

Four Seasons in the Shade

Newsletter of the Shade & Woodland Plants Group
Spring 2024



Corydalis 'Blue Heron' (photo courtesy of Jo Howe)

From the Editor

In spite of the weather (and the less said about that the better!), spring has sprung and the clocks have changed to give us longer days in the garden. It has been a frustrating couple of months though, squelching around a sodden garden while everything grows at an amazing rate; so much to do and just an occasional dry day.

In this issue we have an article on Anemonella from Colin Crews which reminds me of the year we included several in the HPS Display at Malvern where they attracted much attention. Sally Gregson prompts us to think about including some gorgeous Hydrangeas for later in the year and there are some lovely images that you have shared with us on Facebook.

If you haven't done so already there is still time to book a place for the Annual Meeting and AGM in Colwall on Saturday 27th April. Details on page 12.

If you feel inspired to share your shady border, favourite plant or just a nice photo then please email me at shadenews4@gmail.com

Shade and Woodland Plants Group on Facebook

This is a private (closed) group for HPS members only.

You can find the group by searching for HPS Shade & Woodland Plants Group on Facebook or by following this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/857604866001641/>

Where are we now?

Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Wilma sent me this map of the UK showing the distribution of Shade & Woodland Plants Group members.

There are 170 members in the UK. In addition there are 5 members in the United States, 3 in New Zealand, 2 in Australia and 1 in each of France, Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands.



Anemonella thalictroides

Colin Crews

At a specialist plant fair several years ago I noticed a plant that I hadn't encountered before that was labelled *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Betty Blake'. It was not in flower but had attractive fern-like foliage and the label pictured a hardly significant yellowy-green flower. It was also rather expensive for its size. For some reason this combination of factors prompted me to buy it (this wasn't unusual) and on receiving my payment the stallholder remarked with some amusement "Oh, you're *one of those* collectors". I put 'Betty Blake' into my shade bed where she grew slowly and frequently came perilously close to being weeded out, so a couple of years ago I moved her into a trough of 'woodland' compost made by adding composted bark and leaf mould to some John Innes. The trough was placed in the shade and over the following months I added a few more *Anemonellas*.



Colin's woodland trough (Photo Colin Crews)

Companion planting was provided by the use of recycled seed tray compost from which sprung *Cyclamen coum* and several small *Roscoea tibetica* in a narrow-leaved form from Julian Sutton. I added *Isopyrum biternatum* (syn. *Enemion biternatum*) which looks very similar to *Anemonella* but has thicker tuberous roots.

Anemonella are members of the *Ranunculacea* and closely related to anemones and commonly known as rue anemone. They are distinguished from anemones by having flower stems which grow from the same point as the leaves. There is only one species of *Anemonella* : *A. thalictroides*, syn. *Thalictrum thalictroides*. *Thalictroides* refers to the resemblance of the foliage to that of *Thalictrum* and refers to the Greek 'thallo' which means "to flourish". *Anemonella* grows well in woodland areas of the Northern Hemisphere where there is humus rich soil in partial shade and there it will gradually naturalise in drifts. Photographs of sizeable clumps of the plant are very impressive but I have only seen the plant as relatively small individual specimens held by specialised nurseries.

The small tuberous roots are found in clusters attached to the base of slender stems and only just below the soil surface. The pale green leaves are held on stalks arranged in a whorl or in pairs, they are divided into 3 ovate leaflets each having 3 rounded lobes. The flowers are usually white or pink comprising 5-10 sepals with no petals. They appear in mid spring and are quite long-lasting, double forms remaining in bloom considerably longer than singles. There are many long stamens, giving the flower a dense feathery look.

Popular single forms are nearly all pink and include 'Amelia' with cup-shaped pink flowers and 'Babe' which has larger flowers. 'Charlotte' and 'Rosea' both have with pale pink flowers whereas 'Tairin' is darker. 'Hakikomi Fu' is a pale pink single form with striking variegation to the leaves comprising veining and patches of cream and pink.

'Kikuzaki' has larger semi-double (open-centred) flowers in both pink and white forms and 'Snowball' is a similar semi-double white.



Anemonella 'Snowball'
(Photo Rob & Sharon Illingworth)



Anemonella 'Shiozaki' (Photo John Lonsdale)

There are more double selections available from a small range of nurseries. 'Blushing Bride', 'Flore Pleno', 'Shiozaki' and 'Spring Symphony' are pink flowered hybrids, 'Cameo' is a dwarf but vigorous cultivar with flowers of a very pale pink colour 'Rosea Plena' is somewhat darker pink and 'Diamante' another vigorous form with double white flowers.

'Schoafs Double Pink' syn. 'Oscar Schoaf' is possibly the showiest double and a little slow growing. The flowers are quite small and I sometimes regard the double forms in both pink or white as a poor man's Japanese hepatica albeit without the variety of colours.



Anemonella 'Schoafs Double Pink'
(Photo Colin Crews)

Other remarkable flowers are the greener forms. The commonest are 'Betty Blake', a fully double jade-green flowered hybrid and 'Green Hurricane' which has strange deep green flowers having a large calyx with twisted petals in a distinctive pattern.

'Green Dragon' and 'Jade Feather' are very similar or possibly the same as 'Green Hurricane' with yellow and white anthers. The latter was awarded an RHS Award of Garden Merit in 1989.



Anemonella 'Betty Blake'
(Photos Rob & Sharon Illingworth)

Anemonella 'Jade Feather'

Anemonella is usually seen as plants that are less than 10 cm in height but literature suggests that they can get taller if planted away from competition. They are hardy to moderate frosts and are best grown in rich well-drained slightly acid soil out of direct sunlight and watered well when growth starts in the spring and then throughout the summer. They are best planted or moved while dormant, putting the tubers 2-3 cm under the soil and they should then be left undisturbed. Feeding is not essential but can be given in moderation.

Established plants will self-seed unless the flowers are double. Seed should be sown as soon as ripe, in the autumn or if this is not possible, in early spring. Seed should be only very lightly covered and can be left outside unless frosts are severe. Germinated seedlings must be kept moist and transplanted when large enough to handle. Flowering can occur in the plants' second year.

Plants can be propagated by carefully removing tubers; this is best done by carefully loosening soil from around the plant without digging it up and prising off the outermost tubers which should not be allowed to dry out. If the whole plant is taken up and some tubers removed recovery to a flowering situation may take a year. *Anemonella* are relatively unaffected by diseases but can be attacked by greenfly, slugs and snails, especially at the seedling stage.

Hopefully my trough will thrive in 2024. There's probably not room for another *Anemonella* but based on experience so far I'll probably add a few more cyclamen to provide a longer period of interest and perhaps more small *Roscoeas* such as *R. scillifolia*. With luck I'll be able to propagate these charming plants and place some back into the shade plot.

John Lonsdale recently gave an inspiring description of his astonishing garden in North America as one of the winter Zoom talk for members, and his website has an impressive gallery of *Anemonella* (<https://edgewoodgardens.net>).

Garrya elliptica 'James Roof'

Elaine Boot



This shrub is a native of the coastal area of California and southern Oregon. It is in the small family Garryaceae.

G. e. 'James Roof' is a male plant and has longer catkins than a female plant would have. It is drought tolerant and can cope with being in the rain-shadow of the house wall. This shrub is planted against the north-facing wall of my house. It receives direct sunlight for only a short time in the late afternoon.

The tassels begin to form just before Christmas and then expand to around 6 inches long as the Spring warmth begins. The bush then looks as if it is a waterfall, cascading downwards.

The only drawback is that some of the leaves are a little brown at the edges, due to cold winds. I prune it immediately after flowering to tidy it up. Large branches can be cut away to maintain a good shape and it responds well with vigorous growth which I tip prune later in the Summer.

A good shrub for a difficult place and it provides interest in late Winter and early Spring.

Springtime beauty

Hepatica nobilis multipetala
(Photo Jo Howe)



Hydrangeas for Shade

Sally Gregson

The world is getting warmer, and the sun is shining ever more brightly. Our gardens are swiftly becoming a refuge from the harsh light. Little wonder that increasingly gardeners are looking for plants, large and small, to grow in shady conditions. And perhaps some of the best shrubs for shade are hydrangeas.

In the UK hydrangeas have, for some odd reason, always been associated with sunny places. And yet many, if not most of them, originate in cool, shady woodland conditions. The archetypical *Hydrangea macrophylla*, that of the huge mops of flower, is a plant that is much misunderstood. It comes from the southern seaboard of Honshu, the main island of Japan, where it grows happily in dense edge-of-woodland terrain. And it tolerates all the salty sea breezes thrown at it from the South China Seas.

But it's easy to forget that this coastline is roughly on the same latitude as Madrid. That is, distinctly warmer. And with well-defined seasons, rather than the UK's fluctuating temperature changes. Here we can experience freezing, Arctic winds one week, then balmy breezes the next. And it's only February.

Hydrangea macrophylla initiates its flowers during cold spells in mid-winter, that is December and January. Thereafter the embryonic flower buds are enclosed in the topmost shoots of the plant ready to expand with the warmth of late spring and early summer. Consequently, if we experience a late April frost that blackens the tips of the *H. macrophylla*, those flower buds die, leaving little in reserve. The plant does not usually flower lower down the main stems. At the first threat of such a devastating late frost a wise gardener will screw up balls of newspaper and push them in-between the shoots and cover the whole with horticultural fleece. Once all danger of overnight frosts passes it can all be removed.

And *H. macrophylla*, along with all its kin, needs a moisture-retentive soil. Which is not to say it grows well in bogs. It too hates being drowned in a bog. 'Moist but draining' is the apt condition of the soil, which is easily achievable with plenty of garden compost and dressings of mulch.



Hydrangea serrata 'Shichidanka' (Photo Sally Gregson)

Their pretty, dainty relatives, *Hydrangea serrata*, are essentially plants of shady woodland. They come from central Honshu which is mountainous, cool, and wooded. Light, overhead shade is what protects them, not just from the harsh sunlight of a Japanese summer, but from freezing winds in winter. This protection from the elements is essential even in our more equable climate. *Hydrangea serrata* need the overhead protection as much here in the UK as they do in Honshu.



H.serrata 'Miyama-yae-murasaki'
(Photo Sally Gregson)

Jardin Shamrock, Normandy
H.serrata cvs under Paulownia trees
(Photo Sally Gregson)



But woodland soils can be very dry. Many trees, including Birches, can, after a time, rob their soil of moisture. The National Collection of Hydrangeas in France is maintained in a very special woodland just outside Dieppe. 'Shamrock' has been home to some of the most beautiful and rare species of hydrangea that are the envy of many British growers. They have achieved this by first planting dozens of Paulownias. These extraordinary, and very beautiful, trees have the ability to hold moisture around their roots, providing a reservoir of water for the hydrangeas so lovingly planted around them.

Of course, the woodland is well maintained with regular mulching and pruning to let light through the canopy, but it is this water retentive ability that makes the difference.



Hydrangea 'Tiara' (Photo Sally Gregson)

In wild Japan, Honshu, *Hydrangea paniculata* grows alongside *H. serrata*, and thrives in the moist woodland shade, alongside dozens of other native shade-lovers such as *Tricyrtis*. It's a remarkable sight.

So before spending any money on some seriously beautiful hydrangeas (and believe me, it's easily done), pause and think about exactly where to plant them. Choose a shady, woody site with overhead shade, where the soil is improved with plenty of water-retaining compost, and maintain the plants well. They may need watering in the first few years' droughts, but once they make flower, they will knock all your socks off!

Take a Moment....



Erythronium 'Miss Jessop' (Photo Brian Ellis)

Reports from the Winter Zoom Talks

John Lonsdale - Woodland Treasures (from 30th January)

John has been developing his garden, 'Edgewood' since moving from the UK to the USA in 1995.

Situated near Philadelphia it is usual to have heavy snowfall in winter and temperatures down to -20C, although the last couple of years have been warmer. There is abundant rainfall although summer months can be very humid. The garden is on a south-facing hillside, with rocky, slightly acid soil and sheltered by mature deciduous trees. John has also installed a deer fence to protect his plants.

In this talk, John took us through the winter season in his garden, starting in late September when carpets of *Cyclamen hederifolium* are in flower, through October, November and December with species crocus, galanthus (John has quite a collection as those of us who attended his zoom talk to the Galanthus Group will know) and the dainty narcissus, N. 'Cedric Morris'.

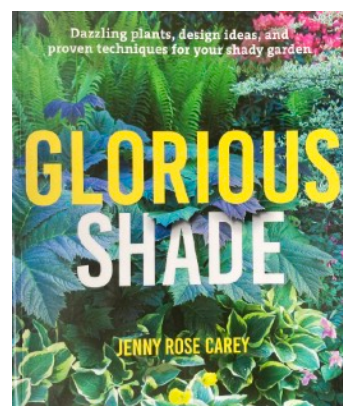
By the end of January, there are eranthis, hellebores, hepaticas and adonis, all naturalised on the woodland slopes. The season progresses through early spring with carpets of erythroniums and *Cyclamen coum*, punctuated by clumps of *Corydalis solida*.

On through April and May and another of John's favourite plants, trilliums, colonise the ground, before the woodland takes on a quieter appearance as the tree canopy develops. John retreats into the shade before another season of leaf clearance to ready the garden for the 'woodland treasures'.

Jenny Rose Carey - Glorious Shade (from 7th February)

A few years ago I bumped into Jenny in the RHS tent at Chelsea when she was there to launch her new book 'Glorious Shade', so I was interested to hear her eponymously named talk.

Jenny's own garden is Northview, in Pennsylvania, USA where she has been developing a series of smaller themed areas linked by "endless paths and contemplative spaces" since 1997. Like our previous speaker Jenny was also born in the UK, describing herself as English American and is a passionate educator through her lectures, garden tours and books.



She too cited Pennsylvania's hot summers as a reason to create shady spaces in both private and public gardens.

Jenny looked at the various aspects of gardening in shade, including the 'Practical Principles' of how much and what type of shade, water management and soil types as well as gardening for wildlife, before moving on to using specific plants. Starting with taller trees and shrubs and moving down through the backbone perennials and accent plants she showed beautiful combinations of foliage texture and colour.

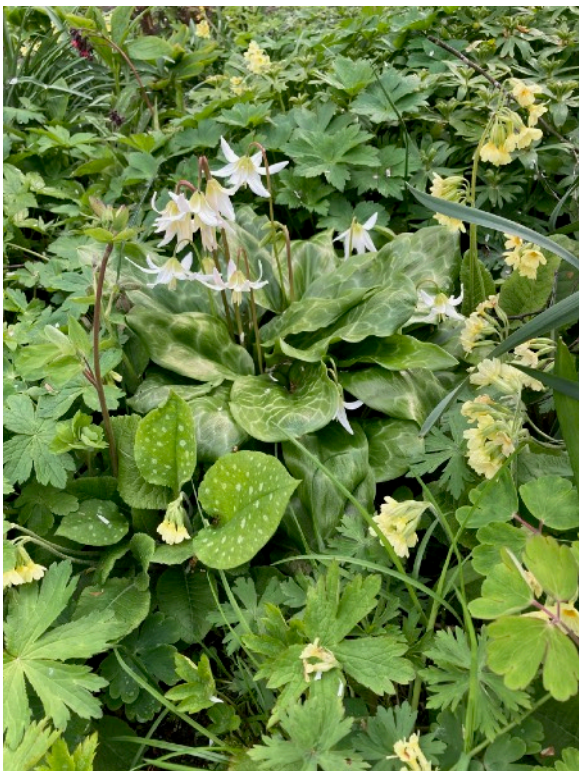
We saw examples from her own garden as well as those taken from other notable North American gardens of how small spaces can be jewel-like with a mix of early spring neophytes (snowdrops, crocus, scillas for instance) and the importance of “glimpses” from meandering paths into patches of diffuse sunlight.

Two invaluable pieces of advice from Jenny were to use small plants which establish faster and can be tucked between tree roots to avoid damage, and to enrich and embellish the shady areas directly around our houses.

Andrew Ward - Woodland Gems: the Diamond Edition! (from 22nd February)

Andrew began by describing the disastrous beginnings of his woodland garden in 1999, when his choice selection of trees and shrubs failed to survive the wet winter. Undeterred, he raised the planting level with homemade compost retained by log edging and started again. The area has now matured into a jewel-like tapestry of woodland gems.

Starting at the beginning of the year, Andrew then looked at the best cultivars of a wide range of shade-loving perennials. First to flower is often *Synthris reniformis* from the Pacific NW USA and another unusual early-flowerer is *Helionopsis orientalis* from Japan. And so on through the year to late summer with *Anemonopsis macrophylla* and *Tricyrtis hirta*.



I visited Norwell Nurseries and Garden with the Pulmonaria Group last April and my photos show how cleverly he uses colour and texture combinations in this densely planted woodland.

This talk provided inspiration and an ever lengthening wish list!

Notice of Tenth Meeting and AGM

on Saturday 27 April 2024 at Colwall Park Hotel, Walwyn Road, Malvern WR13 6QG

The day will start in the Hampton Room of the Colwall Park Hotel (on the ground floor).

- 9:00 Registration, refreshments and Plant Sales
- 9:45 AGM followed by talks from Angela Tandy and Ross Barbour.
- 10:30 Angela Tandy “Ferns for your Garden”
- 11:15 - 11:45 Plant Sales
- 11:45 Ross Barbour “Some Shady Plants in the Picton Garden”
- 1:00 - 2:00 Lunch

(Please remember to bring a packed lunch which can be eaten in the hotel).

Plant sales will end at 1:30

- 2:00 Visit to The Picton Garden and Old Court Nursery.
- 3:30 - 4:00 Tea at the Colwall Park Hotel

There are still spaces if you haven't booked yet.

The price for the day will be £20.00 for Shade and Woodland Plants Group members, and £25 for other HPS members.

Please contact the Secretary, Diana Garner, on montana@cholesbury.net for details.

AGM Agenda

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Approval of the Minutes of the previous AGM on 20 May 2023: published in the Autumn Newsletter and available on the day or by request to the Secretary.
3. Chairman's Report – Jon Segar
4. Accounts for 2024
 - A copy of the accounts will be circulated to Members
5. Nomination and Election of Officers
 - Standing for election as Vice Chairman: Helen Brown
 - Proposed by Wilma Keighley and Seconded by Diana Garner
 - The Chair, Treasurer/Membership Secretary and Secretary are all standing for re-election and require Proposers and Seconders.
 - Chair: Jon Segar
 - Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Wilma Keighley
 - Secretary: Diana Garner
 - Colin Moat and Jan Vaughan, who has stood down as Vice Chair but remains on the committee, require proposers and seconders.
6. Election of Independent Examiner of Accounts - Graham Rennells proposed by Wilma Keighley
7. Any other business – email questions by 20 April 2024 please.

Join the Committee

The committee would very much welcome interest from anyone interested in joining them. If you would like to join the Shade & Woodland Plants Group committee then please contact the Secretary, Diana Garner, montana@cholesbury.net

Save the Date!

The Eleventh Meeting and AGM will be on Sunday 30 March 2025 in Devon, and will include a visit to Keith Wiley's iconic garden, Wildside. More details to follow.

Fantastic Foliage

Several of the photos in '4 Seasons in the Shade' have been previously shared on the Facebook Group.



Arum 'Miss Janay Hall' (Photo Helen Brown)



Trillium freemanii has the most lovely grey/silvery green speckled leaves!
(Photo Brian Ellis)