Ltd in 1997 looks indistinguishable'. In his *The Biking Gardener* blog ('Rare as hen's teeth', 30 July 2023) Geoff Stebbings states that *T. 'Hermine Grashoff'* produced the same sport in a garden on the island of Anglesey. The plant was spotted by Keith Sangster of Thompson & Morgan and was sold as *T. 'Apricot Twist'*. So, although it looks indistinguishable from *T. 'Margaret Long'*, it arose separately. Given this information, we needed to be sure that Dermot O'Neill had brought back the true Irish plant in 2012 and not the plant from the Thompson & Morgan stock.

My enquiries started with Carmel Duignan, who, I thought, was the most likely person to be able to shed some light on Dermot's find. She remembered that it was indeed at Tatton that the plant was purchased and she was also fairly sure that he bought it from Cotswold Garden Flowers. Following that, I contacted Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Flowers, who recalled being at that show and selling *T. 'Margaret Long'*. He also remembered Dermot O'Neill being there and said, 'In all probability I sold it to him.' He further volunteered the information that it was Helen Dillon who, in 1994, brought the plant to him as a plant worthy of being included in his catalogue. This is sufficient proof that the plant that Edel and I now grow is the plant that arose in Ireland. It also proves the adage that to keep a plant, you need to give it away.



*Tropaeolum majus*  
'Margaret Long'

We now grow the plant in our garden at Ballinagam, Co. Wexford, using it as a summer spectacle in pots of low-nutrient compost in full sun, where it cascades, displaying beautiful qualities. Its apricot-coloured flowers are of a gregarious nature, mixing easily with any brightly coloured annuals: I classify it as a 'hinge colour', linking fiery and pastel colours. We treat it as a tender perennial.

It is not unusual to see roots appearing on flower stems in vases for indoor decoration. Such was the case with some stems of *Plectranthus* we were using some time ago. After potting up, the *Plectranthus* went on to make viable plants; indeed, water was the preferred method for rooting Busy Lizzies over the years. With regard to *T. 'Margaret Long'*, we tried the same method with great success. The results were spectacular and roots were produced quite quickly, even in January last year.

It is important to use pest-free, healthy shoots plunged into clean jars full of plain water; the roots produced are plentiful and robust. The best results are from cuttings procured from lush growth taken in early autumn in lengths of 8–9cm. However, we have noticed that cuttings taken earlier in the year, when good propagating material is available, will also root well. These are potted up in peat-free potting compost with added grit.

We ensure that we have well-established plants in 9cm pots for overwintering in a frost-free, insulated glasshouse. These are ready for the summer planting season and, most importantly, for sharing, on the basis that to keep a plant you should give it away. Of course, always document who you give your surplus plants to, as, should the worst happen, you may need to go knocking on their door.

*Acknowledgements:* Bob Brown, Cotswold Garden Flowers; Carmel Duignan, gardener; Rachel Hynes, librarian, National Botanic Gardens; Nicky Kyle, gardener; Brendan Sayers, horticulturist; Geoff Stebbings, gardener and blogger.



***T. 'Margaret Long'* growing at Logan Botanic Garden, Scotland: photo courtesy of Andrew Gee**

# Conservation in action

Andrew Gee



*Ilex 'Lady Valerie'*

One of the Society's objectives is to 'research and locate garden plants considered to be rare or in need of conservation, especially those raised in Ireland by Irish gardeners and nurserymen'. Over the years there have been several initiatives targeting specific genera and cultivars of historical or botanical importance. For more than a decade Stephen Butler, as Heritage Plants Coordinator, managed the task of researching, recording, propagating and distributing plants and acted as our regional representative on Plant Heritage. We are hugely indebted to him for his work. In April 2024 the baton was passed to Claire McNally and me.

The IGPS holds a secure database of the Irish Heritage Plants (IHPs) grown by members or in public gardens and nurseries, both large and small. Recently several new growers and further accessions have been added to the list. As of December 2024 there were 2,469 accessions and 1,115 different taxa on the records. Claire and I also

record accessions on Persephone, the Plant Heritage database, for the IGPS Dispersed National Collection of IHPs, although member and garden details are known only by us.

Of course the nature of plants means that these records can quickly go out of date, so I am now updating the records as far as I can. If you are growing a plant you think might be Irish, we would be delighted to hear from you. If you are not sure whether it would be classed as such, **please send a list anyway** and we will check. If possible, the source/s for where the plant/s came from would be appreciated, though this is not essential. Please contact Claire and me at [igps.heritageplants@gmail.com](mailto:igps.heritageplants@gmail.com). Many of the plants recorded are no longer available commercially, so we gardeners are critically important. Members may be aware of the presumed loss of *Aubrieta 'Shangarry'* in cultivation, despite several appeals throughout last year. This shows how, once a plant is lost, it's gone for good.

# *Meet the gardener – Trevor Edwards*

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## **What do you do?**

I have been self-employed for the last 48 years, first running my own garden centre in my home town of Carrickfergus and then as a garden designer and consultant. In recent years I have travelled all over the world as a garden tour manager – Italy, Sicily, Spain, France, USA, Japan, Morocco, Singapore, New Zealand, Grenada, Barbados, Mauritius and the gardens of India's Golden Triangle.

Local tours regularly feature in my schedule, bringing gardeners from all over the world to visit the wonderful gardens on the island of Ireland. I have lectured in many countries on the gardens of Ireland

on behalf of Tourism Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland to promote garden tourism to the island, and I strongly believe that there is still considerable development potential for garden tourism here. I was delighted to be a member of the jury for the 2023 International Garden Tourism Awards, which recognised several Irish gardens.

In 2021 I led a small group of like-minded volunteers to extend the National Gardens Scheme (NGS) to Northern Ireland and I became the inaugural Area Organiser for the NGS in Northern Ireland. Over the past three years NGS NI has raised close to £80,000 for nursing and care charities through the opening of private gardens to the public and, through the annual Community Gardens Grant Scheme, we have assisted several community gardens in Northern Ireland with grants totalling £25,000.

## **Earliest memory of gardening?**

About the age of six, I vividly recall my father growing vegetables (particularly radishes) and the annual ritual of planting alyssum along with the then ubiquitous blue lobelia. Around the same time I worked for pocket money after school in a flower and vegetable nursery in Carrickfergus owned by Mr Gingles, the local greengrocer.

## How did you get started in your career?

I served a five-year apprenticeship to become a mechanical engineer with ICI in Carrickfergus, but left engineering to become self-employed as a small landscape contractor in 1976. A short time later I opened a garden shop, which became a garden centre. I have been a self-employed horticulturist ever since.

## Do you have a favourite plant?

Over the years there have been many favourite plants and I get excited when I see exotic plants growing in their native lands. However, I always come back to my love of the many varieties of hosta.



A favourite hosta

## When and why did you join the IGPS?

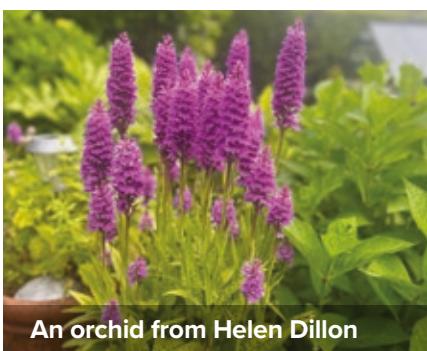
I think I have been a member since 2000 or perhaps a little earlier. I joined because I wanted to learn more about the history of Irish garden plants and gardens, and I wanted to support, even in a small way, the efforts of like-minded people to preserve and promote Irish plants, gardens and history.

## Horticultural hero?

Having been involved in this fascinating industry for so long, it is impossible for me to choose just one hero. I have fond memories of the late Crosbie Cochrane, who gave me sound advice and encouragement. More recently I had the pleasure of spending time with and learning from the late Brian Cross in Cork and the incomparable Ronnie Cameron. Helen Dillon is both a hero and a dear friend, while, throughout my time as a member of the Northern Ireland Heritage Gardens Trust, I have been blessed to rub shoulders with many remarkable gardeners, including Thomas Pakenham and the late Charles Nelson.

## Tips for gardeners with a busy schedule

When I am at home I watch the weather forecasts diligently; when good weather is in prospect, I adjust my day to spend the daylight time in the garden and the early mornings and evenings in my office. I must confess to now using contractors for my lawn treatments and for the hedges around my quarter-acre garden, Spindrift, in Crawfordsburn in Co. Down.



An orchid from Helen Dillon

# Heritage on your plate

Niamh Donohoe

Perhaps I was a caterpillar in a previous life, because I do love a plant I can eat. I'm always curious to try out new edibles, and recently I reconnected with our beautiful heritage vegetable varieties.

Championed by the Irish Seed Savers Association (ISSA) in Scariff, Co. Clare, and also stocked by the fantastic Brown Envelope Seeds of West Cork, there are numerous tasty varieties on offer. Perhaps not unexpectedly, the cabbage family (Brassicaceae) is widely represented. Many people may be familiar with the Gortahork cabbage, a drumhead hailing from its namesake village in Co. Donegal. Saved by three generations of the same family, this huge variety always turns heads; it has reached over a metre in diameter here at the National Botanic Gardens Glasnevin, where I work. Heritage crops are often linked with the movement of people. Many believe it is the same giant cabbage of Scottish lore. Legend has it that one stormy night, centuries past, a ship was wrecked off the cliffs of Glendale, Isle of Skye. Survivors settled on the island for the winter and in spring shared treasure saved from the waves with local people – a leather pouch of precious seed from their home – which grew to be known as the giant Glendale cabbage.



In Glasnevin the Dutch-type cabbage called Mayo Common produced light green heads, which overwintered well. Sean Flynn's Westmeath Greens is an exceptionally prolific cut-and-come-again-type cabbage and Irish Savoy also did extremely well. Uncle John's kale is a must, a good flat-leaved and vigorous variety, not only surviving but thriving in the wet summer of 2023 and looking set for the same this year. The Tipperary turnip did well, as did two varieties of sprout, Balbriggan and Irish Glacier, both ending up on last year's Christmas table.

Peas (*Lathyrus oleraceus*, a recent name change from *Pisum sativum*) also have some interesting varieties. Josh Toomb's purple-podded pea came to the ISSA from 79-year-old Mr Toomb of Co. Antrim, who thought that others might like to grow it.

I used the pea called Daniel O'Rourke for shoot production (my latest obsession) and it was lovely, as was Irish Green, although all had to be netted against the pesky pigeons. The Irish-bred onion, *Allium cepa 'Buan'* (translating as 'lasting' or 'enduring'), is a beautiful, flattened golden onion variety from the 1970s, which stores very well.

Apples (*Malus domestica*) are well represented in the ISSA's great collection. Particular favourites of mine are Bloody Butcher, a very tart cooker, and the gorgeous Lough Key crab apple, which not only makes the prettiest pink jelly but has beautiful crimson blossom in spring, followed by crimson-tinged foliage.



**Lough Key apple jelly**

The memory of the Famine remains strong on the island of Ireland and, with climate change, our food heritage will be more important than ever. Here at Glasnevin we intend to grow a bed of Irish crops that would represent the diet at the time. Although most of the population would not have had access to many of them, the rich diversity of what was being grown is very interesting.

The parsnip named Hollow Crown can be traced back as far as 1820, and it seems likely that it would have been grown in Famine times. It is interesting to see the Lumper potato being reinvented for today's tastes. The original strain, while not particularly flavourful or pretty, was incredibly reliable on poor soil and hence became synonymous with the subsistence farming of the time. The company Glens of Antrim now have Lumpers for sale, which, they say, they have tweaked for a modern palate.

While my initial incentive was simply to sample these varieties, I was delighted to see that they did indeed grow immeasurably stronger and more reliably than their French and Italian heritage counterparts. It was fantastic to see the resilience and productivity of these varieties and the experience has reignited my interest in the world of heritage crops – next season's fixation might just be heritage grains . . . !



**Heritage seed envelopes**

# Fascinating fynbos

Vick Ind



In 2018 I was lucky enough to be awarded an RHS bursary to travel to the Western Cape of South Africa to volunteer at a nature reserve and indigenous plant nursery, with the aim of developing my botanical knowledge and learning new propagation techniques, particularly of difficult genera like Proteaceae. For five weeks a copy of *A field guide to the fynbos*, my journal and my camera became my daily companions.

The word 'fynbos' is Afrikaans for 'fine-bush', hinting at the needle-leaved, scrubby, bush-type tendency of many of the plants, and is a blanket term used to reference the world's smallest floral kingdom (there are six in total), also known as the Cape Floral Region. The fynbos biome is made up of several types of veld, thicket, temperate and coastal forest, and succulent Karoo; many of the plants within these communities are distinct, with populations reliant on the marginal environmental and geological

quirks of each place. As a result, the Cape has developed incredible diversity, with over 9,000 native plant species, around 6,000 of these being endemic. Compare this with Ireland's count of around 1,000 native plants, with a mere twenty or so endemic, and it becomes obvious how rich this kingdom is!

The main defining components of fynbos include generous numbers of species in the families Ericaceae, Proteaceae, Restionaceae and, to a lesser extent, Iridaceae. It is a fire-dependent region, requiring a 'burn' typically in cycles of around 15 years. Fire initiates seed dispersal and seed germination in some plants and provides a window for pioneer species and a number of geophytes to flourish.

Fynbos is a good example of what happens when an area has been untouched by an ice age for tens of millions of years, enjoys a Mediterranean climate, and has vastly complex landscapes

and incredible amounts of high-quality light. Time has allowed the plant species to develop intimate relationships with the fauna around them, including the invertebrates, and to exploit pollinators and seed dispersers. Many of the prostrate fynbos plants like *Leucospermum prostratum* produce a sweet nectar that attracts mice and anoints their whiskers with pollen to pass on at their next stop, while the ground-hugging *Guthriea capensis* is pollinated by a lizard. My favourite, though, is the relationship that *Roridula gorgonias* has with a beetle. On first appearance the plant looks like just another sticky carnivorous sundew, but the beetle has adapted to live happily among its stems; the plant traps insects for the beetles to eat and the beetles, through their excretions, provide nutrients for the plant.

Climate change and human encroachment are the primary threats to the survival of the fynbos biome. Since the seventeenth century European settlers have been responsible for clearing vast swathes of land and most renosterveld (meaning 'rhino-field') has been lost, as these soils are ideal for grape growing and general agriculture. Now just 5 per cent survives in fragmented pockets. Illegal and accidental man-made fires are also a problem and, when coupled with hotter, drier summers, are leading to more frequent and intense combustion, something fynbos species find difficult to recover from.



**Protea in profusion**

The inevitable introduction of non-native plants is another problem. Escaped forestry trees have destroyed some parts of the fynbos region by affecting fire behaviour, out-competing native species and semi-permanently changing soil structure and composition, the basis of which is so important for highly specialised fynbos genera, many of which require specific mycorrhizae to thrive. *Acacia* species are particularly damaging, including *A. melanoxylon*, also known as Australian Blackwood.

This experience left me with an enduring love of South African flora and dry-climate plants in general. Two years ago I left my position at Lismore Castle Gardens, where I'd worked since 2013, to become a freelance horticulturist and set up my small business, the Individual Plants Nursery, based in Lismore, Co. Waterford. I specialise in growing rare and unusual plants, many of which are fynbos friends.

# Returning to my roots

Paul Smyth

I grew up on a small farm in Co. Carlow. My grandfather had just about made a living on it, but my dad had more reliable employment and only farmed part-time. As a teenager I took over growing the family's vegetables and very soon got the 'bug'. Being allowed free rein in the garden around the house helped me realise what I wanted to do. Initially I dreamed of growing veg on the family farm and diversifying, but, on starting a degree in horticulture in what was then the Waterford Institute of Technology, my eyes were opened and I haven't looked back. The weekly plant identification became something I loved, and learning about plants and how to ID them is still something I love.



The family garden in Carlow

As part of the course we were required to complete a practical placement. I asked Angela Jupe if I could come to her garden in Bellefield, Shinrone, Co. Offaly: a stroke of luck. I can still remember my first trip there 12 years ago to meet her and discuss the placement. I ended up working for Angela for that summer and we remained in touch. She became a mentor and was the person who flung me into scenarios and put me in touch with people who proved to be important later on. In Bellefield I learned lots of the practical skills of gardening under Angela's watchful and sometimes fierce eye. She collected plants of all sorts, many of Irish origin. Snowdrops were a particular favourite of hers; daffodils, primulas, peonies, tulips, roses and clematis were also favourites and a wide variety of Irish cultivars can be found among their ranks.

I joined the IGPS as a student about this time, after another student outlined the many benefits. The one that caught my attention was the seed distribution scheme. Being 'broke', the prospect of getting some free seed excited me and I still have a few plants from that original sowing!

After completing college and as a result of a contact I made through Angela, I worked for a time with Dr Tom Mitchell at Evolution Plants near Bath. Tom, like Angela, was a plant collector of the highest order,



with a nursery packed with gems he had collected on expeditions over a number of years. Here I learned about propagating, cataloguing and arranging a collection of *Galanthus*. My time in Evolution Plants was brief, but it gave me a great insight into what's involved in both organising and maintaining a collection of plants.

That led to being offered a job as a gardener and field worker in Crûg Farm Plants in north Wales. Plant collectors will most likely have heard of Crûg, often described as a mecca for new, unusual and hard-to-get plants.

Sue and Bleddyn Wynn-Jones were originally beef farmers who, in the 1990s, decided to focus entirely on their passion for plant collecting and growing. They have completed over thirty collecting trips and have amassed thousands of different plants in their nursery on the edge of the Snowdonia National Park. Here I learned about growing plants for sale and what's involved in the day-to-day running of a specialist nursery. The sheer range of plants that grow at Crûg is astonishing, even overwhelming at first. The garden, fields and tunnels are packed with plants being trialled to see how they grow outside in the wilds of Wales. Later on I was appointed propagator; it was a fantastic challenge. Often there was no guide or handbook to tell one how to do it! It was guesswork, with some success and lots of failure as I set about propagating a whole new range of plants.

It was during my time there that I was approached by Adam Whitbourn of Blarney Castle Gardens and asked if I wanted to join a plant-hunting expedition to Vietnam.



Plant exploration in Vietnam

I worked with lots of Vietnamese plants at Crûg, so I jumped at the idea and we spent three wonderful weeks, exploring, seed saving and working with a team of botanists from the university in Hanoi. One of the plants we specifically went to collect on that trip was *Aesculus wangii*, a rare chestnut tree with conkers as big as a tennis ball.



**Conker from the Vietnamese plant: photo courtesy of Adam Whitbourn**

My time in Wales came to an end in 2019 when I went to London to pursue a very different path, running an indoor plant shop; for various reasons, it never took off. I spent the next couple of years working with Diarmuid Gavin, landscaping and planting gardens, mostly in Ireland and occasionally London. Covid brought an end to all activities for a while, but Diarmuid and I began doing nightly Instagram broadcasts about gardening, which led to a TV series being commissioned and a book that we co-authored, called *Gardening together*.

In May 2021 Angela died suddenly, bequeathing her house and garden to the Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland (RHSI), with a view to it becoming a training garden where the practical skills of horticulture would be taught. In December 2022 I took on the role of head gardener at what is now known as RHSI Bellefield, thus coming full circle and returning to the garden where I trained.

The plan for the garden is to develop the 28-acre site, with practical learning at its core, in addition to trialling new ideas and plants, the conservation of some of the Irish cultivars, and the expansion of the plant collections begun by Angela. Two years into the project we've got the garden under a little more control and have started the process of applying for grants and looking at how to utilise the site to its best potential, working with the community, the local development board and Fáilte Ireland. I'm delighted to be back and to be able to put my skills to use.



***Narcissus 'Paul Smyth'*: photo courtesy of Brian Duncan VMH**

# *It's an ill wind*

Seamus O'Brien

Irish gardeners will remember 2024 as the year that ended with major storms. While the most violent of these, Storm Darragh, was on 7 December, it was the earlier (23 November) Storm Bert that was responsible for the toppling of one of Ireland's finest trees, the Mexican *Pinus montezumae* at Mount Usher, Co. Wicklow. Planted by the Walpoles in 1909, the Mount Usher tree was a particularly fine form, with long, grey-blue needles, beautifully located among other trees with blue foliage.

The Walpoles were enthusiastic disciples of William Robinson and they created one of the most celebrated Robinsonian gardens in Ireland, with an eclectic range of choice, rare and tender trees and shrubs. *Pinus montezumae* was one of the stars; sadly its root plate began to lift early last summer and Storm Bert completed the felling process.

However, the demise of the tree offered a rare opportunity to gather its cones at the correct time of year when seeds are fully formed. Five crates were collected by Katherine Jay and taken to the National Botanic Gardens (NBG) Kilmacurragh and placed by a storage heater, where they have released masses of hopefully viable seed.

In the past seedlings raised from this tree have yielded both green-needed and blue-needed variants, so the plan will be to raise as many seedlings as possible and select the very best blue-needed forms to replace the original tree at Mount Usher.

The new Irish champion Montezuma pine grows at NBG Glasnevin, a handsome specimen with a broad generous crown, planted on Pine Hill in 1899. The taxonomy of the surviving trees of *Pinus montezumae* at Mount Usher, the tree at Glasnevin and the giant at Sheffield Park in East Sussex is up for debate. They do not match the descriptions of wild trees, but, whatever they may be, they are superb and worthy of a prominent position in any garden.



# *Containers with an Irish influence*

Áine-Máire Ní Mhurchú

Smaller living spaces have called for a major rethink of how we plant. Lovers green our outdoor spaces. A clever way of creating a focal point is with a container garden. Whether you have a balcony, patio, courtyard or an area on a capped wall, a container garden can be fitted in. If your space is rented, a container can be easily moved when you do.

First, consider the aspect. Is it sunny, shaded, windy or protected? This will help you to choose between an alpine-type container that can cope with sun and is hardy, or venture into some ferns or other suitable shady plants, or even incorporate a miniature water feature.



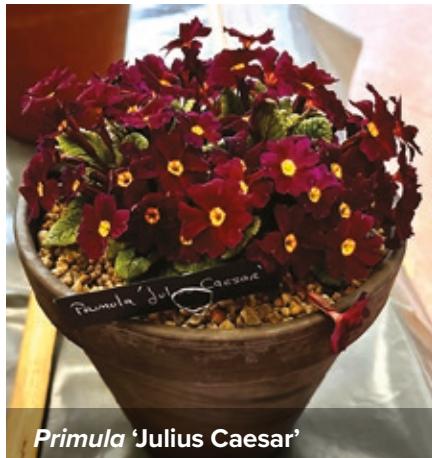
Containers can be upcycled from many sources. I have used cooking pots, biscuit tins, copper tops from old heating cylinders and old metal buckets. You can of course use more modern materials: lightweight fibre clay pots are very suitable and are available in home stores and garden centres throughout the country.

Whatever container you use, ensure that you have drainage holes; if there are none, create some yourself, but always adhere to safety guidelines if using a drill. When using any metal container, I line it with corrugated cardboard before I add my mix, which stops the roots from burning on a hot summer's day. Remember: when the soil mix is added, a pot can become heavy very quickly, so perhaps fill it after it has been placed in its intended position. Take care when lifting heavy pots.

Good drainage is necessary for container planting unless you are planting bog-loving plants or a table-top water garden container. A 50/50 mix of loam-based compost and horticultural grit with some slow-release fertiliser mixed through is a good combination.

## Choosing your plants

Some Irish Heritage Plants (IHPs) that I use in containers are *Ruscus aculeatus* 'John Redmond', a compact dwarf shrub cultivar that reliably produces bright red berries from late summer onwards. These can be held on the plant for a long time, as birds seem uninterested in eating them. It's very slow growing, with an ultimate height of only 0.5 metres, so will not engulf any pot for many years. Another lovely Irish cultivar is *Berberis × stenophylla* 'Corallina Compacta', with orange-yellow flowers in spring and blue-black berries in autumn. It holds an RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM).



**Primula 'Julius Caesar'**

A delightful IHP is *Epilobium canum* 'Dublin', a dwarf willow herb that has gorgeous spikes of scarlet-red flowers, opening wide with four notched inner petals. *Primula 'Julius Caesar'*, *P. 'Lady Greer'* and many other Irish primroses have become regulars on the Alpine Garden Society's show benches in March and April and they look wonderful incorporated into containers.

Bulbs with miniature flowers are always really useful. There are many beautiful *Galanthus* of Irish origin, for example *G. 'Castlegar'*, *G. 'David Shackleton'* and *G. 'Cicely Hall'*. Dwarf daffodils are perfect. A beautiful new introduction by Esker Farm Daffodils in Co. Tyrone is *Narcissus 'Luna Love'*, which I have used in my most recent container planting. Some other plants that work well in containers are *Saxifraga*, *Roscoea*, *Corydalis*, *Oxalis*, sea thrift and violas.

If you fancy something a little different, try some Irish heathers, which can work well in our wet climate. I have only recently begun to use them myself in containers. *Erica carnea* 'Eileen Porter' is a great example of a relatively easily available, long-flowering dwarf plant, while *Erica × darleyensis* 'Archie Graham' flowers from December to April and looks wonderful in a winter planter.

A final touch can be added by using some slate or shale stones to give a quirky shape, creating extra interest in your container. *Sempervivums* look fantastic in crevices and crannies and a piece of driftwood or part of a gnarled branch can look super as a temporary piece. Have fun and create something unique for your own space.



# Worth a read

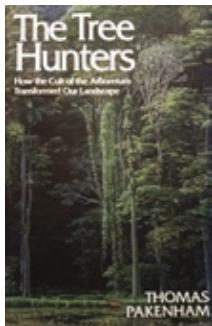
Paddy Tobin

## The tree hunters

The stories of plant hunters have been told before, but never so wonderfully or in so enjoyable a manner.

There is a change of perspective in this account of plant introductions, as Thomas Pakenham, the author, gives equal billing to those behind the collectors, those with a passion for trees, those who established the first collections, the first arboreums. They are as alive and as exciting as the introduction of the trees was to those who first collected and grew them. Their stories are extraordinarily absorbing.

Interestingly, the first definition of an arboretum arose in an Irish context. In 1796 Dr Walter Wade proposed the establishment of a botanic garden in Dublin and the development of an arboretum there – ‘a collection of trees, duly documented, and arranged either for education or for ornament’. He was supported by John Foster, then Speaker of the House of Commons, who had a collection of 1,700 different trees and shrubs at Collon, Co. Meath.



The concept and development of the arboretum went through various phases, but always seem to have involved interesting characters. In the earliest days we read of Bishop Compton at Fulham Palace and the garden of the Tradescants in Lambeth, followed by John Evelyn and a host of others. The gardens of the Horticultural Society at Chiswick were home to the introductions from north America of David Douglas. The great plant nurseries of Veitch and Lawson sent collectors far and wide to supply the appetites of tree-hungry landowners.

The Hookers of Kew stand large, followed later by Arthur Bulley of Ness, J. C. Williams of Caerhays Castle and Augustine Henry, among others. The list goes on. Each adventure is recorded with tremendous insight and passion. With love and enthusiasm and the experience of collecting and growing trees himself, Thomas Pakenham has given us one of the most informative and enjoyable horticultural books one could imagine.

*The tree hunters: how the cult of the arboretum transformed our landscape*, Thomas Pakenham, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £30

# A gardener's eye

Rosie Maye

One of my earliest challenges while establishing our garden was introducing colour in winter. Summer was easy, but everything in winter seemed a little on the brown side; I wanted to walk a path in late winter and have scent and colour. A few well-placed winter-flowering shrubs – *Daphne*, *Edgeworthia* and *Viburnum* – did the trick. I've always loved underplanting roses and shrubs with hellebores, bulbs and *Cyclamen coum* for a splash of colour in February. As I also want colour throughout the season, I plant bulbs among favourite perennials such as catmint, *Geranium 'Rozanne'* and *Persicaria bistorta 'Superba'*, while, for later in the summer, a group of *Rudbeckia fulgida 'Goldstrum'* in one corner and sedums in another have the desired effect.

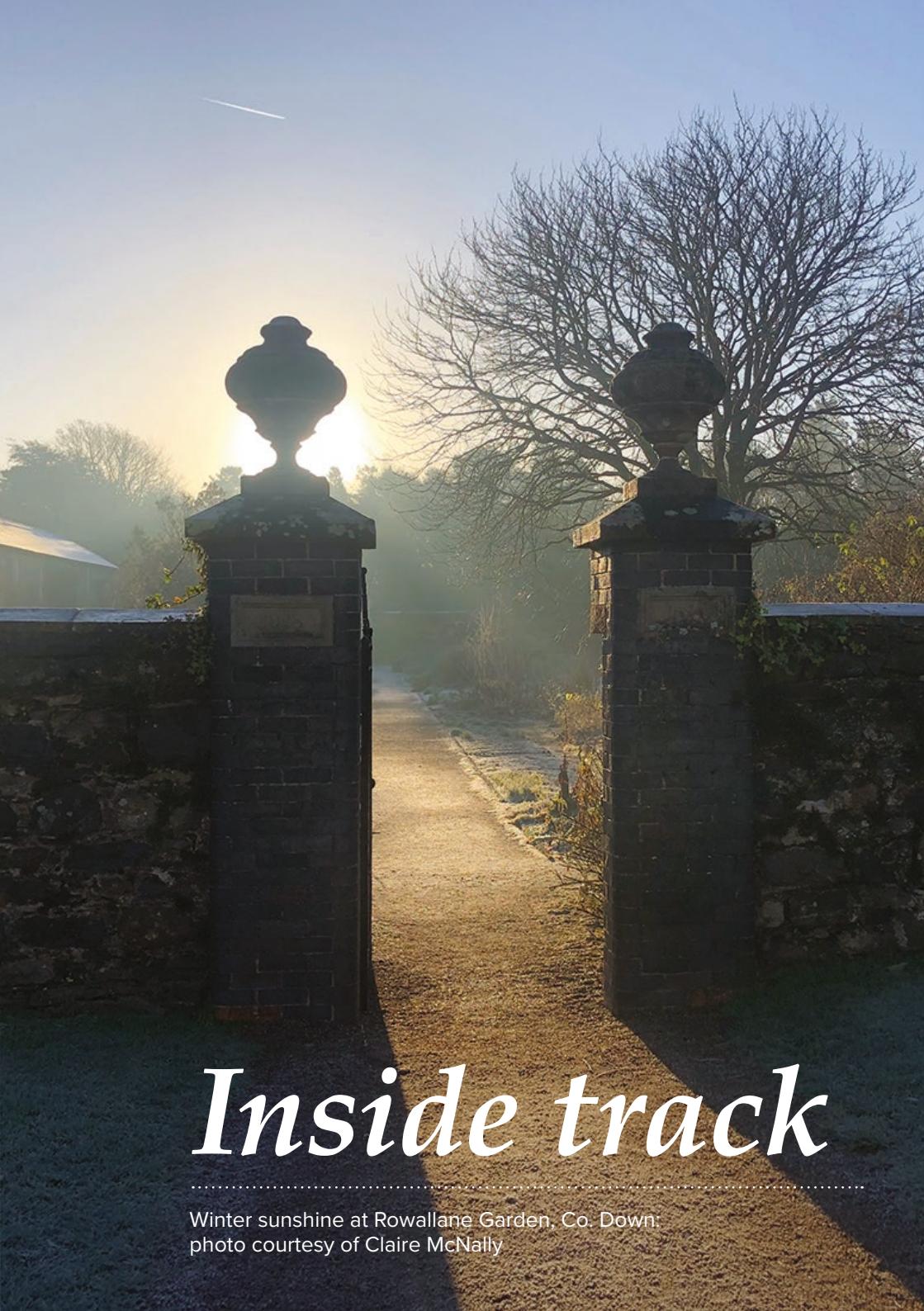
A copse of silver birch looks good all year round, but especially in winter, when the white stems shine out on a dark day. Luckily at the outset

I underplanted the young trees with snowdrops, tulips, bluebells and a carpet of forget-me-not, as, twenty years later, the intertwined roots would prevent any bulb from growing. A real favourite of mine for winter colour is *Pittosporum tenuifolium 'Irene Patterson'*, with its variegated evergreen leaves. Colourful stems of dogwood and Japanese maples also catch my eye as I brave the winter cold, and the leaf of *Fatsia japonica 'Spider's Web'* is fabulous when backlit by a weak winter sun.

When I was growing up, my parents had lots of shrubs for winter interest, including *Mahonia*, with its lightly scented yellow flowers, *Skimmia* and *Pieris* in pots. For years my mother's pride and joy was an early-flowering camellia, whose bright pink flowers always signalled the end of winter. Her *Pieris*, now planted out, is thriving in my garden, bringing memories of my parents and hinting at the joy that lies ahead.



*Fatsia japonica 'Spider's Web'*



# *Inside track*

Winter sunshine at Rowallane Garden, Co. Down  
photo courtesy of Claire McNally

# *Preview of the AGM weekend: 17–18 May*

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Welcome to a weekend in the west of Ireland for the AGM! The Leinster sub-committee has put together an exciting programme based in the Oranmore Lodge Hotel, a four-star, family-run hotel in the village of Oranmore, just off the M6 and only 7km from Galway City. The event will include a Gala Dinner on Saturday evening and garden visits in Co. Galway and Co. Clare over the weekend.

## **Annual General Meeting**

The AGM will begin at 10.30am in the hotel's Inisheer Suite. Registration and refreshments, with tea, coffee and scones, will take place from 9.45am. The formal notice of the meeting and the agenda will be published in the April issue of the *Newsletter*. The Society is very keen to hear from members willing to come forward to fill various posts and contribute to the future of the organisation. For details, please see Mary Forrest's Note on page 4.

## **Accommodation**

Bookings should be made directly with the Oranmore Lodge Hotel from 1 February. Bed and breakfast is €90 per person per night sharing a twin or double room. Single rooms are €169 per night.

## **Garden visits**

We have plans to visit Carl Wright's wonderful garden near Fanore. Even if you have visited this garden previously, you will probably find something new – he is always expanding, developing new areas and adding new plants.

We will visit the Irish Seed Savers Association's base in Co. Clare. There we will tour their Irish Heritage Apple collection and learn about their projects to safeguard Ireland's diverse food-crop heritage.

We will take a guided walk on one of the Burren's 'Green Roads'. The gradient is gentle, and there will be opportunities to see orchids, gentians, cowslips and other endemic Burren flora. The archaeology and the elevated views of the sea add to the enjoyment and there's a 'holy well' near the far end. There will also be a visit to Gert and Elizabeth Stam's Caherhurley Nursery. Their plants, which are certified organic, are well known to many of us from plant fairs and through their website. They grow a wide range of hardy perennials, many of which are unusual. You are almost guaranteed to find something to tempt you!

### **Booking the weekend**

Booking for the Gala Dinner and the visits on Saturday and Sunday will be on Eventbrite from 1 February. There will be a link to the Eventbrite booking on our website and via the ebulletin. Those who are uncomfortable using Eventbrite can email [igps.leinster@gmail.com](mailto:igps.leinster@gmail.com) and we will endeavour to find you an alternative method of booking.

Eventbrite will give details of the sequence of visits and will set out the options. The cost of the events will be detailed on the Eventbrite booking; this will not exceed €100 for members.

For those arriving early on Friday, we suggest that you might like to include Woodville Walled Garden as an optional extra. There is also a garden centre in Kilcolgan which has been recommended. We hope to see many of you for the weekend, and there will be a special welcome for our 'West of Ireland' members, whom we don't see so often.

**N.B. All members are welcome to attend the AGM free of charge. However, we would ask those who intend going only to the AGM to email us at [igps.leinster@gmail.com](mailto:igps.leinster@gmail.com) so that we can prepare name badges and document packs, and plan catering for pre-meeting refreshments.**



**Flowers of the Burren – *Dryas octopetala* (Mountain avens), *Gentiana verna* (Gentians), *Parnassia palustris* (Grass of Parnassus):**  
photos courtesy of Paddy Tobin

## Around the regions

September brought a final garden visit, when we had the privilege of being taken on a tour of the grounds of Tullynally Castle by their owner and IGPS member, Thomas Pakenham. Thomas's knowledge was dazzling and he had wonderful anecdotes to entertain us with throughout the tour.

The autumn saw an excellent mix of lectures taking place both via Zoom and in person. Nichola Monk and colleagues organised an eclectic selection of speakers via Zoom, including Tom Coward, head gardener at Gravetye Manor, the former home of William Robinson, who spoke of Robinson's lasting impact on gardening; Steve Edney, Chelsea Gold medallist and owner of the No Name Nursery in Kent, who traced the nursery's development from small beginnings in 2019; Conall O'Caoimh, co-owner of Ardán in Howth, who encouraged us to think more deeply about the health of our garden soil; and Dr Christy Boylan, who discussed the history, development and rich artistic heritage of Dublin's parks and gardens.

The Northern sub-committee organised two in-person lectures. The first was held in Antrim, where T. J. Maher, author of the book *Grounded in the garden*, dazzled us with images of his garden's colour and form. The second took place in December at a new venue near Bangor, where Claire McNally,

head gardener at Rowallane Gardens, Saintfield, Co. Down, and a member of the National Executive Committee, lovingly described the garden's history.

Meanwhile, the Leinster sub-committee organised a lecture at the National Botanic Gardens Glasnevin on 16 November when Dave Hardy, who, with his wife Jules, established Esker Farm Daffodils in Co. Tyrone in 2016, told the story of daffodil breeding in Ireland. We could have received no better seasonal offering than his delightful and informative account, which encouraged us to look forward to spring.

## Plant sales

The Northern region raised £1,104 (approximately €1,325) from a number of plant sales and the sale in October organised by the Leinster sub-committee raised €2,345. Our sincere thanks go to all the organisers, those who grew and donated plants, and the many helpers on the ground for their work in raising this splendid amount.

## GLDA Conference

This year's Garden and Landscape Designers Association conference is titled 'Building resilient landscapes for a changing climate' and will take place on Saturday 22 February at the Crowne Plaza Dublin Airport Hotel, Santry, Dublin. The speakers will include Adam Whitbourn, Gardens Manager of Blarney Castle Gardens and an IGPS member. See [glda.ie](http://glda.ie).

# Meet the Committee

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**Edith Brosnan**



*Leinster sub-committee*

Plants have always been a love of mine. I was lucky to grow up in a lovely garden and Botany was still a Leaving Certificate subject, my best. I am a plantaholic! I collect all sorts of plants, no speciality, just an eclectic mix of whatever I think I can grow. I love to travel to see plants growing in their native environment. I am not an artist; if there are good combinations, it is more by chance than design.

I joined the IGPS in the early 1980s – not quite on day one but soon afterwards. My working life was as a medical scientist, starting with the Blood Transfusion Service and latterly in Wexford General Hospital. For many years I thought I would like to do something useful for the Society, but time and distance were a problem. With constraints lifted and the Leinster sub-committee looking for help, I responded.

**Claire Woods**



*Northern sub-committee*

I have always been interested in plants, both cultivated and growing in the wild, and I took my first cuttings of *Hebe 'Autumn Joy'* at the age of seven. I have now been involved in and passionate about horticulture in a professional capacity for over thirty years.

I am an enthusiastic plantsperson and I believe horticulture is important, whether it is the production of food crops or the creation of beautiful green spaces in which to live and play. I am committed to raising the profile of horticulture through radio interviews, giving public lectures and talks, and delivering curriculum support workshops to inspire and educate schoolchildren. I am fortunate to have been able to pursue this passion professionally in the development of the grounds at CAFRE (College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise) and now as Gardens Manager at the wonderful gardens at Hillsborough Castle and Gardens, Co. Down.



# Dates for your diary

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*Garrya x issaquahensis* 'Glasnevin Wine', an Irish Heritage Plant:  
photo courtesy of Christine Linehan.  
See [www.irishgardenplantsociety.com](http://www.irishgardenplantsociety.com) under Irish plant portraits

# Dates for your diary

Compiled by Rob Evans

**Thursday 23 January at 19.30**

## **Gertrude Jekyll and Munstead Wood: the Home of an 'Artistic-Gardener'**

with Caroline Ikin  
A Zoom lecture

Munstead Wood in Surrey was the home of the famous Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932). In 1882 she began to create a 15-acre garden with areas to flower in different seasons, a woodland garden following the wild gardening principles of her friend William Robinson, and a nursery to supply plants to clients. Jekyll wrote 15 books and over a thousand articles, which offer an extraordinary record of her gardening activities at Munstead Wood. It was acquired by the National Trust in April 2023.

**Dr Caroline Ikin** is the National Trust Curator at Munstead Wood, an author and lecturer. The photo is courtesy of Hugh Mothersole.



**Thursday 6 February at 19.30**

## **Growing your own cut flowers: season and sustainability**

with Fionnula Fallon  
A Zoom lecture

Think of the pleasure an arrangement of fresh, home-grown flowers will bring compared with an ill-assorted, imported bunch from a garage forecourt! Fionnula will share her experience to help us get started with tips on the best varieties to choose for picking throughout the year.

**Fionnula Fallon** is one of Ireland's best-known garden writers, with a weekly column in *The Irish Times*. She is a florist and established The Irish Flower Farm, a sustainably managed flower farm and flower studio in Co. Laois.



# *Dates for your diary*

**Saturday 15 February  
from 11.00 to 13.30  
(note the start time)**

## **Kilmacurragh through the seasons**

with Mary O'Neill Moloney  
Venue: National Botanic Gardens  
Glasnevin, Dublin 9 D09 VY63

Mary will take us on a virtual tour of the National Botanic Gardens Kilmacurragh, showing us the highlights of each season. If you haven't been to Kilmacurragh, you'll see what you've been missing; if you have, you will be encouraged to visit at a different time of year.

**Mary O'Neill Moloney** is head guide at Kilmacurragh, having previously been a guide at the JFK Arboretum. Anyone who has been on a tour with Mary has found her enthusiasm for the people involved, the locations and the plants truly infectious.



**Saturday 8 March from 11.00 to 12.45 (note the start time)**

## **Trees in Ireland – some distinguished natives and honoured guests**

with Mary Forrest  
Venue: National Botanic Gardens  
Glasnevin, Dublin D09 VY63

Though trees native to Ireland number not more than twenty species, trees introduced over many centuries from the temperate regions of the world number in the hundreds, plus there are the many varieties of trees selected by the nursery trade, both abroad and in Ireland. This talk will look at a selection of these trees, with an emphasis on those suitable for a suburban garden.

**Dr Mary Forrest** has had a lifelong interest in trees from her time studying in the National Botanic Gardens, through cataloguing tree and shrub collections in Ireland, to her many years as a horticultural lecturer in University College Dublin.



**Thursday 20 March at 19.30**

**Reflections on two years'  
gardening in the oldest  
continuously cultivated  
garden in Ireland: Lismore  
Castle**

with Colm O'Driscoll

Venue: Antrim Old Courthouse,  
Market Square, Antrim BT41 4AW

The talk will cover Colm's approach to managing the gardens and what he and his team are striving to achieve. It will include details of plants, planting trials and the innovations to date that have had the biggest impact in the past two years.

In 2022 **Colm O'Driscoll** moved from Airfield Estate, Dundrum, to become head gardener at the ancient Lismore Castle Gardens in Co. Waterford, a garden with an existence spanning 840 years!



**Wednesday 26 March  
at 19.30**

**Treading gently through  
the borders: a detailed look  
at the softer side of border  
management**

with Ben Pope aka

The Working Gardener  
A Zoom lecture

This talk will explore both traditional and contemporary methods of herbaceous perennial management, and will leave you confident when deciding how to improve your own borders.

**Ben Pope**, head gardener in a private garden in West Sussex, cares for a large walled kitchen garden, herbaceous borders, ornamental lawns, a floral meadow and more. He is a member of the RHS Herbaceous Committee and writes for *Gardens Illustrated*.



# *Dates for your diary*

**Saturday 17 – Sunday 18 May**

## **Annual General Meeting**

Venue: Oranmore Lodge Hotel,  
Oranmore, Co. Galway H91 NN76,  
and private gardens in the area.

See page 26 for details and  
how to book.

**Saturday 24 May from 14.00  
to 16.00**

## **Visit to the Morgan Garden**

Venue: The garden of Jeff & Irma  
Morgan, 99 Ballynahinch Road,  
Saintfield, Co. Down BT24 7LZ

Originally a greenfield site, this is a relatively young garden, started in 2015; it is enclosed by stone walls and sits effortlessly in Co. Down's undulating landscape. Herbaceous borders were developed along with a rockery, while hostas, ferns and hellebores feature in shaded areas. The acidic soil has allowed rhododendrons and magnolias to thrive. South-facing with an open aspect, broadleaf trees, mainly lime, beech and maple, play their part alongside fields of juvenile fruit trees planted four years ago.

Sensible footwear recommended.

Members free, guests £5.

**Saturday 21 June from 14.00  
to 16.00**

## **Visit to Castlewellan Arboretum and Gardens**

Venue: Castlewellan Forest Park,  
Castlewellan, Co. Down BT31 9BU

Following extensive investment  
thanks to the Heritage Lottery  
Fund, we have an opportunity to  
experience the restoration of this  
important historic garden, including  
its noteworthy Arboretum and  
Annesley Garden. Alwyn Sinnamon,  
head gardener, will be our guide.

Sensible footwear recommended.  
Members free, guests £5. Parking  
charges apply in Castlewellan  
Forest Park.



# Thanks to our contributors

**Niamh Donohoe** trained at National Botanic Gardens (NBG) Glasnevin and Aberdeen University. She currently manages the NBG's organic walled garden and apiary.

**Rob Evans** is a retired teacher. A lifelong gardener, he started to create a new garden in the mid-Antrim countryside ten years ago.

**Andrew Gee** is a student at Queen's University Belfast, a member of the National Executive Committee and the joint Irish Heritage Plants coordinator.

**Vick Ind** runs the Individual Plants Nursery in Co. Waterford.

**Paul Maher** is the former Curator of the National Botanic Gardens. He is a long standing member of the IGPS and edited the *Newsletter* for several years.

**Rosie Maye**, also known as The Insomniac Gardener, gardens near Slane and writes a column for *The Irish Garden* magazine.

**Áine-Máire Ní Mhurchú** served as Honorary Secretary of the Society from 2021 to 2024 and lives and gardens in Co. Meath.

**Seamus O'Brien** manages the National Botanic Gardens Kilmacurragh, Co. Wicklow. He is a long-standing member of the IGPS, an author, and serves on two committees of the Royal Horticultural Society.

**Paul Smyth** is the head gardener of RHSI Bellefield in Co. Offaly, having previously been the propagator at Crûg Farm Plants in North Wales.

**Paddy Tobin**, a former Chairman of the Society and former Editor of the *Newsletter*, lives in Waterford and writes a column for *The Irish Garden* magazine.

My thanks also go to **Adrian Bell, Edith Brosnan, Brian Duncan, Christine Linehan, Claire McNally, Mary Montaut** and **Carl Wright** for providing written contributions and photos.

**Photos** are by kind permission of the authors unless otherwise attributed.

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.



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