



# Shade Monthly

The journal of the Shade and  
Woodland Plants Group

**Welcome to the January 2023 edition of Shade Monthly**



*Dryopteris affinis* 'Grandiceps' 'Askew'

## Notes from the Editor

### Winter Zoom Lectures

We have a couple of great Zoom talks coming up.

#### Wim Boens on Epimediums

Tuesday 17 January 2023 starting at 7.30

With a keen interest in a broad range of plants, particularly Eranthis and Leucojum, Wim is a lecturer, writer and regular contributor to the RHS 'The Plant Review'.



Tuesday 28 February 2023 starting at 7.30

**Jimi Blake**, inspirational creator of Hunting Brook Gardens - **The Woodland Plant Collection at Hunting Brook Gardens.**



## **Subscriptions**

We are not too far from the New Year, have you renewed your subscription to the Shade and Woodland Group.

Subscriptions are due 1st January and remain at the bargain price of £5 single £6 double for one year or £14 single £17 double for three years. Overseas £7 per year.

Payment by Bank Transfer is much preferred (it saves us the 50 pence charge on every cheque we bank) but we are still accepting cheques if anyone finds electronic transfer tricky.

## **This Month**

For the 'January edition we have 2 articles for you, and both have been written by Barry Knee.

The first is entitled 'December Stars', celebrating what is attractive in the garden at this (often) somewhat bleak time of year.

Barry's second article is about designing a border from a clean sheet of paper, inspired by the berries in his garden. Will it get built? – maybe we will see

## **Contributions**

To quote from Barry Knee's first article 'as the Editor is always asking for contributions I thought "lets give it a go"....and we are all the richer for it. This is the time of year when the weather tends to allow us more 'indoor time', so what better time to pen an article for 'Shade monthly'.

Contributions to [jon.segar@ridgewaybarn.net](mailto:jon.segar@ridgewaybarn.net), all gratefully received

## **Does anyone have?**

Alex Scott-Tonge is looking for *Woodwardia unigemmata*. Can anyone help?

## **December Stars and other Shady Characters**

Barry Knee

I have never submitted an article for general circulation before but as the Editor is always asking for contributions I thought "lets give it a go".

Just to set the scene my wife Sue and I live at Pump Cottage, Weatheroak in the northeastern corner of Worcestershire 10 miles south from Birmingham City Centre. Some of you may have visited our garden as we opened for the NGS for 10 years with the final visits being in 2016.

The garden is approximately 1 acre including a natural pond approaching 1/4 acre. We have a terraced area near the house, a lawn of sorts but only the size of a badminton court and the rest is basically beds and borders, half of which are in shade or semi shade for most of the year.

We also have several water features. We have created the garden over years from a pony paddock.

There are several large oaks and a walnut tree on the south side of the garden which by early December have shed most off their leaves, thereby letting in light to the area the photos were taken. Obviously nearer to these large trees the soil gets very dry but over the 32 years I have lived here the soil has been improved with some new top soil, recycled waste soil improver, home made compost and leaf mould.

During the last 2 years, in order to have a bit more impact within the shady areas of the garden, we started to plant more in blocks rather than the "bitty" effect we had before. This has also resulted in slightly less maintenance, a real plus as we get gracefully less able to keep up with the weeding! We have spent the last 9 months focusing on this task. We have achieved this by discarding less worthy plants ( always hard to do and often long debates ensue ) and either moving like plants from other parts of the garden or buying additional plants of our favoured varieties. This of course is never a problem for Hardy Planters.

At this time of year when walking around the garden, which I do most days, I don't just want to see bare earth and a few dead stalks that "offer the promise of a riot of colour next summer". I want to see something to stimulate me now. With this thought in mind I went out to take some photos of plants that were still providing interest in December. It was an interesting exercise.

Obviously, the majority of colour was being provided by foliage and the contrast between different form and texture of foliage rather than flower. Most

of these plants were growing in areas where for half the year at least they were in some degree of shade.

I reflected that when we think of plants that will tolerate varying degrees of shade our minds seem to focus first on those that perform best in spring before the leaf canopy of trees and shrubs form. But I was recalling that a lot of these plants had been looking good for 9 months or even longer.

Perhaps not the divas that we see in summer but December stars non the less.

A lack of labels and a fading memory means some of the plants mentioned might not be accurately identified! No doubt many of you will be able to correct me.

Fig 1



Unknown *Epimedium*, *Podophyllum* 'Spotty Dotty' (looking better in December than previously in the year and in my experience fairs much better in moister conditions) unknown *Disporum*, Harts Tongue Fern *Asplenium Scolopendrium* and further along variagated ground elder *Aegopodium podagraria* and *Reineckea carnea* growing at the foot of a holly hedge.

Fig 2



The lichen on the trunk of the *Sorbus aucuparia* is picked up by the foliage of *Brunnera* 'Silver Heart' and echoed across the path with *Euphorbia wulfenii*, a combination I hasten to add that was luck, not planned. When the *Brunnera* first emerged I was disappointed that the foliage was mainly green but the variegation has steadily increased and now I find myself attracted to the effect.

Fig 3



Strong foliage of hellebores and *Epimedium* with 3 *Liriope*s growing around the base of the Tibetan Cherry, *Prunus Serrula*. The *Liriope* has grown to about 2 ft in height but has never flowered in over 10 years. You might just see the orange jewel like seedpods of *Iris foetidissima* peeking out of the *Liriope*.

Fig 4



A better showing from this group of *Liriope*s with the lovely marbled foliage of *Arum maculatum*.

Fig 5 and 5A



This is part of a recently revamped bed. It is in front of hedge which divides our garden from an adjoining field, directly under an oak tree and also has 2 acers in it each about 10 ft high. The bed measures about 50 ft long by 10 ft in depth. (Apologies to those of you who can now visualize size in metric) We have retained some Rhododendrons and Camelias to the far end of the bed which left us with 30 ft for replanting.

The ground slopes down from the hedge to the path, so to improve growing conditions and make the bed more level we constructed a retaining wall 2 sleepers high to which we have just further added a round 3" pole horizontally on top of the sleeper. This softens the appearance of the harsh looking sleepers. The soil has been improved and we have almost finished planting. Obviously the plants will take a few years to get really established but there was also an area of cyclamen which we have retained.



(Fig 6)

We have included 2 shrubs new to us which we were advised would cope with semi shade. *Diervilla sessilifolia* "Cool Splash" (Fig 7) with *Bergenia* 'Overture' in front.

The other shrub is *Helwingia himalaica* (Fig 8) and we planted some *Carex morrowii* 'Vanilla Ice' in front of that. We find that there are a surprising number of grasses that cope with semi shade, many of which have the added bonus of being evergreen.

Perhaps we should swop the perennials over so that the *Carex* will pick up on the foliage and flowers of the *Diervilla*.



Fig 7



Fig 8



Fig 9

Nothing ceases to amaze us in gardening. During the high winds we experienced earlier in the year the entire top of this *Tetrapanax papyrifer* Rex was torn off leaving just a bare trunk 6 ft tall. Within 3 months it resprouted, again just at the top and is looking healthy once more. It stands in front of a *Fatsia polycarpa* 'Green Fingers' and you can just see *Acanthus mollis* 'Hollands Gold' to the side still looking good in December. This is part of our "fern and foliage" bed. It includes 2 other tetrapanax, *Fatsia japonica* and *Fatsia japonica* 'Spiders Web'.

Two of my favourite ferns in this bed are *Dryopteris wallichiana* now about 4 ft high and growing! and an unknown variety with lovely spiralling foliage. (Fig 10)





Fig 10

Here are some photos of other ferns looking good now.



And finally:



A small area around a *Prunus cerasifera* subsp. *pssardii* with *Heuchera* 'Caramel,' *Carex* 'Evergold' and *Hosta* 'August Moon' (which has already gone over). Old roofing tiles have been used in order to allow us to create an area of improved growing conditions around the base of the tree.

Fig 16

## Fruit for Thought

Barry Knee

Whilst thinking what pictures to use in the previous article it dawned on me that several plants growing in our shadier areas had got berries on them. Later I sat down with a cuppa and started making a list of some other plants with berries, hips or haws that would tolerate shadier conditions and the list grew encouragingly longer. Surprisingly several of those selected not only bore fruit at the same time but also had other good periods of interest and several were evergreen.

We often consider colour or foliage schemes but rarely focus on the fruit so this made me consider the possibility of grouping them together somewhere in the garden.

I know that my wife Sue has heard me say many times that I would stop rearranging beds and borders. Every year I say it will be the final “tweaking” (but she knows me well enough to appreciate this might never happen). So I decided to set myself a project to design a border, based on plants that bear ornamental fruit, just as a fantasy (for the moment anyway!) - by fruits I’m referring to hips, berries, haws and seed capsules.

We’ve got a pretty free reign so lets start by using our imagination beginning with the border itself. Lets make it 40 feet in length and 10 feet deep in the middle but 4 feet deeper at the sides. The soil is obviously going to be “moist but free draining” with an open humus rich structure.

As this is in an open situation we need to create our own shade. Plants at the back will receive some sun unless the bed had to be located in front of a fence or hedge. As its a fantasy border money is not a consideration so we will invest in some mature specimens.

I have included a few photos from our garden but please appreciate they don’t necessarily reflect the plants full potential.

We’ll plant three trees at the back of the border to provide the desired shade. As the choice is pretty endless I have selected the following as we don’t already have these in our garden:

- Lets go for a *Sorbus cashmiriana* in the middle - white berries.
- Flanked by a *Malus x moerlandsii* ‘Profusion’ - purple young leaves and deep purple fruits.
- Finally *Crataegus prunifolia* ‘Splendens’ - red fruits.

Already, as well as providing fruits/berries, they all have good autumn colour and early flowers. Again, like the trees, the choice of shrubs is encouraging so lets choose some with more unusual coloured berries.



*Euonymus europaeus* 'Red Cascade'- pink/red berries. (Fig 1)



*Clerodendrum trichotomum fargesii* 'Carnival' - metallic turquoise/crimson berries - the later having attractive variegated foliage. I find the scent pleasantly heady but I know some folk find it unpleasant. (Fig 2)



Then *Callicarpa bodinieri* "Profusion"(violet/purple berries). (Fig 3)



Hypericums, so many to choose from. (Fig 4)



*Skimmia rubella* Fig 5

Now add some evergreens. From the many options we could go for Hollies, Pyracantha, Mahonia, *Skimmia rubella* ((Fig 5) or Kew Green), *Aucuba japonica* "Crotonifolia"



*Viburnum davidii* (Fig 6) - with its unusual blue berries.



*Nandina domestica* (Fig 7) would be yet another choice selection.

Could we afford to leave out *Sarcococca* for scent and black berries?

I'd like to add three roses, they could be placed near the outside of the border, although those chosen will tolerate some shade in my experience. *Rosa Glauca* with red spherical hips, *Rosa rugosa* 'Roseaie de L'Hay' with red hips nearing the size of a golf ball and *Rosa moyesii* 'Geranium' with flagon shaped red/orange hips. Interesting foliage on all of them and flowers to boot.

Lower level/ground cover would be planted "en bloc", we want to cover the soil.

At the rear beneath the trees *Cotoneaster horizontalis*, *Dammeri* or 'Coral Beauty' - red berries. Then some *Disporum uniflorum* or *Disporopsis logistylum* (Night Heron or Green Giant?) - mainly black berries.



*Liriope* (Fig 8) evergreen, including some with variegated foliage - purple/black berries. *Gaultheria procumbens* and *Cornus canadensis* - red berries.



*Iris foetidissima* (Fig 9)

*Lunaria annua* (Honesty) (Fig 10)

*Iris foetidissima* (Fig 9) the native iris, to give some vertical spikes - orange seed heads.

*Lunaria annua* (Honesty) (Fig 10) not fitting the criteria exactly but would add high notes to the scheme.





*Dianella caerulea* (Fig 11) evergreen - dark blue seed capsules.



*Arum italicum* and the variety 'Marmoratum' (Fig 12) which has more pronounced markings on the foliage - orange seed capsules

*Actea rubra* - red berries.



*Ophiopogon planiscapus* (Fig 13) evergreen, 'Nigrescens' and *Ophiopogon japonicus* 'variagatus' would be good near the front of the bed - black berries

Finally, to provide a shot of colour in the spring, although strictly not in the remit, we could include some small bulbs. So many to choose from but another excuse to drool over the bulb catalogues.

As is the norm I will have tried to shoehorn too many plants into the available space with undue care taken over their eventual size, but as this is after all a fantasy border the plants will quickly grow to their optimum size and remain so!

What a great way to spend wintery days and evenings, perhaps with a favourite tippie near to hand, creating a new border and with no physical labour and no expense - unless I can persuade Sue to "tweak just one more time!"

It would be interesting to hear from others what plants they would choose. I would also welcome readers who are more knowledgeable than myself to point out any plant features or names that are incorrect.

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