

The Newsletter of the
IRISH GARDEN PLANT SOCIETY



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EDITORIAL

Congratulations to Dr. Dermot Kehoe, I.G.P.S. Chairperson, and to the committee – *Moorea 15* has arrived! *Moorea* had been a significant publication in Irish horticulture but unfortunately slipped by the wayside for a number of years. Hopefully this is the start of a revitalised period for the publication and we might once again see it on an annual basis.

The Annual General Meeting is on Saturday 5th of June in the Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. It's always a good weekend so make your arrangements.

Finally a Very Happy Birthday to Wendy Walsh, an honorary member of the IGPS, who will be celebrating her 90th in early April. The front cover is of emerging Horse Chestnut leaves which Wendy drew in April 2004.

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A Message from the Chairperson and Committee

"We are pleased to include *Moorea 14* with this post-out. In the early days of the society *Moorea* was published annually. It is now officially an occasional publication and with the passing years the occasions have become ever more seldom. Apart from increasing costs a great deal of work is involved, not least that of inducing our members to write.

Since its inception I believe that *Moorea* has made a valuable and unique contribution to recording the history of Irish plants and gardens and should remain a central part of the society's contribution to Irish gardening.

For this edition I would particularly like to thank Brendan Sayers for his valuable suggestions regarding contributions, Mary Bradshaw for occasionally twisting arms and proof reading, Mary Forrest for her crucial role as editor and Mary Davies for her technical help.

Finally, many thanks to the contributors. I hope they continue to write and that we can soon look forward to *Moorea 15*."

Dr. Dermot Kehoe

National Council for Conservation of Plants and Gardens National Collections – Making a Start by Stephen Butler

As Collections Co-ordinator for Ireland (South) I regularly feel guilty that I as yet have not formed a collection myself, and talking to our Newsletter Editor we thought that my current efforts to change this may be interesting to our Members.

I have started to collect 3 different genera, with the intention hopefully to form a collection in the near future. I've chosen *Francoa* (no collection yet), *Libertia* (one collection in Mount Stewart), which are both good Zoo plants too, not normally being grazed by our resident geese etc, and *Gunnera* (no collection yet). My interest in *Gunnera* is 3 fold. Firstly it is a Gondwana plant, that is, found in South America, New

Zealand, and South Africa, yet unable to survive sea crossings and so helps prove the existence millions of years ago of a super continent (Gondwanaland) that broke up taking the plants and animals with it to evolve differently. Secondly *Gunnera* is one of our most dramatic landscape plants, especially near water, that even non gardeners notice. Thirdly I managed to get seed germinated of *Gunnera perpensa*, a South African species that no one seems to have heard of. The leaves are about half a metre high, with a delicate red edging, and the flowers extend above the leaves to about a metre. It seems very vigorous, with 50mm thick stolons spreading about 300mm a year, but not tried completely outside yet – last years fresh seed has given me a few extra plants, and I hope to plant some of the parent (now the fill of a 12 litre pot) out this spring.

I am concentrating on *Gunnera* initially. One of the first criteria to fulfil for a collection is I must have at the least 75% of the *Gunnera* listed in the Plant Finder. There are 13 listed – *G. arenaria*, *dentata*, *flavida*, *hamiltonii*, *magellanica*, *m. 'Munoz Gamero'*, *m. 'Osorno'*, *manicata*, *monoica*, *proprepens*, *scabra*, *tinctoria* and *t. 'Nana'*. Chasing any nurseries that do mail order can very simply increase the range I have, and give me a great excuse to go nursery visiting too. This year I should be able to get the numbers up to the required level.

More interesting is researching other *Gunnera* species. The Internet is wonderful for this. I went into the website www.bgci.org.uk of Botanic Garden Conservation International, which has a database of what plants are grown, as a group, by botanic gardens worldwide. Individual plant records are not shown obviously, but it is a fantastic listing with links to images and other listings. This list has 24 plants in *Gunnera*, (with only one growing *Gunnera perpensa*), but with some listed as synonyms that would come down to about 18 probably, and some are tropical so beyond my current potential. The Web is also great for looking up individual species – just tap the full plant name, genus and species, into a Google search, and sit back – the numbers of sites that pop up is sometimes scary though!

The next step is getting the plants established. For collection status they must be 3-5 years established for herbaceous plants, depending on genus. I'll also need to demonstrate good cultivation, plant health, on site propagation, correct labelling, and maintain a good record system, but all that comes along as needed!

If anyone has any questions re National Collections please contact me at 01 626 8532, or email at scbutler@indigo.ie

Stephen Butler

Curator of Horticulture, Dublin Zoo

Collections Co-ordinator Ireland (South)

Flowering of the rare Pitcairn Island endemic *Abutilon pitcairnense* Fosberg at TCD Botanic Garden.

Noeleen Smyth, Steve Waldren & Naomi Kingston
Contact : nsmyth@tcd.ie

The Pitcairn Group of four islands, a UK Overseas Territory, is exceptionally remote, lying at the south-eastern extremity of the central Polynesian islands (2100 km East of Easter Island and 5350 km North-West of New Zealand; Fig.1, South-Central Pacific Ocean). The group comprises two atolls, Oeno and Ducie (the most southerly atoll on earth), the raised atoll Henderson (a world heritage site), and the high volcanic island of Pitcairn.

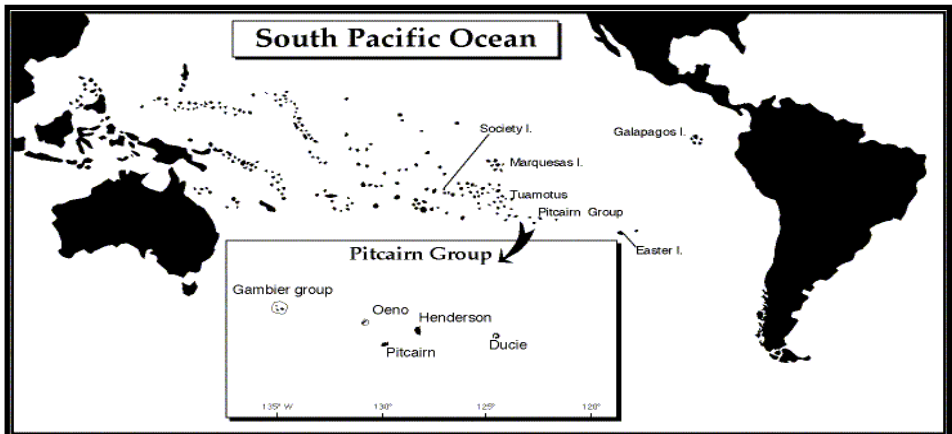


Fig. 1 The location of Pitcairn Island

Pitcairn Island is a small (4 x 2km²), relatively young island, with steep slopes and a maximum altitude of 329 m (Fig.2). The climate is sub-tropical with mean annual rainfall of 1716mm (approx.) but with considerable annual variation. Mean temperature ranges in the summer from 17-28oC and in the winter from 13 - 23 o C; the winter season is wetter and windier than the summer season.

Abutilon pitcairnense occurs only on Pitcairn, better known to most people as the hideaway of the *Bounty* mutineers than the home of globally threatened plants. *Abutilon pitcairnense* is considered one of the rarest plants in the world, with only a single wild individual known. The local people of Pitcairn speak Pitcairnese; a blend of

Tahitian and rather archaic English which reflects their history. Their name for *A. pitcairnense* the plant is “Yellow Fowtoo”.



**Fig. 2 The view over Adamstown - Pitcairn Island.
The houses featured are the only houses on the island.**

In total there are over 100 species of *Abutilon*, they hail mostly from tropical and warm temperate areas of the globe, with one European species *A. theophrasti*. Many *Abutilon* species are highly ornamental with showy flowers and have been long-time favourites in cultivation such as: *A. megapotamicaum* a tender climber for the greenhouse with yellow and scarlet petals; *A. vitifolium* a shrub (3-5m) with downy leaves and large open cupped white, mauve and bluish forms in cultivation and the myriad of *A. hybridum* cultivars with varying flower colours and spotted leaves.

Abutilon pitcairnense itself is a sprawling shrub (1-2m); the young leaves have an attractive downy appearance. The flowers are pendulous and pale yellow which are held in lax terminal clusters and are somewhat bell shaped. It is a very attractive and highly ornamental plant (Fig. 3).

Abutilon pitcairnense has always been recorded as rare on Pitcairn Island. It was first collected on Pitcairn in 1898 as *Abutilon sp.* by Miss Rosalind Young (a native Pitcairner) who was charged with collecting specimens from the island by Captain A.W. Torlesse of H.M.S Royalist who forwarded her specimens to J.H. Maiden, the then Director of the Botanic Gardens in Sydney.



Fig.3 Abutilon pitcairnense in flower

Throughout the intervening years there were no reports of *A. pitcairnense* until Americans botanists: St. John & Fosberg, made an extensive inventory of the Pitcairn flora for the Bishop Museum of New Zealand in 1934. In 1955 Twyford, a soil scientist, collected many specimens during his compilation of the “*Soil Resources of Pitcairn Island*” one of which was *A. pitcairnense*.

The last recorded sighting of *A. pitcairnense* before its rediscovery was in 1983 by an islander Andrew Young who stated it was “a plant of no practical use”. Careful searches by Dr. Steve Waldren and colleagues in 1991 and 1997 failed to find the plant despite searches of previously known locations - the species was thought to be extinct. The visits to Pitcairn island by researchers in the 1990’s and searches for this and other rare plants stimulated islander Carol Warren to keep an eye out for the plant. On a foray for banana in 2003 she spied some yellow flowers creeping above a steep roadside bank. Carol wisely took some cuttings of the pretty yellow flowered shrub and one of them rooted, making a global count of two individuals for this species in 2003.

Since June 2003, the Pitcairn Island Nursery (Fig. 4) was built with funds from the Overseas Territories Environmental Fund and a further seven vegetatively propagated clones from the original wild plant have been raised, and one of these cuttings was brought to TCD Botanic Garden in August 2003. In addition, artificial self-

pollination, using a small paint brush, of the largest cutting on Pitcairn Island in 2003 resulted in seed set and 7 seedlings have been obtained.



Figure 4. Pitcairn Island Nursery established in June 2003

A landslide on Pitcairn in late 2004 destroyed the original plant of *Abutilon pitcairnense* which demonstrates how a simple stochastic effect could have wiped out the species. Without the propagation efforts to date *A. pitcairnense* would no longer exist.

The Trinity “cutting” flowered on the 17th of January 2005 - this is the first time the plant has been grown and flowered outside of Pitcairn Island. The Trinity plant represents a major hope for the survival of the species. Attempts to artificially self-pollinate the Trinity plant have been made and further crosses between the seedlings obtained to date are planned for the future.

Molecular work in the botany department of Trinity College using a DNA fingerprinting technique, amplified fragment length polymorphism, (AFLP) of the progeny to show that there is some genetic variation among them - some genetic recombination must still be occurring.

Our aim is to artificially self-pollinate the Trinity plant and then cross - pollinate the most genetically distinct of the progeny. This breeding programme will hopefully maximise the genetic variation within the species, thereby helping to increase fitness of subsequent generations to aid the recovery of this extremely critically threatened species.

Nasties by Rae McIntyre

Gardening is like life in microcosm. There are all its joys – the equivalent of life running smoothly which it does sometimes. Then there are all the adversities that nobody can avoid in life and gardening has its share of poor weather conditions, pests and diseases.

I'm always whinging about the weather round here both on these pages and to anyone else who will listen (many don't) but last weekend, March 4 and 5, I realised that, compared with some places, the weather in this corner of the far north of Ireland is almost balmy. My friend Nora rang for a long chat on Friday March 4. She lives above Balerno outside Edinburgh in the foothills of the Pentlands, 950 feet above sea level, and has always claimed that it was above the snow line. I thought this was a bit of a joke but now I am not so sure because for the past three weeks they have had ten inches of snow. Even though it was very picturesque she was becoming heartily sick of it. Three weeks of snow would drive me demented, three days of it would be very irksome but I could just about cope with the three hours we had of it one morning in late February. Mercifully it thawed at lunchtime.

Nora is always worried about plants being killed by frost which is around until, what we would consider as, late spring. She loves the hortensia hydrangeas but finds that they flower sparsely. In spring they need almost continuous protection from frost and don't flower until early autumn when they're liable to be hit by frosts again; frost comes much earlier there than it does here and is more severe. So she can only grow the toughest plants and even then they have to be well away from the boundary of their property because deer are fond of leaning over the fence and having a meal. Ever since Bambi (being reissued) people feel sentimental about deer – that is people who don't suffer from marauding deer in their gardens. Nora and her husband Rennie have had to put deer proof fencing right round their 1.5 acre garden.

On the next day, the Saturday after Nora's phone call, it was the National Trust Gardeners' Luncheon at Mount Stewart. The speaker afterwards was John Anderson who is now Head Gardener at Inverewe in North West Scotland. Many will know John from his days as Head Gardener at Mount Usher in Co Wicklow. Inverewe is very different from Mount Usher. Both are beautiful gardens but Inverewe is extremely challenging and weather conditions there are atrocious. There may be little frost because of the Gulf Stream's influence but the annual rainfall can be 90 inches and there are gales that reach speeds of 125 m.p.h. The rain is so persistent that John says the gardeners wear waterproof gear all the time. He showed a slide of a *Drimys winteri* that had its leaves entirely stripped in a January gale that, unusually, was blowing from the south.

Other adversities at Inverewe are the infamous midges that declare war on mankind annually on May 15 so it's advisable to visit before that. And then there's a pool which has to have a makeover because it's covered in duckweed and filled with gravel which has leached in from paths, helped by copious rainfall.

Duckweed is a hateful pernicious beast that will appear from nowhere that I can see and cover a whole pool in a matter of days. Painstakingly remove it with a net and the sky will be reflected for a short time but there's always a smidgen left to fight another day and then the whole process has to be repeated.

I am forever whinging about slugs on these pages but am not going to do so now. Unfortunately I must confess that I am using slug pellets on *Iris unguicularis*. It took me years to discover that it wasn't flowering at the foot of the south-facing wall where I had planted it in limy, rubbly soil (ideal conditions for this Moroccan native) because of slugs and snails. Tiny shreds of blue could be seen at the base of the plant's abundant foliage and it eventually dawned on me that slugs were chomping through the flower buds. I've taken to placing one slug pellet beside each bud and now have a series of the glorious flowers for months on end. In pre-blue pellet times snails used to be unsightly sticking on the leaves like so many brown stud earrings.

At this time of year (March 10) early flowering rhododendrons are particularly vulnerable in frost especially when it's followed by early morning sun. Most late winter bloomers are in sheltered west-facing positions or, if they do face east, have a bulky shrub to protect them. Even so I still festoon precious rhododendrons like "Bagshot Sands", "Bric-a-brac", "Eclipteum Yellow", "Moupinense", "Ostara" and "Rosevallon" with white fleece secured in place by clothes pegs. Viewing the garden on frosty moonlit nights or in early morning one gets the impression that a convocation of ghosts is about to take place. This is inconvenient but better by far than the dispiriting sight of the flowers turned into brown mush after being frosted. I am lucky that my plants are still small enough to be able to protect them although they are growing every year. At Mount Stewart and Rowallane they haven't been so fortunate with huge tree-sized rhododendrons decked with browned blooms.

Apparently vine weevils are the most hated garden pests. I don't want to say much about them lest I tempt them into the garden and this also applies to lily beetles. A recent photograph of one showed the lily beetle to be a gorgeous fellow like a brooch fashioned in scarlet enamel featuring in an upmarket jewellery advertisement on the back page of *Country Life*. The photograph gave no evidence that the beetle has the disgusting habit of surrounding itself with its own excrement and can rapidly kill lilies, fritillaries and other related genera.

The narcissus fly I only heard about a few weeks ago. At Coleraine Horticultural Society, Mark Smith was the speaker at the January meeting. Mark has a splendid

collection of snowdrops in his small garden in Antrim and he was wary of the depredation that could be caused by the pest. Derek Turbitt, the chairman, is a keen daffodil grower and breeder and he too was scared of the obnoxious little critter. Both men take pains to keep the narcissus fly at bay.

Something else I only learned recently from a gardening magazine was that the eggs of internal parasitic worms in pet faeces can survive up to two years in the soil. Dogs and cats, especially in the country, need fairly frequent worming but, even if you keep your own animals worm free, you should be wary of marauding cats, dogs and even foxes soiling in your soil. I nearly always wear gloves but I can still manage to have fingernails as black-edged as old-fashioned mourning letters and I've just remembered that I always plant bulbs with my bare hands. Yeugh! From now on I'll be scrubbing as vigorously as a surgeon about to operate.

Other nasties include grey squirrels, crocus bulb-eating mice, honey fungus, bacterial canker, anthracnose of willows, powdery mildew, capsid bugs, aphids, sudden oak death, New Zealand flatworms, wireworms, cutworms, caterpillars and pigeons. Pigeons are the most destructive birds and Tom Lehrer has my full approval for his song "*Poisoning Pigeons in the Park.*"

Isn't it a wonder that we can garden at all?

Seed Distribution Spring 2005 by Stephen Butler

Writing this I find myself wondering where the winter went, but with 120 seed requests sent out so far I suppose some of it went into seed packing. I'd expect another 20 or so before closing in April, which means we should have a higher total of requests than last year.

As I write this early in March the favourites so far this year are *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty', *Myosotidium hortensia* (no surprise there), *Antirrhinum pendula* 'Chinese Lantern', and *Nicotiana glauca*. It gives me a good feeling thinking of all those Chatham Island forget-me-nots, and there was a very good batch of seed sent in, but I hope I'm not encouraging members to grow their own tobacco. No one so far has requested *Apalochlamys spectabilis*, called native tobacco in Tasmania. If I'm not careful I'll need to have the seed list checked for drugs before distributing. (Has anyone else had to explain to visiting Gardai that *Datisca cannabidifolia* is not Cannabis?)

As usual I'll do a full breakdown when all the requests are in, until then, happy sowing – and don't forget a good few seeds need 2 years to germinate!

The Irish at Chelsea 2005

Last year our interest was certainly heightened by the coverage given to Diarmuid Gavin during his preparations for the show, the accounts of his attempts to source sponsorship, the various design and fabrication problems which arose and which had to be solved, the logistics involved in assembling the garden and finally, the arrival of the judges and the announcement of Diarmuid's well-earned success. Along the way, the tiff with Bunny Guinness provided some entertainment but, above all, showed the tension involved for the participants in the Chelsea Show; nerves can be raw and tempers frayed.

Diarmuid's garden this year will again feature his by now trademark garden pods, six, I believe. It is a design intended to be viewed from above as it is the communal garden area set in an apartment block. Viewing such an area, sadly left undeveloped and neglected, from his own apartment gave Diarmuid the starting point for his design.

Ireland will also be represented by Elma Fenton, of the Kildare-based company Ellen Landscape Designs, who will design an eco-garden, her first for Chelsea. Entitled Moat and Castle, it will feature sculpted landforms to evoke the essence of the natural Irish landscape, old apple trees for maturity and a natural swimming pond bordered by plants that organically filter the water.

An illustration of Elma Fenton's design shows the natural swimming pool in the foreground, mature apple trees to the left and a grove of hazel trees in the right foreground. The central area is a meadow while the landforms in the background have been made from the earth excavated from the pool. In front of these landforms is a "topiary wildlife home".

Another Irish entrant at the Chelsea Flower Show will be Flowers by Lucy, the Kilkenny-based florists who have competed in the Professional Floristry Section over the past four years and have enjoyed success in each on these appearances receiving a Silver Gilt, two Silver and one Bronze awards. The fact that participation in this section is by invitation only shows the high regard in which Flowers by Lucy is held.

With such an excellent track record we can look forward with a certain hope that Flowers by Lucy will once again enjoy success at this year's show.

Best wishes to all entrants. Ed.

NCCPG Collection of *Eucryphias* at Mount Usher

by Maria Vlahos

Mount Usher is well known for its collection of trees. Amongst them one very special group of trees and shrubs stands out in the summer months, in the same way that *Rhododendrons* do in the spring. This group is the magnificent *Eucryphias*, of which, Mount Usher has 26 different types, making it the largest NCCPG (National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens) collection of *Eucryphias* in Ireland.

The name *Eucryphia* comes from the Greek words **eu-** meaning **well**, and **kryphios-** meaning **a covering**, which is in reference to the sepals that form a cap over the flower bud. This cap later falls off as the flower opens. *Eucryphias* are native to the temperate regions of the Southern Hemisphere, mostly Chile, Australia, and Tasmania. They are a monotypic genus, meaning it's the only genus in the family Eucryphiaceae, with only 5 species. All are evergreen, except for one species, *Eucryphia glutinosa*, which is deciduous, and is considered to be the easiest species to cultivate in Ireland. They range in size from a tree occasionally reaching 80 feet to large shrubs. The majority of *Eucryphias* are acid loving, with the exception of *Eucryphia cordifolia* and *Eucryphia x nymansensis* 'Nymansay' and 'Mount Usher' which will tolerate alkaline soils. They all prefer moist cool soils and protection against cold winds (*Eucryphia glutinosa* is less demanding of conditions), and flower best when planted in full sun.

Propagating *Eucryphias* is most successfully done by way of softwood cuttings. Soft wood cuttings potted in a neutral to slightly acid mix are more likely to root when taken in July or August, and usually develop roots within 2 months. Propagation may also be done with semi hardwood cuttings in February or March. Propagation by seed is also a commonly used method. Sow seed indoors in February. *Eucryphias* are known to self seed at times and here at Mount Usher self seeded plants of *Eucryphia moorei* do arise in the sheltered areas of the woodland gardens.

Eucryphias generally do not require pruning, and are best left to grow into their natural shape (space providing). Saying that, there have been a number of mature *Eucryphia glutinosas* here at Mount Usher that were severely damaged by falling branches from neighbouring trees that have successfully resprouted from the base. The *Eucryphias* were chain sawed to about 1 metre off ground level and within a couple of years are hiding this main cut with their new branches.

Although there are only 5 species of *Eucryphias* there are many crosses and cultivars. I mentioned there are 26 different types at Mount Usher, they are as follows:

Eucryphia 'Castlewellan'

E. cordifolia

E. glutinosa
E. glutinosa ‘Daisy Hill’
E. glutinosa Plena Group
E. x hillieri
E. x hillieri ‘Winton’
E. x intermedia
E. x intermedia (Dwarf Form)
E. x intermedia ‘Rostrevor’
E. lucida
E. lucida ‘Ballerina’
E. lucida ‘Gilt Edge’
E. lucida ‘Leatherwood Cream’
E. lucida ‘Pink Cloud’
E. lucida x cordifolia
E. lucida x glutinosa
E. lucida x intermedia
E. milliganii
E. moorei
E. x nymansensis
E. x nymansensis ‘George Graham’
E. x nymansensis ‘Mount Usher’
E. x nymansensis ‘Nymansay’
E. x nymansensis ‘Penwith’
E. wilkiei

Amongst the *Eucryphias* in the list above, the three most noteworthy specimens at Mount Usher are *Eucryphia cordifolia*, *Eucryphia x nymansensis* ‘Mount Usher’, and *Eucryphia moorei*. The oldest *Eucryphia* in the gardens is *Eucryphia cordifolia*, planted in 1910. It is also noted as one of the finest specimens in Ireland. Situated near the main house, it blooms simultaneously in August with its neighbour *Myrtus luma*, another fine specimen planted in 1890. *Eucryphia cordifolia* is an evergreen species, which can grow up to 70 feet. It was first introduced into cultivation in 1851. It is native of the temperate rain forests of Chile. Its distribution is widespread there and usually found in close association with *Nothofagus dombeyi*. Too tender for many Irish gardens, here it thrives in the cool moist conditions of the River Varty.

Eucryphia x nymansensis ‘Mount Usher’ is another fine and noteworthy group of specimens at Mount Usher. *Eucryphia x nymansensis* is a hybrid between two Chilean species, *E. glutinosa* and *E. cordifolia*. This is also an evergreen tree, and is today one of the most commonly sold hybrids. It can grow to about 40 or 50 feet. The famous cross between these two species was made at Nymans, Handcross, Sussex from seed sown in 1914. Two outstanding plants were then selected from this cross and were labelled **Nymans A** and **Nymans B**. **Nymans A** went on to receive an Award of Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society at Vincent Square, London in 1924 and went on

to become known as *Eucryphia x nymansensis* 'Nymansay'. This same cross occurred naturally at Mount Usher Gardens in the 1920s, though its leaves are slightly smaller than the 'Nymansay' cultivar, and became known as *E. nymansensis* 'Mount Usher'. Today a group of 'Mount Usher' cultivars, planted in 1927 are thriving just off of the old tennis court/Palm Walk area and can be seen in their full glory in early August.

Lastly, a species well worth noting is *Eucryphia moorei*. Again evergreen, this species is considered a more tender *Eucryphia*. Charles Moore discovered this species in 1860 in the wooded hilly country of New South Wales, its native habitat. The specimen grown in the woodlands of Mount Usher is again considered to be the finest specimen in Ireland. Planted in 1940, it has attained a height of 50 plus feet (it usually only grows to 20 to 30 feet in cultivation) in the woodlands. It has very attractive and numerous narrow pinnate leaves. The flowers are similar to *E. glutinosa* though slightly smaller. Its flowers are not as attractive as the Chilean species but its leaves and growth habit are more elegant. It flowers slightly later than the rest of the *Eucryphias* at Mount Usher and sometimes continues flowering until December or January.

These remarkable plants deserve to be more widely planted. They are the perfect plants for the summer garden, bringing life and colour into a season that often lacks it. The founders and gardeners at Mount Usher have recognized their beauty and elegance since their first introductions into cultivation and today the collection continues to grow and expand. The best time to see them in their glory is August and it is a site to behold....

Maria Vlahos is the Head Gardener at Mount Usher Gardens

A Note on Mount Usher by Maria Vlahos

Laid out along the banks of the River Vartry, Mount Usher has been designed in the Robinsonian style. Trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants have been introduced from all parts of the globe and are planted in harmony with woodland and other shade loving plants.

Like all the great gardens of Ireland, Mount Usher offers varying pleasures at different seasons of the year, rhododendrons in Spring, a blaze of Summer colour and the wistful tints of Autumn, all elegantly set off by the crystal waters of the river.

In addition to the gardens, Mount Usher offers home produced refreshments in our

Tea Room and a Shopping Courtyard which is open all year round. Parking is available and the Gardens are within easy reach of Dublin.

Mount Usher was once a working mill. It was first a tuck mill and later a corn mill. The mill used the Killiskey River, a tributary of the River Vartry, to turn its wheel.



A view along the River Vartry in Mount Usher. Photograph: Maria Vlahos

Where the main house is today, there was a small cottage with less than an acre in front of it which was used to grow potatoes. The gardens of today came into being in a romantic way. Edward Walpole Senior, a Dublin businessman, was very fond of walking in the Wicklow hills. He often stayed at Hunter's Hotel, Newrathbridge, which is still, as it was then, a comfortable hotel. He seems to have met with the owner of the mill, Sam Sutton, and become friendly with him. At all events Walpole began to stay at the miller's house rather than the hotel. When Sutton's lease expired, Walpole took it over in 1868. Thus began an association which was to last over 100 years. In 1980, the property was bought by the current owner, Madelaine Jay.

In the early days of the garden, the Walpoles were fortunate in having a great deal of expert help and advice. Yet the garden is not a manicured showpiece and it is not a botanical warehouse. It is a collection of felicitous natural plantings according to Robinson's principles and must be approached with that in mind.

Spring is a delightful season in the gardens with plenty to be seen both at ground level and amongst the branches. The Robinsonian style is very apparent at this time of year

as thousands of bulbs are in full bloom throughout the gardens. Purple and white crocuses line the paths off the Palm Walk

Spring is also the time for the Magnolias to begin to show what they can do. You will see *Magnolia campbellii*, the first of the Magnolias to flower in the gardens, flaunting their large cup and saucer shaped flowers.

As spring slides perceptibly into summer, the picture of the gardens changes. Buds have become leaves and the Rhododendrons and Azaleas are ablaze with colour. As the long hot days unwind the various plants in turn put on their show. Around the dog days in August, the *Eucryphias* begin to flower.

In autumn's season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, Mount Usher bursts with colour. The Maple Walk is a perfect example of this as the Japanese Maples and the Golden Larch are ablaze with colour. At ground level as well, various mushrooms start making their appearance, the Toad Stool being one of the most attractive.

Popularly known as 'Sweet Gum', *Liquidambar styraciflua*, shows a gaunt of colours in the year. The dark green leaves erupt into oranges, reds and purples with the onset of autumn.

This is a garden of nature and beauty and we would love to have you visit.

Coming Events at Mount Usher:

Wednesday August 24th 10:30am-5pm "Mount Usher Gardens Plant Sale"

Located in front of Mount Usher Gardens Tea Rooms. Enjoy this special opportunity to purchase plants propagated at Mount Usher Gardens.

Wednesday October 12th 7:00pm "Evening Guided Tour" Join Head Gardener Maria Vlahos on this special torch lit walk* through Mount Usher Gardens. Capture this unique opportunity to experience Mount Usher for the first time in the evening as Maria will share historical and botanical information about the gardens. Mulled Wine and Cheese to follow.

*Please bring hand torch €12.00 Pre-booking in required. Please call 0404-40205.

The Wicklow Directory 2005/06: The Complete Tourism Information in County Wicklow will be on sale from mid March. € 7.50 + € 2.50 p&p

Contact: Philomena O'Dowd 087-2301678 e-mail philodowd@hotmail.com

Volunteers and students looking for work experience:

Please contact Maria Vlahos, Head Gardener, 0404-42850

Visit the website: <http://www.mount-usher-gardens.com/>

Going Strong – Wendy Walsh, Botanical Artist

One of Ireland's foremost botanical artists, Wendy Walsh enjoys international recognition for her work yet will always hold a special place in Irish horticulture because of her outstanding contribution in this field. Members of the IGPS will especially treasure her work in 'An Irish Florilegium' where, with Dr. E. Charles Nelson, she produced a book which won a bronze medal for the 'Most Beautiful Book in the World' at the Leipzig Book Fair. This is a book which so well addresses the interests of the IGPS that it is a must-have volume for all members who wish to further their knowledge of Irish plants. You will find there the most beautiful of illustrations and also the most authoritative, informative and well-written text. It is simply a book to treasure, a book which has always pleased me and of which I never tire.

Personally, Wendy has been most generous to me as editor of the Newsletter. Shortly after taking on this position I was searching for some particularly nice illustrations for the front cover and telephoned Wendy. I had never met her; she had never heard of me, yet she gave an immediate generous positive response and two beautiful line drawings arrived in the post shortly afterwards. After scanning into the computer, her drawing of winter aconite was used immediately and that of *Cyclamen coum* is on the cover of this issue. Both drawings, now framed, adorn my kitchen wall and are treasured.

A recent visitor to the house told me that Wendy was approaching a milestone birthday and that her daughter, Lesley, had decided to mark the occasion by releasing a limited print run of four beautiful illustrations of hellebores which Wendy painted last spring. I telephoned Wendy to enquire of this but as we had some communication difficulties I later spoke to Lesley. Wendy dropped a line in the following days and enclosed a line drawing of emerging horse chestnut leaves which she thought might suit the newsletter. This is on the front cover.

As I wish Wendy a Very Happy 90th Birthday I will quote her note to me as it so well shows the kind person she is and how at this venerable age she still continues to work so unstintingly and so beautifully. Long may it continue!

'I was so disappointed when Lesley told me whose name I had failed to get, such a nuisance being deaf but I console myself that I can see! So much more important! However it did jog my memory about the horse chestnut buds I drew last year and have lain forgotten ever since. I expect they are much too late for inclusion in anything but am posting it off to you anyway. Now I live in Kildare and only drive locally I can no longer get to many of the lectures and outings I used to enjoy but I do look forward to the newsletter. With all best wishes, Yours...

For details of the hellebore prints contact: Fennell, Burtown House, Athy, Co. Kildare. Telephone/fax: 059 8623270. Email: admin@wendyfwalsh.com See also the website: www.wendyfwalsh.com The hellebore paintings are illustrated across.



Green of Sand by Annette Dalton

It poured with rain upon my arrival in Paris on the Saturday night, and it was still raining as I left the hotel at 5am that Sunday morning to go to Charles de Gaulle Airport. I was so happy. I knew that the soaking I got in Paris would make my first footsteps off the plane in Algeria feel even more exciting! Four colleagues from Kew and I were flying to Tamanrasset, in southern Algeria, and then planned to travel overland to Djanet, in the southeast. Both towns, and all destinations on our trip, are in the Sahara Desert. From Djanet we would trade our vehicles for luggage carrying donkeys for 5 days, and climb onto the plateau Tassili n'Ajjer. Finally, we had 5 days in vehicles again to explore the Tadrart region in the very southeast corner, near the Libyan border.

You may wonder what my trip has to do with all things green, but we were actually in the desert to look at plants, and at one in particular. One of our party, Aljos Farjon, is the conifer expert at Kew and had always wanted to go to the Tassili n'Ajjer to see *Cupressus dupreziana*, and see it we all did - at 1784 metres above sea level in the middle of the desert! In half a day we visited all 17 famous specimens in the Tamrit area of the plateau.



Cupressus dupreziana. Photograph by Annette Dalton

Cupressus dupreziana is closely related to *Cupressus sempervirens* and is sometimes regarded as a geographical form. It is, however, a distinct species, with flatter branchlets and smaller, more elongated cones. *Cupressus dupreziana* is critically endangered, and the Tassili n'Ajjer is the only type location left on the planet, i.e. the only place where this tree is to be found growing in the wild. There are 12 specimens held by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew growing at both the Kew and Wakehurst Place sites. The Hillier Garden and Arboretum also have one which measured 5.5m in 1990. Although the specimens remaining on the Tassili n'Ajjer still produce fruit, the decreasing rainfall in recent decades, and the grazing of passing goats and camels, has meant that, even if they germinate, the seedlings don't usually survive. The Tassili n'Ajjer is now part of a National Park and afforded much protection, but despite this, it is known locally that a tribe of Libyan nomads called the Garamand still use these trees for firewood when they travel across the plateau from Libya into Algeria.

Although this tree was the 'holy grail' of the trip, the entire flora of the desert was interesting and new to all of us. The first plant to be seen in abundance was a large shrub/small tree with woody trunk and large, light green, leathery-looking leaves, a bit like cabbages from a distance! It was *Calotropis procera*, a member of Asclepiadaceae, which bore small pale pink flowers and large ovoid green fruits. On closer inspection it was covered in aphids and the sticky honeydew was glistening in the sun. For this reason, and the fact that it was so common, I think I discounted this plant quite early on as not very interesting. I soon learned, however, that it had a number of uses. The soft white fibres which surround the seed inside the fruit can be used in textile making. The latex from the plant contains calotropine which is used in toothache and ulcer preparations. The wood is extremely light and, although it is no good for firewood, is used by nomads to make the bases of their temporary beds. A new respect was born.

Many of the plants we encountered were used locally for medicinal or practical purposes. When a couple of us experienced stomach upsets, we were instructed to collect a number of plants of a grass called Teberimt (in Tamahaq, the Touareg language) shown to us by our guide, Amar. Amar then pulled the roots from these and made the usual Touareg tea for us, but this time included these roots. I later discovered this grass to be *Cymbopogon schoenanthus* and to be quite abundant in most of the areas we visited. As we wandered around the plateau I often noticed Mohammed, our guide in the National Park, grab a handful from one of the few plants we encountered. It turned out to be *Teucrium polium*, which he was collecting to bring home to his mother for her medicine cabinet. This plant was also used to make a decoction against gastric troubles.

Then there were plants which initially I expected to have great uses, such as the colocynth melon. *Citrullus colocynthis* is a cucurbit which grows in great abundance in the desert. However, I was told that sometimes gazelles graze on the leaves if there is nothing else, and similarly, small rodents may eat the melons, but generally the melons

just sit on the sand and dry up. Mind you, this means they successfully set seed for when the rains come the following year, so it's not such a bad thing from the plants point of view. We found a good use for them on St. Stephen's Day – we played boules!

I suppose the most astonishing plant I saw was the “Rose of Jericho”, *Anastatica hierochuntica*. This plant is known also as the resurrection plant. When green it has an open habit with branches spread out in a star shape, but when the drought comes, it sets seed and then the plant dries up and rolls into a ball. These sometimes come loose in the wind and roll around the desert. When it rolls to a moist spot, or when the rains come again, it rehydrates and spreads out again. I did not believe this when it was first told to me in the desert, but I have since found reference to it in a couple of books. The Touareg believe it comes back to life, but I suspect that this re-opening is merely a mechanism to ensure the seeds are released where there is sufficient water for them to germinate. Either way, it's another example of the ingenuity of plants.



Rose of Jericho. Photograph by Annette Dalton

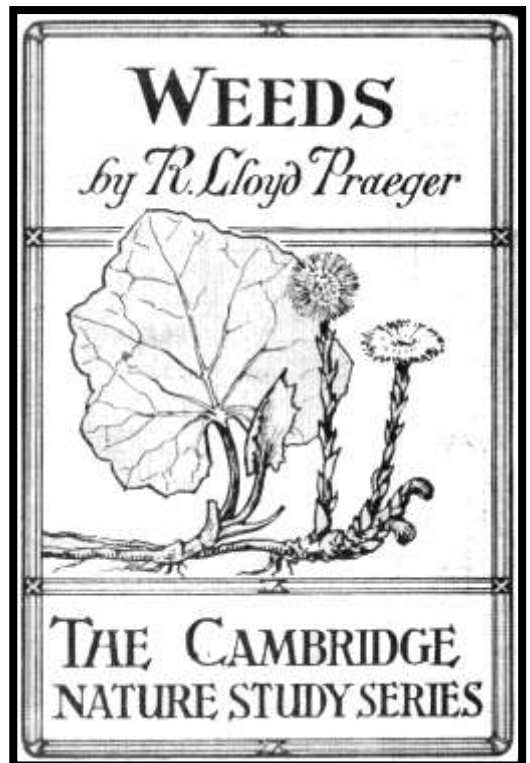
In all we saw over a hundred species of plants in this part of the desert, some in oases and others in dry river beds, and most of them played an intrinsic part in the lives of the people who lived, or travelled through there. From the acacia wood which gave good embers in the fire for making Touareg tea, to the *Panicum turgidum* used to fashion ornate windbreaks, the use of and respect for the indigenous flora was another reminder of how much we depend on plants and how closely our fate is linked to that of the Plant Kingdom.

(Annette is the Horticultural Amenity Manager of the Hardy Display Section at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)

Leaves from a sun-lounger IV. Charles Nelson writes...

What are weeds? “When there were no men, there were no weeds.” Wise words, even when the now politically dubious word “man”, singular and plural, is replaced by something deemed innocuous. “Before man began to interfere with the natural vegetation, plants grew only where they were best fitted to grow; each species and group of species occupied a definite place in the plant societies ...” But farmers and gardeners changed this orderly scheme, exterminating the natural vegetation in order to cultivate worthwhile, useful or beautiful plants that were not native to a particular place – as a rule we don’t deliberately sow and tend those plants that are indigenous to the land we cultivate because, simply, there is no need to. Yet those exotic, pretty or useful plants thrive and survive only under the protection of the gardener or farmer, and so there is a continuous battle – “the native plants all the time strive to break in and re-occupy their old homes, and men are as constantly employed in driving them back ...” In olden days the war against weeds was waged with Biblical fervour using hoes and hands and fire. Today the farmer’s and gardener’s weed-war armoury includes a ferocious battery of chemicals, which we may yet rue. To address anxiety about herbicides, we have even turned fungi, beetles and caterpillars into immensely useful, but perhaps not entirely inoffensive, weed-killers! We still wage war on weeds with Biblical intensity, and that war is often “lost” and the “worthless” weeds retain the upper hand.

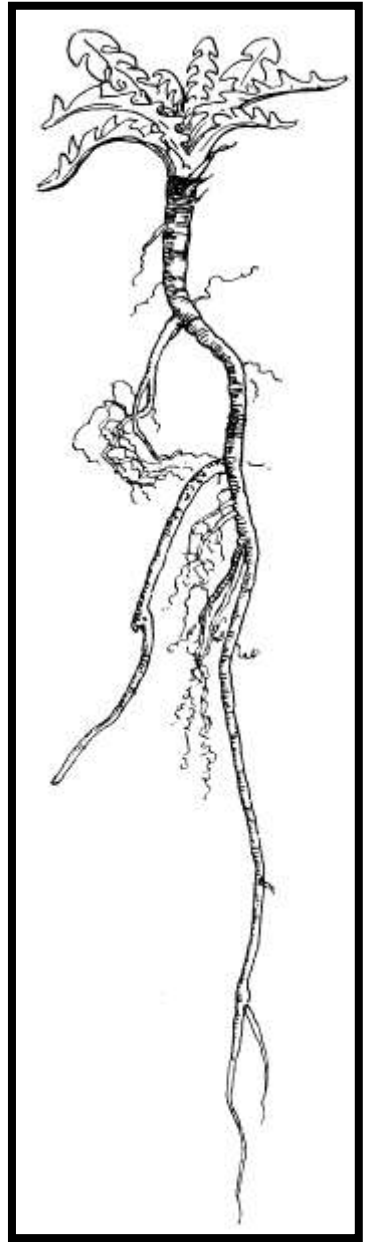
“When there were no men, there were no weeds. ... Weeds are, in fact, plants growing in places where man does not want them to grow.” I am quoting from a little book, published in 1913, that I have long treasured, entitled *Weeds. Simple Lessons for Children*. It was written by Robert Lloyd Praeger and illustrated with brilliant line drawings by his sister Rosamond and several photographs by the Ulster photographer R. J. Welch. One of its charming attributes is a series of



The cover of R. L. Praeger's 1913 book

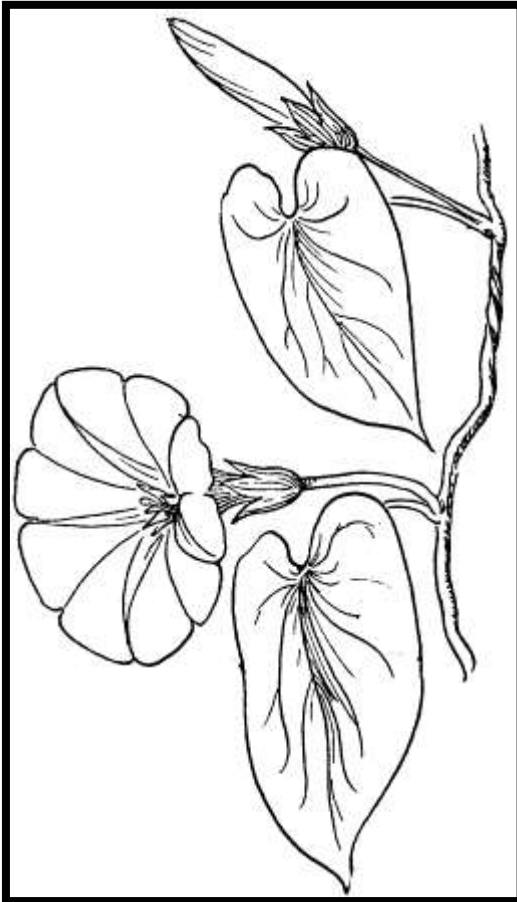
end-of-chapter “Exercises”: “Mark out a hundred square yards (or less) of a pasture field. Count the number of Thistles on this area. Estimate the total number of Thistles per acre.”; “Find out what different kinds of weeds, both field weeds and garden weeds, a donkey is willing to eat.” (The donkeys down the road eat what they’re given, including stale bread roll!) While a little out-of-date in some ways, its botany will never be dated because weeds have not needed to change their habits to enable them effectively to re-invade fields and gardens. Dandelions have the same long roots, the same unaltered power “of easy and rapid invasion from a distance” as they always had, and “our efforts to keep our gardens or fields free from such plants ... may be frustrated if a neighbour allows these to grow”. On the other hand, human activities have changed. “The increasing trade and intercourse between different parts of the world, which the advent of the steamship has brought about,” observed Praeger, “have been accompanied by a copious interchange of weeds between widely-separated countries.” Remarkably, for an author writing more than 90 years ago, he foresaw the possibility of plants being dispersed much more rapidly by aeroplanes!

So, is Praeger’s definition that a weed is a plant growing where we don’t want it to grow still true? The simple answer is *yes*, even when the places in which we do not want them to grow are uncultivated, wild ones! Remember he wrote that weeds are plants growing where “man does not want them to grow” and that such places can include utterly natural habitats, although once exotic weeds have invaded such localities they are no longer strictly “natural”.



An illustration of dandelion by Rosamond Praeger in 'Weeds'

Plants that are demonized as weeds can be native or exotic. Some of the more pernicious of our garden weeds are merely those indigenous plants that are trying to reoccupy the ground from which they have been ousted – ragwort, groundsel, couch grass, dandelion, bindweed and sheep sorrel. Can you blame them? And, as Praeger noted, they employ various different strategies to make war. Groundsel, ragwort and dandelion use mass-invasion, dropping in seeds by parachute. Couch grass and bindweed creep in by stealthy, invisible, underground roots. When they have established their bridge-heads, some weeds consolidate their positions by proliferating from virtually every fragment of root that remains when we counter-attack. Dandelions and sheep sorrel do this.



Successful weeds are resourceful and extremely prolific whether from seed or fragments or both. They don't resent disturbance but rather they thrive on it, which is one reason why they are such a nuisance. Dig or hoe or plough and the weeds take the opportunity to increase.

Mind you, it is all a matter of opinion! When does a plant become a weed? Or put it this way, one gardener's beautiful flower is another's baneful, ineradicable weed. Praeger wrote about this conundrum: "... the common idea of weeds as ugly plants has no foundation; beautiful plants may become weeds in our fields and gardens just as much as plants devoid of special beauty." Take bishop's weed: I recall my parents waging war on a patch of this for years on end, and yet had we only regarded it as a tasty vegetable, like spinach, they might have allowed it to flourish a little. Now there is the variegated version, with creamy white margins to the leaflets – when

Convolvulus, another of Rosamond Praeger's beautiful line drawings from 'Weeds'

I first saw it, growing in a pot that had been brought lovingly by a proud gardener to an IGPS plant sale, I was horrified at the thought that anyone would be foolish enough to let it loose in their garden, no matter how enthusiastic they were about variegated foliage. It's a handsome thing but must be confined in an island-bed around which you can mow vigorously or, better still, in a root-proof container out of which it cannot escape. Let it loose – and it is as ineradicable as the plain green original.

We have not, I think, got variegated groundsel yet, but if you keep canaries, there is no reason for you to regard groundsel as a weed since the birds adore it. Denigrating a plant as a weed is, thus, a matter of taste – the blanched leaves of dandelions are delicious as a salad, and the brilliant yellow flower-heads make many Irish roadside a joy in early spring. But try to convince a gardener to grow them willingly ... never in a month of Sundays! How prejudiced we are! We really should not have such prejudices when we recall that almost without exception the exotics that become weeds need a helping hand on to the ladder to weediness.

Praeger's *Weeds* is full of facts and observations. "Where in nature can we find anything to compare to the blaze of scarlet where, on light soils, Poppies are rampant among the corn?" Yes, that still does happen, although now more often along newly constructed motorways. Times and weeds have changed. A century ago he was able to write: "Some of the most brilliant bits of colour that characterize our landscapes are due to weeds. ... One common Irish weed which is always welcome to the lover of beauty is the Corn Marigold, ... which during the autumn and often until Christmas lights up our potato fields with yellow stars." No more, alas! It is even remarkable that some of the old weeds of tilled ground are now deemed to be rare, threatened species!

Weeds do paint still landscapes in glorious, gaudy colours. Who hasn't seen ditches full of brilliant orange montbretia – a man-made hybrid, doubly enabled by gardeners to become a weed– or hedges bedecked in scarlet and purple fuchsia, or derelict land in cities and towns brimming with the mauve spikes of butterfly bushes? "A weed is no more than a flower in disguise", said James Russell Lowell. So they are!

"What is a weed?" "A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered!" answered Ralph Waldo Emerson. We need virtuous weeds! Just like vine weevils, potato blight, golden-leaved *Escallonia* (with plant breeders' rights attached) and Leyland cypresses, to mention just a few ineradicable pests, how would the horticultural industry make profits without them?

Drastic Measures by Shirley Snook

I listened with amusement to Helen Dillon talking at the 'New Year Lecture' about getting rid of her failures, dislikes and bores. I have been to Helen's beautiful garden and saw no sign of failures, nothing I disliked and it was anything but boring - a great inspiration!

There are times however when, like Helen, we have to admit our mistakes. It seemed like a good idea when I planted my *Rosa rugosa* hedge. The books describe it as charming, luxuriant, flowers well in summer - (nowhere does it say 'this is a thug, don't plant it'). I thought of those lovely roses in summer, hips for the birds in Winter, a natural look to enhance my cottage garden style bed. At first all went well. It was tame and manageable and I didn't mind a few snags as I kept it in trim. As each year went by however my enthusiasm for 'the natural look' waned and each Spring as I cut it back to reasonable proportions I became more and more irritated.

January 28th 2005 was one of those calm, sunny, winter days amidst the seasonal storms - I was taking advantage of my new-found spare time, having gone 'part-time' at work. In buoyant mood, I donned hat, fleece and gloves and ventured out to do a bit of tidying - no seasonal gardener here! - eager to get on top of the Spring chores before Spring arrived. My enthusiasm however was short lived. As I bent down to clear the perennial debris under my lovely, charming rose hedge, it attacked. Each move brought another backlash and as I grappled with it, another thorn pierced through my gloves. The air became blue and I'm not accustomed to swearing. 'It's time for the chop,' I thought, 'No time like the present. Let's get the job done early this year'. The first branch clung to my gloves as I tried to edge it towards the wheelbarrow. All attempts to release it only swapped it to the other hand. [Only those who have attempted to remove a bramble patch will understand the difficulties encountered when chopping 7-8ft canes that once severed whip round to find the only piece of the anatomy that isn't covered.] That's when I thought of Helen. I decided there and then I was not going to have this battle every year. After all - 'Life's too short to stuff a mushroom'. Vengeance, temper - call it what you like - the decision was made - it was coming out, lock, stock and barrel, roots and all. With renewed enthusiasm those 7ft canes were reduced to 4ft, then 2ft. Out came the spade and the rest or rather the *Rosa rugosa* is history. The whole lot is on the bonfire.

I am now seated in front of the fire with a nice glass of wine - Cheers Helen! My new years resolution is - 'if in doubt dig it out'. The gardening books are piled on the table and I'm feeling smug but exhausted (who needs to go to the gym for exercise). Now.... will it be a nice formal Yew hedge, a clipped Box, maybe *Pittosporum*? Who knows? I might build a brick wall.

Shirley is a member from Islandmagee - great to have a new contributor. Ed

Looking over the garden hedge - R Bradshaw

Riding the bus to work recently it occurred to me that, travelling on the same route over almost fifteen years, I had looked over, or perhaps overlooked, a great number of front gardens.

From a seat on the top deck, I do a daily review of hundreds of the great, and mostly not so great, front gardens of middle class Dublin, as my bus makes its way through a radial slice of suburb and town. Seasons pass, plants flower and fade but my run to work remains the same.

The front garden has always been a difficult one to manage and to lay out. Doubtless most IGPS members are less proud of their front garden than they are of their back garden. How have these front gardens changed over all that time?

Well, a good deal actually.

Fashions have certainly changed and the wheelie bin is now the most common garden ornament, having come from nowhere as the feature to dominate so many small gardens. Relatively few house owners seem at all anxious to find a means to conceal the bins, and many gardens now have three or more. Perhaps pay by weight will move them out to more secure locations.

Only one item is more common, the ever present car. With more and more cars in use, vast areas of (usually scruffy) grass or lawn have fallen victim to cobble lock paving. This is seemingly now going out of fashion, and more recently gravel and grit have been installed so that three or more cars can be parked off street. The scale of these changes on the urban garden landscape is very little remarked upon. Car use too has led to widened gates to drive to the door and the old style symmetrical front garden - two tiny lawns each side of a narrow path to the door - with or without narrow beds - is an endangered species.

Has the "garden makeover show" and the alleged awakened and widespread interest in gardening had a profound influence for good, encouraging better front gardens?

On the whole, no - probably not as much influence as longer working hours, very long commutes and increased road noise which may have eroded interest in practical gardening, at least gardening by the city road side. On the whole practical gardening seems to be in decline. A very few gardens show evidence of having being redesigned,

probably by professional designers, as in many cases the maintenance ceases almost immediately the plants go in.

In at least one case, the garden room idea has been taken up and applied in a really tiny garden. I wonder how you could ever bring in any big item, such as a sofa or even a new TV through this mini garden maze. As the plants mature, this design problem intensifies. Only one garden on the route has really been transformed for the better, but two or three good gardens have also fallen by the wayside. One old man, often seen working outdoors in past summer evenings, must have died, as his garden which once had no blade astray, is falling into decay.

Indeed what is very remarkable is that many gardens seemingly get no attention whatsoever, grass is uncut for months, hedges (and they are amazingly common things, hedges) remain untrimmed or are given a once a year short back and sides. Whatever about watching gardening on television, very little of the real stuff is going on. There are no poor houses in my sample, quite the contrary and my impression is that however house proud the residents may be, the front garden is mostly just a space between the car and the front door, a space to be crossed as quickly as possible.

Perhaps the most dispiriting news relates to the public spaces, schools, hospitals and church gardens and grounds that I pass. These once carefully tended semi public spaces now mostly show a great lack of maintenance. From once being neat showcases for the gardeners' art, if not over imaginative garden sites, public building or institutional gardens have now become dilapidated and generally unloved. In these usually large and important spaces in the urban fabric, large trees decay and they get little care. It might indeed be wise to pass by on the other side of the street on a windy day. When Ireland was poor we could keep these spaces properly, we could plant young trees and flowers and remove dead wood and rubbish. Now the groundsman's greenhouse falls into decay, while the institution has more money than ever to spend. This is happening without any of us doing anything much about it. If the car has had a profound impact, it is perhaps ironic that the neatest institutional garden that I pass every day is one centred on a busy petrol station.

Of course the real pleasure of the trip comes from individual plants. Curiously, some of the loveliest ones live in much neglected gardens, living in spite of neglect or even contempt from the householders. The *Camellia* that blooms alone, in what is just a bike park for the tenants is arriving earlier and earlier each year. The *Ceanothus*, that has had so many branches lopped from it over the years to let cars into its garden, should be very, very dead a long time ago but it remains a splendid sight twice a year. It gives me hope that neglect is not always deadly. Perhaps in some of these neglected gardens live on many rare old varieties just awaiting rediscovery.

Some Like it Hot says Phemie Rose

It would appear that 6 weeks of sun and no rain in May/June 2004, coupled with the extremely mild weather up till now (mid January 2005), has resulted in some unusual events in the garden.

Astroemaria ligtu hybrids has never stopped flowering since last summer and is still producing its bright pink flowers. *Clianthus puniceus* is looking lovely with its brilliant red lobsterclaw-like flowers against the light green wall leading to the Mediterranean garden. *Musa basjoo*, for the first time, in November, produced 2 large flowers and small inedible bananas. The flowers are still hanging on in there. *Passiflora caerulea* is still in flower and fruit. Next to it, spilling down the rock, is *Grevillea rosmarinifolius* beautifully smothered in red flowers. *Anigozanthos flavidus* still has its red/green flowers and *Abutilon megapotamicum* is carrying loads of yellow/red bells.

The Acers had the most magnificent autumn colour, the best ever, but the star of the foliage display was the *Euonymus* family. *Euonymus alatus* was a bright fiery red and *Euonymus atropurescens* 'Cheatumii' a dark vibrant red (despite being in part shade). Meanwhile *Daphne bholua* is scenting the whole garden along with *Sarcococca humilis*. The Azaleas and Camellias think spring has arrived and are already producing their flowers.

Rhododendron 'Christmas Cheer', which up until now I thought was for too optimistically named, came into flower before Christmas and is still going. Another first is the flowering of *Acacia dealbata*. We have had no flowers for the past 14 years despite it now being some 40' tall; at last we have those lovely yellow fluffy scented balls of flowers. Even *Fuchsia* 'Swingtime' still has foliage and flowers.

Acacia pravissima and *Cestrum elegans* are flowering at the same time. Very weird! Even the tree ferns have gone mad. *Cyathea australis* is sending up 2 new crosiers and *Cyathea cooperii* (which is usually loses its fronds in the winter) not only has retained its fronds but also is sending up more crosiers.

Strobilanthes violacea is still hanging on to its foliage and the daffodils are in bloom as is *Leucojum vernum* and a pink *Abutilon*.

Has spring come early? If so, one wonders what there will be to delight and add colour to the garden in March/April.

Maybe it is the unpredictability of it all that keeps us so passionate about plants and gardening.

Regional Reports

Reports from Munster

January 14th 2005

My Garden in Co. Wicklow

Dermot Keogh

Dermot Keogh came to tell us of his fourth garden in Co. Wicklow so that we could indulge in some escapism on an unpleasant January evening that, sadly, kept our numbers down.

Our lecturer was an enthusiast for all forms of plant life and we saw slides of herbaceous plants and of shrubs, of the newly fashionable grasses, of plants that lived within the shelter of his woodland and of those which appreciated the more arid conditions of a raised bed. A constant theme as a new slide was shown – this is a rather unusual plant but it came originally from an IGPS sale or was grown from seed obtained through the society.

This was not a garden where plants were cosseted or pruned to fit the grand design but grown for the pleasure of their company. It was a place where plants were allowed to give of their best in their own way and left to cope with conditions of soil and weather as best they could.

So we heard of plants whose lives were short and of those which flourished – a garden that would be worth the long drive from Cork on its open days when one would surely see something to inspire or covet.

February 4th 2005

The redevelopment of Herbaceous Borders at Kylemore

Ann Golden

This was one of the Great Gardens of Ireland flagship schemes and had been visited in its early stages when there was an AGM in Galway. In the course of a well crafted lecture Ann led us from the start of the restoration project, in 1996, to photographs of the border in full flower taken in 2004.

Great courage must have been needed to start this enterprise as the site had been neglected for over 60 years. Weed infested and relatively shallow pasture is not ideal for herbaceous plants. The historical dimension of the restoration of borders which had

been at their best in the last years of the 19th century added to the difficulties; ordnance survey maps were the source for infrastructure but no plant lists or planting plans survived and only one neighbour, aged 93, could remember the borders' existence.

Cleaning and revitalizing the soil, sourcing plants similar to those of the original plantings, designing appropriate planting plans were only part of the difficulties. Ann was working in the windy and wet weather of Connaught, organizing a team of FAS workers with no horticultural background and transport costs were a significant factor. Inevitably there were plants that had lost vigour over the years, others that created maintenance problems but overall the recreation of the borders has added another dimension for the visitor to Kylemore to enjoy.

This was a very interesting and enjoyable talk but I wondered whether herbaceous borders of this magnitude and in this area is a viable proposition or whether they will prove as ephemeral as their predecessors.

March 4th 2005

The Productive & Beautiful Vegetable Garden Joy Larkcom Pollard

Spring had come, tempting packets of vegetable seeds were in the shops; it was the ideal time to stimulate interest in this often, neglected area.

Joy, a well-known advocate of and writer on vegetables, introduced us to ideas used in other countries from Villedary in France to Seattle in the U.S.A. and on to 'Edible Landscaping' in Canada.

She spoke of growing climbing beans for height and as a focal point on willow arches and among sunflowers, of the brilliant colour effects of rainbow chard and beetroot, of maize interplanted with salad crops. She showed us slides of fruit trees skilfully pruned into ornamental shapes, of different edgings to neat beds and of different ways a vegetable garden could be enclosed. She pointed out that vegetables often grow better in patches than rows and it is more economical of both ground and time.

My outstanding memory was the colour co-ordination of *Lonicera 'Baggesson's Gold'* surrounding a bed of blue-grey leeks but I wondered if I could ever bring myself to destroy the pattern and eat the leeks when young and tender- it was a fascinating glance at an old subject.

Elizabeth Corban-Lucas

Reports from Leinster

Thursday March 10th

“**Explaining the Burren**” by Dr David Jeffrey.

This lecture by Professor David Jeffrey, '*Explaining the Burren*', was certainly thought provoking. He asked why the Burren was such an odd place, a contradictory place where plants with arctic-alpine affinities grow at almost sea level, a place where calcifuges like *Calluna vulgaris* and *Potentilla erecta* and calcicoles like *Asperula cynanchica* coexist.

Prof. Jeffrey suggested a unique combination of environmental factors allow this juxtaposition of species to take place. Three factors he discussed were soil base status, soil fertility and the regular occurrence of drought.

In the Burren one encounters great variation in soil depths with non-calcareous loess lying on calcareous bedrock. The loess, having been crushed by ice, has been carried, he suggests, by Kalabatic winds from Connemara to the Burren and deposited in various depths around the area. The depth of soil obviously affects fertility as a deep soil will contain a larger nutrient reservoir. A deep soil will also be less susceptible to drought.

Despite high annual rainfall, because of close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, drought is a critical factor. High evapotranspiration between April and July in areas with shallow soil results in a plant community with xerophytic characteristics. These characteristics include deep extensive roots, root storage organs, and leaf traits that include leaf succulence, small leaves or leaflets, leaf hairs, and stomata sunken or in grooves. Xerophytic species range from annuals to long lived grasses, *Geranium robertianum*, *Geranium molle*, *Poa annua*, *Dryas octopetala*, *Calluna vulgaris*, *Helianthemum canum*, *Sedum acre*, *Sesleria albicans*, *Plantago maritima*, and *Carex flacca*.

And finally another question posed by Prof. Jeffrey about this unique and fascinating place and one he left us to ponder, "***Why is the Burren not a World Heritage Site?***"

Mary Rowe

Looking Ahead

Munster Fixtures

Saturday 21st May

Summer outing kindly hosted by: Christel Rosenfeld, Knochnaboula, Killorglin, Co. Kerry. Tel: 066-9761079

For ten years Christel Rosenfeld has worked on creating a garden close to Killorglin in Co. Kerry. The garden is best described as Cottage style. Working in an exposed site, which is only a short distance from the sea, creating sufficient shelter is one of her main challenges. For added interest she has created a lake, built stonewalls and incorporated a number of sculptures which complement the style. I encourage all members to take this opportunity to see a unique garden in a spectacular setting.

Our programme for the day will be as follows:

12.00: Meet at Muckcross House and Gardens for lunch

13.00: Travel to Ard Na Sidhe Hotel, Carragh Lake, Co. Kerry.

N.B. As the location of our hosts garden is difficult to find I cannot stress the importance of making this final meeting point.

14.00: Meet our host at Ard Na Sidhe Hotel and travel to her garden.

She will give us a tour and afterwards will very kindly provide Teas & Coffee.

NB: There is no charge for this visit.

Saturday 16th July

Summer Lunch Tourin House, Cappoquin, Co. Waterford.

Leinster Fixtures

Thursday 14th April

Dr Tom Curtis: A botanist's guide to plant conservation, gardens and the art of travel. At National Botanic Gardens at 8pm

Saturday 16th April

Garden Visit to Dr Keith Lamb, Woodfield, Clara, Co. Offaly. 2pm

Saturday 7th May

Garden Visit to 'Earlscliff' Howth. By the kind invitation of Mrs Muriel Robinson 2pm to 4pm

Thursday 12th May

'Ireland's Wild Orchids' Susan Sex and Brendan Sayers. Artist and Author talk about their prize winning publication. Joint with the Alpine Garden Society. At National Botanic Gardens 8pm

Saturday 21st May

Garden Visit to 'Charleville' Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow

Saturday 5th June

AGM at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin.

10am. Booking form and details enclosed.

Sunday 10th July

Garden Visit to Mir, 8 New Russian Village, Kilquade, Co. Wicklow.

By kind permission of Dr. Dermot Kehoe.

Northern Ireland

Thursday, 14th April

The Clotworthy Spring Lecture Clotworthy Arts Centre, Antrim; 7.30pm. *'Making Gardens - with an Artist's Eye'*. Daphne Levinge Shackleton explores the use of colour schemes and interesting plants to make gardens of inspiration and atmosphere. A botanist by training, an artist by inclination, Daphne has made gardens throughout Ireland, including the popular Lakeview Gardens in Co Cavan. Refreshments provided. Members free, non-members £1.00.

Wednesday, 18th May

Garden visit: Mr & Mrs McKelvey, 7 Mount Charles North, Bessbrook, Newry; 6.30 for 7.00pm. Set in the delightful 18th century village of Bessbrook, this is a connoisseur's garden, with a superb collection of alpinists and clematis, troughs, arches and trellises, cleverly planted with herbaceous plants and shrubs. Plants for sale. Fee for charity £3.00 per person, non-members £4.00.

Friday 10th – Sunday 12th June

The Garden Show, Belfast IGPS publicity/recruitment drive.

Volunteers wanted to man a stand - contact Patrick Quigley on 90-225484 or 07801-299263.

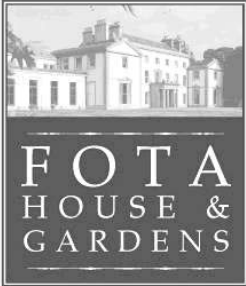
Friday, 24th June

Annual Dinner, Galgorm Manor Hotel, nr Ballymena.

7.30 for 8.00 pm. Menu and booking form enclosed.

SNIPPETS

Fota Demesne and the Great Gardens of Ireland Celebrating our Heritage: Nineteenth Century Architecture and Gardens



From 29 April-1 May the Fota Trust will be organising a conference on 19th century Architecture and Gardens. This will be accompanied by a 'Garden Event' on Sunday, 1 May, which will include lectures, workshops and clinics conducted by well-known gardeners.

Fota House was built originally as a hunting lodge for the Smith Barry family. It was extended in the 1820s by Richard and William Vitruvius Morrison to include fine reception rooms with intricate plaster work, painted ceilings and substantial servants' quarters. Much of the original kitchen and scullery areas remain, together with a well preserved game larder. The programme of restoration was carried out under the direction of the architectural services of the OPW.

The long established gardens and arboretum are world famous due to the great variety of unusual trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants which flourish in the mild climate of Fota Island.

Talks will include *The Big House in Ireland* by Dr. Alicia St. Leger (Cork), *An Architectural Context for Fota House in the early nineteenth century* by Frank Keohane (Paul Arnold, Architects, Dublin), *Conservation and Preservation, the story of Fota House* by John Cahill (O.P.W.) *Created and ideal landscapes in Irish art* by Prof. Tom Dunne (U.C.C.) *The Legacy of the Hill Family* by Dr. Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (U.C.C.), *Great Gardens of the South East* by Cormac Foley (O.P.W.), *Gardens of the Past, Inspirations for the Future* by Finola Reid (Dublin), *Bridging the Gap: bringing the Heritage Garden into the 21st century* by Angela Jupe (Roscrea)

There will also be practical workshops/clinics in the gardens led by Charlie Wilkins, Finola Reid, Angela Jupe and Peter Dowdall along with tours of the Arboretum and Fota Gardens.

For information contact: Fota House and Gardens, Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork.
Tel: 021 4815543, Email: info@fotahouse.com, Web: www.fotahouse.com

Moorea Back Issues:

With the imminent publishing of the latest issue of Moorea new members might like to have some of the back issues. Mary Forrest has back copies of Moorea Volumes 11 and 13. If any new members would like a copy please send an A4 SAE to: Mary Forrest, Dept Crop Science, Horticulture & Forestry University College Dublin, Dublin 4
Copies will also be available at the AGM.

Heritage Bulbs:

Heritage Bulbs specialise in rare and historic bulbs, and also offer bulbs for naturalising in quantity. Their display of a 'Woodland Garden' at this year's Spring House & Garden Show at the RDS was a demonstration of this kind of look. Their new list of naturalising bulbs, called 'Wild About Bulbs', is published in April 2005, and offers bulbs by the hundred, at wholesale prices. The list includes many woodlanders such as snowdrops, bluebells and cyclamen, and this year they offer a choice between buying these varieties as loose bulbs, for delivery in September/October, or alternatively 'in the green' in February/March. Some 30 bulb varieties are offered in total. For more information, please ask Alex or Noreen for a free catalogue, info@heritagebulbs.com or tel. 044 62744.

West Cork Garden Trail

West Cork Garden Trail in association with the Harold Barry Trust 11th - 26th June.
Brochures available from Phemie Rose, Kilravock, Durrus, Co. Cork 027 61111
e-mail kilravock1@eircom.net

Gardens of the South-East, June 7th – 19th.

Revised brochure available: SAE to Margaret Power, Abbey Gardens, Abbey Road, Ferrybank, Waterford. Phone: 051-832081

Helen Dillon in Cork, Thursday 26th May.

Helen will speak in Cork, "*55 years a gardener – My Inspirations*"
Contact: Hestor Forde 021-4353855, Miriam Cotter 021-4343583 for details and tickets.

The Big Raffle:

The IGPS Private Draw Deborah Lambkin's watercolour of *Cyclamen pseudibericum* with *Hepatica nobilis* and the signed Print and Text by Susan Sex and Brendan Sayers of *Epipactis palustris* will take place at the AGM. Take this late opportunity to return your tickets to Mary Bradshaw, Avondale, Bird Avenue, Clonskeagh, Dublin 14

Worth a Read by Paddy Tobin

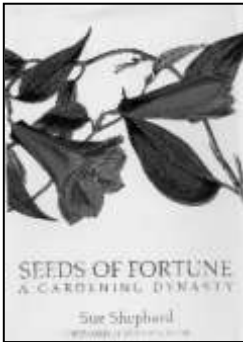
Christmas presents inevitably brought books and book tokens, predictable perhaps but perfectly welcome. The early months of the year have been unseasonably good ones for gardening because of the long dry spell we have had but the evenings have been short until now and what better way to pass them pleasurably than by reading. Armchair gardening is a growing pastime, I believe.

Seeds of Fortune by Sue Shepherd gives an enthralling account of the Veitch family, plant collectors, plant introducers, cultivators and hybridisers through five generations in their famous nurseries in Exeter and London. They sent plant collectors to the Americas, Australia, India, Japan, China and the South Seas. They were key figures in gardening and were involved in the Royal Horticultural Society and the Chelsea Flower Show. Theirs is an extraordinary story of how one family can make such efforts and have such influence for the development of horticulture. Sue Shepherd writes their story with flair, drawing on an immense wealth of information and presenting it all in a most readable and entertaining manner. It left me as

awe of the work this family had achieved. A most enjoyable book. [*Seeds of Fortune - A Gardening Dynasty, Sue Shepherd, Bloomsbury, 2003, 300 pages, Hardback, £18.99, ISBN 0 7475 6066 8*]

The Plant Hunter's Garden by Bobby J. Ward a similar theme as Sue Shepherd's book. Here we have accounts of the modern day plant hunters, those who are presently searching out new plants for the trade and for our gardens. At first consideration their stories may not strike one as being as exciting or as dramatic as those of E. H. Wilson, George Forrest or Frank Kingdon Ward with travel is so much easier today than previously. However, even with the help of modern travel and modern technology the work of the plant hunter is a challenging one. The author gives us pen pictures of thirty two of today's most successful plant hunters. The narrative dwells as much on the plants as on the people, giving the book a good balance. Some of those profiled will be familiar: the Wynn-Jones of Crug

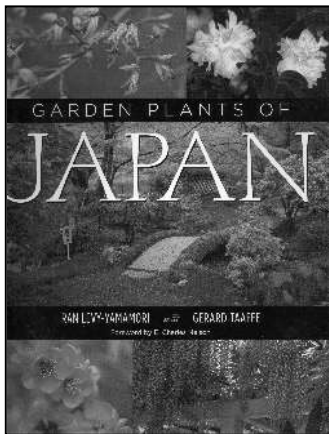
Farm in Wales among them. Also profiled are many other interesting people who have introduced that passion of every gardener – new plants. As well as telling us of the plant collectors we are also introduced to a range of most interesting plants. A very good read. [*The Plant Hunter's Garden – The New Explorers and their Discoveries, Bobby J. Ward, Timber Press, 2004, 340 pages, Hardback, £29.99, ISBN 0-88192-696-5*] Readers can



order *The Plant Hunter's Garden* for £31.99 including p&p (saving a total of £6 on the retail price plus postage costs). To order, please contact Timber Press: 0044 1954 232959 or email timberpressuk@BTinternet.com, quoting reference code IPGS03.

Has Graham Stuart Thomas ever approached a subject in other than a most thorough manner? I doubt it. *The Rock Garden and its Plants* is one of those books that impress one with the depth of research and breadth of treatment which the author brings to his subject. Not only does he give us a grand tour of the history of rock gardening, we are also given the necessary geological background, an account of the historical introduction of alpine plants, practical advice on the construction and maintenance of rock gardens, how to choose the most suitable plants and how best to use these in a pleasing, suitable and aesthetic manner. Graham Stuart Thomas was an enthusiastic rock gardener from his youth and later became recognised as the leading authority on this fascinating branch of gardening. The photographs are in black and white and despite our now

familiarity with coloured illustrations they serve their purpose perfectly. A number of plants are illustrated by colour prints, some from *The Botanical Magazine* and dating back to the early 19th century, giving the reader the bonus of their historic interest also. This is an authoritative and very readable book. [*The Rock Garden and its Plants from Grotto to Alpine House*, Graham Stuart Thomas, Frances Lincoln, 2004, 266 pages, Hardback, £25, ISBN 0 7112 2398 X]



Garden Plants of Japan presents the plants cultivated in Japanese gardens, noting which are authentically Japanese and which not. This encyclopaedic listing of the plants occupies most of the book. The illustrations are excellent as is the text with each plant entry. The introductory chapter gave a most interesting account of gardening in Japan, the different approaches, traditions and methods and I wished it had gone on for much, much longer. While the plant accounts were excellent, most could be found elsewhere and the glimpse the authors have given of Japanese gardening has sparked my interest in the area. Another book for the authors? Should they ever write it I imagine it would be another excellent book. [*Garden Plants of Japan*, Ran Levy-Yamamori & Gerard Taaffe, Timber Press, 2004, 440 pages, Hardback, £45, ISBN 0-88192-650-7] Readers can order *Garden Plants of Japan* for £44 including p&p (saving a total of £9 on the retail price plus postage costs). To order, please contact Timber Press: 0044 1954 232959 or email timberpressuk@BTinternet.com, quoting reference code IPGS04.



Cyclamen coum – a line drawing by Wendy Walsh.