

Irish Garden Plant Society

Newsletter - January 2024



Issue 160

Irish Garden Plant Society

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Copy for the April issue as soon as possible
please and no later than **29th February**.

Cover:

***Ruscus aculeatus* 'John Redmond'** courtesy of Paddy Tobin
- see www.irishgardenplantsociety.com under Irish Plant Portraits
for further information. Grateful thanks to our horticultural advisors,
Stephen Butler and Brendan Sayers, and the backroom team of Mary Davies,
Adrian Walsh and Sara Whelan for their editorial assistance.

Welcome

When does your gardening year begin? I think it is definitely January; the coldest weather may still be lying in wait but the all-important daylight is starting to increase bringing, for me at least, new hope and enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm for the gardens at Birr Castle still fills Lord Rosse, an IGPS founder member now in his ninth decade. Read his delightful account of new planting and other developments at Birr on page 11.

The family links between the Parsons of Birr and the Actons of Kilmacurragh are mentioned by Seamus O'Brien as he reviews the beauty of that estate describing many wonderful plants with Irish associations which are seen at their best in the winter months. I feel inspired to add at least one of them to my Irish collection. I hope you do too.

New ground was broken last November by a study day at Bellefield in County Offaly when a group of enthusiasts from the RHSI and the IGPS met to pool their knowledge on soil health. A warm welcome to these pages to Candida Frith-Macdonald who tells us about it on page 18.

The focus on sustainability in the autumn issue carries through to this one. Three of our members from disparate parts of the island tell us how they have given various artifacts a second life in their gardens; meanwhile Paddy Tobin adds a dose of practicality and common sense to the discussion of

biodiversity under the heading A Gardener's Eye.



Dates for your Diary lists a splendid range of talks both by Zoom and in person together with a couple of exciting garden visits scheduled for April. Meanwhile May will see us return to our popular two-day format for the AGM which will take place in County Down. Please come, it will be full of interest and the company will be great.

In the meantime a very happy new year.

Maeve

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A Note from the Chair



The IGPS year can be divided into two, with garden visits in one half and lectures in the other. Plant sales and workshops also form part of the yearly round. Now in the 'lecture' part of the year, I hope you have enjoyed lectures in person or via Zoom.

Claire Woods introduced members to *A Year at Hillsborough Castle*. Those attending Christine Skelmersdale's lecture saw how to be creative with bulbs. Trees were the subject of John Anderson's thought-provoking lecture in Glasnevin and of much of Alwyn Sinnamon's in Malone House, Belfast; respectively they manage Windsor Great Park in England and the Arboretum and Annesley Gardens at Castlewellan, County Down.

At the AGM in May 2023 a request was made to hold more talks via Zoom and a small group volunteered to organise them. Shirley Lanigan challenged us to garden 'outside the box', Matthew Jebb's botany studies in Oxford introduced him and now his audience to the amazing world of plants, Billy McCone's enthusiasm for garden design was evident in his talk.

Thanks are due to members of the Leinster and Northern Committees and to those organising the Zoom lectures for fielding such an excellent team of speakers.

Dates for your Diary gives details of our coming talks in January, February and March. Garden visits too will take place this spring and early summer – Limerick and south County Dublin in April while County Down is the venue for the AGM and associated garden visits; details about the AGM are on page 24.

Whatever the time of year, the IGPS website is worth a browse. The *Strategy for the Preservation of Irish Cultivars* was updated in October 2023 and can be viewed there. In last September's Newsletter (Issue 159) the article about Irish *Agapanthus* referred to extra information being on the website; since then, more illustrations of Irish cultivars have been uploaded.

Mary Forrest, Chairman

Winter at Kilmacurragh

by Seamus O'Brien



The winter months have their charm: log fires, low shafts of sunlight and the arrival of winter-flowering stalwarts in our gardens. Kilmacurragh has many winter-interest plants, given the Victorian passion for evergreens and conifers together with our more recent additions which include Irish cultivars and plants with Irish ties.

The warm south-facing wall of the early 18th century courtyard has one of the most exciting climbers we grow, the Dutchman's pipe, *Aristolochia californica*; by late January it's smothered with purple-brown saxophone-shaped blossoms on naked stems. Not far away grows my namesake, *Helleborus x hybridus* 'Seamus O'Brien', a deliberate hybrid created by Will McLewin of Phedar Nurseries in Cheshire by crossing *H. multifidus*

subsp. *hercegovinus* with *H. multifidus* subsp. *serbicus* (syn. *H. torquatus*), resulting in a plant with dissected foliage and deep port wine-colour blossoms in late winter.

On arrival to the car park, visitors are greeted by *Griselinia littoralis* 'Bantry Bay', selected on Garinish Island (Innacullin), County Cork by Murdo McKenzie (1896-1983) about 1950. It is the most handsome of the variegated griselinias, with a marbled pattern of butter-yellow, lime green and dark green across its leaves. This clone is female and bears innumerable purple fruits when male plants are nearby. Another Irish cultivar grows nearby, *Eucryphia x intermedia* 'Rostrevor', perhaps the best of the eucryphias for Irish conditions. This County Down selection blooms up to Christmas.

Visitors enter the gardens through a short avenue of *Leptospermum lanigerum* Pillar Form BIBET 074. This was collected by the British-Irish Botanical Expedition to Tasmania (BIBET) in the wilds of Tasmania in January 2018 [see Issue 144 Ed]. The parent plant grew in alpine moorland where it assumed the habit of an Irish yew, a trait passed on to the seedlings. They are currently on trial here, with potential for naming.

Approaching the house is a fine young tree of the Californian big-cone pine, *Pinus coulteri*, named for Dundalk man Thomas Coulter (1793-1843), who discovered it in 1832. It has already formed a striking tree with long exotic needles, but no cones as yet. It looks over a gargantuan cloud tree, *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Elegans' which turns red-bronze in winter.

Passing the drawing room, a young tree of *Emmenopterys henryi* is forming a shapely specimen, with striking red winter buds. Augustine Henry (1857-1930) discovered this tree in the Three Gorges region of central China in 1886 and was a regular visitor to the Acton family at Kilmacurragh. On the western side of the drawing room is *Paeonia* 'Anne Rosse', bred by the 6th Earl of Rosse at Birr Castle in the late 1950s. A union of two great gardening families in Ireland took place when William Acton (1711-1779) married Jane Parsons from Birr (1710-1780) in 1736; Jane's dowry enhanced and expanded the gardens at Kilmacurragh.

Behind the house is Kilmacurragh's much-celebrated Broad Walk, planted in 1873 by Janet Acton (1824-1906) with alternating Highclere rhododendrons and Irish or Florence Court yews.



Helleborus x hybridus 'Seamus O'Brien'

On Victorian maps they are highlighted as ‘Enniskillen yews’, the only time I’ve seen this common name used for *Taxus baccata* ‘Fastigiata’, one of our island’s best-known horticultural exports.



Aristolochia californica

Beyond is an elderly tree of *Magnolia delavayi*, from Glasnevin planted by Sir Frederick and Phylis, Lady Moore in April 1919. Frederick Moore proposed to Lady Moore in the gardens at Kilmacurragh and they both advised at Kilmacurragh over a remarkably long period. Near the lower end of the double herbaceous border is a young *Azara microphylla* ‘Variegata’, which originated in William Gumbleton’s (1840-1911) garden, Belgrove, Cobh in County Cork. A first-class foliage plant, it is magical in late winter when its tiny blossoms smell of vanilla.

Directly opposite is the Munster cultivar, *Luma apiculata* ‘Glanleam Gold’, found by Peggy Uniake in Glanleam on Valentia Island seven decades ago. In winter, its variegated foliage turns rose-purple and contrasts here against a ghostly grey-blue Kashmir cypress, along with another Irish cultivar, *Pseudowintera colorata* ‘Marjorie Congreve’, named at Mount Congreve, County Waterford, from a plant propagated at Fota, County Cork.

Strolling on, visitors reach the impressive young trees of *Heptapleurum* (syn. *Schefflera*) *macrophyllum*, one of Augustine Henry’s Yunnan discoveries, and, opposite, the golden-flowered *Edgeworthia chrysantha*, named for M Pakenham Edgeworth (1812-1881) and his step-sister, the novelist Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), from Edgeworthstown, County Longford.



Edgeworthia chrysantha

East of the Broad Walk is an old tree of *Taxus baccata* 'Lutea', found near Clontarf, Dublin in 1833. This tree and another near the estate entrance were no doubt propagated from a specimen sent to Glasnevin in 1837 by Lady Dufferin. It's a shame that this exceptional Irish cultivar is so rare in our gardens. Approaching the Monks Walk are some *Daphne bholua* seedlings currently on trial. The best bears flesh-white blossoms along its stems and has potential to be propagated and named as a cultivar.



Bergenia purpurascens
'Irish Crimson'

As I pass the bog garden, the towering stems and seed capsules of the giant Himalayan lily, *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, provide much winter interest. The Kilkenny explorer and soldier, Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Madden (1805-1856), introduced it to Glasnevin. Either side of the Pond Vista are trees commemorating Charles Moore (1820-1905), Director of Sydney Botanic Gardens, and a brother of Dr David Moore (1808-1879), who advised at Kilmacurragh. The first of these is a young 8m *Nothofagus moorei* from SE Australia (first trialed outside Australia for hardiness

at Kilmacurragh in 1885), and opposite is *Eucryphia moorei*, which in mild winters bears blossoms into December.

Given pride of place by the pond is a clump of *Acanthus spinosus* 'Lady Moore', donated by Sally Walker from Fernhill, who was given her plant by Lady Moore, then living at Willbrook House, Rathfarnham. A good perennial for winter, it stands out in spring with its creamy-yellow foliage. Among its bedfellows are *Bergenia purpurascens* 'Irish Crimson', its leaves a beetroot-colour in winter.

A fine winter tree is *Pinus sylvestris* 'Aurea', near the Oak Avenue. It is a beacon of gold at onset of winter. Several years ago I raised 160 seedlings; just seven seedlings assumed golden foliage in winter and two have proved outstanding. If they demonstrate their worth, perhaps it may mean a new Irish cultivar — *Pinus sylvestris* 'Kilmacurragh Gold'.



Daphne bholua
a Kilmacurragh seedling

A Delightfully Monstrous Delphinium

by Brendan Sayers

Delphinium 'Weeshy's Blue' [pronounced wish she] arose as a seedling sown by Anthony Aloysius Doherty at Pretty See Cottage in County Meath approximately 10 years ago. It grew among other delphinium seedlings and it was not until it was a mature clump that its uniqueness was spotted. The cultivar is best noted for its mutant qualities, evident in the uppermost flower being an amalgamation of many flowers and the flowerless gaps on the inflorescence. The cultivar name is derived from the violet blue flowers and the diminutive of the middle name of its originator.



Delphinium 'Weeshy's Blue'



Delphinium 'Weeshy's Blue'
flower spike

The plant first flowers in late May and early June at a height of approximately 2 metres. The branched inflorescence is approximately 80 cm tall and the flower colour is predominantly violet for the buds and outer sections of petals and violet blue for the central part of the petals (Violet group 86A and Violet-Blue 95A; RHS colour chart 1966).

The mutation is technically termed Peloria, defined by the Merriman-Webster dictionary as 'a normal, often hereditary regularity of structure occurring in normally irregular flowers'.

One of the most commonly encountered peloric flowered plants of our gardens is *Digitalis purpurea*, the foxglove, where the terminal flower is cup-shaped, more reminiscent of a *Campanula* or bell flower. Seedlings of *D.* 'Weeshy's Blue' exhibit the peloric nature of their parent.

As mentioned, *Delphinium* 'Weeshy's Blue' is noteworthy in having gaps (up to 8cm long) in the inflorescence, devoid of flowers but still possessing the floral bracts. Furthermore, some of the flowers lack the spur found on normal delphinium flowers. The second flush of flowers produced in late summer may lack any evidence of mutation.



Delphinium 'Weeshy's Blue' may not be everyone's first choice for a border, but its unusual form and captivating violet blue flowers makes it attractive and unique. It must be propagated vegetatively, by simple division of the root stock or by basal cuttings in spring and from the second spurt of growth in late summer. If propagating from cuttings, the cuttings should be taken from the plant when the stems are approximately 8cm tall and before they have become hollow.

A small number of rooted cuttings will be available to members by the time of the AGM in May. Further details will be available in the April issue.

What's New in Birr Castle Gardens

by Lord Rosse



Birr Castle photo courtesy of Paul Moore

Birr is looking beautiful. The avenue of young beech down towards the formal garden is beginning to come into its own. These are no ordinary beeches. They were grown from seed gathered below our *Fagus sylvatica* 'Rohanii' about twenty years ago. To our surprise each one came up differently, some with the crinkled leaves of Rohanii, some with dark leaves, some plain, some crinkled but green. The other parent pollinator must have been one of the big beeches in the park. We decided to plant them in an avenue and now it is interesting to watch them grow.

At the start of the avenue is one of our young zebra beech. The distinctive striped leaves of our *Fagus sylvatica* 'Birr Zebra' were discovered some years ago on the parent tree opposite the Shell Well and it has become one of our specialities.

Visitors may notice some improvements to the garden. A huge and expensive restoration is taking place on the Suspension Bridge as I write and I hope it won't be too long before it is back in place. It has had many repairs over its 200 year existence,

but this time it has been removed to get a more permanent makeover. Below the bridge the bank has been renewed and strengthened and the path smoothed and levelled. We intend to fill the bed beside it with *Agapanthus* and *Kniphofia* to echo my mother's original planting, with *Cytisus* to flower in the spring; the steep bank below it has been filled with hundreds of aubretias to be seen in the spring from the River Garden. On the terraces above the bridge, our star tree is the magnificent *Magnolia delavayi* which manages to produce a flower almost all the year round. We love it because we know its history. It was bought in France and planted by my grandfather in 1912; we have the invoice and even know the price — the large sum at the time of 12 old French francs.

The last two years have been exciting in the Demesne with several of our introductions flowering for the first time. Is it global warming? Everything has been flowering better than ever this year, especially our Chinese *Calycanthus x raulstonii* with its beautiful dark purple flowers in the River Garden, and also the *Eucryphia lucida* 'Pink Cloud' from Tasmania.

Our new Chilean plants have been especially interesting: in the last two years *Podocarpus andinus* [now *Prumnopitys andina* Ed] bore fruit for the first time while *Colletia paradoxa* flowered for the first time. *Quillaja saponaria* also flowered and *Pitavia punctata* even set seed. These shrubs and small trees are

grouped close to our 'Chilean Gate', which is covered in *Berberidopsis*, just outside the Formal Gardens. Plants from the Southern hemisphere seem to do well at Birr.

We were delighted, too, to see one of our young *Carrieria calycina* in flower for the first time. We have several of these young trees taken from cuttings of the huge champion in the River Garden which was planted by my father in the 1920s. It flowered beautifully for many years, but sadly died recently. We have also been busy planting. Most recently we planted the beautiful specimen of *Zelkova carpinifolia* 'Glasnevin', so kindly presented to us by Mary Forrest on behalf of the Irish Garden Plant Society.



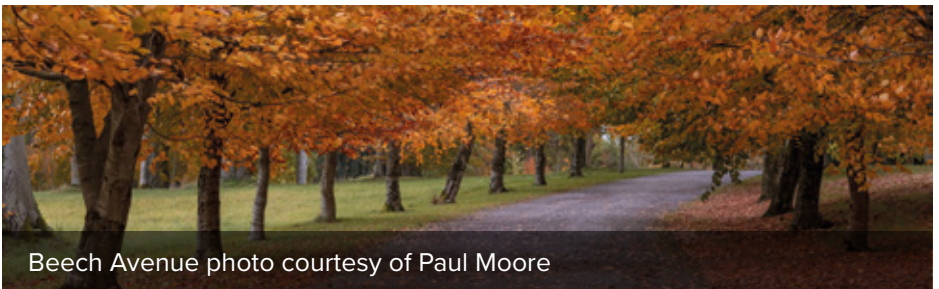
Carrieria calycina photo courtesy of Shane Holywood



Birr Gardens in winter photo courtesy of Paul Moore

As well as some of these rarities, we have planted over 1,000 specimens of native trees in the last two years to increase our wilder areas of woodland along the rivers and the lake. These have been everything from birch to rowan, spindle to yew, and of course oak. We are lucky in Birr to have both the native oaks: *Quercus robur* and *Quercus petraea* growing naturally here, so we have planted more of both of them alongside those that are coming up self-seeded.

Gardens never stand still. We hope to keep Birr on the move with an ever increasing range of plants, both in the herbaceous borders and in the greenhouse where we are adding to a collection of unusual geraniums and fuchsias. This autumn and winter we have planted more magnolias to add to our collection, as well as many other rare and native trees. We look forward to their flowering in the spring and to keeping Birr always full of beauty and interest.



Beech Avenue photo courtesy of Paul Moore

Aucuba japonica 'Ashmount'

by Billy McCone

Always on the lookout for Irish plants for our IGPS garden at Pogue's Entry in Antrim, I was drawn to a listing of *Aucuba japonica* 'Ashmount' by Ravensberg Nurseries in County Offaly. Ordering it before I saw it, I was not disappointed. Thought to be a female clone, the glossy, lanceolate, slightly crenated leaves are a vivid green splashed with yellow.

Pogue's Entry volunteers found a challenging position for it at the base of a wall in the deep shade of a very mature birch. Complementing hollies, ferns and hellebores, the laurel is thriving, adding colour and structure to a difficult spot.

As a garden designer, I have rarely used spotted laurels in any of my planting plans, usually opting for the solid green of varieties such as *A. 'Rozannie'*; 'Ashmount' however will certainly be in my palette of plants for my next shade garden. We missed the opportunity for summer softwood cuttings, but the volunteers will be trying some hardwood cuttings to increase our stock and hopefully have some to pass on to other gardens.

Seeking some background information on the shrub, I found its origin to be vague. Hans Ravensberg says that, many years ago, the original plant was given to his father, Jan, by McCoy's Nursery in Kildare who in turn got it from a grower in Wicklow. As both donors have passed on, Jan was unable to find any further trace of the *Aucuba*. Needing a name, he called it 'Ashmount' after their estate. Our colleague, Stephen Butler, thinks he may have seen a similar one growing in or near Glasnevin.



Aucuba japonica 'Ashmount'
photo courtesy of Barbara Kelso

If you can help us with more information about this plant, please get in touch igps.heritageplants@gmail.com. Ravensberg Nurseries are wholesale only but designers and garden centres can order from the nursery for you.

A Second Life

by Kevin Begley, Dave Victory and Adrian Walsh

Have you heard of Annie Leonard? I hadn't until recently. She is an American environmental campaigner who once said: "There is no such thing as 'away'. When we throw anything away it must go somewhere."

She's right of course, and one of the ways we might avoid throwing quite so much away is by using reclaimed materials in the garden. With vision, this could not only reduce waste and landfill but lend our gardens a sense of age and character, bring an extra layer of meaning and a sense of place, that can't be achieved by going out and buying something new.

Some of our members have embraced this approach and, with an artful eye, have saved various items, both wacky and wonderful, from being thrown in the skip.

Adrian Walsh is treasurer for the Northern region and has a small, plant-packed city garden in Belfast.

My colander was purchased about eight years ago from an antique and bric-a-brac dealer who used to have a stall at St. George's Market, Belfast. Described as an 'army catering-sized colander', it had a very reasonable price tag, probably less than a new pot of similar size – a bargain.



I used to grow rocket and other salad leaves in it. However, having amassed a number of *Aeonium* (mainly of the dark-leaved *A.* 'Zwartkop' variety), I thought that the colander with its multiple drainage holes and contrasting aluminium colour would be a suitable and unusual container in which to display them. The colander is lined with planting fabric to prevent the potting mix (loam-based potting compost with added grit) from escaping. It goes for its winter holidays to an unheated greenhouse near the sea in County Down.

The second container, a large cast iron cauldron, was sourced from a farm in the Mourne Mountains. Although some might describe it as a ‘famine pot’, it had been used to mix food for pigs when I got it. Re-purposing it as a reflecting pool within a rectangle of box hedging was adapted from a Chelsea garden design in the early 2000s. Its placement in the centre of the garden gives a nod to a paradise garden while a solar-powered pump gives the right amount of power to eject a small fountain of water at intervals and create a cool splashing sound on hot summer days.



Kevin Begley, the owner of Coolwater Garden in Limerick, describes his garden as “... marching to a different drum”. This is partly due to his enthusiasm for finding further uses for discarded, everyday items.

I have acquired most of my items gradually over the years. Circular concrete access chambers to main sewers can make large planters, coal scuttles are very handy with their two handles for moving them around, cattle drinking bowls, sawn off oil tanks, vintage pre-stainless steel milk churns, aquariums, teapots, and ice buckets from a bar: the list goes on and on.

You have to make sure that they blend in with their surroundings — there’s nothing worse than something that looks like a rubbish dump. Plastic items are generally a no-no.

Recently, some items came from a scrap yard/recycling centre in Tuamgraney and others from farmers’ yards locally. But I only acquire things if, then and there, I can visualize what to plant into them.



Dave Victory and his wife Antoinette garden in Ballbriggan, County Dublin. Now part of the Dublin Garden Trail, the Victory Garden extends to half an acre and showcases a variety of features crafted by Dave.



There is something very satisfying about recycling and repurposing objects and materials. With a bit of imagination and some basic skills, we can create interesting features to add a unique character to our gardens. While the story of their origin may even be more interesting than the objects themselves. We made a pergola from roof timbers reclaimed from the roof of our former extension. Cast iron bench ends got a new lease of life when I fitted them with reclaimed oak floorboards and painted the bench bright yellow.

When re-modelling our patio, I rip-sawed the old hardwood decking and fabricated some sturdy trellis panels to dress a new boundary wall, choosing the spacing of the slats carefully to mask the horizontal and vertical mortar lines.

Metal too can have its uses. The copper cylinder from our former extension was re-crafted into a couple of stylish planters and I made a waterspout for the pond from some of the rest of the metal. A vintage copper coal scuttle and an old brass tap were crafted into a relatively simple water feature, now bringing a calming ambience to one of our sitting areas. I have used drum cymbals as a visual feature at the end of a path while an old bass drum was recently re-engineered and now forms a viewing window through a beech hedge.

Keep your eyes open, become a skip-diver, browse salvage yards and bric-a-brac stores. Use your imagination and always remember that one man's junk can be another man's treasure.



The Secrets of Soil Science

by Candida Frith-Macdonald

Never mind the future, even now we can't garden as we once did — because the conditions have changed, or because the products we relied on are withdrawn, or because (whisper it) some old practices never worked that well anyway. The answer? Go back to basics, learn and understand the science better, and start literally from the ground up. A day at Bellefield in County Offaly last November involving the RHSI and the IGPS did just this, through workshops led by gardeners who have been on their own soil science journey all year, steered by Conall O'Caoimh of Ardán Gardens.

Gardeners who reach for a bottle may know that NPK means nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium, and what balance to choose for general growth or boosting tomatoes. Those who think more about the soil may choose bulky organic manures, compost, and bone meal instead, to 'feed the soil, not the plant'. But both of these are applying thing **A** to achieve result **B**: if we are to understand whether the desired result is realistic, and how to adjust our methods (and maybe our aims) to our specific garden conditions and a changing environment, we need to understand what's going on **between A and B**.

What's going on is the ceaseless activity of soil organisms, from the earthworms and insects that start the breakdown of organic matter to the micro-organisms that finish it — over 20,000 of them in a single teaspoon. Hard to study and often overlooked in the past, these invisible populations are critical. Without the right soil bacteria, for example, most nitrogen (whether it's from a bottle or from a green manure) would be stuck in a form useless to plants. Fungi, nematodes, protozoa and bacteria live in a perpetual trading relationship with plant roots, processing and delivering usable nutrients, and taking sugars and carbon from the roots in return.



Worms photo courtesy of Maeve Bell

The workshops explored ‘future-proofing’ our gardens by working in harmony with this web of life rather than ignoring or harming it. We need to know the nature of our soil to know the plants that will suit it: not just acid or alkaline, but its composition from sand to clay through loam, peat, chalk and silt. We need to increase its organic content, as happens naturally every time plants die; making our own compost works well because it closely mimics nature. Heaps and tumblers, or worm and bokashi bins for those with more kitchen waste than garden waste, were all covered, with hands-on examples. For a booster, we can home-brew liquid fertilisers from compost or comfrey; if that process is too pungent, we might buy a bottle of seaweed feed.

The good news is the less work we do the better it works. We now know that surface mulching is more effective than strenuous digging-in; when you stop to think about how beneficial fungi grow through the soil as fine, root-like meshes penetrating and connecting plant roots, it makes sense that ripping them apart won’t help much. You can even just ‘chop and drop’ when weeding or pruning, leaving the worms to do what they do best — although ingrained tidy habits might make that hard!

Adding organic matter naturally brings more life into the soil: every bit of organic matter carries its own cargo of organisms and feeds worms, and this on its own

encourages a good balance. But the day also included interesting new products based on living biology (such as beneficial microbial cultures) rather than crude chemical formulas, which are coming to market even as old products are retired because of their damaging effects on our biodiversity.

Gardening for the future means learning to create naturally resilient gardens and plants that can withstand the odd attack. When the late Angela Jupe bequeathed Bellefield to the RHSI, she wanted it to be used for education: we can look forward to many more workshops like this there, teaching us how to garden better in the years to come.



Tackling the compost heap photo courtesy of Rosie Campbell

Worth a Read

by Paddy Tobin



Drawn From Nature

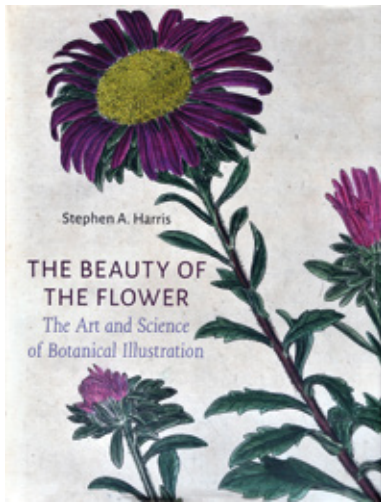
Patricia Butler was the guest curator of *Drawn from Nature, Irish Botanical Art* at the National Gallery of Ireland in 2020. This book was inspired by and developed from that exhibition and could be considered the first comprehensive attempt to chart the history of Irish botanical illustration from around 1730 to the present day although Patricia's earlier work in 1988, *Irish Botanical Illustrators & Flower Painters*, was a very worthwhile contribution to this cause.

Botanical art is currently very much alive and well in Ireland and for this great credit is due to the Irish Society of Botanical Artists which was founded in 2014.

However, until then, it seems to have been a forgotten part of Irish heritage. While there was a sprinkling of outstanding botanical artists over past centuries, it is only in recent years that we have witnessed a blossoming of many talented artists, many of whom are featured in this book. There is discussion of the earliest illustrated flora, of early amateur botanists, and of contributors to botanical design and to the famous *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*; it ranges from topographical artists engaged in the mapping of the country and the 'fair discoverers' — those ladies who made a significant contribution to Irish botany as well as to its botanical art — through to the first professional botanical artists and the present-day flourishing of gifted practitioners.

This is a beautifully produced and, as might be expected, lushly and lavishly illustrated volume but it was the text which most delighted me giving the social and historic background, insights into the personalities of the artists, their family and social connections while at the same time skilfully weaving it into the story of Irish botanical art. As well as being a book of great value, it is also a very enjoyable one.

Drawn from nature: The Flowering of Irish Botanical Art, Patricia Butler, ACC Art Books, €35/€40



The Beauty of the Flower

This book gives an excellent overview of the development and history of botanical art from the early days of woodcut printing to the development of lithographic printing in the 19th century with colour added by hand afterwards. The early 20th century saw a growth in the use of the work of botanical artists as aids in education and the accommodation of modern developments in photography. The story is fascinating, the book fabulously researched and written, and the scope of personalities and achievements recorded simply astounding.

The Beauty of the Flower
– *The Art and Science of Botanical Illustration*, Stephen A. Harris,
Reaktion Books, £30



The Essential Tree Selection Guide

This is an excellent guide to tree selection and has an approach far broader than previous such books. Of course, it presents the essential information on size, cultivation, attractions, cultivation and care and so on — all very beautifully illustrated and described, I must add — but focuses also on the ecological basis for tree selection, based on the authors' extensive experience, research and observation of the trees in their natural habitats. A well-chosen tree will contribute to the valuable ecosystem in your garden; the text highlights not only those trees valuable for pollinators or of benefit in filtering air pollution or for carbon storage but also those which will cope with drought, poor soil or high winds. These are all areas of concern to us at present and at last we have a book to guide us in our choices.

The Essential Tree Selection Guide,
Henrik Sjöman & Arit Anderson,
Filbert Press in association with the
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, £50

A Gardener's Eye

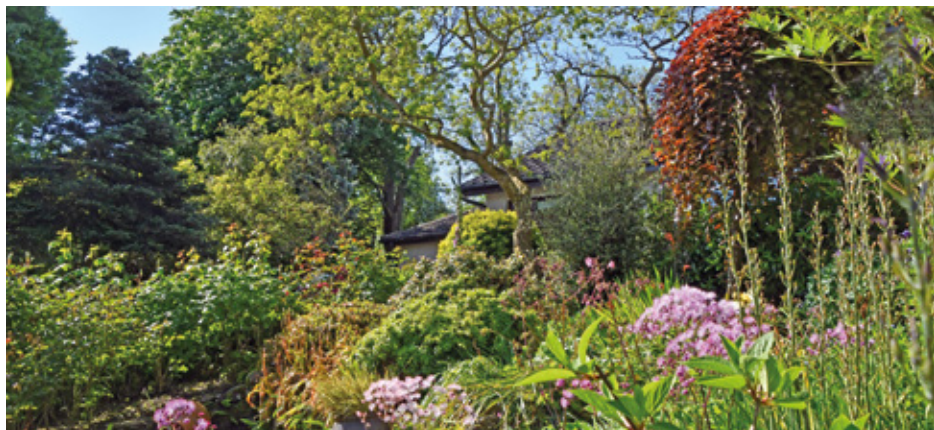
by Paddy Tobin

Last September's issue of this Newsletter asked "What do you think about re-wilding?" Many of us, I feel, detect an implied criticism of traditional gardening in much the re-wilding proponents have to say.

Gardeners are criticised, for example, for cutting our grass though many nowadays maintain their grass areas in a manner which accommodates a wide range of native plants. Growing exotic plants — and almost all our garden plants are exotic, i.e. non-native — is condemned with the recommendation that native plants would be preferable and more environmentally friendly. My garden is in a rural setting. There are four kilometres of wild verges along our road, and the riverside meadows and riverbanks are left to nature. In this context it is my garden, with all its exotic plants, which is providing the biodiversity.

Fergus Garrett, of Great Dixter in Sussex, spoke during the Carlow Garden Festival last summer; he told how, with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, surveys and habitat assessments were carried out at Dixter by specialists who looked at the woodland, farmland, lakes, meadows, hedgerows and ornamental gardens to evaluate the lichens, mosses, fungi and trees as well as the birds, mammals, reptiles, butterflies and insects. The study found that the greatest levels of biodiversity were in the ornamental gardens!

Gardening practices have changed in recent years. We recognise the dangers of pesticides and herbicides and are more aware of the need and, dare I suggest, obligation to care for our environment. I suggest we continue our gardening confident in the fact that our gardens are providing the biodiversity so regularly called for these days.





Inside Track

Woodland with snowdrops
Photo courtesy of Trevor Edwards

AGM Weekend in County Down 18th & 19th May

The magnificent Clondeboye Estate in north County Down will be the venue for the AGM and will be followed by visits to nearby private gardens over the weekend of the 18th and 19th May. The 2000 acre estate on the outskirts of Bangor, 12 miles north-east of Belfast, contains formal and walled gardens, woodlands, a lake and around 620 acres of farmland. Dating from 1674 and owned by the Dufferin and Ava family, its historic parklands were laid out by the 1st Marquis (1826-1902).

Annual General Meeting

Registration and refreshments will take place in the grand Banqueting Hall, one of the early 18th century courtyard buildings, at 9.30am on Saturday with the meeting starting at 10.30am. The formal notice and agenda will be published in the April Newsletter. **The Society is very keen to hear from members willing to come forward to fill various vacant posts and contribute to the future of the Society, especially as Leinster and Munster representatives.**

Garden visits and lunch

Following the meeting, there will be a guided tour by the head gardener of the Clondeboye Estate gardens followed by a buffet lunch in the Banqueting Hall; this is included

in the fee for the weekend. After lunch there will be visits to two nearby delightful private gardens; tea/coffee will be included mid-afternoon. On Sunday there will be two further visits to large, three acre private country gardens, both in mid County Down. The owners will give guided tours and tea/coffee is included at both gardens.

Accommodation

For those wishing to stay overnight on the Saturday evening, there are several hotels and B&Bs within the North Down area. Please see the Discover Northern Ireland website www.discovernorthernireland.com for a list of accommodation. Maybe consider extending your stay and visiting the nearby National Trust Gardens, Mount Stewart and Rowallane.

Booking the weekend

Booking for the AGM with lunch and garden visits will commence via Eventbrite on 1st February 2024 with a link from the event page on the IGPS website www.irishgardenplantsociety.com

Please book online if possible as it greatly reduces the workload of the organising team. If you are unable to book online, a form is included with this Newsletter. Postal applications will not be opened until the 1st February.



For the comfort and enjoyment of all concerned, the lunch and garden visits are limited to 100 people. The closing date for booking via Eventbrite or by post is 25th April 2024 or when sold out.

The cost of the weekend, including the Saturday lunch, teas/coffees, garden visits and the booking fee will be: Saturday only £44/€51, Saturday and Sunday £66/€76.

Members may bring one guest at an additional cost of £11/€13 per ticket. Guest tickets are limited.

Please note that the euro price may vary slightly depending on the exchange rate at the time of booking through Eventbrite.

NB. All members are welcome to attend the meeting free of charge. However it would be very helpful to know that you are coming to ensure we have a badge, conference pack and morning tea/coffee for you. If you could let us know, preferably through Eventbrite, it would be much appreciated.

For further enquiries, please contact **igps.northern@gmail.com** or **phone Billy McCone +44 7411 244568 or Barbara Kelso +44 7449 484050**

Meet the Committee

Marie Curran

Website



Growing up in West Waterford on a dairy farm and gaining a BSc in Equine Science, the outdoors was my first love but, while my grandmother had pots of cuttings filling her small urban yard and my mother adored her roses, gardening to me was painting fences. It wasn't until a cruel twist of fate left me jobless and with the diagnosis of ME that I went on to discover gardening.

In 2014 a group of friends arrived one birthday morning; with the help of my husband, they began digging and that was the start of my baby forest and vegetable patch.

My GP cheered me from the sidelines as I shared tree names and escapades; to her, my thirty-something-year-old broken body was geriatric and the act of gentle pottering delighted her, knowing I'd been a runner with my local athletics club prior to illness. Due to the limitations of my illness, I'm housebound 90% of the time and so my garden has become my world.

Andrew Gee

Facebook and Instagram



Like many keen gardeners, my interest began with my grandfather who demonstrated how to take *Pelargonium* cuttings when I was barely able to see over the top of the potting bench. My interest developed and I began volunteering at Mount Stewart's plant nursery where my horticultural knowledge grew rapidly. Meeting other volunteers opened further doors into the horticultural world. It was thanks to IGPS member Doreen Wilson that I joined the IGPS.

I study Geography at Queen's University, Belfast, while living at home in Bangor, County Down; most importantly this allows me to keep growing my treasured plants! I garden not far from the coast, meaning I can grow the more tender plants outdoors year-round. Currently, I am constructing new raised beds for my collections of special bulbs, mainly *Erythronium* and *Galanthus*, several of which have Irish provenance.

News

Around the Regions

Many congratulations to the Leinster Committee who raised a splendid €2031 after expenses from their plant sale in Blackrock, County Dublin in October, and also to the Northern Committee who raised almost £600 at a September sale to add to the £1700 raised in May. A big thank you to our hard-working committees, their friends and helpers, and the green-fingered members who provided the all important plants. Please see Mary Forrest's Note on page 4 for details of our other recent activities.

This will feature rare and unusual bulbs including a good selection of Irish snowdrops and spring-flowering perennials from specialist nurseries. Please contact **hesterforde@gmail.com** for details.



Claire McNally and Stephen Butler

Conservation strategy

Finding, growing and conserving plants which have been raised in Ireland by gardeners and nurserymen is, of course, a unique focus of the IGPS. How to go about this and identify whether these cultivars are common or rare is behind the adoption of *The Strategy for the Preservation of Irish Cultivars*, first published by the Society in 2004 and updated in October 2023. See our website **www.irishgardenplantsociety.com** for further details.

Snowdrop Gala

The annual Snowdrop Gala will be held in Ballykealey House, Ballon, County Carlow on **Saturday 27th January**. There will be two speakers in the morning; following lunch, the afternoon includes a guided tour of the snowdrop collection in Altamont Gardens and a Specialist Plant Sale.

World Daffodil Convention 2024

The prestigious World Daffodil Convention will be hosted by the Northern Ireland Daffodil Group and take place from 18th to 24th April. Further details are on the Group's website **www.nidg.weebly.com**

Additional members for the Leinster Committee

A warm welcome to Sarah Earle and Dave Victory who, over the past few months, have joined Edith Brosnan, Mary Montaut and Anne-Marie Woods on the Leinster regional committee. Together they have organized a first class programme for the coming months.



Dave Victory, Edith Brosnan and Sarah Earle with John Anderson at Glasnevin

Interested in Agapanthus?

Following the article on Irish *Agapanthus* in the September issue, our member Ian Scroggy of Bali Hai Nursery in County Antrim has supplied photos of some of the stunning Irish cultivars he can supply. Check them out on our website (details above) and look under Irish Plant Portraits. Ian can be contacted at ianwscroggy@btinternet.com

GLDA Seminar

The Garden and Landscape Designers Association seminar will take place at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Santry, Dublin on 24th February. The theme is *Space to Grow – How our gardens and open spaces can help us achieve*

a liveable future; the speakers will include Jo Wakelin from New Zealand, Stefano Marinaz from Italy and Mark Gregory from Britain. Tickets are available online at www.glda.ie

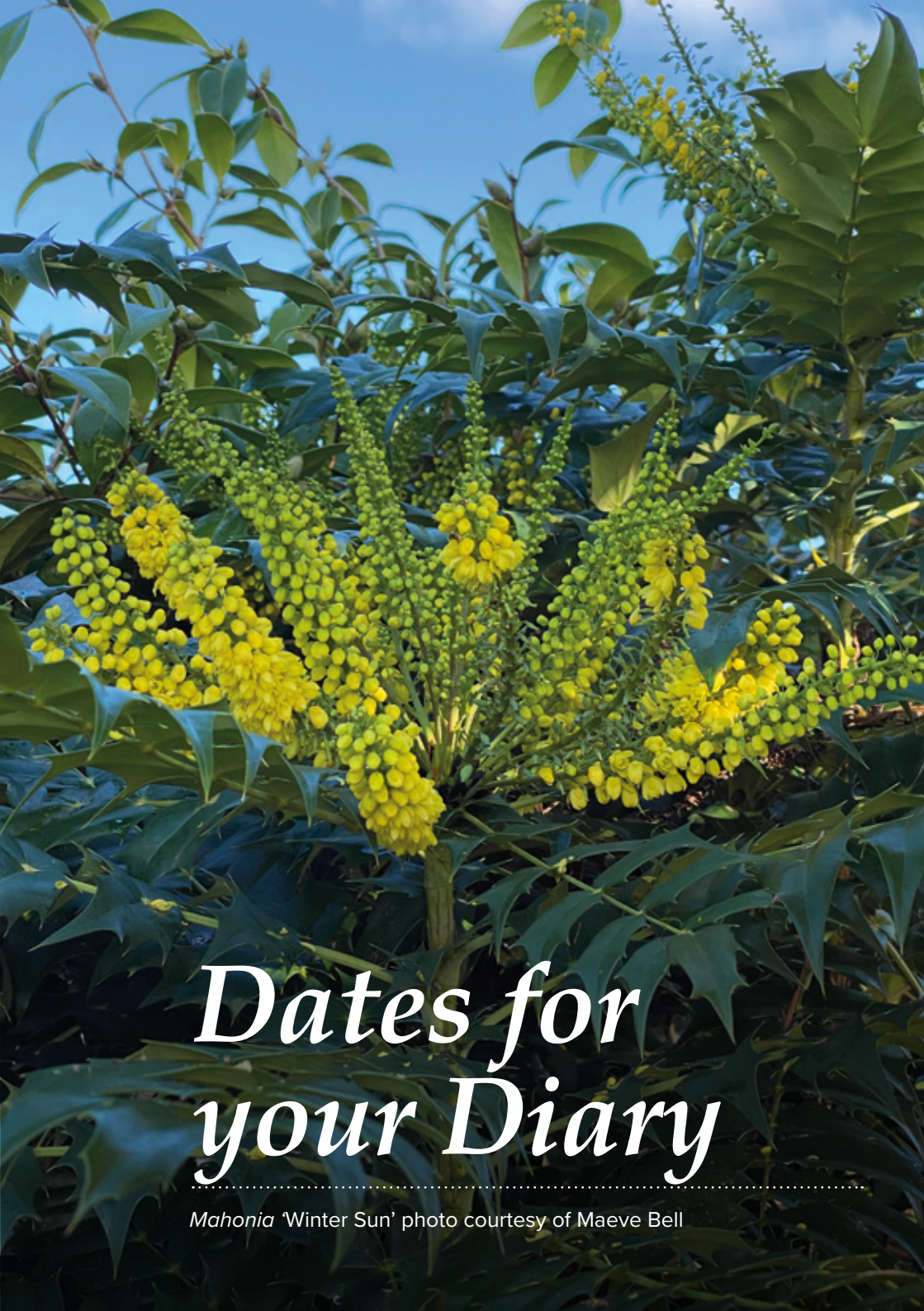
Kilmacurragh

Welcome news is that planning permission has recently been received to start the restoration of Kilmacurragh House. Phase 1, due to begin towards the end of 2024, involves re-roofing and making the structure weatherproof together with the reinstatement of floors, windows, doors and other major features. This phase is expected to last 18 months to two years.



Condolences

Val Dillon will be remembered fondly by visitors to Helen Dillon's great gardens in Ranelagh and Monkstown as an enthusiastic and knowledgeable support to Helen (a founder and now honorary member of the Society). We send her our sympathy on his recent death.



Dates for your Diary

Mahonia 'Winter Sun' photo courtesy of Maeve Bell

Dates for your Diary

**Saturday 13 January
at 2.00pm**

Happy Plants: the Story of Ardán

with Conall O’Caoimh

Venue: National Botanic Gardens,
Glasnevin, Dublin 9. D09 VY63.

Ardán Garden, on half an acre of a hilltop in Howth, Dublin, is an official partner of the UNESCO Dublin Bay Biosphere. Conall outlines the methods he together with his wife Nuala Doherty use to get the best from their plants, and how they care for them through the seasons. He also introduces some of the special plants at Ardán Garden.

Conall O’Caoimh is an artist and co-creator of Ardán Garden, Across 20 years he and Nuala have designed, created and developed Ardán into a place of outstanding beauty, with an extensive collection of rare plants. They write a monthly column in *The Irish Garden* magazine.



**Thursday 22 February
at 7.30pm**

Gertrude Jekyll and Munstead Wood: the Home of the ‘Artist-Gardener’

with Caroline Ikin

A Zoom lecture

The Zoom link will be emailed to all members a couple of days in advance.

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

Dr Caroline Ikin is the National Trust Curator at Munstead Wood. She has previously worked in museums and for the Gardens Trust and her research interest is in nineteenth century art, architecture and gardens. The author of several books, she has lectured widely, including at the Gardens Trust, V&A, Watts Gallery, and Oxford University.

Dates for your Diary



Photo courtesy of
Hugh Mothersole

**Saturday 24 February
at 2pm**

Cultivating Resilience: Sustainable Gardening amidst Pest and Climate Challenges

with Dr Cara Daly

Venue: National Botanic Gardens,
Glasnevin, Dublin 9. D09 VY63.

Cara will give a talk outlining some tips and tricks to help us to garden sustainably in the face of common challenges. Drawing from her expertise in plant science, she will explain the effects of pests and diseases on plants and will suggest eco-friendly methods to reduce their impact.

Dr Cara Daly is Programme Director for the SETU BSc in Horticulture degrees at SETU Waterford/Kildalton College, and at the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin.



**Wednesday 20 March
at 7.30pm**

Succession Planting for Year-Round Colour

with Adrian Walsh

Venue: The Old Court House,
Market Square, Antrim, BT41 4AW.

This talk will take us through a year in Adrian's small city garden in Belfast, which has been described by Shirley Lanigan in *The Open Gardens of Ireland* as 'a veritable sea of plants'. The talk will demonstrate how, by including a variety of plants and planting combinations, year-round interest and colour can be ensured — even in a smaller space.

Dates for your Diary

Adrian Walsh is a member of the Northern Committee, Chair of the Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens and a former winner of the UK-wide *BBC Gardener Of The Year* competition.

Members free, guests £5, students £3.



**Saturday 23 March 2024
at 2pm**

Evolution, Revolution & Re-invention; Re-imagining an Irish Country Garden

with Des Doyle

Venue: National Botanic Gardens,
Glasnevin, Dublin 9. D09 VY63.

Dating from 1810, Des Doyle's house and garden are on the banks of the River Nore just south of Kilkenny. The challenges were many: limited horticultural knowledge, huge areas of lawn, trees felled by storms and limited structure in the garden. Over the past ten years the garden has been reinvented.

This is the story — with sensitivity, sustainability and structure all coming into play along with the plants, why they were used, how they are combined and the effect they deliver.

Des Doyle is a garden designer who mostly works with clients on larger scale gardens with a particular focus on sensitively restoring older and historic gardens in a contemporary style. His first book will be published next year.



Dates for your Diary

**Wednesday 27 March
at 7.30pm**

Searching for Mr Robinson: the Original 'Wild Gardener'

with Judith Nesbitt

A Zoom lecture

The Zoom link will be emailed to all members a couple of days in advance. The lecture will not be recorded.

Living near Gravetye Manor in Sussex, William Robinson's home for fifty years, Judith Nesbitt became so intrigued by the story of the Irish garden writer that she gave up her job to write a new biography. Robinson was famously private and never talked about his early life in Ireland, but Judith set out to find out more about the enigmatic man behind the best-selling books and firm opinions — his friendships, passions and daily life in Victorian London and at home at Gravetye.



Photo courtesy of
Gravetye Manor

Born and brought up in County Tyrone, **Judith Nesbitt** was Chief Curator at Tate Britain (2001-2010) and Tate's Director of National & International Partnerships (2010-2020). Judith has curated and organised many art exhibitions, bringing Tate's iconic collection to audiences across the world. She is also a keen gardener.

**Saturday 20 April
from 2pm to 4pm**

Visit to Coolwater Garden

Venue: Coolwater Garden,
Fedamore, Co. Limerick. V35 YN29.

The garden is 14 minutes from
Junction 29 on the M7.



IGPS member **Kevin Begley** has designed his half-acre garden to be different. No lawns and borders to be found in this garden! Overlooked on either side by Skule Hill and Rockstown Castle, it has been

Dates for your Diary

designed for structure and shape year round. It has a wonderful Water Garden, many alpine troughs crammed with choice specimens, a chimerical West Garden, pagodas, a mirador and an Alpine House.

The cost for members and guests is £10. Booking via Eventbrite will start on a date to be announced in the e-bulletin.

**Saturday 27 April
at 2.15pm**

**Visit to a private garden in
south County Dublin**

Address to follow.

Our visit to this 18 acre garden will coincide with magnolia season and we will be able to admire *Magnolia* 'Yellow Bird' and *M. campbellii* 'Darjeeling' along with at least 50 others. Camellias and rhododendrons will be in bloom through the woodland and along the banks of the Little Dargle river. Closer to the house there are more formal gardens which have been designed by June Blake so expect colour saturation from the tulips.

Members only. Booking via Eventbrite from 25th March. Please note that the garden is hilly and parts of it are described as strenuous.

Stout footwear and a reasonable level of fitness are required. No information is to appear on social media. Restrictions on photography may be announced nearer the time.



Magnolia 'Caerhays Belle'

**Saturday 18 & Sunday 19 May
Annual General Meeting**

Venue: Clandeboye Estate near Bangor and private gardens in County Down.

See page 24 for details and how to book.



Thanks to our Contributors

Since moving home to Ireland in 2019, **Candida Frith-Macdonald** has been making a garden from scratch in Kilkenny and shares the presentable bits on Instagram as @marblecitygarden

Barbara Kelso is a garden designer and a former member of the Northern regional committee

Having originally worked in the public sector, **Billy McCone** retrained as a garden designer. He is a former Chairman of the Society (2016-2021) and is currently the Northern representative.

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

Lord Rosse was a founder member of the Society in 1981 and has continued the great gardening tradition of the Parsons family at Birr Castle. Among other things Birr is noted for its champion trees.

Brendan Sayers is Glasshouse Foreman at the National Botanic Gardens and has spent almost 30 years working there; he specialises in orchids, both native and tropical. He is a long-standing member and former committee member.

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

Many thanks to the following members for their contributions:

Kevin Begley, Trevor Edwards, Dave Victory, and Adrian Walsh.

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

While every effort is made to ensure that content is correct at the time of printing, views expressed in the articles are those of the author(s) and may not reflect those of the Society.

Any factual errors will be corrected as soon as possible.




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