

Plant of the Month: *Erythronium dens-canis*

Joe Sime



This is a typical spring ephemeral. The flowers don't last long and even the attractive, marbled leaves are gone by the end of spring. In spite of this it is a lovely plant and a welcome addition to early spring. For me they are reliably long lived but seem to bulk up more slowly than the other erythroniums that I grow. In the wild in southern Europe there is a range of colours from white through pink to lilac, and this range has led to the naming of several varieties with different flower colours.

I think the one in the photo may be 'Rose Queen', but I failed to record it when I planted it so I cannot be sure. They are easy to grow in good woodland soil that does not dry out in summer or get too soggy in winter. I have heard it said that you should always buy erythroniums in pots as naked bulbs dry out and die quickly. This is not my experience. We have bought *E. dens-canis*, 'Pagoda' and 'White Beauty' as bulbs from Parkers Wholesale with good results. 10% may not grow but at about half the price of potted ones from nurseries, they are still a good deal.

Seattle Notes: the latest update from Walt – January and February 2019

With the usual wide variations in temperature these days, it's hard not to worry about the end result for some plants. I put in a side extension to a sprinkler line last month and in doing so, lifted clumps of *Asarum caudatum*, *Polygonum x multihybrida* and *Epimedium x cantabrigense*. I decided to pot these up for future gifts on my garden walks. Maybe it was the transplant shock or the intermittent freezing weather, but the asarum looks poorly. The established plantings look fine in their more shaded location.

Camellias and mahonias have been blooming right along since November. A large *Mahonia x media* 'Charity' attracts the resident Anna's hummingbirds. My nose must be failing, for I no longer smell it but still do enjoy the sweetness of the sarcococcas (*S. confusa*, *S. ruscifolia*, *S. hookeriana* ssp. *humilis* 'Sarsid I' = Fragrant Valley).



A friend gave me a handful of *Chimonanthus praecox* 'Grandiflorus' to perfume the house. It has a most complex scent. Hers gets a burst of noontime sun while my specimen languishes in too much shade explaining why mine has never bloomed.

I've been taking advantage of the decent weather and have been digging out snowberries (*Symphoricarpos albus*) to create new planting sites. It's a wonderful plant that tolerates any light condition and that leafs out early with a delicate tracery of small leaves, some oval, others toothed. Flowers are minute but do result in the striking white berries that dance though the slender twigs all winter unless visited by hungry birds. I potted up smaller starts but wanted to heel in larger clumps. I wanted to put them in a little visited area, but it took some preparation.



One of the miseries of this site is the overly ambitious *Lamium galeobdolon* 'Variegatum'. I rue the day that I was persuaded to take home a basket of it from my wife's grandmother while visiting in Oregon years ago. It looked attractive with the silver-gray patches on its leaves but oh, how it spread once it escaped from the container. Compounding the problem is the ubiquitous morning glory (*Calystegia sepium*). After removing a patch of *Lamium*, I found pale ropes of roots extending endlessly. Break a piece off and they'll be back ere long. And before this occurs, long arching branches and roots of Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*) had to be cleared out. A simple task that easily turned into a long process.



February Update: Well, the mild days of January fell by the wayside as we got into days of snowfall, some areas into historic amounts. This has been the snowiest



February for Seattle on record. Hundreds of motorists were trapped on the mountain passes as the avalanche danger was too great for any traffic until daylight allowed the state highway department the opportunity to fire artillery shells into some of the more dangerous slopes to loosen heavy snow loads. Temperatures plummeted as well for weeks never rising above freezing.

The heavy, thick snows tore into broadleaf evergreens with a vengeance. I lost major portions of a huge old *Viburnum cinnamomifolium*, camellias, *Hoheria* 'Borde Hill', etc. The photo shows what I started pulling up slope to the front lawn, the next step being shredding/grinding. I now have much more mulch than I can use in the immediate future. Many groundcovers accustomed to a shaded existence now will have to cope with direct sunlight

Of passing note, the Northwest Flower and Garden Show was able to come off as planned despite the snow and ice. This is the 29th year for what is the largest show west of Philadelphia and second largest show in the U.S., covering some 6 acres and running for 5 days, all inside. One photo from the show is of a particularly dramatic landscape. Three different sets of lectures ran throughout the day and evening; Nan Sterman and John Anderson, Keeper of the Gardens at Windsor were the English representatives there this year.



Linnaeus's favourite flower

Peter Williams

The answer to last month's pictorial quiz is *Linnaea borealis* or Twinflower.



Linnaeus knew this plant from his travels to Lapland in northern Sweden and is reported to have found great quantities near [Gävle](#) on his first expedition there in 1732. It was to become his favourite plant and was incorporated into his coat of arms when honoured in 1757 for his work in devising the binomial system of plant and animal nomenclature.

A young Linnaeus dressed in the national costume of Lapland can be seen holding 'his flower' in the copied portrait by Hendrick Hollanders, painted years after Linnaeus's death. The specimen of *L. borealis* in the portrait looks like a very robust form, certainly much larger than the ones I have seen flowering. It might, of course, simply be 'artistic licence' on the part of the portrait painter.



When Linnaeus found the plant in Lapland it was known as *Campanula serpyllifolia* but later it was renamed in his honour by his friend and fellow botanist Jan Frederik Gronovius. Naming genera after famous botanists was common at this time but there was often no correlation between the features of the botanists and the plant genera that took their names. This is certainly the case for Twinflower because quite unlike Linnaeus who was, and still is, of very great importance, the plant has been described as lowly, insignificant, disregarded, and flowering but for a brief period. The specific name *borealis*, added by Linnaeus himself, refers to its widespread occurrence in boreal, i.e. northern, regions where it can be found in open woodlands and sub-arctic scrub and has a circumpolar distribution. It does, however, occur further south at high altitude in mountainous regions in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Japan. There are thought to be three geographically distinct subspecies in Europe, North America and Asia.



The common name comes from the fact that the flowers are borne in pairs, hence Twinflower, and are shown in the beautifully engraved Swedish stamp released in 2007 to commemorate 300 years since Linnaeus's birth. Both Linnaeus's name, and that of his favourite plant, are kept in the public mind in Scandinavian countries because they are commonly used for female children as Linnea and Vanamo, the Finnish name for Twinflower.

L. borealis is a creeping, sweetly-scented, evergreen subshrub and is member of the honeysuckle family, the Caprifoliaceae. It is a rare British native species restricted to Scottish pine forests mainly in the Cairngorms. It has been recorded occasionally in northern counties of England but it is thought that these cases are either the result of deliberate planting or chance introductions via woodland products moved from Scotland. *Linnaea borealis* is a relict species that was almost certainly far more common throughout Britain during the last ice age and has retreated northwards as the climate warmed.

In this, and many other respects, it is similar to *Cornus suecica* (Dwarf cornel), another rare ice age relict species whose southernmost location in the UK is in the North Yorkshire Moors near Pickering.



British populations of Twinflower have declined over many years as a result of habitat loss and fragmentation. The wholesale clearance of native woodlands before 1930 was a major factor in endangering populations. Since then, uncontrolled grazing by deer and other herbivores, and changes in woodland management, have exacerbated the problem. The most significant of the management changes are the mechanical harvesting of timber that cause severe ground disruption, and the encouragement of dense tree regeneration that shade out light demanding species like Twinflower. In an ideal habitat, *L. borealis* grows in well illuminated areas of open woodlands in association with mosses, and flowers freely.



L. borealis in a Scottish woodland.

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<http://ukwildflowers.com/>

In shaded habitats the plant often fails to flower and in dense shade it dies. Individual plants may live for hundreds of years and form very large clonal patches. Vegetative regeneration by clonal expansion is typical of many woodlanders because the very competitive environment, both above and below ground, makes establishment from seed difficult. However, occasional regeneration from seeds is essential to maintain the genetic diversity of populations to enable long term adaptability and survival. To ensure that seed embryos are genetically variable, clonal woodland plants are often self-incompatible. These strategies have clearly been effective over evolutionary timescales, but in situations where rapid population decline and habitat fragmentation have led to clonal isolation, as is the case with Twinflower, self-incompatibility is a serious threat to the survival of species in the wild.

Research into the reproductive strategies of Twinflower in Scottish woodlands [1] showed that populations of *L. borealis* were highly isolated and often kilometres apart. Within these isolated populations, there was frequently low, or no, genetic diversity. Pollination was performed by a variety of insect species and pollen transfer between flowers readily occurred. However, *L. borealis* was shown to be highly self-incompatible. Where clones of different genotypes, as indicated by differences in flower colour, were present in very close proximity (a few metres), 30-40% of pollinated flowers produced fruit each containing a single seed. In marked contrast, where the only pollen available was from the same genotype, fruit set was almost zero. These findings are of great value when practical habitat restoration and conservation schemes for *L. borealis* are being implemented. They clearly show that in addition to providing the open, non-competitive habitat required for growth and flowering, the introduction of mixed genotypes in close proximity, is essential for effective fruit set and long-term survival.

I first became enchanted by Twinflower when I saw it growing in the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh. I thought that my acid soil would suit it well and that it should get enough light when planted towards the front of the woodland beds. However, my efforts to get it established so far can only be described as lamentable. My first attempt involved just a single plant that grew away well after planting in early spring. In June, I observed that flower buds had developed and were just colouring before opening. A few days later when I approached the plant, camera in hand, ready to record my first Twinflowers in the garden, I was astonished to find that the whole plant had disappeared. Undeterred, I obtained another specimen that I grew in my glasshouse for a year or so, during which time it developed into a large colony. I split this into five pieces and foolishly planted all out in just one location. To my dismay, exactly the same thing happened again! Excellent establishment and clonal growth were followed by good bud formation and then by an overnight disappearance. To misquote Oscar Wilde's *Lady Bracknell* – *to lose one planting may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose two looks like carelessness!*

Careful examination showed the plants had been cropped right to ground level and the poorly rooted stolons ripped out. What remained of the root system did not regenerate.

I believe the offenders in both cases were most probably pheasants or pigeons, both of which are very common in my garden. Fortunately, *L.*



borealis is very easy to propagate and I obtained more shoots from a friend who lives in an urban setting and whose unprotected plant flowers freely in his town garden. I obtained the new propagating material in February this year when it looked rather dormant and unpromising. I simply buried the pre-rooted rhizomes shallowly in

a pot, and in a period of a few weeks they began to grow actively. The plants I have been attempting to introduce have been the North American sub-species.

This year I will again try to establish Twinflower in the garden but the plants will have the benefit of mesh protection at least until they flower. I also intend to keep a reserve pan of *L. borealis* in my glasshouse because to lose a third planting would be horticultural homicide!



Shoot regeneration in spring

[1] The reference mentioned that provided much of the ecological information in this article is by:

Scott, A.R. & Wilby, C.C. 2009. Limited mate availability decreases reproductive success of fragmented populations of *Linnaea borealis*, a rare, clonal self-incompatible plant. *Annals of Botany*, Volume 103, Issue 6, 1 April 2009, Pages 835 – 846, <http://doi.org/10.1093/aob/mcp007>

Gardens open

Monday 6th. May

The garden of Barry and Sally Hennessey

'Limetrees' 1 Priestwell Court, East Haddon, Northamptonshire, NN6 8BT

'Limetrees' is open under the NGS Scheme. Full details and photographs are in the NGS Handbook and on the NGS website. It is our first garden opening.



Although the garden is south-facing it is shaded by mature Oak, Birch, and pollarded Limes, bounded by an Ironstone and Cob wall. We grow many Ferns, epimediums, *Primula sieboldii*, *Galanthus*, erythroniums, hellebores, dwarf rhododendrons and many other shade-loving plants.

There is a wildlife pond, rock garden and mixed herbaceous and shrub borders in the sunnier areas.



Gardens open on request

The following gardens, belonging to HPS Shade and Woodland members, would welcome visitors – please do get in touch with the relevant gardener before your visit.

Chestnut Farm

West Beckham, Holt, NORFOLK NR256NX

Opening Times: 11am - 4pm

Admission £5

Three acres of garden over 150 varieties of snowdrops to see, bulbs and plants for sale, further information from Judy Wilson, 01263 822241

judywilson100@gmail.com



Mill Cottage Plants

Wookey, Somerset

We have a good selection of *Hydrangea serrata* (that flower from the beginning of July) plus many other unusual species and forms, as well as some gorgeous epimediums. Our garden has been planted to provide shade for many special plants throughout the year in early spring, with hellebores.

Epimedium 'Pink Champagne'



Hydrangea serrata 'Miyama yae Murasaki'

Open by appointment only – please get in touch with Sally Gregson before visiting on 01749 676966 or millcottageplants@gmail.com . More info at www.millcottageplants.co.uk

Montana

Shire Lane, Cholesbury HP23 6NA – on the Herts/Bucks border high in the Chiltern Hills

“The garden is open for the NGS from March to end July by arrangement. One acre of mixed shrubberies and herbaceous borders, planted to attract birds, leading to 3 acres of mixed deciduous woodland which was part of the Dunton’s brick yard in 1960s. Thousands of daffodils are planted in the wood in Marjories Mile which leads to a fernery in one of the clay pits. Full details on NGS website. The house is surrounded by footpaths and beautiful walks so ideal if you are travelling from afar to bring the dog and make a day of it. The local pub, Full Moon, does excellent lunches. Come and have a wander about and remind me of some of the names I have forgotten.”

Please get in touch with Diana Garner before your visit on montana@cholesbury.net or 01494 758347.

Weather Vane House

Mill Lane, Seaton Ross, York YO42 4NE



A large woodland garden with acid loving plants including rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias and other interesting shrubs. Spring bulbs, including trillium, shady perennials and flowering trees. There is a meadow and woodland with owls, goldcrests and sparrow hawks.

Open Sunday 5th May and Monday 6th May 12 – 5pm. Small groups welcome by arrangement. Please get in touch with Peter and Julie Williams before your visit on 01653 648 or peteandjuliew@gmail.com

Admission £5 or a donation to the Yorkshire Arboretum.

Available Seed

If you would like some of the seed offered below and are a paid up member of the Shade Group send a S.A.E to S.J.Sime at Park Cottage, Penley, Wrexham, LL13 0LS. Please include your email address in case there is a query.

If you have seed to donate please send it to the same address.

Cardiocrinum giganteum var. *yunnanense*

Hydrangea aspera subsp. *villosa*

Hydrangea heteromalla var. *xantheura* 'Wilsonii'

Hydrangea paniculata ex 'Brussels Lace'

Hydrangea scandens subsp. *chinensis* f. *macrosepalum*

Kirengeshoma palmata

Rhododendron yakusianum

Senecio tangutica

Aquilegia canadensis

Meconopsis paniculata

Aquilegia longissima

Rosa moyesii

Euonymus myrianthus

Sarcococca ruscifolia

Name this Plant

Name this Plant W***** t*****

'Herbs perennial, creeping Rhizome prostrate. Radical leaves 7–10 cm including petiole; stipules brown, abaxially subglabrous, margin ciliate; petiole glabrous or apically pilose; leaf blade 3-foliolate; petiolules short, sparsely pilose; leaflet blade abaxially purplish, adaxially green, rhombic-ovate to obovate, 1–4 × 1–3.5 cm, both surfaces sparsely pilose or glabrescent, base cuneate or broadly so, margin crenate, distally 3–5-lobed, apex obtuse to acute; cauline leaf solitary or reduced. Flowering stems 7–20 cm tall, glabrous; cyme 1–3-flowered; bracts ovate-lanceolate, membranous, margin entire. Flowers 1–2.5 cm in diam.; pedicel glabrous, rarely slightly pubescent. Sepals triangular-ovate, glabrous or abaxially sparsely pilose, apex acuminate or 2- or 3-serrate; epicalyx segments lanceolate, much shorter than sepals. Petals yellow, elliptic to rhombic-elliptic, nearly 2 × as long as sepals. Achenes black-brown, cylindric to obliquely obovoid, 2–3 mm, white villous. Fl. and fr. May–Jun.

Damp forests; 700--1000 m. S Jilin (Changbai Shan) [Japan, E Russia (Sakhalin, E Siberia); C and E Europe].'

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SHADE MONTHLY is compiled by Joe Sime
and this web-friendly version was produced by Tony Bays.