



Shade Monthly

September 2020

Welcome to the September 2020 edition of Shade Monthly.

I hope you enjoy reading this month's articles – we've got a great piece on Trilliums from Chris Parkin in the north of Scotland, Diana Garner (who you'll all know as Group Secretary) describes some of the Hydrangeas growing in her garden, and we have the second installment in the making of a woodland garden from Sarah and Janet Wood.

As summer turns damply towards autumn, many of us will be thinking about planting spring flowering bulbs. Do let us know if you've got any big plans, can recommend your favourites, or would like to write about one you've grown before. As always, the address to send any articles or comments to is shademonthly@gmail.com, and if it can arrive by the 26th of the month, it will be included in the next edition.

Finally, Chris's vole article last month prompted this fascinating comment by Colin Crews. Thanks Colin. Watch out voles!

*I was interested to read the article in Shade Monthly by Chris Parkin which referred to voles eating toxic plants as I spent the latter part of my career studying the contamination of food by toxic wild plants. The *Echium vulgare* that Chris mentioned contains high levels of toxins called pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs). These are the most common toxic compounds in nature, causing liver disease and possibly cancer. *Echiums* (principally *E plantagineum* but also *E. vulgare*) are highly invasive in Australia and New Zealand where they poison sheep. They occur in a huge range of plants, notably Ragwort in the UK. PAs are also found in Comfrey (banned for internal use) and at lower levels in Borage. The major problems for human health are contamination of herbal teas by weeds harvested with the herbs, and contamination of honey by the transfer of PAs by bees. EU Legislation is in preparation. I think Chris's voles are very likely to be affected by these alkaloids should their natural lifespan be long enough.*

More info:

<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/170727>

Trilliums: A view from the (temporarily defrosted) far frozen North.

Text and photos by Chris Parkin

Trilliums are not a quick fix for gardeners, more a long term project. True they are a little quicker off the starting-blocks than Tree Paeonies, but you still have to be looking at a 5 year plan.

Trilliums are Monocotyledonous , Order Lilliales, Family Melanthiaceae, and as such are in the same family as our native *Paris quadrifolia*. They are originally from North America and Eastern Asia. They are grown for their curious three-fold symmetry of both leaves and flowers. They are tough, slow growing, herbaceous plants, well able to tolerate severe winter temperatures. They are toxic, and slugs or rodents do not trouble them. They prefer damp conditions with plenty of leaf mould, but tolerate drier conditions later in the season. They grow best in shade, but can tolerate direct sun if moist. In winter they retreat to a slowly creeping rhizome.

For non-experts there are only a few species in contention. They are known collectively as Wake Robin due their appearance in springtime.



Fig 1

T. chloropetalum (Fig1) is perhaps the most commonly grown. It hails from the West of North America. The leaves are speckled with darker tones, giving it summer interest. There is a larger version known as *T. chloropetalum* var. *giganteum* (Fig2). Normal flower colour varies from red through pink to white (Fig 3), also there is a yellow-flowered version sometimes sold as *T. luteum* (Fig 4).





Fig 4 - *Trillium luteum* (photo courtesy of the HPS Image library)

Next comes *T. grandiflorum* from the Eastern side of North America (fig 5). It has larger white flowers, and plain green leaves. There is also a double flowered version 'Flore Pleno' (fig 6). I have been disappointed with 'Flora Pleno', for me, it has failed to increase over the last 10 years. I have moved it this year, so am hoping that it will prefer its new location.



Fig 5 - *Trillium grandiflorum* - courtesy of the HPS Image Library



Fig6

T. ovatum (Fig7) is also readily available. It also come from Western North America. It is similar to *T. grandiflorum*, but a little smaller. However it has the advantage that it starts flowering in early spring as a white flower, but later slowly turns pink. The fruit is also quite architectural. The seeds are often stolen by wasps, as they have a sticky sweet coating.



T. erectum (Fig8), is a little bit taller (30cm). It has smaller, bright red flowers, the green sepals are more prominent, (again there are white flowers in some clones) the sepals are more prominent. It is carrion scented (not its most redeeming feature), hence it is referred to as 'Stinking Benjamin'. Again it is from Eastern woodlands of North America.

Fig 8 - *Trillium erectum* var. *albiflorum* (courtesy of the HPS image library)

Finally there is the tiny one, *T. rivale* (Figs 9+10) (or *Pseudotrillium rivale* since 2002), from Oregon and California. This charming little Trillium flowers at the same time as *Galanthus nivalis*, and is on both the same scale, as well as liking the same conditions. It spreads slowly from a creeping rhizome which runs through the leaf mould. It is also known as Brook Trillium, due to its penchant for even more moist conditions.



Trilliums are one of those groups that have a large number of synonyms for the same species, as well as hybridising both in the garden and the wild. For this reason, unless you wish to make a study, and a collection, it is better to just grow and enjoy their unique appearance.

Propagation from seed (Fig 11) is satisfying, but a slow process. Seed planted with a delay (such as we normally find), may not germinate in the first spring. Instead it may loiter until the second spring before putting in an appearance. The first season, all that appears is a thin lance-shaped leaf (Fig12). In the second season, a larger spatulate leaf emerges (Fig13). It is not until the third season that the characteristic three-fold symmetry leaf emerges (Fig14). In its fifth season, you might get a first flower if you are lucky.....definitely a long-term project! On the plus-side: after the first season, the leaves are unpalatable to molluscs, and they can be planted out safely in season three.

I understand that moving Trilliums is best done during the spring, when in active growth, as otherwise the flower bud for next season can abort if transplanted in winter.

I have found a small number of self-set seedlings near to the parent plant, these are always a pleasure to discover, but are quite rare, even in ideal conditions.

For Plantaholics, Trilliums fit the bill, as plants that are both rare and unusual. After all, we wouldn't be members of HPS or S&WG if we just wished to grow easy plants, would we?

Chris Parkin from the far far North (land of the Midge).



Fig11



Fig12



Fig13

Hydrangeas in Montana, Cholesbury

Text and photos by Diana Garner

The Hydrangeas in my garden appear to have enjoyed the wet winter and like all the blossom in the garden this year, look as if they are going to put on a good show. I thought I would share some photos of some of them with you.

They are all planted in semi shaded positions. 'Madame Emile Moulrier' has beautiful full white flowers with a blue dot in the centre. This is planted under an Acer.



Much slower growing is *Hydrangea* 'Koria' and she is happier in a sunnier position.



Hydrangea 'Blue Wave' was planted in 2008 and loves its position under the shade of the Acers. The flowers start off white and turn bluer as the weeks goes by.



Hydrangea 'Kyushu' is planted next to Blue Wave enjoying similar conditions. I watered them both during May when we had no rain this year, but apart from that just put leafmould on them in the autumn.



Close up of a flower of H. 'Kyushu':



I don't know the name of my mophead Hydrangea that I have had for years, but it is the most beautiful turquoise blue colour in my acid soil.



In contrast, a beautiful low growing white Hydrangea, with such a delicate flower. Anyone know its name?

Montana is open for the NGS under the By Arrangement scheme between March and July.

Diana Garner

July 2020

Creating a Woodland Garden

Part 2 – Take Back Control!

Text and plan by Sarah Wood, all photos by Janet Wood

In the first part of this series I described the state of the garden as we found it on our first exploration, when we decided to purchase the property and take on the challenge it presented to our woodland garden ambitions. Five months later, our sale and purchase was effected and the move from Sussex to south west Scotland was completed on a hot and sunny day in late May 2014. The rhododendrons and azaleas were in full bloom, and riot of red and pink predominant, sunglasses obligatory. However, our sellers, it appeared, had become less enthusiastic about garden maintenance once they had accepted our offer and had let things like weeding slide.

Clearly the potential woodland garden could not be the sole focus of our initial efforts, so a frenzy of lawn cutting and hedge trimming ensued and a garden wide programme of prevention undertaken, removing the increasing profusion of seed heads of dandelions and foxgloves that were threatening to engulf the place for years to come. In the woodland areas, all the bluebell heads were removed as the flowers faded – you can have too much of a good thing – while the understorey of fledgling ash trees were cleared in one dedicated sweep. The line of new larch trees intended to screen the one open glade in the woodland area was swiftly consigned to history, as were seedling trees of any sort, birch, holly, cotoneaster, that had outstayed their welcome.

A garden-wide assessment was made of the large number of conifers dotted around the plot, increasingly dominating proceedings. These were all too large for us to tackle ourselves, so selective removal was required, though access for tree surgery was extremely poor. In the end, the wind selected two particularly large conifers to be removed from the woodland area and they, along with two others in the open garden were consigned to their fate of providing a seemingly endless supply of logs for our wood-burner. The enormous trunk of a previous casualty was removed at the same time. The rest of the conifers, like the banks in the financial crisis of 2008, were deemed too big to go and would just have to remain as part of the challenge.

In our minds, we sketched out an idea of where paths might be created in our putative woodland garden and considered what next must be done. At one end of the garden was the thicket of Portuguese Laurel, yew and bamboo, interweaved with overgrown and layering rhododendron that infested the whole area, while at the eastern end of the garden, seedling hollies had created tangled heaps of twisting branches that grew ever thicker and taller.

We actually like rhododendrons and were aware that not all those in the woodland were unwelcome, so each plant was marked as it bloomed to identify whether it should stay or go (*Photo 1*). Some were in so much cover that no blossom occurred, so they were reprieved for now, while others were decreed to be simply in the way.



Photo1:

Some rhododendrons, like this one, were selected to remain

The hollies were getting to the stage of becoming too tall to tackle ourselves so we had a choice to make. Remove them altogether or bring them under control now and perhaps make a feature of them. We decided on the latter course, with the notion that one growing near the stile could be “lollipopped”, while a trio further up the dyke could be encouraged to become a little more shapely. Unfortunately the straggly upward growth of all these hollies had allowed them to become entangled with trees beyond the dyke but, with a lot of high level, prickly cutting and pulling, each tree in turn was eventually reduced to the outline of its intended shape for the future. *(Photo 2)*



Photo 2:

Cutting the hollies down to size and shape

At the other end of the garden we waded into the thicket with gusto, cutting down unwanted *Rhododendron ponticum* on our way to the heart of the matter, the big Portuguese Laurel. Here, hard hat and chainsaw toiled through the thick lower branches, exposing the branches above to attack. Our ambition was not to remove the tree but to reduce it to servitude, so it was cut to size and left to lick its wounds and re-sprout while we decided what future form it would take. *(Photo 3)*



Photo 3

The once mighty Portuguese Laurel gets a new role in the garden

Once the laurel's unwanted layers had been removed, the nearby yew was subjected to the same treatment and, with the extra light coming in from the laurel's removal, the yew slowly changed to reveal its true golden nature. During the removal of the laurel and its associated gang of *ponticum* thugs, we also uncovered other denizens of the thicket, a *Philadelphus* which was granted an opportunity to show us what it could do, a *Chaenomeles* that was allowed some breathing space to recover from its confinement and a *Prunus* with no redeeming features that was written out of the script. Beyond the tamed laurel and yew, we lopped and sawed our way through the remaining *ponticum* growth to reach the dyke and clear a way along its length. At last the way seemed to be clear to create a burnside path and the woodland garden's outline plan was beginning to appear on the ground, so all the cut trunks were gathered together as potential edging for our woodland path network. (*Photo 4*)



Photo 4

Potential path edging assembled, large logs around the reprieved Philadelphus, smaller ones stacked around the condemned Prunus's remaining trunk

Removal of all this growth left two more features worthy of note, the first of which was the bamboos, now visible in the round at last. We were relieved to see that these were actually quite well behaved specimens in three distinct clumps, showing only minor signs of waywardness that were soon hacked away. They could definitely stay, even though they obstructed the passage of the burnside path forming in our mind's eye, until we decided that a pair of them might just form an arch through which the path might pass. (*Photo 5*)



Photo 5

The yew awaits regrowth and reshaping, the three bamboo clumps are in the clear and a route for the Burnside Walk begins to emerge

Adjacent to the bamboo arch, as we now perceived it, was a tall *Embothrium*, sparsely flowered and gangly, surrounded by lots of short suckers. We had not previously appreciated that this was a suckering tree but we decided to leave this area intact for later evaluation, to see what the increased light levels might produce. Nearer the centre of the garden, in the dry zone presided over by the enormous Norway spruce and its Western Hemlock friends, we cleared yet more *ponticum* and considered the remaining specimens in this area. A poor Strawberry Tree had arched over in an effort to find some light, growing in a tortured shape to seek survival from the smothering conifers. Although it carried much dead wood where light had been insufficient, there was life in it yet, so the dead wood was removed and it remained in the game. Another arch would be just right to hang over another path, parallel to the burnside path, another item for the plan.

Between these two notional paths, a tall tree stretched up into the conifers, branching out desperately to continue its shrivelled grip on existence, some of its branches doubling back over the dyke high above the mill lade beyond. It still bore leaves, but not that many. What was it, would it survive? As autumn came, those few leaves coloured up fantastically and we realised we were in the presence of a *Nyssa sylvatica*, a tree we'd always wanted. But those were the last leaves it ever held, as it had to come down, a sad end to proceedings. One lesson learned was not to start a task too late on a winter's day, when our efforts to free the cut trunks and branches from the overhead conifers led to not one but two chainsaws getting pinched and left hanging unceremoniously. We had to resort to handsaws in the dark to bring everything down to earth before retiring indoors chastened by the experience. A very clear case of "Don't do as I do"!! (*Photo 5 & 6*)



Photos 5 & 6: The *Nyssa sylvatica* before and after its sad demise

That's enough death and destruction. At last it's time to get the plan down on paper. (below) Next time, we put it into action.

