

Plant of the Month: *Impatiens scabrida*

Joe Sime



This is an annual from shaded moist places in Nepal, Sikkim and into China. It grows to about 4ft on good soil, has bright green foliage and produces many soft yellow flowers over a long period, up to the first frost. Each flower is followed by an elongated seed pod that swells and then 'pops' explosively when touched. This is both a blessing and a curse. They are fun for the kids, and there is plenty of seed scattered to ensure plants next year, but there is plenty of seed scattered which can lead to a mat of unwanted seedlings next year! They do not root deeply so are easy to weed out, but this can become a chore.



I made the mistake of planting our first plants close to some precious, smaller woodlanders and so spend some time each year weeding them out. But I have established them in wilder areas of the garden where they look good growing among shrubs and adding some flower colour that is valued at this time of year. They are easy from seed, which is usually available from the main seed distribution scheme.

‘Greencombe’, Porlock, Somerset

Tim Longville (Photographs: Val Corbett)

The woodland garden at Greencombe is a model of what can be achieved by patience, perseverance and skill, even out of what in many ways was a less than promising site. Made by Joan Loraine over almost exactly half a century - from 1966 until her death at 91 in 2016 -, it consists of three-and-a-half wooded acres (the trees mostly oak and sweet chestnut) running along a steeply-sloping north-facing Somerset hillside, between Porlock and West Porlock. As a result, it loses the sun completely for much of the winter and Joan always insisted that it was by nature almost soil-less as well, having ‘just stones and centuries of leaf-mould.’



The House

By the modest house are three equally modest terraces and the garden’s only (roughly grand-piano-shaped) lawn. Beyond, to the west, is the main garden, in the form of three gradually narrowing sections of woodland, known unsurprisingly as First Wood, Middle Wood and Far Wood. Though the previous owner had begun gardening here, what visitors see today is very much Joan’s creation: and she was always characteristically very clear

about the principles that had guided her. It was the garden’s ‘rhythm’ which she insisted was essential – and that was something created not by ‘the setting up of a brilliant master plan’ but by ‘the frequent minor decisions that you have to make.’ Decisions, that is, about where to put one plant or how to prune another, or which of two plants to sacrifice for the garden’s greater good. And each of those decisions ‘either maintains the rhythm of the garden or lets it go.’

One way of creating and maintaining that 'rhythm' was to respect the natural terrain and fit into it, rather than imposing a design upon it. She used to say of Greencombe that, 'It belongs in its surroundings, follows the contours of the land, and makes its own world'.



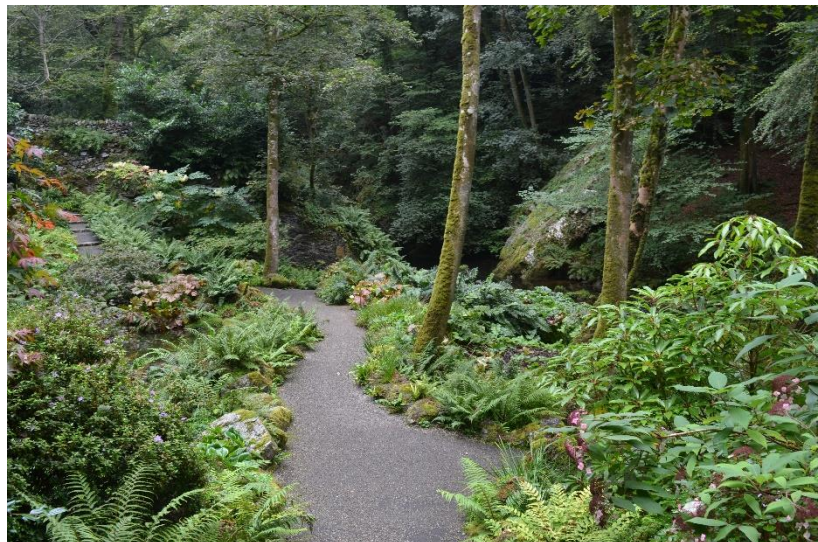
The natural setting



A typical narrow but inviting path

Even its paths, for example, are narrow and winding and as unobtrusive as possible, so that there is over a mile of them in the woodland, each with an evocative name, such as Fox, Badger, Hare or Mouse. Of course, since the garden's 'own world' is a complex intermingling of plants from around the whole of the real world, it is in a way an imaginary world, one that could only exist within the continually evolving work of art that is a good garden.

Indeed, maintaining the balance of that intermingling – through those 'frequent minor decisions' – was for her a large part of gardening. At least, of her sort of gardening, the sort in which the garden seems as though it had 'just happened,' but is in fact the result of continuous scrutiny and scrupulous maintenance.



Keeping the balance, looking back along the path

(She spent years studying the varying flowering-times and colours of her azaleas, before finally feeling she knew them well enough to move them in winter and position them so that they created effective colour-combinations. In the same way, the seed-grown specimens of tender, scented *Rhododendron lindleyi* which line one of the paths in First Wood were painstakingly pruned for decades to create good, upright shapes.)

It is a measure of her success that though the garden contains four National Collections, each rigorously ordered, yet each fits so seamlessly into the overall pattern that their existence would easily be missed by anyone not paying close attention.



Erythronium citronella

(Though she would cheerfully confess that assessing parentage 'sometimes involves a degree of guesswork!')

Perhaps the most eye-catching is the erythronium collection. The species, many of which Joan collected in the wild, are arranged above a path, following the order from east to west of their places of origin, while the cultivars are placed below it, as close as possible to their seed-parents.



Erythronium 'Ian Fisher'

The collections devoted to the two closely related groups of rhododendron-relatives, gaultherias and vacciniums, are ordered in the same east-to-west way. She was a passionate advocate of the virtues of these unshowy and unfashionable shrubs, since, given conditions they like (acid soil and a modicum of sun), 'they have the happy gift of always looking neat, inevitable and at home.' The final National Collection here is of polystichums, both the foreign species, arranged geographically, and the almost innumerable varieties of the native *P. setiferum*, arranged according to the degree of complexity of their variation, from the simplest to the most complex.

The rude health of the four collections and of the garden's thousands of other plants – shrubs such as rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias, camellias, roses; smaller woodland plants such as primroses, anemones, hellebores, trilliums, tricyrtis – Joan attributed to her intensive programme of soil feeding and improvement, maintained here, on strictly organic lines, for more than four decades. (As she often pointed out, she was an organic gardener long before it became a gardening fashion!) She used no sprays or artificial fertilisers. Instead, each year tons of leaves were (and still are) swept up and barrowed into three pairs of huge pits, dug out of the hillside along the

garden's lowest path to make them less visually intrusive. Turned from one pit into another – 'sides to centre, top to bottom, any wet day after midsummer, with dry wood-ash added' – the leaves are ready for use as leaf-mould by the following year. Being organic was an essential element of what she termed 'intrinsic' gardening, in which the garden becomes virtually a closed system, supplying compost, leaf-mould and wood-ash, providing sub-soil for paths, wood for buildings and including a wide range of plants in a wide range of ages, from youth to maturity to old age. It is characteristic of her that the chapel she had built in the garden (she converted to Catholicism as a young woman) was made by local craftsmen out of Greencombe's own timber and positioned close to (as if in symbiotic relationship with) that sextet of compost pits.

In her own summary, 'An intrinsic garden is sustainable. It is the opposite of an immediate garden. And it is not a garden you simply view from a fixed point. It is one you can only experience fully by walking into and through it.'

Note

Joan Loraine contributed many articles over many years to issues of the garden journal *Hortus*, including a substantial quartet on her travels to see and collect erythroniums in the wild. Visit the website www.hortus.co.uk, enter her name in the Search box and a full list will appear. Most if not all are still available, at modest prices.

She also wrote and self-published two booklets based on the garden, both of which were available to visitors to it during her lifetime and I believe still are. They are *Greencombe, The First Fifty Years, 1946-1996* and *Letters to My Nephew on Intrinsic Gardening at Greencombe* (2005).

It was that nephew, Robert Schmidt, who inherited the garden after her death, and still keeps it open to the public. For details see the website at www.greencombe.org.

Her life was discussed on the BBC Radio 4 programme *The Last Word* for 3 April 2016, which is still available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b074vtqn>. The section devoted to her begins at 16 minutes 24 seconds. Contributions include reminiscences by Robert Schmidt and archive recordings of Joan herself.

Plas Cadnant Hidden Gardens

Joe Sime

Wendy and I had a short holiday in the north of Anglesey at the end of September. Most days were spent walking the dogs along the lanes with the only real plant interest being the many different forms of native ferns growing in and beneath the ancient, crumbling stone walls. However for one day we went south to the 'Welsh Riviera' along the Menai Strait to revisit the garden at Plas Cadnant.

Originally laid out by relatives of the Tremayne family of Heligan in Cornwall it had fallen into disrepair before the present owner bought it in 1996. It consists of two distinct sections.

There is an upper garden with a large area of grass with a yew-hedged double herbaceous border down one side and a broad, raised, mixed border down the other. These are impressive in their own right, but the end of September is not the best time to see them. However it is worth mentioning some fine shrubs: a huge, multi-trunked *Eucryphia* 'Nymansay', a very venerable *Buddleja alternifolia* with a trunk 12ins in diameter, and a large *Cornus* 'Norman Hadden' covered in fruits - so the flowers must have been superb.

The lower garden mostly covers one bank of a steep sided valley with a stream and waterfall at the bottom. It has light, open shade at the top and dense shade at the bottom. As well as the stream, a spring rises and ripples down. It is one of the few sites that is really 'reliably moist but well drained'. This, together with the mild climate and the shelter provided by the canopy, make it an ideal site for a woodland garden.

We visited with the North Wales group of Plant Heritage about 12 years ago. At that time the upper garden was essentially complete. The paths were in place for the valley garden and planting had started in earnest. There was a superb range of shrubs in place for the understory and a wide selection of woodland perennials and ferns (Crûg is, and Rickard's ferns was, just across the water!) We heard that the lower part had suffered badly from flooding over the Christmas holiday of 2015, with the stream tearing many plants out. We were interested to see what the years had done.



As you might expect it has grown up a lot and it is probably time to 'edit out' a few of the small trees. The rhododendron species have grown very well indeed and must look great in spring. Some of the less common understory shrubs that we had seen were still there and well grown. I was particularly impressed with the two *Schefflera* (*rhododendrifolia* and *taiwaniana*) and several of the *Hydrangea aspera* and *H. heteromalla* were still in place and looking good but I seem to remember there being more 12 years ago. Perhaps they have been sacrificed in favour of the rhododendrons. One thing that had worked well was the planting of plenty of female clones of *skimmia* species (with the occasional male companion) which were in berry and looking good. I will certainly try this. The ferns were dominant and superb, with enough different species and varieties to satisfy a fern fanatic for several hours.

The underplanting of 'higher' plants was relatively scarce. No arisaema, one podophyllum ('Spotty Dotty') and a good plant of the green form of *Impatiens omeiana*. Is this the result of ferns outcompeting the other plants in this wet Welsh wood, or, more likely, the owners got the 'fern bug' and have made a really fine collection of them.

One good foliage plant in the less shady parts was *Geranium palmatum* with several having seeded themselves about and growing well in the mild conditions.



One final addition since 12 years ago has been the provision of a facility vital for Hardy Planter visits. They have constructed a superb tea room with plenty of seating overlooking the garden.

Bulbs in the Wood

Four stalwarts have volunteered so far covering hesperanthus (schizostylis), trillium, nomocharis and narcissus. We need at least 6 more.

Available Seed

None this month but we will start again next month with late ripening varieties. This often makes available seed of plants that are not usually found in the society's main distribution. Please go out into your plots and look for late ripening seed and send it to S.J.Sime, Park Cottage. Penley, Wrexham, LL13 0LS.

Name this plant

Name this Plant P***** p*****

'Rhizomes: annual elongation increments (2-)6-20 cm. Leaves of nonflowering shoots 2-5 dm; blade 18-38 × 18-38 cm. Flowering shoots 3-6 dm; leaves nearly opposite, slightly unequal in size; petioles 5-15 cm; proximal blades 10-35 × 14-40 cm, distal blades 6-25 × 10-33 cm. Leaf blades 5-7(-9)-parted, parts lobed or not (frequently 2-lobed), margins entire or coarsely dentate, teeth apiculate; surfaces abaxially sparsely pubescent to glabrous. Flowers solitary, nodding, fragrant; peduncle arising from angle between petioles, 1.5-6 cm; sepals orbiculate, 10-18 × 10-18 mm; petals white, rarely pink, obovate, 15-35 × 10-25 mm; stamens 2 times number of petals, 8-13 mm; filaments 3-5 mm; anthers 5-8 × 1-1.5 mm; ovaries 6-12 × 4-8 mm; style 1-2 mm; stigmas 3-6 mm. Berries yellow, rarely orange or maroon, 3.5-5.5 × 2.0-4 cm. Seeds 30-50, ovoid, 6-8 × 4-6 mm. 2 n = 12. Flowering spring, fruiting late spring-summer; summer deciduous. Mixed deciduous forest, fields, moist road banks, river banks.'

Last month's plant was *Mukdenia rossii*. Known best in our gardens as the variety 'Crimson Fan' syn. 'Karasuba', it makes a clump-forming woodland perennial with long-stalked, lobed leaves and clusters of small white flowers in spring. It is at its best in autumn when the leaves turn a deep crimson colour. It is at home in woodland conditions as long as they are not too wet.



Lecture Day 2020

**Saturday 16th May 2020
at the Britannia Airport Hotel, Manchester**

In addition to our three excellent speakers there will be a rare and unusual Plant Auction, Members plants for sale, and stands from Crûg Farm Plants, Swines Meadow Farm Nursery, and Woodlands Nursery, a raffle and homemade teas.

Christopher Bailes

'Always something to keep you amused' – a brief history of shade planting and the story of developing his own new Devon garden.



Previously curator of both the **Chelsea Physic Garden** and RHS Rosemoor Garden, Chris is a member of the RHS Orchid Committee, President of the Devon Branch of Plant Heritage and the Alpine Garden Society, and a Trustee of the Fortescue Garden Trust which administers The Garden House in Devon.

Bleddyn Wynn-Jones **'Discoveries and recent Introductions of Ruscus and Aspidistra'**



Sue and Bleddyn Wynn-Jones are the owners of Crûg Farm Plants where they specialise in introducing new and wondrous plants from their annual expeditions to remote corners of the globe.

Dan Hinkley

'Minions of the Shade, Asia and Beyond'

Dan is an American plantsman, garden writer, horticulturist and nurseryman. He is best known for establishing the garden and nursery at Heronswood and continues to travel extensively to discover new plants.



Ticket Price: £24.00 for members of the Shade and Woodland Plants

Group To book for the day email Diana Garner on montana@cholesbury.net or mail to Montana, Shire Lane, Cholesbury, Herts HP23 6NA giving your name, address, telephone number, email address, and HPS membership number. **If space available** non members may book **after 1 April** at **£34.00**.

Electronic transfer details are: Branch sort code: 40 32 02 Account no: 21574647 Account name: Shade and Woodland Plants Group Reference: Your HPS membership number and last name. Cheques payable to "HPS Shade and Woodland Plants Group" and sent to Diana Garner.

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SHADE MONTHLY is compiled by Joe Sime
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