



*The  
Irish Garden Plant Society*





Photos: Shirley Snook. Visit to Shepherd House, Edinburgh, see page 27





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## *Editorial*

It is late September as I write and I am glad for the people of Cavan, Leitrim and Roscommon that the snow forecast by Gabrielle Monahan in *The Sunday Times* and mentioned by Rae McIntyre in the July issue, has not arrived. It would be a particularly long winter if snow arrived in September!!

On page 4 John Joe Costin extols the virtues of clogs as gardening footwear, something he first experienced as a student in Glasnevin. This practice had been discontinued when I arrived as a student at the Teagasc College of Amenity Horticulture. Our College Principal was Dr Paul Cusack. Dr Cusack retired last August and I want to wish him a long and happy retirement. I know IGPS members who were students when Dr Cusack was Principal will be grateful to him for the positive learning atmosphere he created and for the opportunities to work abroad during our Intra Year. This was made possible by his horticultural contacts throughout the world.

I have wanted for some time to include correspondence from members in the Newsletter. I have done so in this issue as I am not able to answer the query myself. If space allows in future issues I will include letters or emails on matters of interest to IGPS members. Contact details will not be published but will be available with the consent of the letter writer. Please write to me at the address (or email address) below.

Mary

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

Copy date for the January 2011 Newsletter is Friday 3rd December



## *The Big Freeze January 2010*

### Plant Mortality and Survival Survey

I know we are all still trying to forget the awful winter last year, and I hope all of you have had a good summer, but this is a wee reminder to please send any notes you have for this survey. It is equally important to note the losses and the surprise survivors, for future planting!

Please record as much detail as possible for your garden as below – don't worry too much if you cannot supply all.

Address (general area, urban or rural)

Site – elevation, shelter (windbreaks or tree cover over), position (eg can cold air drain away)

Minimum temperature recorded (with site of thermometer, near house, on a wall, in the open etc)

Plant details – age (how many years established), drainage (is the soil very wet), previous damage (at what temperature)

Any protection given? Fleece, bubble wrap, etc.

Degree of damage – dead, killed to older wood, killed to ground and regrew

Please send details, preferably emailed as easier to compile, to me at **[stephencbutler@gmail.com](mailto:stephencbutler@gmail.com) or at Dublin Zoo, Phoenix Park, Dublin 8.**

I will compile later this year and spread the results.

Many thanks

Stephen Butler  
Curator of Horticulture  
Dublin Zoo



# *Clogs, Klompen, Sabots and Zeta*

## *by John Joe Costin*

In September 1963 I enrolled as one of 24 male students in the Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin. The student hostel closed the previous June. We were the first group liberated to find accommodation outside the Gardens. An allowance of €3.00 per week was a Godsend sum for most but a cause of mutterings 'slave labour' by a dissenting few. A student with money was an oxymoron. The Beatles concert that October induced a frenzy that the audience never sat down was a media sensation. Mascara, beetle tattoos on ladies and microskirts were high fashion. I was introduced to urban warfare, a handbag fight, at my first dance in St. Peter's Hall Phibsboro. Masticating chewing gum was the silent insouciant signal that they did not want to dance with you. No one called for a Tribunal of Inquiry when John Lennon advised "women should be obscene and not heard". Later we were told that we were the swinging 60's. They stopped outside the gates.

Besides attending classes, we were obligated to work in the grounds to gain practical experience rotated between sections during the academic year. On my first morning, I was presented with a pair of Clogs, the approved work footwear and a Birch twig broom. What I saw was antiquated footwear and equipment and the symbols of my induction into servitude for life as a gardener. It was as my mother had warned. In choosing a place in the Botanic Gardens she asked if I was prepared to spend the rest of my life kowtowing to my employer. As a gardener I would have to. Born near Thomastown Co Kilkenny she absorbed osmotically from her milieu the hierarchy and social status accorded to staff in the many landed gentry estates in south Kilkenny. Mount Juliet in 1962 employed 22 gardeners, the head gardener her neighbour Jim Carty was the first gardener I knew. If butlers and hunt masters were at the apex, gardeners were near the base of the status pyramid.

To her disappointment I had rejected a bursary to study Dairy Science in UCC and a guaranteed career as a Creamery Manager the esteemed and most influential position of any profession in rural Ireland where 43% of the then population lived. Horace Plunkett third son of Lord Dunsany championed the self-help ethos and benefits of Agricultural Cooperative Societies that would lead to personal transformation and national revitalisation. Their formation from the late 1800's was to transform peasant farming to modern industrial.

The Creamery Manager was the farmer's confidential financial and business development advisor. My father, in estate free west Waterford was oblivious of social position and hierarchies but was disappointed that I rejected the inheritance of his dairy farm.

The clogs had wooden soles and studded black leather uppers. Bemused at first, as there was no transmission of the feel of the ground through the wooden soles, I got accustomed to a new way of walking and working. I quickly had to acknowledge the clogs superiority and versatility over what I previously wore, the durable hobnail leather boot and the Wellington. Equally protective in dry or wet weather, the Clog kept the feet dry and cool as the wood absorbed perspiration. When digging, no jarring shock was transmitted to the sole of the foot.

The second item issued was a Birch Broom. This looked medieval and primitive. It had a half length Alder handle around the end of which as many birch branch ends as could be fitted were tightly secured with fine wire. It seemed outdated but proved not to be so. The 75cm long cluster of branches was a surprisingly adept and efficient tool for gathering fallen leaves in volume to keep the paths in the garden clear for pedestrians. These brooms were made in house, a winter wet day task in the loft behind the Palm House. Christy Crosby, former curator, advised that the Birch branches were supplied from Co. Carlow by the Forestry Department. The clogs were supplied ex Manchester by the Post Office Supplies Stores in Rathmines, then the procurement agency for all Government Departments.

The following summer, I worked on a nursery in the Beemster Polder in North Holland. My host spoke no English and I no Dutch. On arrival, he gesticulated that I remove my shoes before I enter his home. It is a Dutch custom and was not a verdict on my black polished laced shoes. For that summer I wore what he wore, the all timber footwear painted a fetching yellow, hollowed out of a solid block of wood. What the Dutch called Klompen is in France and Belgium a Sabot. A railway strike by French workers in 1910 when they removed the wooden shoes that kept the train tracks in place gave us a new English word - sabotage.

The first impression was that their width made them cumbersome. In time, I appreciated the foot protection they provided, their cool comfort and the convenience with which you could step into and out of them. I could run, cycle and even demonstrated Irish dance steps to my host. Since then the EU has officially accredited the Dutch clog as safety shoes with the CE mark. They can withstand any penetration including sharp objects and concentrated acids.

A year later my host in Warwickshire took me to a local festival where I saw clog dancing as an art form. Roy Lancaster related that he wore clogs until he



was 15, when he rejected a new rubber soled version his mother bought him and never wore clogs again. He disliked the new clog because they did not produce the familiar clatter of clog on the cobbled streets of his native Bolton. The mills and mines of Lancashire were at the centre of the industrial revolution and clogs were the footwear of the workers. Their demand created an export industry in Ireland from 1840-1920.

The timber of our native Alder, *Alnus glutinosa* was the wood favoured by clog makers. Michael Carey **“If trees could talk” (2009)** records that this species was popular for making clogs during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alder was sold from between 4d and 5.5d (2-3c) per cubic foot to cloggers who came from Lancashire to make clogs on the spot in Wicklow woods both at Ballycullen and Ballymanus. Others, (Edlin, Elwes and Henry) record that clog makers offered a bespoke service. They took delivery of roughly hewn soles and shaped them to their customers feet while they waited, having measured their soles and observed their gait and stride.

The following paragraph is reproduced from Timber News and Saw Miller Engineer from October 8<sup>th</sup> 1900, which describes this industry under the heading **Alders, and Birch for Clog Soles.**

“The quantity of timber annually required for the manufacture of clog soles is much greater than one would imagine. To supply the Liverpool market alone, vast quantities of fair- sized birch, alder and sycamore are required; but as the making of the clog soles usually takes place in the woodland where the trees are felled, only the converted wood in the shape of rough soles is conveyed to the towns and villages - the refuse being sold as a cheap rate firewood. The timber most in request is that of clean growth and not too large about 8 to 12 inches (20-30cm) in diameter and alder is usually preferred, it working readily and producing a nice clean sole of good lasting properties and not liable to splinter or crack. With wonderful rapidity is the work of converting the rough log into the clog sole proceeded with. First, the timber is cross-cut into lengths, then split into thickness, and finally, by a neatly contrived knife fitted to a block, the soles are cut out to almost the finished shape and dimensions.”

“From 8d. to 10d. (4-5c) per cube foot is the price usually paid for smaller alder, birch and other timber suitable for clog-making, with an allowance from the seller that the soles may be cut out in the wood where the trees have been felled, this minimising considerably the expenses connected with unnecessary haulage and cartage.”

The Kew Bulletin 1904 p6 reported that a “complete series of specimens, illustrating the manufacture for clog soles from wood of *Alnus glutinosa* was added to their Museum’s collection”. These specimens were supplied from Mr John Beattie of Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. Specialisation is a feature of the



supply chain in large and mature industries. The simple process that started with a clog maker cutting down a tree, sawing it into sections drying and then carving a clog from a log, changed as demand grew and was segmented into specialisations. The finished product varied in quality from an everyday work clog to the bespoke and fashionable. Thus whilst the workers clog was carved on site in the Wicklow woods, the Wexford clog maker serviced the top end of the market. The Alder is an important riverbank tree. Four major rivers the Barrow, Nore, Suir and Slaney drain extensive tracts of the most fertile land in the country and empty into the sea on the south east coast. Enniscorthy from this perspective would seem to be a central location where Alder poles could be efficiently transported to for processing.

Alder wood is white but turns a reddish brown when cut, hence its common name mahogany in some parts of Ireland. For the clog maker the wood was firm, smooth, relatively soft and easily carved. For the wearer it is light and resilient, is a poor conductor of heat and is water resistant, durable and tough. Growing closely associated with water, it is not surprising that its wood is durable in water and an ever-scarcer quality in alternating wet and dry. It was therefore invaluable for canal locks, sluices, milldams, weir gates and other structures along watercourses. Much of Venice is built on Alder piles.

All Alders fix atmospheric nitrogen by means of root nodules containing nitrifying bacteria. This gives the tree a great competitive advantage for colonising poor soils that are short of nitrates including bared and made up ground, landfill sites, the banks of new road cuttings, mine spoil heaps and other industrial waste sites. The nitrogen they add to the soil enables other tree species establish in the enriched ground. Alders are the least competitive and so are ideal shelter tree for orchards and crops. They thrive along riverbanks and lakes that receive a good flow of water and beside streams and ponds, but little elsewhere. They extend thick, red roots into the water, which are invaluable in stabilising banks and preventing erosion. Roots acquire oxygen from running water, so they will not grow in stagnant pools.

Alders ubiquity on riverbank and damp ground is reflected in place names. In Irish Fearna/Fearnog, both mean Alder, the later is a diminutive of the first Ferns Co. Wexford seductively posing as an English looking word, represents the plural of the first, An Garran Fearoge, in Co. Antrim is now better known as Aldergrove, Ballyfarnan and Fearnoge, Co. Roscommon. Fernlough (Lock Farna Co. Donegal, Farney, Farnan, Farnagh Co. Monaghan and Glenfarne Co. Leitrim are just a few of the placenames that record the presence of Alders. In Co. Kilkenny and probably in other places too, the conspicuous Elder *Sambucus nigra* (Trom in Irish) is called the Alder and equally confusing some place name authors translate (Farna/Fearnog) as the place of the Elders.

Alders are humble trees that do not produce an attention seeking seasonal spectacle. They are seldom recommended as desirable acquisitions. It is therefore not surprising that they do not figure prominently in the inventories compiled by Mary Forrest of our 30 Major Gardens. Worldwide there are 85 species. Kennedy Park lists 11 species and 7 cultivars. Birr list 6, Kildangan 4 and 8 others have a single entry.

The Tree Council of Irelands 2005 height and girth champions shows their potential. Our height champion in Galway is 3.65 @ 1.1 x 21m. *A. glutinosa* in Muckcross, Killarney measures 5.88m girth @ 0.6m x 19.5m and is the second tallest. The girth champion 5.9m also grows in Kerry.

Champion trees are listed for:

Antrim	3.63m @ 1.3m x 10.7m
Armagh	4.52m x 16.2m - second tallest
Clare	4.05m x 14m

Topsoil is valuable and commands a price, but subsoil is a cost where it has to be removed. One of the greed excesses of the recent housing boom was that some ground contractors sold the topsoil, and left new house owners mainly with poorly drained subsoil and moss filled lawns. In such places Nitrogen fixing Alders may be their only tree choice. Alders are upright and narrow with branches neatly arranged. They grow rapidly initially but once they reach the cone bearing stage the growth rate slows perceptively.

The cut leaved forms of *Alnus glutinosa* (*glutinosa* refers to the stickiness of the winter buds) '**Laciniata**' and '**Imperialis**' are worthwhile for their foliage in summer and their silhouettes in winter.

**Imperialis** has deeply cut, almost skeletal elegant leaves. **Laciniata** has oak like leaves and makes a larger tree. ***Alnus cordata*** the Italian Alder is the aristocrat in the family. Early to leaf, by mid April, it can hold its leaves until early December. The leaves are large, glossy and heart shaped. With an ample supply of nitrogen, they remain a lustrous dark green until leaf fall. In fact, you seldom see an anaemic or prematurely discoloured alder leaf. Their clean green leaves are noticeably visible from July onwards as the foliage of other trees became mottled, discoloured and bedraggled.

Elwes and Henry measured a fine specimen in 1906 in Glasnevin Botanic Gardens at 1.65 x 9.5m. The Irish champion 2.28m x 26.2m is in the gardens but it is not the 1906 tree.

***Albus rubra*, the Red Alder**, so named because its red catkins give the tree a rusty hue in spring, is the humble companion tree to the coastal redwood,

***Sequoia sempervirens***, along its narrow coastal range from southern California to the Oregon border. It continues as the dominant broad leaf tree all the way to Alaska. Its wood is the most common commercial hardwood of the Pacific seaboard where it is widely used for furniture, interesting veneers, electric guitar bodies and umbrella handles.

All of the fastest growing conifers in Ireland come from N.W America and it is not surprising that the Red Alder grows with great vigour too, up to 100cm per year. It proved itself the fastest in the tree trials plot in Kennedy Park in the establishment years. A large number of landscape queries I received relate to screening out unsightly views and/or enhancing privacy. These three Alders are the most frequently deciduous trees I recommended for boundary screening and shelter in rural locations. Alders can be cut with impunity at any age, if they outgrow their space and will sprout again. A procedure that would leave many large trees permanently disfigured.

The Japanese like the Dutch remove their shoes before they cross the threshold. In Nagoya, I and the 180 attending a lecture I gave, did so before entering the lecture hall. The Zuri is their flat work wear clog made from a resilient rush, a *Juncus* species, that their lovely and durable tatami floor covering mats are also made from. The exquisite Kimono, a garment of great beauty is worn by ladies on formal occasions. The Zeta, a high platform clog raised 5cm above floor level by 2 cross pieces, worn with Tabi, a special sock is an integral part of this ensemble. They modify their gait and deportment and so accentuate their delicacy, elegance and femininity. The Zeta is made from Kiri, the wood of *Paulownia tomentosa*. It has a very pleasant silvery colour, is lightweight and develops a very fine lustrous sheen. Like Alders, it has a very low tendency to split, has a high strength to weight ratio and is resistant to rot and decay. Its ability to absorb moisture made it the favoured wood for wardrobes, as it kept their precious kimonos and rolled manuscripts free of mould during the rainy season. Paulownia is an incredibly fast growing tree and is now an important plantation tree in Australia, New Zealand, South America and Canada. This species is not popular or widely grown in our gardens. I planted *P. fargesii* from western China which is believed to be better adapted to our climate 25 years ago. It is now the largest girthed tree in the grounds.

I listened to a vexed dissertation sometime ago to the effect that trees were masculine, exclusively for men and that none named by them honour women. Paulownia is the exception. It was named to honour Anna Paulownia Queen of the Netherlands and daughter of Paul 1 Tsar of Russia. It was collected by Siebold in 1833. He was an eye specialist and doctor to King William 1. The naming was a gesture of gratitude acknowledging the leave of absence granted, that enabled him visit Japan and collect living specimens of Japanese plants,

250 of which survived the journey back to the Netherlands and were introduced to cultivation in Leiden Botanic Garden.

Perhaps it is time we had a revival of the clog as gardening footwear. In our embrace of modernity, shedding the clog, the footwear of the labourer was a preparatory riddance.

The creation of a fashion entails building a consciousness of the new. This necessitates an implied obsolescence and obituaries of the existing, which must be displaced in order for the new to succeed. I would like to acquire a pair of clogs, size 9 made of any of the listed woods to experience again the pleasure of such an ancient skill.



*In response to John Joe Costin's article  
by Rae McIntyre*

John Joe Costin's highly commendable article in the July issue struck several chords with me. Reading it I kept saying 'yes yes' in agreement because, in my thirty-two years of gardening, I've been beguiled into buying plants that are entirely unsuitable for the very cool, very damp, very windy climate we enjoy (?) here in the far north of Ireland. My knowledge of gardening in the early years was gleaned from books written by authors who gardened south of an arbitrary line running between the Severn and The Wash in England. Favourite writers were Christopher Lloyd (Sussex), Vita Sackville-West (Kent), Marjorie Fish (Somerset), Beth Chatto (Essex), Graham Stuart Thomas (Surrey) and Robin Lane Fox (Oxford). I was an avid reader of Hilliers' Manual of Trees and Shrubs, much of it compiled by Roy Lancaster, writing in Hampshire. As long as a plant could survive frost and preferred acid soil I made the mistaken assumption that it would succeed with me.

It was someone in Hilliers who set the record straight. I used to order plants from them because they ran a good, albeit expensive, mail order service: the horticultural equivalent of Harrods. Being greatly taken with their description of *Cornus florida* 'Cherokee Chief' I ordered it. This flowering dogwood has bracts of a beautiful deep rose-red. Other plants I had ordered arrived but a laconic comment on the invoice opposite this plant's name said, *Not suitable for the climate in N.I.* I was cross about this because I knew from my Hampshire relations that they'd had a harder winter than we had that year. Therefore I rang Hilliers and asked, indeed I demanded to know, what

was wrong with Northern Ireland's climate and was told that summers were not nearly hot enough here to ripen the wood in autumn so that plants would flower in spring. I was later told the same thing about *Albizia julibrissin* which apparently will withstand severe frost. It's a lovely thing with delicate mimosa-like leaves and fluffy pink flower heads.

To return to the dogwoods: I've had a love-hate relationship with them ever since. I've had several specimens of *Cornus alba* 'Elegantissima' over the years but I cannot for the life of me remember what happened to them. There is one in the garden at the moment that a friend grew from a cutting. I cannot remember what happened to *Cornus alba* 'Kesselringii' with almost black stems. It was in a twee arrangement in front of the white stemmed *Betula jacquemontii* and surrounded by vermilion primroses but that only lasted for one winter. *Cornus alternifolia* 'Argentea' has been here for two years and appears to be thriving but as I have just realised that it's from Eastern N. America, I now feel pessimistic.

*Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' has been here for at least twenty-five years and (touch wood) seems to be happy enough but then it's a native of Japan and China. It's like an upside-down wedding cake with the largest tiers at the top. This is because a woman used to plunder the garden regularly for foliage for flower arrangements especially when I wasn't around. She helped herself to all the lower branches of *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' for a very large church arrangement. I was absolutely livid, angrier than I've ever been in my life, and forbade her ever to take even a twig unless I cut it off myself. Those branches cut off lower down have never regenerated. The tree comes into leaf early, flowers abundantly in May and retains its leaves until well into autumn – sometimes late November. Its great flaw is that it suckers madly and throws up stems of plain green dogwood leaves. I tried to follow the advice of gardening gurus and pull these stems out but that's well-nigh impossible so I am continually cutting them off at the base with loppers.

I do not know from which dogwood species the cultivars 'Midwinter Fire' and 'Midwinter Beauty' arose but they are quite hopeless here. I was charmed by their glowing orange-red stems at Wisley one February a few years ago and, of course, had to have them. They're planted, as they are at Wisley, in a damp spot but do precisely nothing except produce small leaves in spring and then lose them in autumn. Yet Graham Stuart Thomas writing about 'Midwinter Fire' said it was wildly invasive in his Surrey garden. Mine have not grown an inch.

I have just noticed in 'Hilliers' Manual of Trees and Shrubs' that *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' commonly called 'Westonbirt Dogwood' has this description. "A less robust form with brilliant crimson winter shoots. There is very little of this plant now at Westonbirt".

There may be some change now because this information was from my mother's edition which was published in 1972, but I doubt it.

Another Eastern N. American plant that didn't do much here was *Ptelea trifoliata*. I bought it from Hilliers', who were willing to supply it, because its small insignificant yellowish flowers in June were supposed to be the most fragrant of any shrub. They may be but I never either saw or smelled any. Five redoubtable ladies, who made up the Hampshire Gardening Mafia, visited here one July. They noted the non-flowering of the shrub and all agreed that that was probably due to our climate. One of them suggested that I buy the 'Aurea' form and still have good foliage to make up for the lack of flowers. And scent. I didn't. Instead I dug out the shrub and gave it away when it promptly died on its new owner.

I agree with John Joe about the paucity of flowers on *Magnolia grandiflora*. Admittedly the few flowers I have seen have been attractive and pleasantly scented. The deciduous magnolias flower with such glorious abandon that I've never been tempted by an evergreen form. In any case I don't have adequate south wall space. Gardening writers often advise planting magnolias in a sheltered spot but it was found after the dreadful storms in the south of England in 1987 this wasn't necessary because magnolias were as storm resistant as tough sycamores, willows, Scots pines and yew.

John Joe is perfectly right about camellias when he says that the *williamsii* hybrids are superior to the *japonica* ones in our climate. The advice on camellia cultivation given by writers from the south of England is to grow them in shade, preferably facing north. Doing that with a *japonica* hybrid in our climate would possibly result in a flowerless plant. *Camellia* x *williamsii* was bred by J. C. Williams at Caerhays Castle in Cornwall for general planting in the British Isles. Admittedly their flower colours are limited to the full gamut of pink shades although 'Jury's Yellow' is palest creamy yellow and white. Burncoose Nursery in Cornwall lists 109 in their collection of *japonica* hybrids in their catalogue and they are very tempting. In contrast, Glendoick Nursery in Perthshire lists only the *williamsii* hybrids because they are most suitable for conditions in Scotland and other places in northern parts of these islands. I was once given a *japonica* hybrid 'Apollo' with glowing red – my favourite colour – flowers. It was in full bloom at the time but many years passed before that happened again and, even then, it has never flowered with the profusion that the three *williamsii* hybrids in the garden, 'St. Ewe', 'Mary Christian' and 'Brigadoon' do. It irritates me when I see serried ranks of *japonica* hybrids in garden centres. This usually happens in late February or March when people are weary of winter and yearn for a burst of colour in their gardens. The plants are fresh from tunnels in Holland or northern Italy and are covered in fat buds or unfurling flowers and buyers swoop on them.

They should come with a warning. THIS PLANT MAY NOT FLOWER AGAIN FOR MANY YEARS.

The 'English Roses' do not succeed here. These have been bred by David Austin to combine the best qualities of old roses with the long flowering period of floribundas and hybrid teas. Gardening magazines often have advertisements for these and they come in such glorious colours that I am strongly tempted. However I have never succeeded with any of them although I have to confess that growing roses here is very much a hit-or-miss affair. We have too much rain, too much wind and not nearly enough sunshine which roses love.

Admittedly some do perform very well in spite of the adverse conditions. For example, this year the noisette climber 'Mme Alfred Carriere' grew and flowered so abundantly that it pulled its supporting trellis off the wall. 'Leverkusen' farther along the same wall was sparse flowered and spindly and miserable. It was bred by Kordes in Germany to withstand hard continental winters and, presumably, hot summers so obviously hates our climate. It will soon be going to the great rose garden in the sky because I can't be bothered with wretched-looking roses. The American rose 'Golden Wings' will be joining it because it's also a disaster. It's supposed to stand up well to wind and rain but it obviously finds the wind and rain here too much of a bad thing. I gave it a prime position and prune it and feed it at the right times but over the past three months it has had the underwhelming total of ten blooms. Both it and 'Leverkusen' have pale yellow flowers so you may think that it's yellow bloomers that don't do well but 'Alister Stella Gray' another noisette climber, which has pale yellow flowers that fade to white, flowers continuously from early June until the frosts.

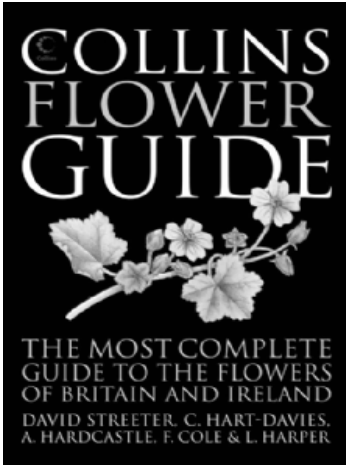
For the past twenty-five years I've had a *Pterocarya fraxinifolia* growing in the damp part of the stackyard. I bought it from a Co. Down nursery because it succeeds in moist soils, is perfectly hardy and can bear greenish catkins up to 50cm long in summer. It is commonly called a 'Wing Nut' and, as the name suggests, has leaves like an ash. It usually comes into leaf before the ash and I have seen them, in some years, zapped by spring frosts. They do recover. Sadly in all of its twenty-five years I have never seen one of its half-metre long catkins. There is a tree in Exbury Gardens in Hampshire which was festooned in them and I have come to the conclusion that this is because Hampshire has much better summers than we have. However *Pterocarya fraxinifolia* is a native of Caucasus and the western Caucasus has 47 inches (1200 millimetres) of rainfall which is exactly the same as the amount we have. There doesn't seem to be any explanation for lack of catkins.





## *Worth a Read by Paddy Tobin*

Recent weeks have seen me physically less active than usual and this gave extra time for reading so that now I have cleared my backlog of books waiting to be read and have a long list of books to report on for you in this issue.



Let me lead off with the *Collins Flower Guide* as it is the one I have most in my hands since receiving a copy. The first book I ever borrowed from my local library as a child was on Irish wildflowers and, though I found it rather tough reading, I persevered and finished it. My interest in wildflowers has continued over the many years since that first book borrowing but, to be perfectly honest, my choice of book did not improve greatly in the interim.

Many “identify-by-the-colour-of-the-flowers” type books have come and gone over the years and have served their purpose for a while but you will realise that these books are extremely limited in their usefulness. Recent years has seen me taking a greater interest in my local wildflowers with regular local outings to view and photograph them as well as wanderings further afield. This deeper interest made obvious the need for a better guide to the identification of the flowers encountered on my walks, as my walks now took me to different habitats, farmland, riverbank, seashore, mountain, marsh and the ever so available roadside.

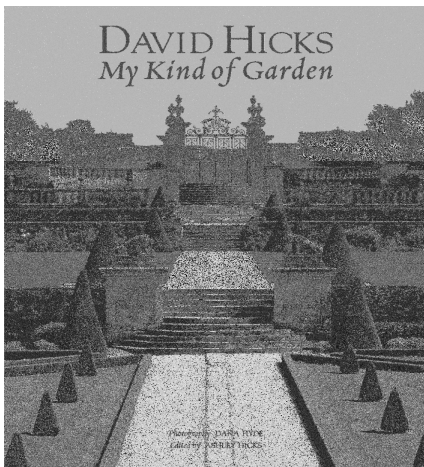
Collins publishers have been leaders in this type of book over many, many years and this latest from their presses continues the high standards they have always set. I have to hand a copy of the paperback issue and yet it is rather a hefty volume, hardly a pocket book but certainly suitable for use in the field and, given its very competitive price, it need not be treated in a particularly precious manner. Over 1,900 species are described in the book, an

extraordinary range for a single volume but so arranged that all are easily and logically accessible and not at all daunting to use.

The flowers are arranged by family with their key features highlighted for quick and accurate identification. You will realise that I am an amateur in these matters and I did find it took a little self-discipline to settle to the use of the keys in the book. Initial keys guide the reader to place a plant into its botanical family where one can then distinguish the specimen from its relatives and arrive at a positive identification and it is this positive identification which is most reassuring. One is led through a series of couplets, either/or questions, each narrowing down the possibilities until one arrives at a certain identification for the plant in hand. I have been using the book for about a month and am absolutely delighted with this new assistant in my hobby. If you have an interest in our native wildflowers and want to make a step up from the picture book identification of your findings then I can highly recommend this book to you. It is one which will be to hand again and again and each journey through the guiding couplets provides an education and learning opportunity which continuously and pleasantly adds to your botanical knowledge. This book is also available in hardback and large format.

*[Collins Flower Guide, The Most Complete Guide to the Flowers of Britain and Ireland, David Streeter, illustrated by C. Hart-Davies, A. Hardcastle, F. Cole & L. Harper, HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2010, Paperback, 704pp, £19.99, ISBN978-0-00-718389-0,]*

I have three books to hand, each by authors describing their own garden design work, one based in England, another in Sweden and a third in California. Books



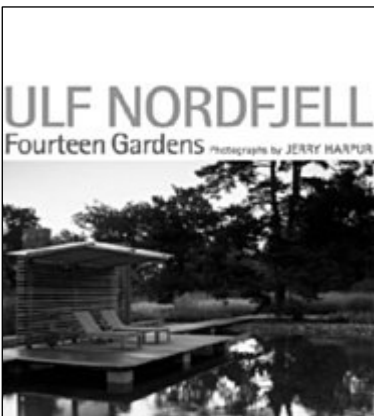
of this kind run the risk of being boring. It is especially an Irish trait to be impatient of anyone speaking or writing in a boastful manner but it would certainly be counter-productive and unlikely for a garden designer to speak modestly of his/her talent. Of necessity, then, these authors tell us of their own creations in a positive upbeat manner. I find this style acceptable when the work described deserves the praises loaded upon it but nauseating when it does not and books of this ilk can range from acceptable and entertaining to downright off-putting.

The last David Hicks had a most

successful career in interior design, designing for the Prince of Wales among others, before he devoted more and more of his time to the design of gardens. His style is exuberant, opinionated and certain of his own greatness. It is bombastic and without flinching in the certainty of his own opinions but, most of all, he has written a highly entertaining, amusing and wonderful book where he gives his praise for the designs and gardens of others in as generous and fulsome a manner as he does for his own work. Fortunately, his work deserves all the praise he lavishes upon it. If you are a lover of clean, clear design, strong lines and simple planting, then you will spend many hours enjoying **“My Kind of Garden”**. He had failed to finish the book before his death and his son completed it afterwards. After a note on his “gardening childhood” he lists, illustrates and describes briefly the gardens which influenced and inspired him. There is an interlude in the book where he tells us of his own garden, “The Grove”, before he continues to tell us of “Gardens I Admire”. We are told of his own work as a garden designer with examples from England and abroad before finishing with notes on “Furnishing a Garden”. The text is crisp, intelligent, opinionated and highly entertaining and his design work simply a wonder to admire.

*[David Hicks, My Kind of Garden, edited by Ashley Hicks, Garden Art Press, Suffolk, first published 1999, reprinted 2000, 2004, paperback 2003, this edition 2010, HB, 272pp, £29.50, ISBN13: 9781870673594]*

Ulf Nordfjell is a Swedish garden designer who designed and built two gardens for the Chelsea Flower Show and was awarded a Gold Medal on both occasions, 2007 and 2009, while his 2009 garden was also recognised as the Best in Show. I can still picture his 2007 garden, “A Tribute to Linnaeus”. This book, **“Ulf Nordfjell, Fourteen Gardens”** describes these gardens along with twelve other of his creations, the text accompanied by the outstanding photographs of Jerry Harpur. His gardens at the Chelsea Flower Show have been described as a dynamic blend of Swedish modernism and English romanticism and some of his commissioned designs follow along these lines also where Swedish granite, steel and timber give his gardens structure while his masterful use of perennials, grass and bulbs dress the compositions.



In others he shows a deep engagement with the surrounding landscape and his efforts are at settling a house into its setting in the most amenable and unobtrusive manner possible. Water plays a large part in his designs as does the artful use of lighting but it is the meticulous attention to planning, execution and detail which are most obvious. His gardens are a delight, the text gives a clear insight into his thoughts, designs and work and the photographs illustrate all to perfection. Actually, the book is quite on a par with the gardens, simple, thoughtful and, above all, beautiful.

*[Ulf Nordfjell, Fourteen Gardens, Ulf Nordfjell, Frances Lincoln, London, 2010, HB, 197pp, £30, ISBN: 978-0-7112-3109-2]*

The third book to hand, by a garden designer, is **“Power of Gardens”** by



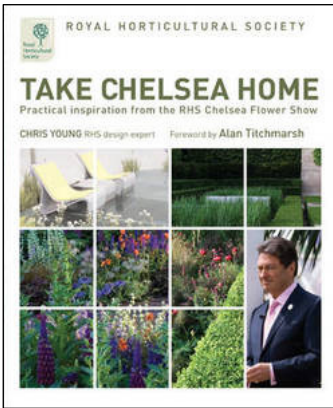
Nancy Goslee Power who took a similar career path to David Hicks, moving from interior design, in New York, to garden design in California.

Among her inspiration and influences she cites Luis Barragen, Burle Marx, Italian Gardens, The Alhambra, Islamic gardens in general and the use of native plants. This has all lead to a style which presents a contrast of ordered form and exuberant growth and which she describes as “studied casual”. It might best

be described as “homey” and the author’s lavish praise for her work might be considered somewhat exuberant and undeserved.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to view gardens from the other side of the globe and, if one can put aside the irritating self-praise, there is much to enjoy in this book. The images are excellent and portray a different gardening culture very well.

*[The Power of Gardens, Nancy Goslee Power, Stewart, Tabori & Chang, New York, 2009, HB, 240pp, £35, ISBN 978-1-58479-757-9]*

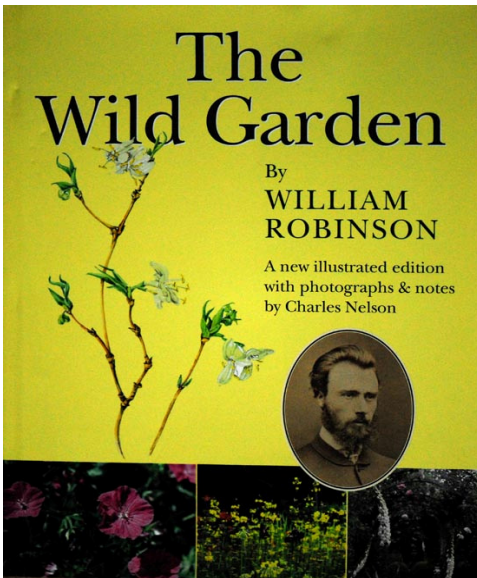


The author, Chris Young, is deputy editor of the RHS monthly magazine, *The Garden*, and former editor of *Garden Design Journal*, the publication of the Society of Garden Designers and this background has heavily influenced the design, layout and style of this book, "**Take Chelsea Home**". The book is a collection of snippets from past Chelsea Flower Shows, grouped together in a rather loose fashion under various headings but fails to organise the material in a manner which makes it accessible or appealing to any but the fluttering reader. It is essentially a large magazine and, while it may have sold well at the last Chelsea Flower Show,

its time is now gone. Better to visit the show itself if you want inspiration for your gardening.

[Take Chelsea Home, Chris Young, Mitchell Beazley, London, 2010, HB, 224pp, £17.99, ISBN 978 1 84533 538 0]

William Robinson first published *The Wild Garden* in 1870. It was only one of many, many books which William Robinson issued over a long career but it is regarded as the most influential in the history of gardening. He wrote in reaction to the prevailing gardening styles and practices of the time and urged an approach which used a selection of plants which were capable of establishing themselves in the garden and performing year on year in the manner in which plants perform naturally in the wild.



A large portion of *The Wild Garden* consists of lists of plants, hardy exotic plants which were suitable for our gardens and native plants suitable for growing in the garden.

For present-day gardeners these lists might have historic interest but hardly have an immediate relevance and can make for tedious reading. Such lists of plants for our gardens have been provided by many gardening writers over the years. Several books by Beth Chatto come to mind and I'm sure many of you have read and used Graham Stuart Thomas' *Perennial Garden Plants* to guide your plantings. (By the way, this book is dedicated to G. S. Thomas.)

So, what is the importance of William Robinson's *The Wild Garden*? It is simply that he was first to lead the way to this style of gardening that we here in Ireland have adopted with enthusiasm and he did so in an era when his suggestions ran contrary to the accepted practice and wisdom of the gardening community. It really was an incredible break with the traditions of the day and it is only with an understanding of this background that one can appreciate the greatness and importance of William Robinson's thoughts and writings.

Charles Nelson has taken the original edition of *The Wild Garden* and added comment, illustrations of plants and gardens and further plant lists but most importantly an introductory essay outlining William Robinson's early life and the course that life took to lead him to publishing the most influential books in horticultural writing. Thorough research is always a feature of Charles Nelson's writing and in this essay while presenting the results of his research he also pointedly sweeps away many inaccuracies presented in previous accounts of William Robinson's life.

It is wonderful and worthwhile to have the original edition of *The Wild Garden* available to the many people who appreciate its importance and I believe no one is better qualified or suited to add comment to it than Charles Nelson. For I.G.P.S. members, in particular, this is a book you simply must have.

[*The Wild Garden, William Robinson/Charles Nelson, The Collins Press, Cork, 2010, HB, 205pp, €29.99, ISBN 978 1 84889 035 0*]

- ***The Wild Flowers of Ireland:*** When I saw that Gill and MacMillan were about to publish a book on Irish wild flowers by Declan Doogue with photographs by Carsten Krieger I was immediately excited. Here, I reckoned were two of my interests, wild flowers and photography, served up in one book by two experts in their fields. Let me tell you immediately that this book did not disappoint me and it will not disappoint you. It is visually wonderful with a selection of photographs which Carsten has taken over the past number of years

# THE WILD FLOWERS OF IRELAND



CARSTEN KRIEGER AND DECLAN DOOGUE

and a text which distils the information and wisdom which Declan Doogue has accumulated during a lifetime of interest in botany.

After a few short introductory chapters the author moves into the body of the book, a series of chapters where the 300 wild flowers presented are arranged by habitat, from lawns and parks, old ruins, urban waste ground, road side verges, sand dunes, canals, woodland, rivers, lakes and bogs, to the rare environment of the Burren.

Declan Doogue's text is simply outstanding and if you are one of those people who has always had a general interest in wild flowers you

will certainly both enjoy this book and learn from it. He constantly explains the reasons why each plant grows where it grows, why one environment leads to a particular plant community rather than another and generously peppers the text with interesting social and historic comment. Carsten Krieger's photography adds a beauty to the book which perfectly complements the text and readers with an interest in photography will enjoy this aspect of the book especially.

*[The Wild Flowers of Ireland, Declan Doogue and Carsten Krieger, Gill & MacMillan, Dublin, 2010, HB, 312pp, €29.99, ISBN 978 07171 46611]*

**There is a lecture 'Wild Flowers of Ireland' by Dr Declan Doogue in the Education and Visitor Centre National Botanic Gardens Glasnevin, on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> October at 3pm.**

**There is no admission charge.**

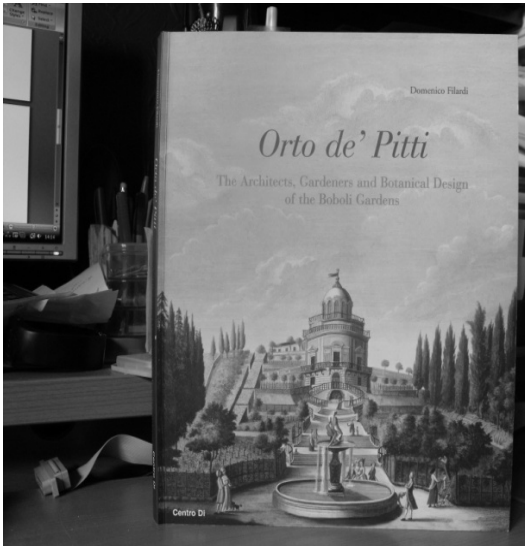




# *Orto de' Pitti The Architects, Gardeners and Botanical Design of the Boboli Gardens*

## *A review by Patrick Quigley*

There can be few garden lovers who visit Florence who have not paid a visit to the Boboli Gardens, stretching out behind the Pitti Palace. This book is a history of those gardens with an emphasis on the makers of the garden – not just the Medici owners, but the architects and gardeners.



The book traces the development of the site under generations of the Medici family. The initial chapter provides a history from the earliest records of agricultural use of the hillside site in the High Middle Ages by a Longobard, Bobilo whose name appears on the title deeds of the land, the later purchase of the land by the Pitti family and then the purchase and expansion of the grounds by the Medici.

Subsequent chapters consider the planting arrangements and agricultural use for this was not just an ornamental garden but an area of high productivity for fruit, vegetables and wine. The author notes '*plums, cherries, artichokes, spinach, beet greens, chickpeas and different types of salad greens*' from the garden being sold to the greengrocer on the Ponte Vecchio. One chapter is devoted to the cultivation of Citrus trees, another to the Groves and Mazes and the final one to the Flower Gardens. A separate chapter deals specifically with the role of the gardeners, their work and the tools they used.

Clearly the author has thoroughly researched his subject – the Bibliography runs to three pages – and provides an almost overwhelming wealth of detail. There are many illustrations from a range of sources to help illuminate the text,

which suffers a little in its fluidity perhaps from the translation into English, or possibly from the urge to include so much fine detail - there is a tendency to quote extensively from accounts listing purchases for the gardens.

We tend to think of the great Italian gardens in terms of their architecture and layout; the Boboli gardens have always had strong horticultural leaning where the plants were of great importance too. The author notes Grand Duke Cosimo I taking pleasure in pruning and grafting trees with his own hands; Francesco I wanting 'millions' of mulberries to be planted in 1576, or Ferdinando II importing the Iroko from Africa. It is nice to read of a mutually respectful relationship between the Grand Dukes and their Head gardeners and of how the gardeners were sent on study trips abroad to learn of the latest techniques for growing new and exotic plants.

Sadly there is also reference made to later 19<sup>th</sup> century developments when the respect for the gardeners seems to have diminished so that *'the cultivation and maintenance of the gardens shall be governed and most carefully monitored by the department book-keepers.'*

A useful Chronology of Events (1341 – 1881) at the back of the book not only gives the usual information we would expect to see, e.g. 154. *Eleonora di Toledo, wife of Cosimo I de' Medici acquires and re-establishes the estate from the many parcels the Pitti family owned...* but also includes such snippets as *'1792. Old and feeble workers are dismissed; only essential positions such as that of head gardener are maintained....'*

I would suggest that the book is of more value to those who have already been to the Boboli; the references to the various areas could be confusing and hard to imagine, even with the many maps and pictures provided, unless one has a memory of how the parts relate to each other on the ground and I think this can only be achieved by visiting the gardens in person. It is many years since I was last there, but even such a distant memory was useful in appreciating the areas being discussed.

The level of detail does not always make for an easy read so perhaps the book is not aimed at the general reader. However, for anyone with a keen interest in the history of gardens, and in particular the great Italian Gardens, this book provides a wealth of information and helps set the various stages of European garden development in the context of one garden. For me, it has certainly sown the seeds for a long overdue visit to this historic garden.

[Orto de' Pitti, The Architects, Gardeners and Botanical Design of the Boboli Gardens, Domenico Filardi, Centro Di, Firenze, 2007. Soft Cover. 143pp. ISBN 978-88-7038-459-8]



## Regional Reports

### Northern

#### Garden Visit 18th May 2010

When Eunice and Noel Gillespie took over their small suburban garden in Hillsborough 4 years ago they inherited an overgrown patio and a bank of dense leyland conifers. Eunice's new design had low maintenance as a priority and the following 3-years they both developed a garden packed with interesting features and plants.

The conifer bank has been replanted with shrubs and small trees - Rhododendrons, Magnolia, Camellias, Acers, Drimys and *Callistemon salignus* - ensuring the succession of colour through the seasons. Leading from the bank towards the patio is a well-clothed pergola of clematis and roses - many varieties are cuttings given by friends and include *Clematis macropetala* 'Blue Bird', *C. alpina* 'Constance', *Rosa* 'Gertrude Jekyll', *R.* 'Sympathie' and *R.* 'Zépherine Drouhin'. The patio is bordered by an alpine area and raised beds of low growing shrubs, bulbs and perennials.

Moving into the front terrace and garden a path winds through choice specimens of small trees and shrubs - including *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, *Cornus kousa*, *Eucryphia x nymansensis* 'Nymansay' and *E. cordifolia*, *Nothofagus dombeyi*, and particularly fine specimens of *Acer pensylvanicum* and *A.* 'Osakazuki' - and the whole of this area is barked for easy maintenance. Easy maintenance is again of prime importance in the choice of non-invasive plants for the perennial border with hellebores, penstemons, doronicuns, astilbe and agapanthus and structure is sustained in winter with *Viburnum tinus* 'Eve Price', *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Pallida' and *Yucca*.

Although this is a relatively young garden it has the appearance of maturity. It is certainly lovingly tended with Noel doing the planting and acknowledging Eunice's considerable weeding skills. We had a lovely evening plant gazing and sharing gardening anecdotes with Noel and Eunice and an unexpected treat of supper at Aleen Herdman's house just around the corner. Thanks to all three for opening garden and home and for making us all feel so welcome.

Yvonne Penpraze

## Garden Visit 30th June 2010

On the 30<sup>th</sup> June our committee member Paul Boyce and his wife Roz opened their garden to the Northern Group. They live in Annahilt and have been gardening there for about 15 years.

About 25 of us gathered on a dull June evening. We started off with a glass of wine while Paul spoke a little about the garden which is called Birchfield. The garden is divided into different sections with a great many beautiful birch trees, many with peeling bark which were planted around the perimeter.

Some examples of trees planted were *Betula utilis* 'Jermyns', *Betula albosinensis* 'Fascination', *Betula albosinensis* var *septentrionalis*, *Betula ermanii*, *Betula papyrifera* var. *kenaica*.

As you walk around the perimeter, touching the bark of the trees, you are led down to a maple grove and some interesting bamboos. To the right of this area is a pond and a Japanese style tea-house where you can stand and contemplate other parts of the garden.

Following on from the tea - house and the pond is a pine walk which leads into another corner of the garden. This area now opens into a meadow with wild flowers and grasses and at the bottom of which is an orchard which had lots of small apples already forming.

We are now round to the front of the house where there is a small gravel garden and a terrace leading out from the conservatory. Here there are lots of pots of blue Agapanthus and black Aeoniums.

Heading to the back of the house there is a herbaceous border and some herbs before coming to a patio area at the back of the house. Here there are Acers planted and interesting herbaceous plants. At the back of the patio are separate raised beds for vegetables all growing well, followed by a grassy area which leads up to a viewpoint over the Dromara Hills.

An interesting, mysterious garden which we all enjoyed visiting.

Hilary Glenn

## **Edinburg Garden Visits, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> July 2010.**

### **Binny Plant Nursery**

On Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup> July the coach arrived 10.30am sharp at the Murrayfield Hotel. A very enthusiastic group of IGPS members hopped on board looking forward to a busy day ahead.

First stop Binny Plant Nursery. The Nursery is located at Ecclemachan West Lothian and sits on a 5 acre kitchen and walled garden. This specialist nursery is south facing and grows over 2500 species and cultivars. There is a good cross section of Trees, Shrubs and Ferns as well as herbaceous plants. The atmosphere is very relaxed with only the sound of birds.

We were welcomed by the owner Billy and his merry bunch of rescue dogs, and then proceeded to wander this amazing nursery at our leisure. Just a little too late to see the National Collection of Peonies flowering, the largest collection in UK, but we were not disappointed with the Hellebores, Meconopsis and Rodgersia.

We enjoyed a welcome cup of coffee and biscuits and made a donation to Billy's local dog home. Then it was decision time and before long trolleys were being wheeled back to the coach and questions like "how am I going to get this on Easy Jet?" What a wonderful experience to start the day in a very beautiful landscaped setting.

Roz and Victor Henry

### **New Hopetoun Gardens**

This was the venue for our second visit on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> July. Owned and run by Dougal Philip and Lesley Watson, this is a very large commercial enterprise. Built around "The Scottish Garden" there are many different sections and focal points - an alpine bank, a potager, a shady and dry border, a sensuous retreat, a "Scottish Throne", the "Chelsea Bench" etc. All have their own story to tell and specimens of the plants used are for sale.

An "Avant - Gardens Festival" has become a feature in the last few years. Six winning display gardens are created annually and are on display from April to October. The 2010 theme is "Treasure". The six winning gardens had been designed to a brief - 4m x 4m, 25% of the space must be plants. It must contain a seat and be practical enough to last six months. Visitors are invited to vote for

their favourite garden each season. My favourite was “Sunken Treasure” designed by Maxine Cadzow.

Among the huge amount of plants and “lifestyle” items for sale I was glad to see some native plants, a good selection of seeds, some excellent free leaflets from the RHS and the Horticultural Trades Association as well as some “Designer Collection” leaflets produced by Hopetoun Gardens. I was also glad to see that they provide a recycling service for unwanted plastic pots and trays.

The Orangery tearoom, although very busy was more than adequate for a quick lunch before exploration and consumerism could be attempted. Well worth a visit!

[www.newhopetoungardens.co.uk](http://www.newhopetoungardens.co.uk) for further information.

Mary Bradshaw.

## **Little Sparta**

Yvonne found our reliable driver after a Haggis and Beer lunch which prepared [many of] us for the gentle climb to Ian Hamilton Finlay’s Little Sparta. This garden is in the Pentland Hills, just south of Edinburgh. It was started by Finlay in 1966, when there was a single ash tree; it is hard to believe the luxuriant growth which surrounds the modest house today.

This is not a plantsman’s garden. Rather, Finlay sought to create a unique space that combined ideas and poetry with the usual garden elements of plants, earth, stone and water. There are 260 artworks scattered throughout the garden; modest/grandiose, humorous/serious, personal/political. All are remarkable, some unforgettable, for example the stone grenades replacing conventional urns on top of brick pillars. It was impossible to absorb everything in a short visit, and the garden is constantly stimulating.

The Temple Pool Garden is the most formal area. A small pond is surrounded by modest farm buildings which have their status elevated by dedication as temples, and decoration with gilded inscriptions and classical columns. Occasional roof tiles are also picked out with gilding. Apollo is the pervading deity, and he appears throughout. But beware! His temple is dedicated not only to his muses and music, but also to his missiles. A small statue in a niche has him brandishing a machine gun!

At the other end of the formal scale, the Lochan Eck Garden is a large pool, surrounded by artlessly tended wild flowers – iris, meadowsweet. Finlay made

a virtue of using the plant material that was to hand in an imaginative way. But the military is also nearby; a smooth slate monolith rises mysteriously at the lochan's edge – the conning tower of a submarine, a nuclear sail. And the political is never far away. The eleven blocks of yellow stone, carved with Saint-Just's aphorism "The Present Order is the Disorder of the Future", are the largest art-work in the garden and probably its most celebrated.

Water is everywhere in the garden, pools, ponds, lochans. It is channelled through small streams and aqueducts, and crossed by stepping stones and bridges. The bridges and stones are inscribed with the names of painters, or single words, or short definitions. Sometimes the meaning is obscure, sometimes evident, but the effect is to make one stop and ponder and take a second look.

The connections continue throughout. Apollo reappears in another celebrated icon of the garden, a massive gilded head with Apollon Terroriste incised on its brow, one more link to the French revolution. However he seemed to me to be contemplating his earlier frolic with Daphne, recorded in two "life-size" figures, [if gods are life-size] running through a glade. These are cut from sheet metal, the red hot Apollo chasing the green Daphne, who is soon to be transformed into laurel.

But the garden is not all about gods and revolutionaries. Andrena found a family of voles at the foot of a wall in the English Parkland. And as we gathered at the front of the house before leaving, we followed the sign to the Siegfried Line – for hanging up the Finlay washing. The family had two pet tortoises that aggressively invaded the garden, and are commemorated by being cast in fibreglass as Panzer Leaders.

Finlay died in 2006, and it is difficult to think of another garden where the spirit of its creator is so pervasive.

Paul Smith

## **Shepherd House**

Our garden visit on Sunday morning brought us east of Edinburgh to the little village of Inveresk, near Musselburgh. The garden of Shepherd House is a one acre walled garden situated at the intersection of two roads, on the site of a Roman camp. It is the home of Sir Charles and Lady Ann Fraser. They have lived here for 50 years and the garden has evolved from a children's playground and football pitch to its present formation. Both Charles and Ann have gardening roots and have passed their enthusiasm on to the next generation. In Charles' words "Gardening is a genetic disease." The combination of



Charles' love of ordered design and Ann's emphasis on colour and plant combinations is clearly a winning formula.

After our visit to the previous garden we were discussing whether a garden could be classed a work of art. The garden of Sir Charles and Lady Anne Fraser left me in no doubt that it could. It has all the elements of a good painting - composition, perspective, colour and texture, interest and focus. This is not surprising when the owner is a very accomplished botanical artist. Ann draws inspiration from the flowers she grows and her paintings are exquisite. Ann is also a keen galanthophile and the garden contains 52 varieties of snowdrop as well as a wide variety of tulips and iris.

In terms of composition, the garden is divided into areas in proportion to each other and each with its own identity but flowing effortlessly from one to the other. We entered the garden through a side door, into the potager. Here geometric beds bordered with woven willow overflow with vegetables, herbs and flowers. The greenhouse and a cute little potting shed with a fern roof are sited here. An opening in the tall yew hedge, shaped like a keyhole, allows you a glimpse of the flower garden. Through the gate, a formal parterre features neatly clipped box hedges, brick and stone paths, sinks filled with alpinas, mosaics of different coloured stones, depicting tulips. Another unusual feature are the standard gooseberry bushes at each corner.

Originally a bank but now a beautiful stone wall separates this area from the lawn and borders. Steps lead up to a rectangular shaped pond (complete with fountain and statue of a girl washing her hair). A shallow stone rill, lined on either side with borders of Nepeta and Allium and arched with roses and wisteria leads the eye up the garden to a large stone fountain at the top. Grass paths open out to other areas of interest - along the west wall a bulb meadow, and to the left alcoves with topiary figures. Another lovely feature of the garden is the line of painted blue posts, wired for espalied fruit bushes. Every nook and cranny is filled with something of interest and beauty or something quirky to make you stop and smile - the bird box in the shape of a hat, the hen and rooster in the meadow, a circular stone built seat. I could go on and on. Even the compost area has had the 'Fraser' treatment - painted vintage tools hang above the compost heaps, and a slate sign leaning against the wall between two striking hens (painted black and red for maximum impact) reads 'A man's compost heap is his castle'. I'm guessing this is the work of Charles who entertained us with his wry sense of humour while Ann provided much appreciated coffee and shortbread.

What elevates this garden to the top of its class is the strong design and structure, layered with abundant and clever planting and then completed with the utmost attention to detail. I thought this garden was outstanding. There was so much of interest (I couldn't possibly mention everything here) and not

enough time to take it all in. I do hope I get the opportunity to visit again. A thoroughly inspiring couple and an exceptional garden!

Shirley Snook

## **Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh**

A garden tour of Edinburgh would not have been complete without a visit to this distinguished botanic garden; this was to be our final visit of the weekend. The garden began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a physic garden growing medicinal plants which were used to teach the doctors how to recognise plants used in medicines. Some of these doctors became plant hunters on long sea journeys as ships' doctors. The garden gradually grew in size, changed sites and evolved to the present 75 acres.

The Royal Botanic Garden has three other sites in Scotland, each with its own soil, topography, and climatic conditions which allows the growing of plants from all over the world. We began our guided tour by walking through a 103 year old beech hedge, and in due course we felt that we had journeyed through the forests of China, the rocky slopes of the Alps, alpine regions of Afghanistan and finally the tropical jungles of South America in the Palm House.

It would be impossible to mention the number of plant species which were of particular interest, but a few that caught my attention were the miniature elm found on an island in Japan, the tropical rhododendrons in the Palm House, rare ferns in the Alpine garden and plants in the Alpine House which survive on drips of water under rock out crops in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the tour a number of plants distinguished by a yellow dot were being monitored for first flowering each year as indicators of climate change. The tour also included a recent garden and shell house dedicated to the Queen Mother. The planting here represented the various countries she had visited and also featured plants with royal names e.g. *Rosa* 'Golden Jubilee'. The gardens were opened by the Queen in July 2010.

We viewed vegetable plots where students had to grow peas, broad beans, carrots, onions and lettuce in their individual plots and then had the freedom to use any plant to any design they wished to complete the plot. There were some interesting results. Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is a place for everyone to enjoy all year round. There are walks, talks, education courses, family and cultural events. In addition to the scientific work RBGE works with local people in more than forty countries worldwide developing their botanical skills in order to conserve and make best use of their plant resources. This can be studied further in the wonderful new modern J Hope Gateway entrance which was also opened this year by the Queen.

At the end our most interesting and informative tour, which lasted an hour and a half, we had only experienced a small section of the “Botanics”. A return visit is a must. “Without plants there would be no life on earth”

Lorna Greenwood

## **The Head Gardener’s Tour of Rowallane 21<sup>st</sup> August**

On a sunny August afternoon twenty or so of the Northern group and a handful of members from Dublin gathered at Rowallane Garden for a ‘behind the scenes’ tour led by Averil Milligan, Head Gardener.

Averil’s announcement that she was taking us to less well known areas of the garden sounded just what we were after: an insight into the history of the gardens, the tactics of management of an historic garden, provenance of plants, horticultural secrets underpinning the development of the gardens by the succession of head gardeners.

We were not disappointed. Averil spent three hours showing us every aspect of her work. The meticulous attention to history and the original ethos of the gardens, her plans for maintenance and development and improvement, the critical balance between rescue work, ground maintenance and satisfaction of the public’s expectation of the garden, plus incorporation of up-to-the-minute horticultural techniques to facilitate all of these. We also had a glimpse of the invaluable artefacts from the past that provide a direct link to how the Reverend John Moore and later his nephew Hugh Armitage Moore envisaged and created the garden begun over one hundred and fifty years ago.

We began by walking down the main avenue towards the gate, a part of the garden that most visitors drive through without seeing. As Averil pointed out this is an important part of the plan, and gives an insight into the inventiveness of the Rev Moore, the horseshoe seat of local stone that delivers a vista over the surrounding farmland, a good example of the concept of the borrowed landscape, and the iconic cairns of river-washed granite hauled by horse from the Mourne.

One of Averil’s prime concerns when she took over the gardens was to work on conservation of the heritage rhododendron collection. Importantly, an identification programme is underway, with solid backing from central funding of the National Trust. The conservation approach is multi-pronged; scrub clearance going hand in hand with a programme of air-layering and micropropagation techniques, especially relevant to prime specimens that are nearing the end of their life span and need to have their genetic material conserved and perpetuated. We saw some of the recent remedial work where several large-leaved species were being uncovered and where one ailing

specimen was living out its last years, a sad but inevitable process softened by the knowledge that the Head Gardener was taking steps to perpetuate its genes for the future. Balancing the often opposing needs for clearance, shelter and access to the public is a skill that we could see was not lacking in Averil's sensitive approach. It is specifically the rough-barked rhododendrons that suit the technique of cleaning up and mulching, the subsequent production of new basal shoots enabling hard pruning to create rejuvenated specimens. The smooth-barked species are not amenable to chainsaw or pruning knife, and it is here that propagation techniques are key, especially air-layering. The vast amount of remedial work entails juggling of time; such tasks have to be fitted in when extra labour is available.

We continued our walk up past the house to the Wall Garden, resplendent in shades of blue: *Agapanthus*, *Geranium wallichianum* 'Buxton's Variety', *Gentiana asclepiadea* and much more taking the place of the fruit and vegetables that would have been there in Armitage-Moore's day. Interestingly a small herb and vegetable garden has recently found a place here, some of its produce evident in the café menu. We stopped to admire a *Schizophragma integrifolia* its cream bracts in pristine condition on the South-facing wall. This section of the stable border is yet another undergoing renewal, begun by one of the careership students, renovation continuing as plants became available. A recent planting of *Echium candicans* was lost in the past bad winter offset by a young *Polylepis australis* (one of Armitage Moore's plants), a gift from Logan Botanic Gardens, was thriving.

We moved through the archway clothed in *Schizanthus rubrifolia* with strings of ripening berries and *Kiringeshoma* still to come, to the Outer Walled Garden which was formerly Hugh Armitage Moore's private nursery area. It is here that the lace-cap hydrangea collection is now being nurtured. The soil here is variable with distinct areas of dry sandy, boggy and good loam so planting must take this into account. Added to that there can be considerable rabbit damage both here and elsewhere in the gardens.

The young specimen *Davidia involucrata* planted in the lawn here had been propagated from an original, now gone, and already it has presence although it could be some twenty years before the flowers and hallmark bracts are seen, yet another instance of the long view necessary in an historic garden. Additional species of hydrangea are to be seen here, *H. villosa* dark group and *H. sargentiana*, together with the curious *Helwingia japonica* and a fine specimen of *Eucryphia x nymansensis* 'Nymansay'.

Moving across to the Spring Ground, we admired the fine *Acer griseum* and took a detour to see the now famous Goathorn tree *Carrierea calycina* that made headline news as it flowered this year for the first time in its 90-plus years. Only two specimens are known in Ireland from the original collection by

Ernest Wilson, this and one in Birr Castle demesne. We gathered that the one in Birr is female, and as stamens were evident on the flowers of the Rowallane tree perhaps in the future we might have some interesting developments? More recently the species has been re-introduced from China so it could become more familiar to gardeners.

We scrunched through fall-out from the Eucalyptus trees that regularly has to be cleared away from paths by garden staff, to see another candidate for propagation, *Acer rubescens*. Honey fungus was the main problem in this case and a limb had recently to be removed. Although a female, this bears no seed as there is no longer a male to pollinate it as happened in the past. Vegetative propagation is required and for this samples will be sent to Knightshayes for expert grafting.

Passing next through the Hospital (where sick calves, not plants, were formerly held) we looked at another acer, *A. forrestii* and paid our respects to the remarkable *Davidia involucrata*, from the same purchase as the original in the outer walled garden, now gone, and a champion *Paulownia tomentosa* which as insurance has a young one planted below, to take over when required, the original now becoming moribund.

In the Old Wood we viewed the scene of further essential developments, funded, as several of the innovations have been, by the Ulster Garden Scheme: plans for a shed to house tools and materials needed for maintenance of the rock garden, saving staff much trekking back and forth. One of the many challenges in this area is access for machinery for such things like stump removal. The Rock Garden was one of two areas that Averil decided to tackle early on in her tenure (the other being the Outer Walled Garden.) Her assessment of the challenges involved in just this one area spoke volumes of her painstaking approach and there was much evidence of success, while the good work continues. The central area replanted in 2006 is now well established in spite of the constant threat from rabbits. By now we were wondering if Averil ever got any sleep at night, so many and varied and urgent were the problems but she seems to thrive on challenge.

Another successful reintroduction is the covetable *Boenninghausenia albiflora*, a neat globe of pretty leaves like rue (it belongs to the Rutaceae) and small white flowers in late summer, and which Hugh Armitage Moore apparently teamed with *Gentiana sino-ornata*. I'm sure it won't be long before this partnership of which the former owner was very proud, will be on display once again. A large *Eucryphia* casting too much shade on parts of the rockery has been much reduced and is successfully regenerating. This is a popular part of the rockery with wonderful stands of *Meconopsis* and candelabra *Primula* in spring. Our route back to the stable block took us past meadow grass with a

superb blue haze of devil's bit scabious, just one part of the grassland management instigated by Mike Snowden, in his time as Head Gardener.

In the traditional potting-shed against a backdrop of shelves of clay pots and seed-pods and sieves, it was demonstrated that the staff are *au fait* with modern horticultural techniques including use of mycorrhiza, air pots and water storage granules used in conjunction with updated planting techniques. Our tour was becoming an advanced horticultural workshop and we drank it all in avidly.

In the nursery we were shown the quarantine area and heard Averil's plans for further developments to reduce risk of importation of disease, notably *Phytophthora ramorum* (sudden oak death). Rhododendrons are no longer bought in, indeed with the upgraded propagation programme there is no need to do this, thus reducing the risk. We felt that the garden was indeed in the best hands to combat such dangers that are all too prevalent and the care and consideration that is taken before any plant is removed or pruned was evident. Ongoing projects include moving on selected rhododendrons, both potted and open ground, out of the nursery to the gardens. One technique proving useful is the use of a PVA glue-based spray on leaves to seal the stomata thus reducing transpiration during the establishment period.

In the Bothy we had a chance to view selected old photographs, garden receipts and other archive material, for which we are indebted to a previous head gardener's awareness and also the recent Parklands Consortium Report which has gathered together much material and ideas for the future of the garden. It was touching to see a photograph of Hugh Armitage Moore and his wife Jane seated in the walled garden that we tend to forget was their private home. We felt they'd be pleased at how their garden has been maintained and developed down the years, at the dedication of the young Head Gardener and her staff, and at the pleasure their demesne has given and continues to give to so many.

Barbara Pilcher

### **News from the Northern Group Committee**

**The Northern Group Committee are pleased to announce that Yvonne Penpraze has taken on the Chairmanship of the Northern Group, and Roz & Victor Henry are joining the Group as committee members. We wish them well.**

## LEINSTER

### Summer Lunch Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> June

The annual Leinster Summer Lunch organised by Ricky Shannon was in every respect a wonderful occasion. The food was excellent, the weather warm and sunny and the venue the new garden of Garden Architect Angela Jupe. The garden is in Shinrone Co. Offaly on the Birr Road approximately seven miles from the town of Birr.

The romance of finding an abandoned garden and restoring its magic is something gardeners dream about but seldom have an opportunity to execute. When Bellefield House, a Georgian farmhouse first constructed around 1795, was purchased by Angela in 2004 the 2 acre walled garden, built in Tipperary sandstone and brick had lain neglected for 30 years. Having spent over 2 years clearing the wilderness of self sown plants and trees and uncovering paths, the garden was then transformed into one with such style and pizzazz that it fills you with delight.

When we arrived lunch was about to be served in the old style Victorian glasshouse constructed in 2008 from salvaged materials. Tables were moved outside for al fresco dining on the large terrace. After lunch we climbed from the terrace into a formal garden with wide paths perfect for a stroll with friends. At its centre is a folly with gothic windows and a striking dome designed and built by Angela in 2007, the folly is surrounded by a fernery.

When we visited, the folly had serious competition from the flowering stars of the garden. Drawing the eye were bearded Iris, a haze of blue in the bright sunshine, and growing on either side of a wide path reminiscent of Monet's garden at Giverny. Indeed the plants are mostly French brought back by Angela from visits to France. Two Iris of note were *I.* 'Harlem Hussey' and *I.* 'Midnight Express' with very dark blue/black flowers, these both came from the French grower Michel Bourdillon.

Drama and atmosphere was created by a large collection of Peonies and Oriental Poppies. Peonies included the magenta *P.* 'Duchesse de Morny' and *P.* 'Princess Amelie', apricot *P.* 'Hesperus' and *P.* 'L'Aurore', and red *P.* 'Postilion' and *P.* 'Madame Antoine Rivière'. Peonies were mainly sourced from the French peony nursery Piviones Rivière, the tree peonies are from Peony Passions in Kildare.

Magenta and pink was also a favourite colour in Angela's choice of poppy that included 'Watermelon', 'Raspberry Queen', 'Manhattan' and 'Papillion'.

Oriental Poppies are mainly from Camolin Potting Shed in Co. Wexford and Leamore Nursery in Co. Wicklow.

Roses are planted in abundance and Angela grows mainly old or old style varieties especially those which are remontant. These include the fabulously scented repeat flowering climber R. 'Céline Forestier', with small pale green leaves. Both stems and buds are flushed with red. The buds open a very pale double cream but the colour becomes a stronger golden yellow towards the centre. Another climbing Noisette of similar but stronger colouring was R. 'Duchesse d'Auerstädt' with golden yellow flowers. A more modern climber was 'Belle de Londres' a strong climbing Hybrid Tea, a beautiful soft pink with a hint of gold and strongly scented. Roses bought in Ireland are from McNamara Rose Nurseries in Midleton Co. Cork, but many came from France. Angela considers roses, iris and peonies from French nurseries to be competitively priced and very good strong plants.

Along the back wall were recently planted vegetables including asparagus, peas, broad and runner beans and tomatoes. Angela also grows a wide variety of fruit trees. Old apple and pear trees are grown with newly planted cherry, plums, quinces, mulberries, medlars, Sharon Fruit (*Diospyros kaki*) and Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*).

After such a short number of years the results are quite remarkable. Finally I would like to thank Angela for sharing her wonderful garden with us and also thanks to Ricky Shannon for organising a most enjoyable afternoon.

Anne Cunnane

## **News from Leinster**

**The Leinster Annual Plant Sale will be held on Sunday October 10<sup>th</sup> at 11 am in the Community Centre below Our Lady of Dolours' Church (The Pyramid Church) Glasnevin.**





*Weed of the year - A light hearted look  
at those unwelcome guests of the plant world  
by Martin Edwardes*

I am reading a book at the moment called “The Greatest Show on Earth” by Richard Dawkins, which gives the conclusive evidence for evolution. I would agree with him for what creator would inflict a range of plants that annoy the heart and soul and sometimes put fear into a benign group of beings, such as gardeners.

So what defines the weed of the year?

If the said weed is the main topic of conversation at the dinner table for a period longer than two weeks, my good wife assumes that I now have a mild obsession with the plant and am embarking on an immediate eradication plan. The weed then becomes the weed of the year.

The first weed to receive this accolade was the infamous Japanese Knotweed. (*Fallopia japonica*), sunlight, some sap splashed up on my face and mouth. The result was my lips swelled up to a size which would have been the envy of Mick Jagger. I will always remember this incident, as it coincided with a visit from a girlfriend of my daughter’s who viewed me with a certain amount of suspicion at our first meeting. Janet finally assured her that I did not always look like that.

Hogweed is a very selfish weed because it blocks out any other weed or flower That is under its’ canopy and is very prolific. I was advised that a good way to kill it is to stick a spade into the crown of the plant and sever it from the rest of the root. In our case, we have so many of them that it would take an eternity, and I would probably end up with one foot shorter than the other. I take the easy option and strim it using a cutting blade quite close to the ground on a non sunny day and not allow it to go seed.

In the walled garden my usually very placid wife has declared war on bindweed. She has investigated at length its’ rooting behaviour and has discovered that it has developed a very clever ploy to survive being dug up.

Its' root apparently descends into the ground vertically and then goes out at a right angle to the vertical. Now comes the clever bit. Just before it reaches the end of the horizontal root, it puts out yet another root at right angles. You will be led to believe that you have managed to get all the root, but in fact you have not. One way to eradicate it is to let it wind around a piece of stick and then wipe it with a glove soaked in glyphosate.

Of course we have a variety of other weeds including the famous dandelion (*Taraxicum officinale*) which seems to flower and then go to seed in one day when your back is turned. It has a root that goes down to Australia and in spite of trying to remove it with a long spade specifically designed for the job. One always manages to leave behind the ever so thin final tip to the root.

When the lawn, which is a man's "raison d'être" comes under attack I go into immediate counter attack mode. The latest menace is the creeping buttercup, which hops along the ground putting a new set of roots down every few inches. If one had a timed camera to watch its' behaviour over a period of days it would make very interesting viewing. I have found that D50 will quite successfully deal with this weed.

So what is the weed for this year?

I think that it has to be the thistle. Many a culinary delightful meal has been spoiled by the vision of multitudinous thistle seeds blowing all over our land as I look out the window. Our neighbouring farmer specializes in growing them. We have had a long hot summer and plenty of wind, so the thistle has had plenty of encouragement to seed all over the place, especially into small holes in the grass dug by rabbits. Now there is another proof of the non existence of a creator, for who in their right mind would design and create a rabbit. I have been observed by my wife flaying my arms about, catching a thistle seed in my hand and putting it into my top pocket. She has put this extremely sad behaviour down to slight touch of eccentricity caused by advancing years.

In spite of all the annoyance caused by these unwelcome plants, I have actually developed a sneaking admiration for them and their cunning ability to survive. I have now in latter years come to terms with their existence, the growing realization that they will always be there come what may and that they will more than likely be growing on top of me when I am six foot under.



## Correspondence

In the September issue of *Gardens Illustrated* I was disappointed to read in an article by Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Flowers that *Aster* 'Little Carlow' was "bred in Devizes in the 1930's". I presume this is Devizes in Wiltshire, England.

I grow it very successfully in my own garden, in reality it is an easy plant to grow, and a wonderful plant for the autumn garden. I had always thought that *A.* 'Little Carlow' was an Irish cultivar bred at the Ballawley Alpine Nursery, Dundrum, Dublin. Dr. Charles Nelson does say in *A Heritage of Beauty* that "the history of this cultivar is obscure" however in the early 1950's the nursery claimed to have introduced it. Has it now been confirmed that it was bred in Devizes and is not actually an Irish cultivar?

Honor Connolly



Photo: Honor Connolly



# *Seed Distribution Scheme 2010*

## *By Stephen Butler*

After much packing and posting our final tally for number of member requests came to only 107, down by 26 on last year. Even allowing for people who only requested 6 or 7 plants, that still means we sent out about 2000 packets, so hopefully by now we have filled a few vacant spots left after last winter's frosts – hopefully with a few spares for plant sales too!

As always there were a few typos, notably listing *Eccremocarpos scaber* correctly but confusingly under annuals and climbers, but fortunately I didn't spot anyone ordering both.....

Only one plant not requested at all, *Scilla siberica*, a lovely and very easy bulb, so maybe we all have it by now?

The most requested list varied a lot as always between the first 50 and the last, but the overall most popular were as below.

*Geranium caffrum* – 24 requests  
*Dierama pulcherrimum* (ex deep blue) - 23  
*Rudbeckia occidentalis* (ex Green Wizard) - 23  
*Papaver somniferum* (double white) - 22  
*Cyclamen hederifolium* (scented) - 19  
*Meconopsis Fertile Blue Group* - 19  
*Watsonia meriania* var *bulbifera* (bulbils) - 18  
*Geranium wallichianum* (ex Buxtons Variety) – 18

For the first time I supplied the seed of the most requested plant! We had only one *Geranium caffrum* at the zoo, so when we dead headed it last year after flowering we left the growth in a wheelbarrow over the weekend – the whole flower head stems were horribly sticky, and it was a pain to try and get off any other way. By Monday more seeds had exploded off as they do within the barrow, pull, drag, tear to dislodge most, dump the bulk, and sift through the remainder.

We kept loads ourselves too, and there is a lot more *G. caffrum* now through our African Savanna planting, excellent but vigorous plant, interesting bluey green leaf colour.

This year in the zoo also saw the flowering of *Cardiocrinum giganteum* from the seed list. Way back in 2002 I sowed loads of seed (a massive amount came in late 2001) but wondered where then in the zoo I could use it. We grew on about 70 eventually, gave some away to plant sales etc, and then realised the visitor side of our elephant exhibit would be perfect for them, surrounded by bamboo and sheltered, so planted out over 2 years about 50.

This July saw 15 of them flowering, an amazing sight, most mornings I found time to stand amongst them looking up in delight, and every time I went to see them there were visitors taking pictures, great!

Many thanks again to all our seed donators, keep up the good work, and especially a thank you to whoever donated the *Cardiocrinum* in 2001. All seed donations as usual please to the address below.

Stephen Butler,  
IGPS Seed Distribution Scheme  
Curator of Horticulture  
Dublin Zoo  
Phoenix Park  
Dublin 8

Comments and queries to above, or [stephencbutler@gmail.com](mailto:stephencbutler@gmail.com)

Opposite is a photo of Stephen standing justifiably proud among his *Cardiocrinum giganteum*.

**The Northern Group Annual Plant Sale will be held on Saturday October 9<sup>th</sup> from 12 noon – 5 pm  
It will be part of the Annual Plant Sale at Rowallane Garden, Saintfield**







# *The Irish Garden Plant Society*

**Membership Correspondence:  
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.

**E-mail:** [igpsireland@aol.com](mailto:igpsireland@aol.com)

**Website:** [www.irishgardenplantsociety.org](http://www.irishgardenplantsociety.org)

Front cover photo:

*Epilobium canum* 'Dublin'. A plant worth seeking out for the blaze of colour its tubular flowers bring to the garden in autumn. With narrow dark green leaves it tolerates drought, flowers abundantly from August until October, dies down in winter but is quite hardy and appears again in spring. It also grows well in a container.