



# HPS

HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

Gardening with hardy perennials

# CORNUCOPIA

*A Journal of the Local & Specialist Groups  
of the Hardy Plant Society*



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# CORNUCOPIA

*A selection of articles reprinted from the Newsletters of the  
Local and Specialist Groups of the Hardy Plant Society*

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***Hemerocallis 'Green Warrior'***

© *Marion Jay*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

**A**t twenty-five years old, *Cornucopia* has reached its fiftieth issue. A golden milestone for a publication which resulted from a chance remark by the then HPS Group Co-ordinator, Jean Harris. Her role required her to read all the Local and Specialist Group newsletters. She said she enjoyed them so much, it seemed a pity that the material didn't reach a wider audience...and *Cornucopia* was born.



The first Editor was George Parker, who remained in the post for eleven years. Tony Bays then took the helm, succeeded by yours truly, and now there is a new incumbent waiting in the wings: Clare Foggett, who is the current Editor of *The English Garden* magazine. *Cornucopia* could not be heading into better hands.

It has been a pleasure to edit the magazine, and I am sad to say goodbye. I have really enjoyed 'talking' to contributors via email and even, once or twice, meeting them in person. Thank you to all of you who have given permission for me to reprint (and sometimes reconfigure!) your writing. I have learned a lot along the way, not only horticulturally but my computer skills have also improved exponentially.

I would also like to thank Alison Tracy, my eagle-eyed proof-reader. Very little gets past Alison, and she has now been poached by Souren Ala, the Editor of *The Journal*. Despite my - and Alison's - best efforts, however, errors sometimes creep in, and I would like to correct a mistake which appeared in the Spring 2022 issue. In *Scented Camellias*, on page 27, the name of *Camellia* 'Kingyo-tsubaki' erroneously included an extra hyphen. Apologies to author Caroline Bell, whose original text was correct.

And so I must love you and leave you. I am not only leaving *Cornucopia* but I will also be moving house very soon, so there are new horizons all round. I am looking forward to making another garden and meeting new gardening friends. I have no doubt that Clare will enjoy editing the magazine as much as I have. Happy anniversary, *Cornucopia* - cheers everyone!

*Marion Jay*

## HARDY OSTEOSPERMUMS

*Mike Brett*

For many gardeners, pelargoniums, petunias and other tender bedding plants provide the long-lasting display that they require, but Hardy Planters are looking for plants that will not only last considerably longer than one season, but will also be tough and undemanding. Shrubby salvias and various members of the Malva family have proved to be hardy and long-flowering, with *Anisodonte* 'El Royo' being exceptional, in that it may be in bloom every month of the year. However, it sometimes has designs on taking over, either by running or seeding.



All photos © Mike Brett

*Osteospermum* 'White Pim'

Osteospermums are in the daisy family and, hailing as they do from South Africa, are often considered to be tender perennials. It is true that some species and varieties do not survive even our present mild winters. However, a few species from the Drakensberg Mountains are very hardy. We have grown three good hardy selections for over 30 years, which flower continuously for more than six months every year and can be highly recommended. Indeed, at Christmas we were able to pick a few flowers of the first two varieties described below, both of which had been flowering since spring, giving a nine-month season. However, as with most plants, deadheading helps to prolong flowering.

*Osteospermum* 'White Pim' is about 30cm tall by 60cm wide and produces a profusion of white flowers, 6cm across, with dark centres and a purplish flush to the underside of the petals. Each flower lasts a few days and, like most daisies, closes up in the evening. We acquired this plant almost 40 years ago, when it was known as *O. ecklonis* var. *prostratum*.

*O. jucundum* 'Langtrees' was acquired a few years later and, again, has been with us ever since. It has mid-pink flowers of the same size as *O.* 'White Pim', but the plant has a more sprawling nature, particularly when grown in shade. The petal undersides are a cinnamon colour. This variety could be considered bulletproof, and it has an AGM from the RHS. Surprisingly, only one supplier is listed in our recent *Plant Finder*. [Now three suppliers - Ed.]

Neat and compact *O.* 'Irish' was the last to arrive. Its smaller flowers, about 4cm across, are a deeper pink which shows through to the reverse.



*Osteospermum* 'Irish'

All three plants are best grown in full sun or partial shade in well-drained soil, sloping banks or raised beds, where they will perform well for many years in the poorest of soils before replacement is necessary.

Cuttings strike fairly easily; the only problem is trying to find non-flowering material. The only seedling that has occurred in more than three decades appeared beside *O.* 'White Pim' a couple of years ago. Its flowers are almost white, with palest pink bleeding into the outer edges of the petals. Strangely, the underside is bluish, unlike its parent.

Unfortunately it has not proved to be as hardy as the parent but, like the others, is easy enough from cuttings.



*Osteospermum* 'White Pim', 'Langtrees', 'Irish' and the seedling



Undersides of *O.* 'White Pim', 'Langtrees', 'Irish' and the seedling

Although these plants originate from the east of South Africa, where winters are dry and torrential thunderstorms occur most summer afternoons, they have adapted well to our climate. We never water ours and they seem to be taking the vagaries of climate change in their stride.

❧ *First published in the Kent Group Newsletter, Winter 2021* ❧

## **BATS IN THE GARDEN**

*Rona Dodds*

**W**hether you live in an urban area or in the countryside, there will be bats about, roosting in trees, attic spaces, barn roofs or even the tiny spaces in between house walls.

The best time to see bats is at dusk as the light fails, when pipistrelles and noctules come out to feed on insects. Other species, such as brown long-eared bats, come out later at night. Some bat species cover large distances during the night to reach their feeding sites, before returning to their roosts.



All photos © Rona Dodds

**A brown long-eared bat**

Bats use a diverse range of habitats, but particularly areas with mature trees and water, so wooded parks, canals and riverbanks are good places to start looking for them.

There is no guarantee bats will feed in your garden; attracting bats to the garden is more about providing the right plants and habitats to encourage insects, which are the bats' food source. Look on your garden as a bonus feeding area, or bat service station, en route to their usual feeding sites. If you are lucky, they will swoop in for a snack. Because bats feed at night, night-scented plants are key, as they attract moths and other night-flying insects. Use plants that produce seeds, nectar, vegetation and fruit which can provide food or cover for the larvae and adults of these insects. All these plants can be incorporated into your garden. Alternatively, you could create a specific area for wildlife in your garden, which in turn will



benefit many more creatures, bugs and beasties, as well as the bats. An important thing to remember when creating a wildlife garden is to plant native species, as these are important for insect egg-laying and larval development.



**Wild flowers and grasses provide an ideal habitat for insects**

perennials to increase cover and insect habitat. Planting up gaps in hedges also creates the same conditions as a row of trees, just on a smaller scale.

If you are planning a wildlife garden, here is a list of plants which are specifically night-scented and encourage insects and bats to eat. Most of them can be easily grown from seed:

- Sweet rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*)
- Bladder campion (*Silene vulgaris*)
- Nottingham catchfly (*Silene nutans*)
- Night-scented catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*)
- Night-scented stock (*Matthiola bicornis*)
- Evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*)
- Tobacco plant (*Nicotiana affinis*)
- Cherry pie (*Heliotropium arborescens*)
- Soapwort (*Saponaria officinalis*)



**Sweet rocket**

Chives, borage, lemon balm, marjoram and mint all have characteristics that attract insects, from their nectar, to their seeds, vegetation and aromatic foliage. Honeysuckles (including *Lonicera periclymenum*, *L. 'Halliana'*, *L. caprifolium* and *L. etrusca 'Superba'*), *Jasminum officinale*, *Rosa canina*, *R. rubiginosa*, *R. arvensis* and brambles all meet insects' requirements in the garden, thus providing bats with food.



**Our log pile in the wildlife garden at the nursery**

Other ways to encourage bats include creating a pond (many insects start life in water), building log piles and installing bat boxes. A pond doesn't have to be big, and you'll probably get other animals, such as frogs and toads, coming to visit too. Log piles, left to rot, will attract many insects and are an easy way to use up logs from felled trees. You can, of course, put up bat boxes if you have a suitable site. Position the box as high as possible on a tree trunk, with no branches directly above or below the box. Also make sure the space into the box is just as wide as your finger, otherwise smaller birds may move in instead of bats!

Please remember that bats are a protected species, and any attempts to harm them or destroy their roosts will lead to prosecution. Bats should only be handled by someone with a bat licence.



**Putting up wooden bat boxes in spring**

**Written in collaboration with David Dodds, Consultant Ecologist at David Dodds Associates Ltd.**

**Rona Dodds runs Quercus Garden Plants nursery, 16 miles south of Edinburgh: [www.quercusgardenplants.co.uk](http://www.quercusgardenplants.co.uk)**

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## MY GANSU AND TREE PEONIES

*John Hudson*

Alongside the west wall of my house I have a row of four 'tree' peonies, interrupted by a large *Euphorbia x pasteurii*; two Gansu Mudan peonies from Will McLewin, and two Saunders hybrids. The defining feature of a Gansu Mudan peony is the presence of large purple to black blotches at the base of each petal. From north to south, the peonies are 'High Noon', a 'black' Gansu Mudan; 'Vesuvian'; and a lilac Gansu. Collectively, they almost block the path that runs alongside them.

Elsewhere in the garden I have three more Gansu Mudan, a *Paeonia delavayi* and a *P. suffruticosa* hybrid. Although I grow mainly herbaceous peonies, the tree peonies were so spectacular in May 2019 that I thought it worth illustrating them and providing a few comments.

Growing against a west wall, *P. x lemoinei* 'High Noon' is a lutea hybrid bred by Saunders in the USA. It is well known for its bright lemon-yellow flowers and its reliability. It sometimes repeat flowers in the autumn. It is the tallest of my peonies, at about 1.5m.



All photos © John Hudson

*P. x lemoinei* 'High Noon'



Next is an unnamed but dramatically coloured Gansu Mudan (left) that I bought from Will McLewin [of the 'research and experimental' Phedar Nursery in Stockport] in 2007. It has grown vigorously and tends to flop

forwards away from the wall. Although it doesn't always flower prolifically, it makes up for it in the size and intensity of its blooms; dark red with a black tinge.



*P. 'Vesuvian'*



*P. 'Lilac Gansu Mudan'*

Beyond the euphorbia we come to *P. 'Vesuvian'*. This is another Saunders hybrid with attractive finely cut foliage that sometimes hides its numerous deep purple-red, double flowers which have fringed margins. It flowers a few days later than its neighbours.

Adjoining and competing with 'Vesuvian' is a big plant that I call 'Lilac Gansu Mudan', again from Will McLewin. This year it was truly spectacular, covered in large flowers whose colour is easier to admire than to describe. It sometimes sets seed, and I have a seedling that finally flowered ten years after it was sown. Rather to my surprise, the flower colour was identical to its parent. We hope to offer seed again via the HPS Peony Group Newsletter.

In my open garden I have the first Gansu Mudan that I bought from Will McLewin about 20 years ago. I asked for the classic white with blotch flowers, typical of these relatives of the wild species *Paenonia rockii*. It forms a small shrub, about 1.2m tall and across, with slender branches spreading outwards, unlike the unruly plants against my wall. It has flowered well over the years and regularly sets seed.

Also in the open I had a bigger plant of an unnamed deep pink Gansu Mudan. It was a fine plant - my best in 2018 - though its semi-double

flowers meant the blotches were less conspicuous. Unfortunately, despite being a strong plant and the least susceptible to die-back, it succumbed to 'peony wilt' in the winter of 2020. Peonies are generally long-lived, but not immortal.

My latest Gansu Mudan is a young plant of *P.* 'Joseph Rock' from the French nursery Pivoines Rivière, which I have planted near a wall. This is the American form of the 'Rock' peonies originally imported from China, a tangled tale too long to include here. It has white flowers with prominent blotches like my first plant, but much larger.



***P.* 'Joseph Rock'**



**Unnamed pink Gansu,  
a victim of peony wilt**

I planted these peonies against the wall to give some protection from frost and wind. In retrospect, I don't think that was necessary; it tends to encourage early growth, which can be damaged by late spring frost.

These plants receive no special attention; an occasional dose of fish, blood and bone, and the removal of unhealthy branches. Gansu Mudan peonies are passengers in the winter garden, but they do drop their leaves completely, unlike my one plant of *P. delavayi* which looks so dreary with its retained brown, mildewy foliage that I am tempted to destroy it!

~ First published in the Peony Group Newsletter, 2019 ~

## THE TRADESCANTS

### *Delphine Price*

**T**he Tradescants were the most important horticulturists in seventeenth century England. They introduced many of our best known garden plants and kept comprehensive records of all their acquisitions. Among John the Elder's introductions are horse chestnut, larch, lilac, robinia, poppy, stock, phlox, Michaelmas daisy, cistus, white lupin, daffodils, gladioli, cos lettuce, and scarlet runner beans. His catalogue of 1634 lists 55 varieties of plum alone!

John Tradescant the Elder (1570-1638) was born in obscurity in Suffolk. He had an extraordinary life as a career head gardener to the rich and famous. His first employer was Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury, for whom he designed gardens at Hatfield House and Salisbury House. His first collecting expedition was to the Low Countries to source and collect fruit trees in 1610. He formed valuable connections with fellow plantsmen in The Netherlands and France, including Jean Robin of the Jardin Du Roi, which led to regular exchanges of plants.



**John Tradescant the Elder**

Tradescant was headhunted, rather against his will, by the favourite of King James I, George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, who was rich and wildly extravagant. Tradescant created several gardens for him, including New Hall in Essex with its grand avenues of trees - probably horse chestnuts - in the French style. During his service, Tradescant undertook expeditions to Arctic Russia, the Levant, Algiers, Paris and back to the Netherlands. Buckingham's influence allowed him to request the Navy to instruct London merchants who were trading overseas, particularly in North America and West Africa, to send back 'anything that is strange'.

Tradescant's relationship with the notorious Buckingham involved many journeys, including one to Paris to escort Charles the First's new wife back to England and, separately, an ill-fated expedition to the Île de Ré to attempt to relieve the siege of the protestant stronghold of La Rochelle. This latter venture was a complete disaster, with sixty per cent of the Duke's men dying before the retreat, and may have been the reason for Buckingham's assassination in 1628.

In 1630 Tradescant was appointed 'Keeper of his Majesty's Gardens, Vines and Silkworms' to the new King, Charles I, and his Queen, Henrietta Maria, who proved a demanding mistress. He created beautiful gardens for her at Oatlands Palace in Surrey. She visited infrequently, and with very little warning, but demanded that the garden should be in full bloom whenever she came. He managed this by having a greenhouse 262 feet long 'with a colehouse adjoining' to keep plants over winter.



**Henrietta Maria**



**Oatlands Palace in Surrey, Queen Henrietta's country retreat**



Wherever he went, Tradescant collected seeds, bulbs and sometimes plants, all of which he had brought back to his garden in Lambeth, which comprised a three acre orchard, a house with an acre of garden and a further three acre field, all rented from the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral. Here he grew on and propagated an enormous variety of plants, forming the basis of a profitable business. His collection included curiosities of natural history and ethnography which he housed in 'The Ark', a building he created to display his 'museum of curiosities': the first public museum in England. It was open to the public and became a popular attraction; London society came in their thousands to marvel at the exhibition and the beautiful gardens. A contemporary wrote, 'Of all places in England it is best for the improvement of children in their education because of the variety of objects to be seen'. The collection included shells, birds, fish, carvings, costumes, weapons, minerals and coins. The specimens were collected by Tradescant and his many traveller and merchant friends. The gardens were run as a commercial nursery, and contained the most extensive collection of plants in England at that time.

John Tradescant the Younger (1608-1662) was brought up helping and learning alongside his father. He benefitted from his father's increasing status and attended The King's School in Canterbury, where he got the classical education that his father lacked. His first wife, Jane, died very young - possibly of plague - leaving him with two young children. His children lived with their grandfather whenever their father went off to spend many months in the new pioneer settlements in Virginia, collecting plants and seeds which were shipped back to England in barrels. His introductions included the pineapple, *Liriodendron tulipifera*, red maple, vines,



**John Tradescant the Younger**  
(attributed to Thomas de Critz)

and Virginia creeper. It was claimed that he brought back 200 different species of plants. He increased the Tradescant plant collection enormously.

Tradescant the Younger returned home in 1638 to find that his father had died in his absence. He reluctantly kept up his father's work for the King and Queen but retreated to Lambeth, where he kept a low profile. The English Civil War made him fear for his safety and it had ruined his business with the aristocracy, his main customers for plants. Paying visitors to The Ark fell away to nothing and Tradescant faced bankruptcy. Henrietta Maria's Oatlands Palace was commandeered by the Parliamentarians and sold in 1650.

In 1657, Tradescant published a comprehensive catalogue of the contents of the Lambeth Ark: *Musæum Tradescantianum, or a Collection of Rarities*.



The Catalogue of the Tradescant collection at the Lambeth Ark

He had added many new curiosities, such as the famous 'Powhatan's mantle', a beautiful deer hide elaborately decorated with shells, which had belonged to Pocahontas' father, and which Tradescant had acquired in Virginia. These rarities later formed the basis of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, opened in 1683. There is some question about the means by which Elias Ashmole acquired the collection, possibly by cheating Tradescant's widow, Hester, who was found drowned in their garden pond in 1678.

The life-long efforts and dedication of father and son introduced 750 species of plant into Britain, including a great range of herbs, medicinal plants and exotics. The two Tradescants are buried in an elaborate tomb in the churchyard of St. Mary's, Lambeth, which lay neglected and forgotten until Rosemary Nicholson discovered it in 1976.



© Peter Barr (Wikimedia Commons)

### **The Tradescant tomb**

She and her husband, John, launched a huge campaign to save the church and churchyard from demolition. The church was rebuilt, the Tradescant tomb revealed and restored, and the Museum of Garden History was established (now The Garden Museum). In the yard, a seventeenth century-style knot garden has since been created, using only plant species found by the Tradescants.

**Author's Footnote:** My interest in the Tradescants began when I read the two highly romanticised accounts in Philippa Gregory's novels, *Earthly Joys* and *Virgin Earth*. Major factual sources are the blog by Dr. David Marsh of The Gardens Trust, and biographies: *Strange Blooms* by J. Potter, and *The John Tradescants* by P. Leith-Ross.

❧ *First published in the North West Group Newsletter, Spring 2021* ❧

## CYCLAMEN HEDERIFOLIUM

*Peter Williams*

**I**vy-leaved cyclamen, *Cyclamen hederifolium*, is one of my favourite garden plants. The flowers appear just as the long days of summer are becoming noticeably shorter, when I begin to feel a little sad at the approach of autumn and winter. If only I had been born a galanthophile! However, the sight of cyclamen flowers popping up from bare earth or through a canopy of fallen or decaying leaves always restores my spirits and optimism.



All photos © Peter Williams

*Cyclamen hederifolium* flowering in late August beneath the canopy of a beech tree



Leaves of naturalised *C. hederifolium* at Anglesey Abbey in Cambridgeshire reveal the great diversity of leaf forms within the species

The main flowering period for *Cyclamen hederifolium* is August, September and October, but some plants begin flowering in late July and others may still be flowering in early November. Flowers are various shades of pink or white and are usually produced before the exquisitely marbled leaves begin to appear. The variability and attractiveness of the foliage is reason enough to grow this beautiful and undemanding European species.

*C. hederifolium* naturally occurs in Europe; from France in the west, to Turkey in the east, and is found in woodland, scrub, hedgerows and rocky outcrops. It has been grown in Great Britain since the sixteenth century and has become naturalised in many locations, especially in southern and eastern England.

Cyclamen are mentioned in John Gerarde's *Generall Historie of Plantes*, published in 1597, and were widely used by herbalists to treat just about every condition, from snakebites to cataracts, boils and wounds. Gerarde suggested that cyclamen corms could be beaten into little flat cakes and used as 'a good amorous medicine to make one in love'.<sup>1</sup> He goes on to warn, however, that pregnant women should not take, touch or even step over cyclamen because to do so might risk giving birth prematurely! Taking medicines containing cyclamen was probably a very unpleasant experience because extracts were distasteful and had emetic properties. James Edward Smith, who, like many early botanists, tasted the plants he studied, noted in 1828 that it was 'a very acrid plant, especially the root whose acrimony is not much perceived at the first but soon becomes intolerable'<sup>2</sup>.

Botanically, *C. hederifolium* is a very long-lived tuberous perennial and a member of the primula family. It is one of 20 or so species in the genus *Cyclamen*. When seedlings first emerge, they quickly form small swellings on their roots, which develop into the corms. Over decades, the corms can reach diameters exceeding 30cm and may be crowded, one upon the other, in the soil. Leaves follow the flowers and remain on the plant until late spring /early summer, when the plants become dormant until the flowers appear again in late summer.

The generic name is derived from the Greek 'kyklaminos', which means a circle, and is thought to refer to coiling of the flower stem that occurs after pollination.<sup>3</sup> The specific name *hederifolium* means ivy leaf, because the patterning and outline of cyclamen leaves look similar to ivy - *Hedera helix*. The species was formerly known as *C. neopolitanum* because it was common around Naples. In Europe, the common name is often sowbread or swinebread because the corms are foraged by wild boars (Gerarde refers to *Panis porcinus*).



**Flower forms of *C. hederifolium***

The flowers of *C. hederifolium* have five reflexed petals, each with a U-shaped purple mark and a pair of ear-like projections (auricles) at the base. The petals can be linear with an acutely pointed tip, or more rounded with a less pronounced tip, and are often slightly twisted.

The flowers on the white forms are equally variable and have auricles but no basal purple U-shaped markings.



**The white form - *C. hederifolium* 'Album'**

Cyclamen flowers are self-fertile. After pollination, the stem becomes tightly coiled and pulls the developing seed pod down to the ground. Over the next 9 - 12 months the seed pods develop, and by July of the year

following flowering, they will be approximately one centimetre in diameter. The pods open to reveal numerous seeds with a sticky coating that serves to attract ants and other creatures that probably aid dispersal.



**Coiled flower stems after fertilisation and mature seed pod with seeds**

Freshly collected seed will germinate freely if washed to remove the sticky material. Stored seeds obtained from seed merchants or from the HPS seed exchange should be soaked overnight and will also germinate easily. Seeds can be broadcast into soil, although better results are probably obtained by sowing seed in trays stored outside or in a cold glasshouse. Seedlings will usually start to flower in their second year and very many can be raised in even a small seed tray. Young corms can be planted out either in growth or when dormant.



**A half seed tray filled with numerous small corms.  
In growth (left) and the following summer (right)**

Dry corms offered very cheaply by bulb companies and garden centres often fail to grow and should probably be avoided.

*C. hederifolium* is totally hardy and will thrive in most soil types and conditions, except heavy wet soils. It is generally more tolerant of poor



*C. hederifolium* at Wakehurst Place in Sussex

soils than *Cyclamen coum*, the equally attractive spring-flowering species. Plants will grow well in shade and can tolerate the dry soil beneath the canopy of trees. It is one of the few species that will grow well on the north side of a wall or dense evergreen hedge like privet or Leyland cypress.

Nurserymen have named many selections which have particularly attractive flowers or leaves, catering for the collectors amongst us who like to display them in alpine houses or raised beds. For me, however, *Cyclamen hederifolium* looks best when naturalised in a rough part of the garden where they can seed around delightfully.

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes* by John Gerarde, 1597. p 694-695  
<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/57081750>

<sup>2</sup> *The English Flora* by James Edward Smith, Vol 1, 1824. p273  
<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/31759134>

<sup>3</sup> *Plant Names Simplified* by A.T. Johnson & H.A. Smith. 2nd Ed 1931 p32

❧ First published in the East Yorks Group Bulletin, September 2021 ❧



## **MAKING A GARDEN FOR BUMBLEBEES AT THE DUCHY OF CORNWALL NURSERY**

*Becky Martin*

**T**here was not always a garden on this spot. In previous years this north-west facing slope was used for growing nursery stock. It was semi-terraced, with breeze block retaining walls and a compacted grit surface, covered with Mypex geotextile membrane in some areas. Following the construction of a new shop building, the ground was smoothed back into a slope. In 2016, a series of herb beds was created at one end of the site, and the ground between was Mypexed and dressed with bark. The remaining ground below the sales terrace was spread with topsoil. Grass seed was sown and all looked good until the weeds started to grow. We had a spectacular crop of docks, which were all painstakingly removed by hand to create a green slope, nicknamed 'The Field of Dreams' while its future was considered.

At this time much work was being done on the Fowey Valley Pollinator Project here in Cornwall. This ambitious and valuable project aims to work out how best to focus changes in land management to enhance populations of bumblebees. The project is trialling the University of Exeter's 'Bee-Steward' model on a large scale. Bee-Steward simulates the growth, survival and behaviour of bumblebees in a mapped landscape, and helps untangle complex bumblebee responses to their environment: in this case, 1,400 hectares along the Fowey Valley. With bumblebees very much in mind, Al Moore, who was our Horticultural Manager at that time, came up with the idea of creating a garden for bumblebees at the Duchy of Cornwall Nursery, and through the Bumblebee Conservation Trust a grant application was submitted. By the end of 2017, funding had been secured to build the garden.

There is significance in the title of this piece. The decision was to make a garden for bumblebees as opposed to a habitat for them. We could have tried to recreate an ancient meadow habitat surrounded by woodland edge plants and hedges, mimicking lost ancient meadows which have all but vanished, but we are a retail nursery; plants are our business and our customers come to us for plants. What we have tried to do is create a

garden that demonstrates how easy it is to cater for bumblebees without compromising the function or aesthetic qualities of the garden itself. Every plant (except the hazel) has been chosen for its nectar and pollen value for bumblebees. Of course other pollinators visit too, particularly the honey bees from the hives above the nursery. We have also seen humming-bird hawk moths and bee-flies.



All photos © Becky Martin

### **The early stages of laying out the bumblebee garden**

The garden is designed with five separate areas: a wild informal area, a kitchen garden, a shady shrub area and a full-on flower power area with lots of colour and annuals amongst the perennial planting. In the centre of these four is a circular central bed planted in shades of blue and mauve, the idea being to create a visual beacon for the bees. It is unusual to create a design with a list of suitable plants as the starting point; a bit like going to the fridge and wondering what to cook from its contents. The criteria for plant selection were, firstly, that they must be valuable sources of nectar and pollen for bumblebees. After that, they must be pleasing to the eye, straightforward to grow, readily available to buy, and bloom in different seasons. The Bumblebee Conservation Trust is a valuable source of information for plant selection, as is the RHS Plants for Pollinators resource.

Work began in spring 2018. The paths had to be cut and levelled, edged and compacted. These had to be wide and safe for public and disabled access. The information hut was built on a concrete base and the site was fenced. A high pressure water supply was fixed to the gatepost. The ground was not ideal for making a garden, with a modest layer of topsoil over inhospitable matter underneath. All available organic matter was added to the beds at this point (split bags of compost and soil improver, spent tomato growbags, and spare soil from elsewhere on site), and the beds were rotavated. Planting began but paused during a summer heatwave. More plants were added the following spring, including a privet hedge which will be allowed to flower, and the majority of the herbaceous plants.

The lavender edging was one of the first plants to go in the ground, and it thrived in the heat. The variety chosen was *Lavandula x intermedia* 'Grosso'. This is an intermediate lavender; a cross between English and Portuguese lavenders, which combines the cold hardiness of the English with the heat tolerance of the Portuguese. It also has a high oil content and keeps its fragrance and rich violet colour well when dried. It has proved to be a key plant in the garden. It would be easy to say we were clever to choose such a star performer, but at the time this was the only suitable variety available in sufficient quantity. This lavender has attracted more attention from customers than any other, and I have lost count of the number of times I have explained how to grow it and cut it back.

It has not all been plain sailing. Some plants have done very well and others have failed to thrive. The shallowness of the soil is a big disadvantage but, as always, it is a matter of finding and using plants which can cope with this situation.

A major problem has been mice, or voles. In 2018, approximately 800 crocus bulbs were planted. Tell-tale vole-sized holes were spotted riddling the planted site, and we saw perhaps twenty blooms the following spring. Next year we tried again, this time planting bulbs in 9cm pots and protecting them in a rodent-proof chicken wire frame. All looked promising until they were planted out, when just about to flower. We discovered stems and buds lying on top of the ground, and the bulbs excavated and eaten. There will be a third attempt this autumn, planting just a few bulbs directly in the soil but as deeply as possible, though they

may never emerge. Fortunately, the snowdrops and miniature daffodils remained uneaten and provided early blooms.

Plants which have done well include arbutus, broom, myrtle, rugosa hybrid roses, lupins, nepeta, achillea, verbena, hellebores and geraniums. The *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant', which edges the central bed, is a reliable plant and flowers twice for us. As soon as the lavender comes into bloom we cut back the nepeta, even if it still looks good. As the lavender is going over, the nepeta is re-blooming. This provides three successive main courses for pollinators. It was originally hoped to plant a variety of annuals and allow them to self-seed, but the preponderance of weed seedlings made this impractical. We have had three spring seasons of determined hand weeding, which is now paying off. We seldom see dock or thistle seedlings, and are now finding Californian poppy, snapdragon, marigold, verbena and lupin seedlings, amongst others.

As well as nepeta, the central bed houses semi-double *Rosa* 'Blue for You', *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna', *Verbena bonariensis*, cerinthe and white cosmos. The salvia, nepeta and verbena have all proved reliable. The rose is stunning in bloom, but suffers badly from black spot. The central obelisk is planted with blue, mauve and white sweet peas. We have tried twice, without success, to get white cobaea to follow the sweet peas. Presumably it needs deeper soil. This bed suffered an attack from a marauding rabbit earlier this year, which destroyed the newly-planted sweet peas and cosmos.



**Rosa 'Blue for You'**

The wild area includes a rough grassy slope below our information hut. This is offered as a potential nesting site for bumblebees. There is a flowering cherry (*Prunus* 'Tai-Haku'), a black elder and white rugosa roses, which are flourishing. There is also a large granite boulder in the corner to add visual appeal, and a decaying tree stump sits below the roses. (A confession is needed here because the boulder is in fact hollow

fibreglass, but utterly convincing). We have also added a half-barrel filled with water, planted with flowering rush, *Butomus umbellatus*. Already we are seeing birds and insects attracted to the water. Against the information hut, the highly scented sweet pea 'Matucana' does well. It is close enough to the path for visitors to sniff, does well in the shade and has the longest flowering season of all the sweet peas we grow.

The vegetable garden has a variety of herbs. Thyme, chives and artichokes are left to flower. Marigolds and borage self-seed among the beans and courgettes. The plants which attract most attention in this patch are the flowering leeks. They are easily as attractive as expensive allium bulbs, and are particularly striking in a row. This year we have added sunflowers and sweet peas along the fence.

The shrub and shade area hosts a mulberry, *Cotoneaster* 'Cornubia', *Arbutus unedo*, and winter flowering cherry, as well as myrtle, several



**Bumblebee heaven...and a paradise for humans, too!**

hebes, mahonia and some smaller shrubs. As the shrubs grow and more shade spreads, the plants beneath will still be happy. They include hellebores, pulmonarias, comfrey, shade-tolerant geraniums and massed forget-me-nots. This area also hosts most of the spring bulbs and looks its best earlier in the season.

The fifth and biggest part of the garden - the flower power area - is largely populated by annuals and herbaceous perennials. This area is full of colour in the summer and continues to bloom into the autumn. Many of the annuals planted here are sown early under glass, as direct sowing has proved unsuccessful. Three particular annuals stand out: *Lavatera trimestris* 'New Dwarf Pink Blush', *Malope* 'Vulcan' and *Helianthus* 'Ruby Eclipse'. These have done really well with minimal care, and make a strong visual impression. Of the sweet peas on the obelisks, 'Gwendoline' is recommended. It flowers profusely, has a good scent and long straight stalks which are good for cutting.



*Malope* 'Vulcan'

Going forward, our aim is to continue to improve the soil and to extend the flowering season by using more successional sowing of annuals, particularly autumn-sown hardy species, and a second late sowing of all varieties. This garden gives much pleasure to our visitors, and hopefully encourages and inspires them to do their bit for pollinators. Thanks must be given, on behalf of our pollinators, to the Hatcher Animal Welfare Charitable Trust, whose donation made it all possible.

~ First published in the Cornwall Group Newsletter, August 2021 ~

## ERODIUMS

*Don Witton*

**L**et's hear it for erodiums! It's taken a long time for me to appreciate them and the contribution they give to my garden, but I'm hooked now and, having been encouraged by HPS members Judy Coulson and Tricia Fraser, I have amassed over twenty different varieties, mainly grown in pots.

Erodiums are closely related to hardy geraniums. The common name for geraniums is, of course, cranesbill, whilst erodiums are known as storksbills. The relationship between the two can easily be seen in the flowers, which are saucer-shaped, with five petals in shades of pink, purple and white. Many forms of erodium also exhibit geranium-like coloured veining in the petals but, unlike geraniums, quite a few forms have an unusual darker patch at the base of just two of the petals. This makes a striking floral feature, most notably in *Erodium* 'Stephanie'.

I bought my first erodium (*E. manescavii*) about 20 years ago. It's taller than most erodiums and, thinking it was similar to a geranium, I planted it in the middle of a fairly shady border. I never saw it again! That initial experience deterred me from exploring the genus further. However, I now know a lot more about erodiums. For example, they are found on limestone mountains in Europe and Central Asia, as well as North Africa and North and South America. As such, they require plenty of sunshine and good drainage, making them eminently suitable for rock gardens, scree beds or, as in my garden, patio pots against a south-facing wall. Most rarely grow taller than 30cm (1ft).

Despite being closely related to geraniums, there are quite a few important differences between the two. Many geraniums grow well in shade, but erodiums need plenty of sunshine and free-draining, gritty or sandy soil. Another difference is that all the erodiums I've grown so far have had evergreen leaves, unlike their deciduous cousins. *Erodium* leaves are small and gently or irregularly lobed in various shades of green. The flowering period is much longer than that of most geraniums; the initial flush of flowers is in mid-spring, but they continue to bloom throughout summer and into autumn. I consistently have pots exhibiting plenty of

flowers on Christmas Day! The secret to a long flowering period is deadheading. It's easy to do, as most spent flower stems protrude above the mound of leaves and can be quickly removed by hand.

The genus *Erodium* also produces a floral colour which, as far as I know, is absent in any geranium flower. Pale yellow *E. chrysanthum* has silver-green leaves and the palest yellow flowers. There is also a rarer pink form of *E. chrysanthum*, which I acquired from Andrew Ward at Norwell Nurseries. The only drawback with this species is that I find it reluctant to flower as profusely as other erodiums.

Another glaucous-leaved variety is *E. x kolbianum* 'Natasha'. The petals are the palest of pink with darker pink veining, and the lower half of two of the five petals are always dark purple.

*E.* 'Maryla' has a profusion of rich pink flowers. Each flower is heavily lined with dark pink veins, making it one of the most colourful forms. It makes a loose clump around 20cm (9") tall and 45cm (18") across. In pots it has a cascading habit and looks good edging a raised bed. In a horizontal bed it will be prostrate, spreading out at least 60cm (2 ft) but, like all erodiums, it can be trimmed back at any time. The flowers are pale pink with subtle pink veining. Another much looser form with longer, more lax stems is *E.* 'Whitwell Superb'.



© Don Witton

*E. x kolbianum* 'Natasha'



© Don Witton

*E.* 'Maryla' has a cascading habit



*E. x variable* 'William Bishop' is very different from many erodiums, having tightly packed, solid mid-green leaves with a serrated edge. It makes a dense, ground-hugging plant which rarely more than 15cm (6") tall. The whole plant is smothered in



© Don Wilton

*E. x variable* 'William Bishop'

flowers which grow just above the foliage. A delightful variation is *E. x variable* 'Joe Elliott', which has the same appearance but boasts white flowers with faint pink veining at the base of the petals.

Another species which is completely different from the norm is *E. pelargoniflorum*. As the name suggests, the flowers resemble those of pelargoniums. Elongated stems carry clusters of white spotted flowers, the upper two petals of which are always spotted in purple at the base. I bought this plant at one of our Botanical Garden plant sales and was told it wasn't as hardy as other erodiums, so every winter I bring it into the cold greenhouse and it has been fine.

One of my favourite erodiums is *E. 'Spanish Eyes'*, which makes a lovely neat mound. The beautiful flowers are strongly coloured bluish-pink with purple veining, and the top two petals have soft purple markings. It has a very long flowering period and will keep producing new flowers well into the New Year.

My all-time favourite erodium is *E. 'Stephanie'*, which I bought from One House Alpine Nursery in Macclesfield (now closed). It makes an impressive clump, bearing a profusion of white flowers over many months. Once

again, the top two petals have an unusual 'blob' at the base. With 'Stephanie' these markings are black, creating a striking effect. My only problem with this variety is that I can't produce enough new plants; it always sells well when I feature it in my talks.



***E. 'Stephanie' is a eyecatching variety***

My most recent addition was a plant swap with Tricia last autumn. I gave her a miscanthus and, in return, received *E. 'Ardwick Redeye'*. It has white petals and, in line with many other forms, two petals have a large blob of - guess what colour!

I propagate all my erodiums from cuttings taken in the first half of July. I use rooting powder and put them in a mix of 50-50 perlite and multipurpose compost. I keep the cuttings in the shade, uncovered. By early September they have rooted, so I pot them up into 7cm pots and overwinter them in a cold greenhouse. They are then potted on into 9cm pots at the end of January and will be ready for sale, or planting out, in the spring.

If you have a sunny spot in your garden, however small, give erodiums a try. You will be amazed by their extraordinary flower power!

~ First published in the South Pennine Group Newsletter, April 2020 ~

## AUTUMN-FLOWERING SNOWDROPS

*John Sirkett*

**L**eap on the first signs of spring with alacrity: they appear long before winter has done with the garden. The first snowdrops will flower in October, and there will be flowers to be had from them until the end of March. I choose to see it as six months of spring and overlook the fact that it can get quite cold in January. I don't mind celebrating spring with stamping feet and puffing breath if I have to.

*Galanthus reginae-olgae* will have finished flowering by the time the really cold weather arrives. It hails from Greece, its distribution spreading northwards into the former Yugoslavia and with an odd outlier in Sicily. The bulbs flower after the summer when they feel the first chill rains of autumn. In their native habitat they grow in surprisingly rocky places, as well as in the thin woodland that we normally associate with snowdrops. In cultivation they appreciate a warm, dry bake through the summer, and in Cornwall that means full sun and fingers crossed. A scree bed might be ideal, but I have never had really good results outside; they produced lovely leaves in the garden but flowers were scarce. Years ago I settled for growing them in large tubs in the greenhouse.



All photos © John Sirkett

*G. reginae-olgae*

Autumn snowdrops are particularly appealing to enthusiasts at present, and some unexpected variations have been selected. For more than a century people have been searching for a pink snowdrop among wild populations. At the end of the 19th century flowers were even exhibited, though it later became clear they had been dyed. The sudden appearance of *G. reginae-olgae* 'Pink Panther' on the market demonstrated that it is

possible. I am happy to acknowledge that it isn't very pink, but it is slightly pink - enough to keep people searching for something better.



**G. 'Pink Panther'**



**G. 'Miss Behaving'**

*G. reginae-olgae* 'Miss Behaving' follows a more usual line in snowdrop variation, with green-tipped outer segments. It earns its name by having a strange and unreliable white margin to the spathe. Discovered in 1996 in Anglesey Abbey, 'Miss Adventure' is a sister seedling, but both ladies are rather frail in cultivation.

The first *G. reginae-olgae* will be followed a fortnight later by *G. peshmenii*. It is found in southwest Turkey and was long confused with *G. reginae-olgae* before being formally described in 1994. I find it easy in the greenhouse, where the bulbs clump up rapidly. In the garden it produced lovely leaves. Lots and lots of lovely leaves.

There is a small population on the Greek island of Kastellorizo, where it grows from the cracks in north-facing limestone cliffs by the sea. Martyn Rix collected it from the island and this stock is now in cultivation as *G. 'Kastellorizo'*. It is taller than my Turkish form of the species, with a larger flower, but it is really only its origin and unusual habitat that mark it out.

*G. peshmenii* 'Green Flight', on the other hand, is distinctive. It is a small form with green-tipped outer segments, the size of the markings varying from year to year. Many snowdrop species produce forms with green-tipped flowers, and it is good to see that there is some variability in *G. peshmenii*, despite its very restricted natural range.



*G. pesh.* 'Kastelloriza'



*G. pesh.* 'Green Flight'

The situation is reversed for *Galanthus elwesii*, which has a wide distribution in Turkey and the Caucasus. It has been common in the trade for a century or more, initially available as wild collected bulbs. In recent years it has been grown as a crop in Turkey and, increasingly, in Holland. The species shows enormous variability and a great many cultivars have been named. Wild collected bulbs had a reputation for being short-lived, but named cultivars and Dutch-grown stock have proven longevity. In cultivation it responds well to a sunny site as the glaucous greyish leaves are not well adapted to shade.

At the start of the snowdrop season it is the Hiemalis Group of *G. elwesii* that attract attention. The name Hiemalis Group is a catch-all title for any form of the species that flowers before Christmas. My plant came from Broadleigh Gardens many years ago and, to be honest, it isn't very reliable. In some years it flowers in the garden in November, and in other years it waits until February. The cultivar 'Barnes' has been much better, always flowering at the end on November and into December.

However, the first snowdrop to flower in the garden is *G.* 'Remember, Remember', which is generally in bloom for the 5th November. As the fireworks from the village were thundering around the house this year I was grieving for a single flower, eaten by a slug before I could photograph it. Never mind, there's always next year.

Suddenly, with the arrival of November, there is a rush of snowdrops urging the spring onwards. *G.* 'Autumn Beauty' is said to be a hybrid



**G. 'Remember, Remember'**



**G. 'Three Ships'**

between an autumn flowering *G. elwesii* and *G. reginae-olgae*. When introduced, the name was applied to a number of clones of the hybrid, and in recent years *G. 'Autumn Belle'* has been selected from the mix. It has a large green mark on the inner segments and flowers a week later than my plant of *G. 'Autumn Beauty'*.

As we approach the winter solstice, *G. 'Three Ships'* comes sailing by. It is an autumn-flowering form of *G. plicatus* which has been vigorous and free flowering in my garden. I have considered spreading it around under the trees, but when it flowers there is usually a thick carpet of fallen leaves still lying on the ground. I do love stomping around on crunchy leaves in the depths of winter, kicking them hither and thither. If I planted 'Three Ships' I would have to give it up, and I'm not sure I'm ready for that yet. For now it will stay in an increasing clump in the snowdrop border: pure, almost immaculate, and hopefully unkicked.

The winter solstice marks a change. It is just wishful thinking but immediately the skies lighten, buds begin to swell and the robin starts to sing again. Once Christmas is over there is a delight in walking (or sometimes staggering) around the garden looking for signs of growth. The first of the spring camellia buds will be swelling and everywhere bulbs will be getting nosy, peering upwards from below ground.

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