



The Autmun/Winter 2023  
**Journal**

Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland  
*Cumann Ríoga Gairneoireach na hÉireann*

The  
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of  
*Autumn*

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# Note From The Chair



Autumn colours reflect the change of seasons and perhaps this year, more than most, we were aware of the growing reality of climate change with a dry spring, wet summer and then a late burst of September heat. Change prompts the need to plan and many of us are looking at ways to garden in ways which tread more lightly on the earth we cultivate.

You'll find the plans for RHSI events in the centre of this Journal. There is a long list of varied activities – Zoom talks, Trips and Tours, Bellefield open days, RHSI plant sale and Christmas lunch. I hope you'll feel encouraged to join in many activities and look forward to seeing you either on-screen or in-person. Sincere thanks to the Events team who have put in a huge amount of work to make these plans a reality.

The Journal is welcomed into all our homes and many thanks to Peter Milligan and team for gathering and collating a varied and interesting set of articles to entertain and inform us all. It's yet another example of the generosity of all our volunteers who give so much time and talent to ensure that the RHSI is a vibrant and growing organisation.

I hope you have ideas for change in your garden, it's a great time of year to assess and evaluate exciting plans for the future.

Happy Gardening.  
Philip  
Chair, RHSI

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# A Note From The Editor



At this time of the year, it is common to hear people say “well, that is the end of the garden for this year”. I, for one, do not subscribe to that view – for me the garden runs on an endless cycle, from spring, to summer, then autumn, and winter and then back to spring, summer, etc.

Each cycle brings the joy and pleasure of the plants that will flower at that time and gives us time to think, plan, and plant for the coming seasons. At the moment I am planting bulbs to brighten late winter and early spring.

There is still time to plant crocus, daffodils, iris, tulips, and many other bulbs so do have a look round your local seedsman or garden centre and select something new for the spring.

It goes without saying that Mary, Peggy, Noreen, and Orlaith provide superb support and my wife Nicola keeps me provided with her excellent photographs of the plants in our garden. I am sorry to report that Phil, who for many years and numerous issues, has dealt with the advertising that appears in the journal is stepping-down from this role. I take this



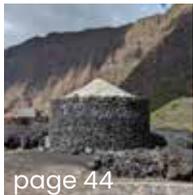
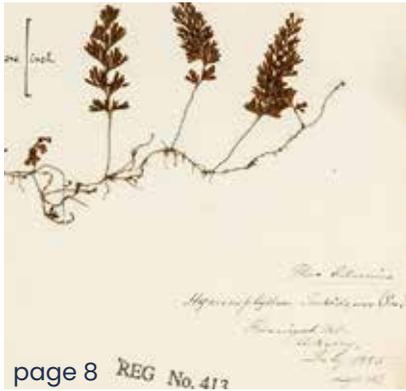
Editor's Boss (wife Nicola) on her way to collect apples from the orchard

opportunity to thank Phil for all of the hard work and to wish her well in all her future activities. I am pleased to welcome Bernie Roddie to the journal family – Bernie has agreed to take on Anne Camilla Voss' role of providing our regular feature on the Russborough garden.

We always have too much work on hand – apples to collect from our small orchard, there is weeding, digging, manuring to do – the herbaceous plants to be cut back as appropriate – an old and very vigorous rose (*Rosa* 'Paul's Himalayan Musk') needs to be discouraged from its current campaign to take over the bed at the small garden house and so much more. I hope that you have your garden work well in hand.

Before I close, I must apologise to Catherine Cookley whose surname was mis-spelt in the spring/summer issue as Croakley. Catherine was kind enough to write the article on Fota House and Garden and I am happy to acknowledge and correct this error.

Peter  
Editor, RHSI, The Journal



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# The Journal

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Cumann Ríoga Gairmeoireach na hÉireann

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# Brenda Brannigan

President RHSI  
2019 - 2022



Brenda Brannigan

**B**renda has given a lifetime of commitment to the RHSI. She is one of our longest serving Life Members, having been joined up, along with her sister Ann and late brother Robert, by her father Ralph Walker, then Chairman of Council, over sixty years ago.

In the last thirty years Brenda has served as Council Member, as Honorary Treasurer, on the Events Committee and was our President through lock-down. For the last number of years, she has been a member of the Board and has now retired at the end of her second term. Of the many memorable tours and events of which Brenda was part, none tops the incredible celebration of our bicentenary in 2016 which she masterminded with a hard-working devoted sub-committee.

Brenda has been and continues to be a loyal and generous supporter of the RHSI in so many ways. Her input cannot be over-emphasised and this was recognised when she was awarded the Hetherington Medal in 2016 for her outstanding contribution to the work of our Society.

I have the great honour on behalf of the Society and all our members to thank Brenda for all she has done for and given to the RHSI over so many years. We look forward to joining with her at many more events in the years ahead.

We wish you well in your retirement. Thank you, Brenda.

Peter Harrison, President



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The National Herbarium and library building mirrored around a large Zelkova in the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin

# Dead Plants in the National Botanic Gardens

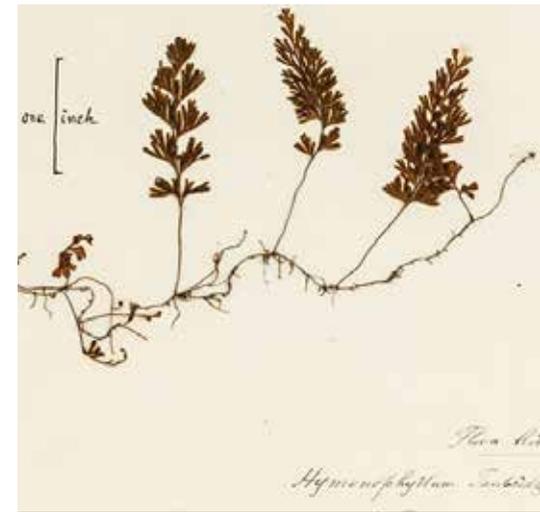
Colin Kelleher

The National Herbarium sits in a red-brick building built around the canopy of a large Zelkova tree in the National Botanic Gardens. The herbarium contains around 600,000 specimens of dried plants, and a few hundred pickled ones. Why are so many dead plants stored in the botanic gardens? What use are these dried dead plants to horticulture? After all, isn't horticulture

about propagation, abundance and fertility? While these dead plants might not seem to have much of a connection to their living relatives, they are in fact the scientific basis of a lot of plant knowledge. Herbarium specimens are used for describing our flora and for defining species. The 600,000 specimens held in the National Herbarium and the 390 million specimens held in other herbaria across the world tell us about the interaction of plants with their environment and about the history of plant discovery in western science. These specimens define our species as they are the standard-bearers for all classification and naming.

Collecting and curating herbarium specimens goes back to the 16th century, when it was realised that flattened dried specimens could be used for teaching medical students plant identification throughout the year, even when plants were not available during winter. Many of the features and the variation of a plant are conserved, sometimes even the colour can last years as can be seen in the example of Spring Gentian from the National Herbarium. While identification is a key component in the use of specimens, in particular for defining a species, there are many more uses for these specimens today. They can be used for the scientific study of historical change because each specimen represents a snap-shot in time and together they give an extensive time-series. Specimens of particular note are held in red-bordered folders to make them stand out from the rest. These are referred to as "Type" specimens and they are exemplars of a species and are the specimens that are used to name a

species. For every species name there is a type to be found in some herbarium across the world. In the National Herbarium some of our most interesting types consist of a set collected by Robert Brown during an expedition around Australia from 1801 to 1805. These are the first scientific records and descriptions of these plants. They are important in the development of botanical knowledge, but also are historically important archives.



A detail of the label on a specimen of the Tunbridge filmy fern (*Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*). While the handwriting is often very beautiful, it also can be a challenge to decipher

What makes herbarium specimens so useful is the data associated with them and this is contained on the label or on notes on the specimen. A specimen without data is almost worthless. The details of the plant name, collection location, collector, date and often additional notes on habitat or altitude are immensely important. The combined data from all these specimens allow us to track past changes and help predict the



Specimens of Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*) maintaining the flower colour over 100 years later



A collection of leaves from Kidney Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirsuta*). This specimen was assembled to show the variation in the leaf shape of this species

future. However, to date we have not catalogued data from many of the specimens within the herbarium. This is mainly due to the large numbers within the collection but it is now changing with the help of digital cameras and databases. Images of herbarium specimens capture unique moments in history and represent hundreds or thousands of data points. The National Herbarium has embarked on a project to take high-resolution images of all our specimens and to extract data from the Irish collection. This is a long-term project, and we will be using image processing tools and a lot of manual checking. The overall goal will be to have the data available to the public to facilitate further scientific and historical studies. One example where

the specimens have already been used is that of phenology, the study of timing. We have thousands of brambles (*Rubus* spp.) in the herbarium and these were studied to develop a timeline of change over 150 years. The study showed flowering and fruiting was happening earlier over time and this corresponded with an increase in temperature. We have also used the specimens to study the DNA of plants from as far back as 1804. As we complete our digital catalogues, we hope that the herbarium specimens will come alive with a whole array of scientific study. ■

**Colin Kelleher is the Keeper of the National Herbarium in the National Botanic Gardens, OPW, Glasnevin, Dublin.**

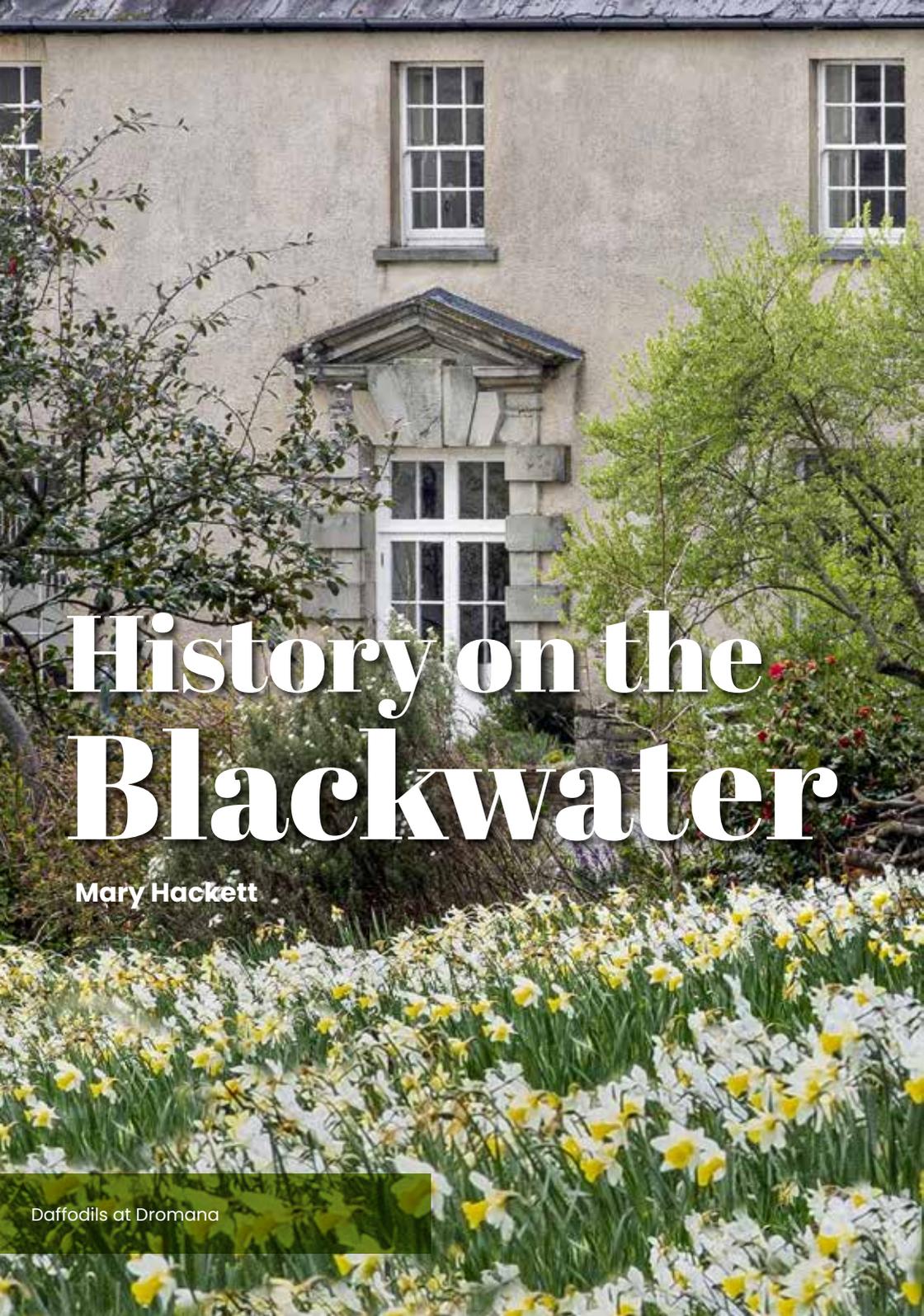


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# History on the Blackwater

Mary Hackett

Daffodils at Dromana

Keeping a heritage house and garden going, keeping the cultural and social history of a family alive, these projects are not for the faint of heart. One of the first things Barbara Grubb tells me about gardening with husband Nicholas at Dromana House near Cappoquin, Co Waterford is that she has her own tractor. Also, her own chainsaw. Thirty acres of multilayered planting demand this no-nonsense approach. The Grubbs' clear-eyed attitude to their garden is leavened with a bone-deep love of place. The combination makes for an exceptional visitor experience.

Lewis' *'A Topographical History of Ireland'* published in 1837 mentions *'the hanging gardens of Dromana'*. This, Nicholas explained, is a reference to terraces rather than to engineering masterworks. From the cliff on which Dromana House stands, wooded riverbanks slope down to the Blackwater. The site is steeply terraced. If steps are a problem, much of the garden can be admired from the lawn and the 'Ladies Walk', a flat terrace at lawn level. For the nimbler, Nicholas has worked out that there are over three kilometres of paths in the garden with something to interest at every turn. Many of these are the same paths Samuel Lewis admired when he was here in 1837. They wind down to the river's edge where the Rock House with its old graffiti was once a ferrywoman's house and the Bastion for many years a slipway for the family's pleasure boats.

Gardening without any outside help, Barbara and Nicholas take a naturalistic approach to design. The southwest orientation of the garden and their fertile neutral to acid soil is a huge



Dromana House C. Black Lace



Nicholas Grubb with R. irrotatum



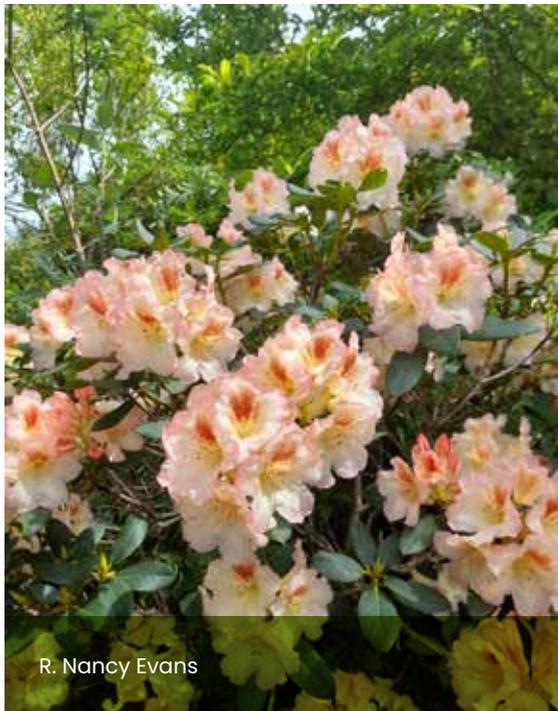
Magnolia stellata



The Dromana Rhododendron

advantage. Trees and shrubs establish quickly. Among many outstanding varieties the Grubbs kindly pointed out on our walk through the garden were several species of cornus including *C. capitata* soon to have an abundance of red fruits, *C. kousa* 'Teutonica' and *C. kousa* 'John Slocock'. Dr Rory Harrington the wetland manager, forester, and ecologist gifted *Agathis australis*, a New Zealand native to the garden. Acers do well in this peaty soil. Barbara enjoys the pops of colour from *A. palmatum* 'Orange Dream' and *A. palmatum* 'Sango-kaku' in spring and autumn with the red twigs of the latter prized through the winter months. The southwestern slopes of the garden proved particularly suited to setting seed of the sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*, a tree that doesn't usually grow well in Ireland. I'm going back to Dromana myself next spring to see *Paulownia tomentosa* in flower. The terraced site makes it possible to admire the flowers from the terrace above the tree, a very rare experience.

Dromana is primarily a spring garden. "Once the snowdrops open, it's all go", Barbara Grubb says. Sheets of daffodils and a bluebell wood follow the snowdrops. Magnolias, camellia, azalea, and rhododendron take the garden into early summer. The



R. Nancy Evans

family are particularly proud of yellow *Rhododendron* 'Dromana 800' bred by Michael White of Mount Congrove and presented to the Grubbs in 2015 when the house and garden celebrated its eight hundredth anniversary. A natural wildflower area and herbaceous borders set off the wide lawn.

The garden is magnificent but a visitor to Dromana should on no account miss the house. Twenty-six

generations of Barbara's family, the FitzGeralds/Villiers/Villiers-Stuarts, have lived at Dromana. The present house is early eighteenth century, a later Georgian frontage having been demolished in 1964. On her croquet lawn Barbara can show you the shape of that Georgian building which, in its time followed the footprint of a fourteenth century Fitzgerald castle bawn. You will be shown the dining room and drawing room and browse a 'History Room' created with the assistance of UCC. The story of the extraordinary Mughal Gate and why it might remind you of the Royal Pavilion in Brighton is documented. Villiers-Stuart family involvement in local issues is explained and supported by family artifacts.

Before you leave Dromana House turn your back on the grass, the trees and the flowers and consider the river. Stand on the remnants of the fourteenth century tower which morphed into an eighteenth-century ballroom and look to the northwest where the Knockmealdown mountains define the horizon. The Blackwater and its woods protect otters, osprey, sea eagles, red squirrels, and whooper swans. Short kilometres beyond that river curve there are exceptional gardens to visit at Cappoquin House, Tourin and Lismore Castle. Don't hurry home. There's a lot still to see right here. ■

**Dromana House, Cappoquin, Co Waterford is an RHSI partner garden. It is open year-round by arrangement with Barbara Grubb. Call 086 8186305 for details.**

**Tea, coffee, scones, or lunch for groups can be arranged in advance. Overnight accommodation is available**



The Bluebell Wood



Dromana House Lawn



Dromana House Dining Room

**at Dromana House for up to eighteen people. Lismore is twelve kilometres away. Accommodation in the town is largely Airbnb. Hotel accommodation available in Dungarvan.**

# Keeping a Horticultural Legacy Alive

## Esker Farm Daffodils are continuing a long Irish tradition of breeding very special daffodils

Jules and Dave Hardy talk to Mary Hackett

Farming specialist daffodils in rural Ulster was not a planned career path for two young teachers. Dave Hardy is from Bolton outside Manchester and Jules grew up in Dromore, Co Tyrone. When they relocated 'home' to Ireland after some years in the UK, Dave became involved with the Northern Ireland Daffodil Group. Intrigued by the variety within the genus and egged on by Brian Duncan and Nial Watson, two of Northern Ireland's most prestigious growers who offered advice and starter stock, he was hooked.

The Hardys could see that there was potential in breeding and marketing daffodil bulbs for exhibition. Dave



Tangerine Tango



Picket Post

sourced a small collection of breeding stock at bulb auctions and from Nial at Ringhaddy Daffodils. Additional seedling stock came from Brian Duncan's breeding nursery in Omagh. The first Esker Farm Daffodil catalogue – an A4 sheet – was circulated in 2016. They had twenty-eight orders in that first year. A year later Nial Watson and the Hardys came to an arrangement to buy Nial's stock as he exited the business. The breadth and depth of the present Esker Farm catalogue owes much to these exceptional beginnings. "We have bulbs we can trace back to the first recorded daffodils hybridised in Cork at the end of the nineteenth century. We have varieties that came from Lionel and Meg Richardson of Waterford whose double daffodils dominated the show-tables through the 1920's and 1930's, we have daffodils bred by Guy Wilson. All the big names in Irish daffodil breeding are represented in the varieties we offer", Jules says.

The Watson collection rocket-propelled the growth of Esker Farm Daffodils with a ten-year plan suddenly condensed into ten months. A presence

**“We have bulbs we can trace back to the first recorded daffodils hybridised in Cork at the end of the nineteenth century”**

on the catalogue lists in the United States was a priority. American growers had strong links with Brian Duncan. His support and the availability of his bulbs in the Esker Farm catalogue was critical. American Daffodil Society exhibitors' requirements and the society's judging criteria continue to influence the Esker

Farm catalogue. From daffodil seed to first flower takes four years, from seed to catalogue listing probably fifteen years with many crosses failing to make specialist sale standard. For the exhibitor-grower, the Hardys look to produce a smaller, harder bulb that will yield a flower that is true to size and has capacity to reproduce so giving the grower more flowers year-on-year.

Looking to the future, the Hardys are hoping to breed a wider range of colours into miniature and intermediate daffodils and to widen the gene pool in their breeding programme. "I'd like to see a miniature Tangerine Tango," Dave Hardy says. "Getting some of that tangerine/ orange colouration into miniatures is a challenge". Looking at the current catalogue, Jules likes Little Alice and Picket Post and mentions Kenwell Centennial as a near perfect daffodil. "I would really like to see public authorities like the National Trust in the north and the OPW in the south use more Irish bred daffodil varieties" she

discloses. Personally, I'm lusting after Mite from the garden at Lissadell. Maybe next year.

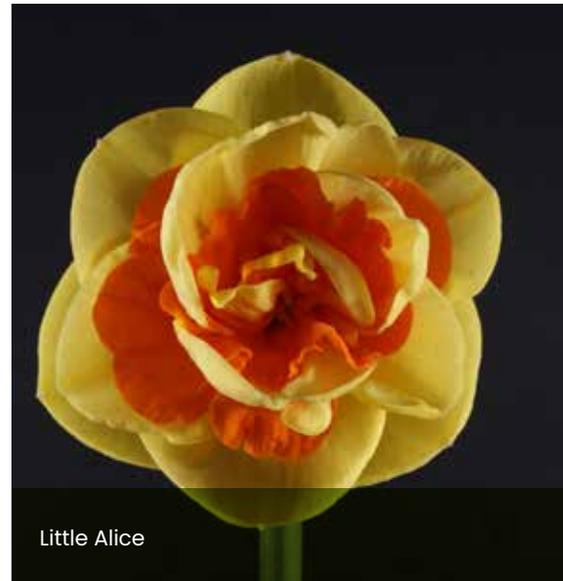
Since Brexit, Dave and Jules have noticed an increase in their customer orders from the Republic. Esker Farm sell online through [eskerfarmdaffodils.com](http://eskerfarmdaffodils.com), in person at specialist sales, and at the RHSI Garden Show, Russborough in May 2024. RHSI members may like to know that at the end of their bulb-selling season Esker Farm have 'chip bags', packs of third- or fourth-year bulbs for sale. Being small, they will do very little in year one but should flower well in year two and will thicken up subsequently. "We sell a big bag with 100-150 chips for the price of a few flowering-sized bulbs, so a real bargain for someone wanting a large quantity of the same variety", Jules advises. ■

**Esker Farm Daffodils, Dromore, Omagh, Co Tyrone**

[www.eskerfarmdaffodils.com](http://www.eskerfarmdaffodils.com)



Kenwell



Little Alice



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# Old Balloo House and Barn

## A shared garden at Balloo, Killinchy

**Moira Concannon and Lesley Simpson**

**W**e have been sharing our love of gardens for forty years, at first living next door to each other in Belfast, until Lesley moved to Balloo in 1986. In 1990, we began having holidays together, visiting gardens and specialist nurseries in Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and even the Netherlands, where like-minded friends organised visits to some amazing gardens. We are now neighbours in Balloo, where we work in our one acre, somewhat challenging site, creating our own special place.



Balloo Red rose

The late Georgian house and barn were built by David Lowry in 1809; it was probably built as an inn, although we only have documentary proof of it functioning as one from 1819 to 1852. The garden around the house was created sometime after 1923 by the Mulholland family. They built walls and arches, dividing the space into different areas and, from the evidence of old labels, sourced plants from the famous Donard and McGredy nurseries. Unfortunately, very little of these plants survived; those which have include several apple trees, *Fatsia japonica*, a yellow-berried holly and seedlings of the original pittosporum trees. The pollarded limes



Lesley's front garden

(*Tilia x europaea*) at the back of the house may also have been planted by the Mulhollands. Three roses still flourished: 'Albéric Barbier', 'Albertine' and a red rose, as yet unidentified, but perhaps from Dicksons of Newtownards or McGredys. It is a repeat flowering climber, tough and reliable – the only drawback is the lack of scent. Moira has taken cuttings from it which now decorate various walls in the garden. 'Albéric Barbier' survived the indignity of being dug up, lying in a heap during landscaping work and then being re-planted months later. It has also been replicated through cuttings. 'Albertine' refused to be completely removed: part remains to cover an archway while others now grow happily elsewhere in the garden.

The garden had been sadly neglected for some time before Lesley bought the property, and it took several years to make any serious impact as restoring the house had priority in time and money. We discovered early on that being in drumlin country the soil is very thin and stony on the higher levels and quickly dries out. However, leading from the garden were two fields, completely bare except for a few trees at the entrance and a hedge between



Orchard Garden

them. The river Blackwater formed the northern boundary. The only downside was the very steep slope in one field! Lesley's plan for this was to start planting trees, common and unusual, especially flowering varieties, or ones with striking bark, to give interest throughout the seasons. The planting began with a new hedgerow to define the eastern boundary and a few large trees such as a *Prunus 'Shirotae'*, a purple weeping beech and *Liriodendron tulipifera*, with smaller specimens such as birch, hollies, malus and sorbus aria and acuparia. Many others were acquired on our travels or from the much-missed Seaforde nursery, which often had plants not found elsewhere: acers, *Camellia 'Cornish Snow'*, *Cornus kousa*, *Eucryphia x nymansensis*, *Liquidambar*, *Luma apiculata*, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, *Nothofagus antarctica*, *Parrotia persica*, *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, *Styrax japonicus* and more. Some large species roses, such as *R. macrantha*, *complicata* and *californica 'Plena'* and hundreds of daffodils were planted too.

Twenty years later, when Moira decided to move to Balloo and convert the barn across the yard from the house, Lesley had established trees, shrubs and perennial planting in the front garden and perennial planting under the apple trees in the back garden. By this time, trees in one field were fairly well grown but other areas were just waiting for inspiration. One of our first jobs was to plant a hedgerow in the second field, along the road. Most of this originated from seedlings of beech, cotoneaster, hawthorn and holly found elsewhere in the garden, along with a few locally grown blackthorn and *Euonymus alatus*. At the same



River field garden May 2022



Rose Garden June 2022



Rosa Kew Gardens



Narcissus with orange tip butterfly



Camellia Jamie



Eryngium giganteum  
Miss Wilmott's Ghost with bee

time, we began work on what was to become a rose garden and sitting area. It was planned around the existing red climbing rose, surrounding what appears originally to have been a shallow pond. It now includes climbing and shrub roses, progressing from white and cream through yellows and reds to purple and pinks, as well as a selection of clematis. Some thrived, especially the older varieties, others did not and were replaced by perennials. Our favourite roses here include the early flowering, pale yellow *R. spinosissima* 'Dunwich Rose', the reliable and repeat flowering Ghislaine de Féligonde and gloriously-scented Gertrude Jekyll. In fact, we have planted roses throughout the garden, in particular making use of trees and hedgerows to host large ramblers. For her front garden, Moira chose acers, red roses and camellias for the border on one side of the path leading to the front door. On the other side is a border full of purple, orange, yellow and red



Waterfall feature in Autumn 2020

flowers, along with grasses for mid-late summer. Dahlias carry this theme on into the autumn. A feature which always attracts the interest of visitors is a water cascade, using stoneware troughs from the byre. They have been set into steps in the boundary wall so that water runs from them into a rill (an RSJ!) and from there into a pond.

When we reviewed the tree planting in the field with the steep slope, the most obvious issue was the need to make a path down to the river. Of course, it would have been easier to have done this before planting! Winding down the slope between trees, with a series of steps, the first path was created. Gradually, others followed so that the fields became part of the garden and we can make our way around the whole area. It still isn't accessible to everyone, but it is possible to appreciate the overall scheme from a viewing point on the level part of the adjoining field. As paths were made, we then cleared between and under the trees and planted more shrubs, especially rhododendrons and hydrangeas and perennials. One of the best shrubs is *Skimmia x confusa* 'Kew Green', highly scented and an asset for any type or size of garden. It is especially nice now to be able to walk along the riverbank.

The entrance to the field was eventually made more interesting by the construction of a winter garden, near the house and barn, and easily accessible in bad weather. As the area was overshadowed by trees and the soil thin and compacted with roots, we had raised beds built with railway sleepers, tanked to prevent root penetration, and filled with tons of soil. Expensive but worth it! The plants were selected for evergreen interest, sweet scents or their winter bark and include *Fatsia japonica*, *Euphorbia mellifera*, *Viburnum farreri* and *Viburnum x bodnantense* 'Charles Lamont', *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Pallida', *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' and *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire'. Most of these are from cuttings and supplemented by snowdrops and early daffodils. Two yew trees planted earlier have been trained to form a 'Gothic' arch, creating a viewing point down to the river.

The field by the road was partly level, with a sloping bank next to our newly created path and fewer trees had been planted here. A living willow arch now provides an entrance. After clearing the sloping section, we initially thought of limiting the planting here to daffodils and primroses for the spring. It will come as no surprise to find that we could not stop at that and there are



Hydrangea macrophylla Blue Bonnet with spider

now more camellias, roses, hydrangeas and other shrubs! The level area has been designed as a meadow, with a winding path cut through the grass. This is most attractive in the spring with bulbs – snowdrops, crocus, daffodils, muscari, species tulips, fritillaria, leucojum, and camassia.

Although we both understood the importance of hard landscaping, funds were never enough to be able to replace the rough surface of the large courtyard. This finally became possible with retirement lump sums, which resulted in the construction of steps to deal with the change in level, walls, planters and proper drainage as well as re-surfacing. A few shrubs and small trees have been planted here but perhaps our favourite is *Viburnum x burkwoodii*, for its wonderful scent in the spring. The steps are now enlivened by a changing 'plant theatre' of pots planted with daffodils, tulips, lilies, pelargoniums, agapanthus and other plants through the seasons.

In March 2020, when a lockdown was introduced, we kept ourselves busy and amused by clearing another slope at the end of the meadow, which led down to the old mill race, running under



Garrya blossom 2023

Killinchy Bridge. This area had never been cleared except for the removal of ash and sycamore trees cut down by request of our neighbour some years before. Those logs and stumps had been left and gradually covered by brambles and ivy. Five bonfires, a log pile of the bigger trunks and heap of offending weeds later we started planting. Most plants came from the garden, although when garden centres re-opened, we did buy a selection of small trees, malus, sorbus and *Acer campestre*. In the autumn we ordered and planted hundreds of daffodils and we have been gradually clearing at least part of the mill race so that we can see the water. Even more than the rest of the garden, this part is meant to be informal, and it will be interesting to see what survives since we will not be constantly weeding it. For those who cannot access this area, another viewing point was created from the top

of the slope, in the meadow. People walking over the bridge can also see this part of the garden from above.

The whole garden was not planned all at once and some parts have been re-constructed if we felt they did not work. Over the years we learnt a great deal from visiting gardens and talking to other gardeners. We began to understand the importance of repeating patterns and mass planting to avoid the 'dolly mixtures' look. Trial and error (quite a lot of that) tested us but honed our skills. We have interesting discussions about new ideas and coping with the long-term maintenance, but Moira's propagation has been key to filling such large spaces. Despite the thin, stony soil and many of our own mistakes (we spend a lot of time moving things around), a great deal has succeeded, and we now appreciate how the sloping site has made the garden more interesting than a totally level site. It has been a joy working together but also rewarding being able to share the garden with others, through opening for the former Ulster Garden Scheme and currently the National Garden Scheme. After 37 years the garden is fairly mature and the challenge for the future is about editing and refreshing the planting. ■

**The garden will be open under the National Garden Scheme in 2024:**

**Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 June 2-5pm; also, by appointment only Mon 5-Friday 9 June.**

**Contact Lesley Simpson at [lsimpsonballoo@gmail.com](mailto:lsimpsonballoo@gmail.com) or 0748 464 9767**



Styrax japonicus



River field garden being constructed 2012



River field underplanting with white narcissus



Rose Garden adding structures 2012

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The glasshouse complex at Ardgillan Castle, recently reconstructed and conserved by Fingal County Council in partnership with de Blacam and Meagher architects, Oldstone Conservation, and Lambstongue Ltd. specialist joiners

# The Glasshouse in Irish Gardens

Photo: Callum Brierton

Callum Brierton

Given the generally wet, cool summer we've just experienced in Ireland, the idea of an enclosed, controllable planting environment may be attractive to many gardeners. The ability to protect delicate plants, safely start seedlings, and extend the growing season – it sounds like a godsend in the context of shifting weather patterns and a changing climate. Such may have been the thoughts of pioneers whose experimentation and advances brought the glasshouse, in its varied forms and uses, to its apogee in the nineteenth century. Whether built with a horticultural, aesthetic, agricultural, or leisure bent, glasshouses are a testament to humans' craving for, enjoyment of, and connection with nature in all its verdant hues.



Photo: Callum Brierley

The glasshouse attached to Rokeby Hall in Co. Louth, attributed to Richard Turner. This glasshouse epitomises the nineteenth century fashion for glasshouses in domestic settings, and shows off delicate cast and wrought ironwork to great effect

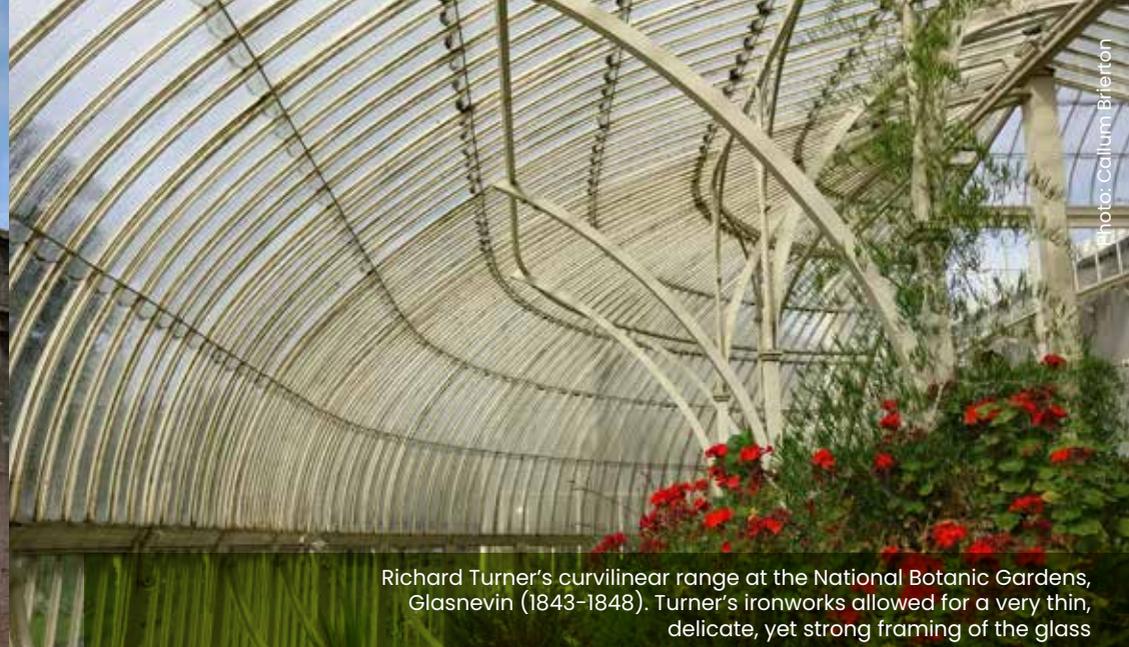


Photo: Callum Brierley

Richard Turner's curvilinear range at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin (1843-1848). Turner's ironworks allowed for a very thin, delicate, yet strong framing of the glass

Glasshouses as we know them began with efforts to grow orange trees in Northern Europe in the sixteenth century, but impeding immediate success in this regard was winter: a seemingly insurmountable barrier to healthy annual citruses. Early attempts at artificial growing environments sought to 'conserve' the trees through their dormant winter season by moving them into a sheltered gallery; hence the term 'conservatory'. These spaces placed little emphasis on the admittance of natural light, as their primary function was to keep the plants away from freezing temperatures – assisted in this by burning charcoal braziers, which by the eighteenth century had generally been replaced

by heated pipes within the floor of the structure known as a hypocaust.

As European powers extended their global reach through the eighteenth century, an indescribable bounty of new plants was encountered. From fruits to flowers, trees to vines, these plants excited the imagination and were immediately brought home. Once again, the climate was a stumbling block to overcome. By this time, orangeries were an established element of many grand gardens, and the most up-to-date were separated from the main house and placed prominently within the garden as an expression of the fashionable informal landscape movement. In 1720,

Richard Bradley, Professor of Botany at Cambridge, having seen many sickly over-wintered citruses, bemoaned the fact that greenhouses were "commonly built... more for ornament than to use". Through research and commentary such as his, orangeries and greenhouses became increasingly glassed, often featuring floor-to-ceiling windows which could be removed in summer when the potted trees were outside, creating a covered area for entertaining.

The process of brightening and opening structures for the growing of plants continued alongside developments in glass and iron technologies at this time. As early as 1802, landscape designer Humphry Repton was advocating the use of cast iron for garden buildings, with a particular focus on conservatories. Industrial improvements to casting technology made strong, fine frames that allowed greater light possible, with

the option of an almost-infinite array of decorative details.

Wood, which had been used for the framing of early glasshouses, was expensive to detail, and required far thicker glazing bars than iron. It was a case of style and substance going hand in hand: growing scientific interest in horticulture and a deeper understanding of plants' light requirements were being matched by a greater technical capacity to construct artificial environments to meet these needs. Glass roofs became much more prolific through the nineteenth century, providing both a better growing environment and a more pleasant, bright space for people to enjoy.

Once this confluence of scientific theory and technology came about, what was left to be debated was mainly a matter of style and taste: various manufacturers of cast or wrought iron glazing systems promoted the benefits



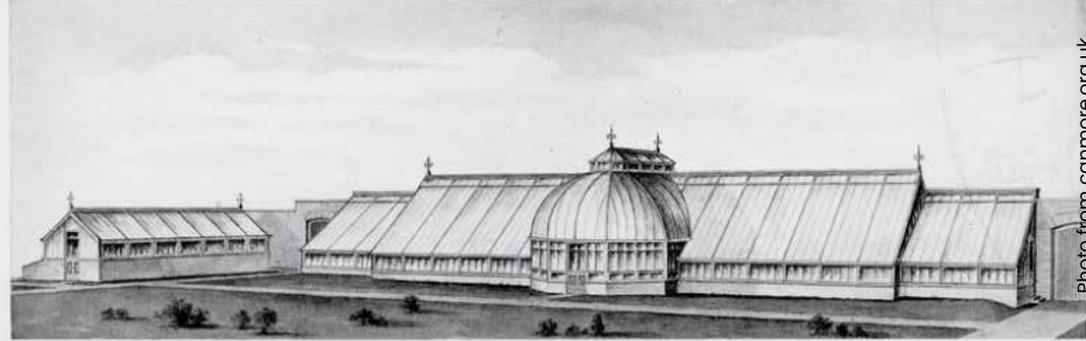
Photo courtesy of Katia Papkovskaia MRIA

The recently restored 'ridge-and-furrow' roof of the Paxton vinery at Lismore Castle, Waterford

of their work, proponents of wooden-framed structures marketed theirs, and all manner of heating and ventilation systems were flogged by enterprising manufacturers. From about 1815 to 1850, cast and wrought iron glasshouses dominated, as the metal's fineness and strength allowed for the construction of vast covered areas, such as Irishman Richard Turner's (b.1798, d.1881) Palm House at the National Botanic Gardens, Kew (1844-1848), designed in conjunction with Decimus Burton, his curvilinear ranges at the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin (1843-1848), and his design for the Palm House at Belfast Botanic Gardens (1839) which served as a template for the later, larger projects. Cast iron structures with wrought iron glazing bars were particularly useful for public glasshouses, as their

scalability meant the visitors could be easily accommodated alongside mature tropical plants, whilst admitting as much light as possible.

However, with the repeal of glass taxes in 1845, the price of glass fell, and so larger panes could be affordably produced. This meant that the width of glazing bars became less important for the admittance of light and gave rise to stronger competition from advocates of wooden structures. The most notable such proponent was Joseph Paxton, who began his career as head gardener at Chatsworth House in 1826. Immediately he set about improving their glasshouses. Paxton was averse to iron due to its high cost and rapid heat loss due to its conductivity, and so worked to find ways to make better wooden



Range of Hothouses erected at Seamount, Malahide, Co. Dublin.

MACKENZIE & MONCUR, LIMITED, EDINBURGH, LONDON, AND GLASGOW.

An excerpt from a 1907 Mackenzie and Moncur Ltd. catalogue showing the glasshouses which are now in Ardgillan Castle, as they were when constructed in Seamount, Malahide for the Jameson family

structures for glasshouses. By adopting the idea of John Claudius Loudon – an ardent supporter of iron glasshouses – that roofs constructed of 'ridges-and-furrows' would capture the most of the sun's rays, and provide the best environment for growing, Paxton created some of the most fantastical glasshouses of the nineteenth century, such as 'Great Stove' at Chatsworth House, and the Crystal Palace of the 1851 Great Exhibition in London.

A notable example of the 'ridge-and-furrow' system in Ireland can be found in the gardens of Lismore Castle, Waterford. This vinery, designed by Joseph Paxton in 1853, has recently been completely restored (see photo, courtesy of Katia Papkovskaia), showing off its innovative and now comparatively-rare roof structure to best advantage.

From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, following the advances outlined above, wood became the predominate structural material for glasshouses. Many specialised firms began operating in

this field, meeting the desires of the upper-middle class and landowners of Ireland and the UK, offering to them all manner of prefabricated or specified glasshouses for the growth of different plants. One such manufacturer was the Scottish firm of Mackenzie & Moncur Ltd., formed in 1869. They were renowned for high-quality wooden glasshouses, though they also branched out to produce iron ones. A Mackenzie & Moncur catalogue from 1900 lists "winter gardens, conservatories, vineries, forcing houses, orchid houses, mushroom houses, verandas, garden pits," among many other types of plant and garden house available to their customers.

The Jameson family were one such customer of Mackenzie & Moncur. At Seamount in Malahide, the family had built a range of composite wood-and-iron glasshouses in the late 1800s, and these remained in place until the house and lands were sold in the 1990s for redevelopment. In 1994, the owners donated the glasshouses – then in a state of disrepair – to Fingal County Council. ■

Photo from canmore.org.uk

# THE NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS OF IRELAND GLASNEVIN AND KILMACURRAGH



The National Botanic Gardens of Ireland are an oasis of calm and beauty, and entry is free. A premier scientific institution, the Gardens contain important collections of plant species and cultivars from all over the world. The National Botanic Gardens in Dublin are located in Glasnevin, just three kilometres from Dublin City Centre, and are famous for the exquisitely restored historic glasshouses. The National Botanic Gardens in Wicklow are located in Kilmacurragh, where the milder climate, higher rainfall, and deeper, acidic soils of this historic Wicklow garden provide a counterpoint to the collections at Glasnevin. The two Gardens have been closely associated since 1854. The National Botanic Gardens are open every day in both Glasnevin and Kilmacurragh, and are free to enter and explore.

Guided tours are provided daily at Glasnevin and seasonally at Kilmacurragh.



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*Galanthus elwesii* 'Remember Remember'

## From the Editor's Garden

Peter and Nicola Milligan

I am writing this article sitting at our 'front' patio, with head gardener Scarlett by my side, bathed in the wondrous and welcome sunshine of an 'Indian Summer'. July and August here in Co Down seemed to have been nothing but wet, wet, and then more wet.

I am sure that many of our members will be aware, although you receive this issue of the journal in October/November, the articles are written weeks, if not months, in advance of the actual publication date.

At the moment of writing – mid-September – I have some beautiful bulbs on the table in front of me – colchicums and some small pots of hesperantha (I still prefer the old name of schizostylis). These are excellent plants for providing late summer and early autumn colour. Many cultivars are available and there are some well-known varieties that can be found in your local seedsman's or garden centre.



*Galanthus plicatus* 'Three Ships'



*Narcissus* 'Bowles Early Sulphur'

Following on from these I have some pots of early flowering snowdrops such as *Galanthus elwesii* 'Remember Remember' (if you remember the old rhyme "remember, remember the fifth of November gunpowder, treason, and plot; ....". This gives a clue to the flowering period of this cultivar and *Galanthus plicatus* 'Three Ships' lives up to the promise in the opening words of the carol "I saw three ships come sailing in on Christmas Day, on Christmas Day, ...." by being in flower for Christmas Day.

While we can rely on more snowdrops to colour the days from January to March many people do not know that you can have a beautiful daffodil in flower before Christmas without recourse to forcing or any other artificial stimuli.

Originating from the garden of the late Cedric Morris at Benton End we have *Narcissus minor* 'Cedric Morris'. We have this in flower in the garden in mid-December. It is a dainty cultivar usually around eight inches in height and is well worth growing. It is listed by few nurseries but it is worth the hunt.

Another daffodil that is worth seeking out comes from the garden of the late E. A. Bowles at Middleton House. Edward

Augustus Bowles in his day was referred to as the Crocus King (many of his introductions can be obtained to this day, e.g., *Crocus sieberi* 'Bowles' White, and *Crocus chrysanthus* 'E.A. Bowles') but he was also well-known for the great range of snowdrops and daffodils that he grew in his garden. A favourite of ours is *Narcissus* 'Bowles Early Sulphur'. This is another dainty cultivar growing to around the same height as *N. m.* 'Cedric Morris'.

We have just obtained a precious few bulbs of another daffodil listed as *Narcissus* 'The O'Mahoney'. We hope this will flower for us in 2024. It is said to come from the garden of The O'Mahoney at Coolballintaggart, Co. Wicklow.

According to DaffSeek (a daffodil photo database sponsored by the American Daffodil Society) this cultivar is paler and later flowered than *N.* 'Bowles Early Sulphur' so we are looking forward to the spring to see this Irish cultivar in flower.

There is still time to seek out and plant some snowdrops and daffodils so do not delay, get busy and then sit back to enjoy the fruits of your labours come Christmas and the spring. ■

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A magnificent salvia in Jimi's garden

# Laurelmere Cottage Garden

**Cherry Sleeman**  
coordinator

Autumn is being welcomed by volunteers who are cutting grass, weeding, and mulching. The shrubs in the east border are now making their presence known. The new pond is proudly displaying its water-lily flowers. A gift of old roses from the Powerscourt Estate, received through Monica Alvarez of Dundrum College of Further Education, bloom at the front of the cottage. The flower bed to the side of the cottage is being covered with carpet and cardboard until spring, to reduce weeds.

The change in RHSI tenancy at Laurelmere is also a major change for garden volunteers. The cottage is no longer available for tea, shelter, or gardening talks. The garden continues to be under the care of the RHSI. We have our tea break outside our storage shed in the works courtyard. A small plastic greenhouse, kindly donated, houses our bags while in the garden.



A waterlily in the Laurelmere pond

We hope a better solution can be found but are thankful that Mondays (so far) seem to be blessed with good weather.

Planning continues with a new display envisaged for the central bed. We visited Jimi Blake's inspirational Hunting Brook Gardens outside Blessington on 11th September.

We are delighted to report that our good friend Andrew Boyle has returned home from hospital, we have missed him. ■

# RHSI Bellefield

• 2024 •

## Open Weekends

Feb 8-11th Snowdrop Weekend

Mar 24th Plant Sale

May 18-19th Open Weekend

June 22-23rd Open Weekend

July 20-21st Open Weekend

Sept 21-22nd Open Weekend

11am to 4pm, Tea/coffee available

Tours with head-gardener Paul Smyth at 12am and 2pm daily

Guest speaker and plant sales on open weekends



We look forward to showing you seasonal highlights in the garden

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Bellefield House, Shinrone, Co Offaly R42 NW82 (mid-way between Roscrea and Birr)



# RHSI Event Guide

Date	Zoom	Event	Tour
2nd Dec 2023		RHSI Christmas Lunch - National Yacht Club	
6th Dec 2023	Seasonal Floral Demonstration		
17th Jan 2024	Paul Smyth - "Snowdrops and other Spring Flower"		
31st Jan 2024	Brona Dore - "Growing to eat - for one or two!"		
3rd Feb 2024			Cork Snowdrop Visit to Coosheen Glounthaune
8th- 11th Feb		RHSI Bellefield Snowdrop Weekend	
14th Feb 2024	Hester Forde - "Spring in Coosheen Garden"		
6th Mar 2024	Luke Senior - "An Irish student in Great Dixter"		
20th Mar 2024	Michael White - "Memoirs of a Woodland Garden"		
24th Mar 2024		Plant Sale at RHSI Bellefield	
3rd Apr 2024	Chris Beardshaw - "Painting with Plants"		
17th Apr 2024	Claire McNally - "Rowallane Garden"		
19th Apr 2024			Garden Visit to Trinity Botanic Garden, Dublin 5
27th Apr 2024		RHSI Plant Sale	
14-17 May 2024			4 day tour to Gardens of West Waterford*
18-19 May 2024		RHSI Bellefield Open Weekend	
8th Jun 2024			Day tour (ex Cork City ) to Gardens of Clonakilty**
22-23 Jun 2024		RHSI Bellefield Open Weekend	

Date	Zoom	Event	Tour
29th Jun 2024			Day tour (ex Galway City ) to Gardens of Limerick***
6th Jul 2024			Dublin Garden Visit to Medina, Howth
20-21 Jul 2024		RHSI Bellefield Open Weekend	
27th Jul 2024			Day tour to Gardens of Down****
10th Aug 2024			Day tour to Gardens of Carlow*****
3-6 Sept 2024			4 day tour to Gardens of Shropshire and Cheshire*****
21-22 Sept 24		RHSI Bellefield Open Weekend	
16th Oct 2024	Marcus Chilton-Jones "The making of RHS Garden, Bridgewater"		

## Tour Details

\* 14/17 May - Four Day Tour to gardens of West Waterford (Lismore Castle, Dromana House, Salterbridge, Cappoquin House & Tourin)

\*\* 8 Jun - Day Tour (ex Cork City) to gardens of Clonakilty (Inchadoney House & Gardens and one other)

\*\*\* 29 Jun - Day Tour (ex Galway City) to gardens of Limerick

\*\*\*\* 27 July - Day Tour to gardens of Down (Hillsborough Castle & Gardens & Fernhill Cottage Garden, Spa, Ballynahinch)

\*\*\*\*\* 10 Aug Day Tour to gardens of Carlow (Hardymount & Altamont)

\*\*\*\*\* 3/6 Sept Four Day Tour to gardens of Shropshire & Cheshire

Booking for four day tours will open January 22nd 2024  
 Booking for Day tours will be 8 weeks prior to tour date





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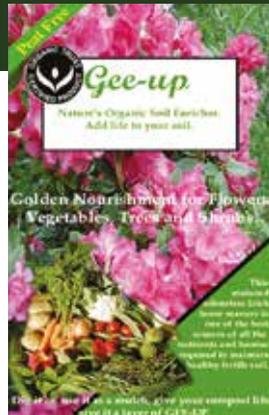
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# A long way for lichens

## Adventure in Antarctica

### Charlotte Salter-Townshend

I always dreamt of Antarctica; when the opportunity to be paid to explore its wonders came up, it felt like my ship had come in. Looking for new opportunities in guiding, a friend and her Instagram posts recommended the role of expedition guide. Expedition cruises offer nature focused adventures in off-the-beaten-track places, from less visited villages to tropical forests and Antarctic breeding colonies. When I joined the team in Praia, Cabo Verde (Cape Verde Islands), I was a novice, green from my decade of guiding at the Botanic Gardens. I was to be Botany Lecturer for the next two months. On board the Silver Cloud, I delivered lectures relevant to the voyages that took us across the Atlantic

to South America, round Cape Horn, and on to Antarctica. The Expedition Team comprised of experts on marine biology, wildlife photography, geology, ornithology, maritime history and more. On paper, their achievements were intimidating, but in person, they were warm and welcoming and soon became friends. Like myself, they were thrilled to be sharing their passion with guests and crew.

**“The village of Caldeiras at the crater has been rebuilt many times”**

Our final stop before we crossed the Atlantic was the volcanic island of Fogo, Cabo Verde. The last eruption at Fogo was 2014. The village of Caldeiras at the crater has been rebuilt many times. We could see where some of the dwellings were buried in 2014. The villagers’ homes are typically round and built of igneous stone from the very volcano that also destroys their homes. Fortunately, no villagers lost their lives in recent eruptions, but they did have to abandon their homes and evacuate to an area slightly further down. It seems surprising that they return and rebuild their homes knowing that another eruption will come, but they make use of the fertile land and humidity higher up. Their way of life is to ebb and flow around the eruptions. The vineyards there are different, with the grape vines



In front of invasive furze with colleagues Carlos and Manuel at Westpoint Island, Falklands

growing along the ground. This works better than growing taller vines, as keeping the leaves closer to the ground stops the moisture from evaporating quickly. Unlike the people further down, the growers do not need to irrigate their crops (which include sweet potatoes, pomegranates, apples, and beans).

When we reached the east coast of Brazil, it felt unexpectedly familiar. In the Mata Atlântica, bromeliads, orchids, and ferns dripped from the trees. It was surprisingly reminiscent of the Atlantic forests of southwest Ireland, with their filmy ferns, lichens, and deep mosses cloaking ancient trees. Life on life on life. Although near enough to the Amazon rainforest, the Mata Atlântica has long been isolated from its larger and more famous neighbour. Approximately 40% of the vascular plants there are endemic, making it one of the world’s great biodiversity hotspots. Like the Amazon, it has suffered significant deforestation – over 85% of the original area is lost, threatening many plant and animal species with extinction. Visiting a reserve near Natal, we saw areas protected and studied by rangers and scientists and enjoyed by visitors.



Lichens and moss, Half Moon Island



The volcanic peak of Fogo, Cabo Verde



Rockhopper penguins Westpoint

However, we could see how the city encroaches upon it.

As we moved from tropical to temperate to polar regions, the climate and species changed dramatically. It was deeply moving to be so close to nesting black-browed albatrosses and rockhopper penguins as I was on West Point Island, Falklands/Malvinas. When chatting to guests on shore and back on board, I highlighted the significance of plants as habitats. The tussock grass, *Poa flabellata*, is key to the lives of breeding birds and seals. Without it, you simply would not have one of the most iconic wildlife spectacles on the planet. When a young Joseph Dalton Hooker landed in the Falklands in 1842, on Captain Ross' expedition to Antarctica, he described these grasses and sketched them. He noted its use for fodder and thatch. The idea of introducing the plant to the Scottish Highlands and to western Ireland followed. It is fortunate that try as they might, landowners in Scotland could not get it to grow. By way of contrast, as our boats approached Westpoint, the first thing I noticed was bright yellow cloaking the hills, with a distinctive coconut scent on the breeze. Furze, *Ulex europaeus*, was introduced to the Falklands as fodder for sheep (also introduced) and is highly invasive.

Having sailed south of the Falklands, I knew that there would be slim pickings ahead when it came to green things. I realised that the guests were slightly more interested in penguins and icebergs than in mosses and lichens. I did not necessarily expect them to pause and admire a clump of moss, even if it were hundreds of years old and protected. I was surprised when



Elephant seal in tussock grass, South Georgia

several enthusiastically showed me images that revealed a patchwork of colour and texture. Some of these were species that you may find growing on your garden paths, unbidden, and often targeted for eradication. Yet here in maritime Antarctica, they represent endurance and resilience. They grow mostly on rocks and whalebones, which form oases in the frozen landscape. In this white wilderness, we marvelled at their adaptations. I explained how lichens are communities and defy our categorisations of the world – they are miniature ecosystems comprised of combinations of algae/fungi/bacteria. As Merlin Sheldrake puts it:

“Lichens are places where an organism unravels into an ecosystem and where an ecosystem congeals into an organism... Lichens are a product less of their parts than of the exchanges between those parts. Lichens are stabilized networks of relationships; they never stop lichenizing; they are verbs as well as nouns.”

These organisms teach us to appreciate symbioses and interdependency of life everywhere. This fundamentally influences our whole worldview, scientifically and socially. ■

**Charlotte Salter-Townshend studied History and Philosophy and completed a master's degree in Public History and Cultural Heritage at Trinity College Dublin. For almost a decade, she worked as a guide at the National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, designing and delivering talks and tours on a wide range of topics and issues relating to plant life. Her work has featured on national television and radio, on podcasts, and in printed and digital media. She joined expedition cruises last year as a Botany and History Lecturer and travelled to regions including Scottish Isles, South America, and Antarctica. She now works as a Digital Marketing and Trade Promotion Officer for Heritage Ireland, Office of Public Works, promoting Ireland's iconic heritage sites.**

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The iris border in its prime

# The Bellefield Iris Bed Renovation

**Paul Smyth, head gardener at Bellefield, explains how it's done in conversation with Mary Hackett**

**S**cutch grass, vetch, bindweed, and rampant Japanese anemone. That's what faced Paul Smyth and his volunteer gardeners in their first renovation project at RHSI garden, Bellefield, Co Offaly. Let's see how they got along:

We'll start at the very beginning!

Angela Jupe loved *Iris germanica*. Monet's garden at Giverny outside Paris inspired her to create a 15-metre-long double border of mixed iris. These painterly flowers need light and baking in summer sun. An overgrown tangle is no place for a self-respecting iris.



The iris bed in Jan 2023



*Galanthus 'Jupe's Belle'*

### What exactly was in there?

Not a lot of iris flowers, that's for sure. A dead pear tree. Weeds. And snowdrops, named and not, Angela was a noted galanthophile. Some of the best snowdrops in the garden turned out to be in the scheduled-for-renovation iris bed.



*Galanthus 'Green Tear'*

### Mind those snowdrops!

Immediately after the last Snowdrops Open Day, Paul and helpers spent a week digging out snowdrop bulbs, labelling and potting up. Unnamed snowdrops went into the lawn for naturalizing.

### A weed is a plant where you don't want it:

Muscari and aquilegia were cleaned of perennial weed and replanted in the woods. Narcissi and pulsatilla were potted up for future use. At the end of April, Paul and volunteers spent one whole day taking out plant material.



Volunteers clearing weed from lifted plants



Potted-up plants waiting for relocation

### And finally, we're digging!

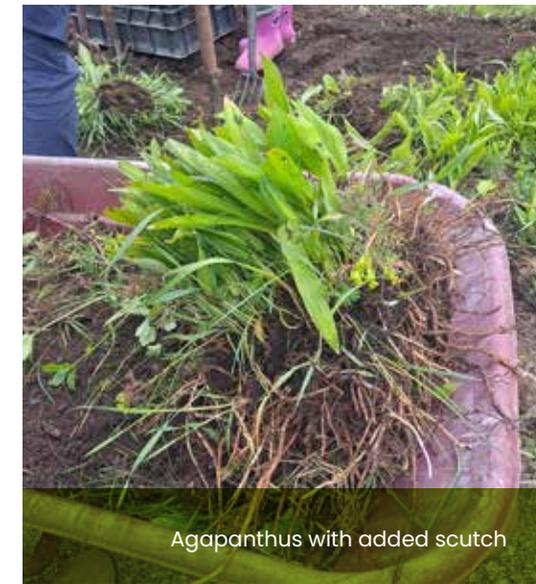
By the time the spades came out, the area had been well sifted. The bed was single-dug in May, taking out every visible scrap of perennial root.



Growth after the wet summer. Bindweed and Japanese Anemone

### Waste not, want not!

If worth keeping, plants were cleaned off and repotted. The odd bit of vetch appears in the pots, but an eye is kept on the stock, and it is weeded regularly.



Agapanthus with added scutch



Plants cleaned of weeds ready to pot up



Volunteers lifting snowdrops

**And then it rained!**

You might remember it was a very wet July. Weeds went mad. The team dug the bed over twice to stop it turning into scutch and vetch heaven.

**Where this season ends:**

One more dig is planned for late September. Paul may cover the exposed loam with membrane for the winter to prevent leaching.

**To be continued...**

Elusive snowdrops will pop up in that bed in 2024. Replanting of iris is planned for March/April 2024. Renovation of the second and less weedy side of the bed is on Paul's to-do list.

We'll let you know how it goes. ■

**See RHSI events page in this Journal/  
RHSI website for open days in RHSI  
garden Bellefield, Co Offaly**



Volunteers lifting clumps before digging

# Fear Not

**Aideen Higgins – Murphy and Wood garden centre**

**M**any of us have been encouraged to seek perfection in the produce we purchase and the plants we grow. To gain this perfection many growers turn to the use of chemicals in the form of sprays and dusts.

Most gardeners realise the need for sustainability, understand the benefits of soil fertility, of encouraging wildlife, and diversity in planting, without the use of chemicals.

Let's not get upset when we have lumps eaten out of the plants. Or if there are discoloured or distorted leaves, blotches, spots, or early leaf drop. Don't worry when things go wrong, plants can cope with infections and infestations, once they have a basic good health.

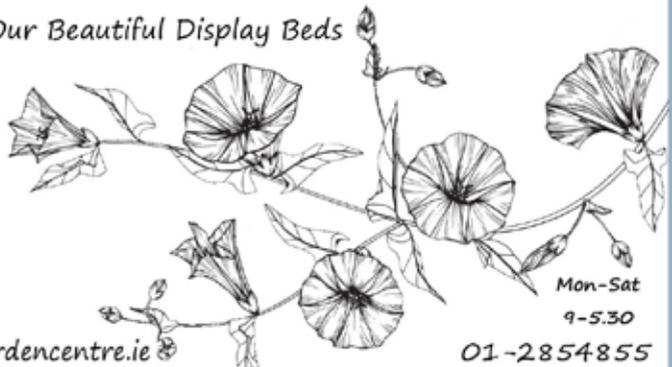


I suppose, it is good to know what is acceptable to the plant; to recognise the difference between symptoms of disease, physiological conditions or physical damage, at a basic level. With knowledge and experience, comes the understanding of when it is ok to leave the plant be and when to take action. Mostly it is a matter of cutting back, watering, feeding and waiting for next year. In most cases recovery will follow. ■

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# Making Places from Spaces

Marion Keogh MGLDA rethinks green spaces in built environments

In conversation with Mary Hackett

**M**arion Keogh is a Dublin based garden designer, a Bloom medalist, and a mentor on RTE TV's Super Garden. One of a group who together founded Bloom Fringe, she teaches horticulture and is part of creative collective Green Edge who 'Make the Gritty City Pretty'.

Let's start with Bloom Fringe 2016. That was the year Ron Finley, the Gangsta Gardener, came to Dublin from LA for a Fringe event, organized by Marion and her pals. Ron likens his gardening work to graffiti, describing Mother Nature as the greatest artist out there. From Ron and from others Marion developed a sense of the importance of creating place, a destination where

people will go with intent. Another driver for her design work is the importance of allowing people to fall back in love with nature. She wants vibrant natural surroundings to actively welcome and surround visitors. A mother of three grown children, she has happy memories of her kids' delight in dirt and wiggly things. "I'm amazed that so many find nature 'dirty'", she says. As part of her transition year teaching, she has teenagers smelling compost and discovering how to dig. Her gardens encourage confidence in directly handling soil, snails and much more.

Fast forward to 2023, and with Ron's revolutionary philosophy as part of her toolbox, Marion is focused on the



Paths mown through grass

potential for radical re-imagining of semi-private green spaces. A recent project with Beechwood Parish Church in Ranelagh, Dublin 6 reminded her of the many church grounds, hidden courtyards, and underused green pockets lurking in our towns and cities. Cut grass and manicured borders are beautiful but need extensive maintenance. 'Neat and tidy' does nothing for environmental sustainability. What's the future for these spaces?

'Turn the traditional approach on its head', says Marion. An admirer of Mary Reynolds' dictum to 'see beauty in a different way', her garden designs aim to shift the environmental game in nature's favour. Around Beechwood Church Marion allows grass to grow naturally, using shaved paths to define space. It looks messy now, she agrees. But in time a richer bio-system will re-establish. Apples, plums, and pears

grown in the community orchard are freely available to all comers while spring blossoms have nectar for pollinating insects, bees, hoverflies, and butterflies. Plants and shrubs chosen for biodiversity also give colour and impact to the area year-round.

Designing a private space open to the public at any time is a challenge. Designing when Ron Finley and Mary Reynolds are whispering at your elbow is radical. Marion admits she asks a lot of the community who support the Beechwood project and of the heroes who volunteer for maintenance gardening. Iseult Honohan, one of those volunteers, feels she is contributing to a larger whole. "Three people weeding a bed finish the job so much faster and it is good to chat. I don't want to have responsibility for the project. As a community project, no individual gardener has control of the planting. Perfection is not what we're aiming for. I see it as a continuing experiment and I'm happy to see how it works out".

Here's the environmental challenge for us gardeners; we like our grass cut (at least I do). We like our edges neat. We stake and we deadhead. We change the mixture of plants in our borders with more concern for aesthetics than for the bees. But a garden with biodiversity principles at its heart asks its curators 'what is gardening'? The whole project team in Beechwood are working on this. 'Dare to be wild', writes Mary Reynolds. 'Gardening is the most therapeutic and defiant act you can do' declares Ron Finley. "I'm not quite as bravely extreme as they are", Marion says. "Not yet". ■

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# The Howth and Sutton Growers Group

**Ruth Barrington**  
Chair HSHS (and member of  
the HSHS Growers Group)

I never knew propagation could be such fun' commented one of the members of the Growers Group of the Howth and Sutton Horticultural Society (HSHS). Now in its second year, the Growers Group is proving highly popular, with a waiting list of people wanting to join. The Growers Group is the brainchild of Conall O'Caomh and Nuala Doherty, creators of the wonderful Ardán, a RHSI partner garden. Conall and Nuala have provided the inspiration, enthusiasm and organisation needed to establish and sustain the Group.

Why a Growers Group? The HSHS celebrates its 80th anniversary next

year and has been fortunate to have had members who are keen propagators of plants for the Society's plant sales, which form part of the Spring and Autumn Shows. These plant sales, which are highly regarded in north Dublin, are a key source of revenue for the Society, accounting for over half of its income each year. However, some of the most expert propagators have had to reduce their activity due to ill health and advancing years. The challenge is to ensure a continuing supply of good quality plants for the plant sales by enhancing the propagation skills of a wider group of the Society's members. Each member of the Growers Group commits to providing at least 20 plants of good quality for the Society's plant sales. The number of participants is limited at any time to 14 so as to ensure plenty of hands-on experience at each session. Members of the Group include experienced gardeners who are keen to improve their skills and novice gardeners who interested in learning about propagation. There is a good representation of younger HSHS members.

The propagation sessions are held on Saturday mornings, from February to October, and follow the gardening calendar. Dates are set at the beginning of the year. In February and October, the theme is plant division, which usually takes place in the garden of a HSHS member who volunteers access to their plants. Conall and Nuala agree with the owner in advance which plants need to be divided and mark them with labelled bamboos. Expert notes on plant division are emailed to the Group in advance and members are advised what tools and gear to bring. The session opens



Mary Sheridan and Karl Flynn dividing plants in a HSHS member's garden

**“Good humoured banter and sharing of garden lore is the soundtrack”**

with Conall and Nuala running through the core principles of successful division and answering any questions. The members of the Group then proceed in pairs to dig and divide the identified plants and to pot and label the young plants, replanting about half of the parent plan. Good humoured banter and sharing of garden lore is the sound



Conall and Nuala outlining the principles of successful seed sowing



Ann Campbell and Conall enjoying Rebecca Jeffrey propagating her *Mammillaria bombycina*

track to this activity. Each member takes home a share of the young plants to nurse them along until they are ready for a plant sale and each member is encouraged to divide plants in their own gardens in a similar manner.

Other topics covered by the Group during the year include seed sowing – annuals and biennials – basal cuttings, soft wood cuttings, root cuttings, hard wood cuttings, seed saving and propagation of succulents and cacti. Each session is prepared in advance by Conall and Nuala and follows a similar pattern to that described above. They also provide the soil medium, pots and labels needed for successful propagation and future identification.

Sessions are held mainly in Ardán but have also taken place in other wonderful gardens of HSHS members such as Medina (RHSI partner garden) and Earlscliffe, the famous garden of David Robinson. Other HSHS members who are expert in taking cuttings and seed saving also contribute to the sessions. The activities of the Group are publicised in the HSHS Ezine, produced four times a year and available on the HSHS website at [www.HSHS.ie](http://www.HSHS.ie).

How well has the Group worked? At the end of the first season, two members volunteered to survey the Group using a Survey Monkey questionnaire. The results showed how much the members valued the Group both for learning more

## “The Group is having a significant impact”

about propagation and for meeting and getting to know other gardeners. All members reported that the sessions had increased their ability to produce plants for the Society’s plant sales, with 75% saying that their ability had greatly increased. Members liked the format and timing of sessions and that the dates were set in advance.

Have the activities of the Group impacted the HSHS Plant Sales? The evidence of this year’s Spring plant sale suggests that the Group is having a significant impact. Thanks to the contributions of the Group, the Society had a bumper crop of good quality, labelled plants for sale and made a record €2,400 on the sale of plants.

And the fun bit? As well as the banter and chat, we have unforgettable moments of great humour and drama, as when one of the Group produced from a plastic bag an unwieldy and bizarre cactus, a *Mammillaria bombycina*, for division. Strong gloves, nerves of steel and a sharp knife required! ■



### Dr. Eva Orsmond and Her Wellness Haven in Portugal: Solar Alvura

Dr. Eva Orsmond is a well-known name in Ireland, where she is famous for her fight against obesity and diabetes. With over 20 years of experience in the market, she has countless success stories to her name and has clinics located all across the country. But her dreams didn't stop there. In 2017, she discovered an abandoned farmhouse dating back to 1868 in the beautiful Algarve region of Portugal, and it was love at first sight. She saw the potential for something truly transformative - a sanctuary of health, a place for people to come and take care of themselves, and thus Solar Alvura was born.

It was not an easy journey for Dr. Eva and her team. There were highs and lows during the six years of construction, and the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a significant challenge. But despite all the odds, she never gave up on her dream, and today, Solar Alvura is a thriving wellness haven. At Solar Alvura, guests have the option of bed and breakfast with relaxation packages or opt for more structured programs with an emphasis on habit-building. The hotel is located in the Algarve, which is famous for having 300 days of sunshine a year, making it the perfect spot to escape the stresses of everyday life.



At Solar Alvura, guests can choose from a range of wellness retreats, including detox, yoga, diabetes recovery, or simply relaxation. There is also the option for a bed and breakfast stay. Whichever option guests choose, they can expect a rejuvenating experience that combines luxurious accommodations with personalized wellness programs.

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20 - 25 April	23 Mar - 1 April	15-24 March	12-20 April
20 - 25 July	15 - 24 June	12-20 April	26 May-3 June
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# Floral Art

Karen Robinson

Hello Everyone. Hope you got out in your gardens this Summer despite all the rain. It's that time of year when we are all back with our Flower Clubs and enjoying meeting up with friends.

Today I'm going to show you a design which I have done in autumnal colours, but it can easily be switched to winter colours by changing the flowers to white roses and/or carnations or white germini. You could then add in some silver sprayed cones or silver birch twigs instead of the phormium.

Keep an eye on the AOIFA website for up-and-coming events. The Floral Artist of the Year and Inter Club elimination Heats will be held on 14 October in Cork and Dunboyne. The AOIFA 50th Anniversary will be held on 2 November in the Midlands Hotel in Portlaoise. Hope to see you there.

#### Design: Autumn Ambience Plant Material

- 3 x *Phormium* 'Tricolor' Leaves
- Roses x 5
- *Germini* x 4/5 (a Germini is a mini-Gerbera)
- Spray yellow *Chrysanthemum* (micro)
- *Solidago*
- *Fatsyhedera lizei*
- *Fatsia japonica*
- *Hypericum* berries (optional)

#### Mechanics

- Square basket or similar container
- Half block floral foam secured with a green plastic pin holder and oasis tape

#### Method

Place the floral foam in the basket, securing it with the pin holder and tape. Start by placing the Phormium leaves at

the back of the design with the centre leaf higher than the others. I crossed both side leaves at different heights and passed them through two small slits made in the centre Phormium leaf. See image.

Place your Roses one below the other, stepping down to give rhythm. Then do the same with the Mini Gerbera but at different heights to the Roses. Try not to have two flowers at the same height as this will square off the design and won't look as pleasing. Place your Fatsia leaves on one side, layering them to hide the floral foam and ensure some fall over the top of the container. Insert the Fatsyhedera on the opposite side, place solidago in between the smooth leaves to give contrast of texture. Place hypericum berries and the micro-Chrysanthemum, again looking for different textures.

Remember to place plant material at the back of the base to balance the design. Enjoy! ■





## RHSI Partner Gardens Scheme

# New Members for 2024

Are you the owner of a garden already open to the public during the summer months or longer? If so, you may like to consider joining this scheme which already has fifty-six members throughout the twenty-six counties.

### The benefits of being an RHSI Partner Garden

- As a garden owner, you would enjoy an increased number of visitors. RHSI members visiting the garden are very often accompanied by non-members who pay full entrance fee. Both the RHSI members and their friends could add to your income stream, spending at your plant sales area, your gift shop and in your cafe or refreshment area if available.
- Online promotion of your garden. There is a Partner Gardens section on the RHSI website, and your garden profile would be linked back to your own website if you have one. If you let the RHSI office know of your upcoming events, they would be posted on the RHSI Facebook page and included in the 2 weekly eBulletin that goes out to all RHSI members.
- Free RHSI membership is given to each Partner Garden owner or a nominee while the garden is part of the scheme. This enables owners to visit other Partner Gardens at a free or reduced-price entry, and to avail of all the other benefits of Society membership.
- A brochure listing participating Partner Gardens for the current year is distributed to RHSI members in April of each year. We also offer this brochure to potential members at garden events and RHSI functions.

If you would like to receive more information about becoming an **RHSI Partner Garden** please contact:

**Noreen Keane**  
 RHSI Partner Gardens Co-ordinator  
 Email: [partnergardens@rhsi.ie](mailto:partnergardens@rhsi.ie)  
 Mob: 087 259 2766



## Partner Gardens

# Winter Visiting

Whilst the heyday of garden visiting is wrapped up by the end of summer, many of our fifty-six Partner Gardens still remain either fully open or by appointment during the winter months. With the attraction of free or half price entry for RHSI members, many Gardens have attached coffee shops for a winter warm-up as an added bonus. This is the real time to observe the structure of a garden or to just enjoy your favourite summertime spot in a totally different way. It is when evergreen shrubs and trees come into their own, and when surprise winter-flowering plants get their chance to make a show. It is also the time to get inspiration for reshaping your garden whilst not distracted by fulsome summer growth.

### So where can you go?

**Browse the Partner Gardens section of the RHSI website** and you'll find the following gardens are open during the winter months:

**Connaught:** Kylemore Abbey and Victorian Walled Garden, Strokestown Park Gardens.

**Leinster:** Airfield Estate Gardens, Mount Usher Gardens, Festina Lente, Hunting Brook Gardens, Colclough Walled Garden, Coolaught Walled Garden, Johnstown Castle Gardens, Belvedere House & Gardens, Birr Castle Demesne, Rothe House Museum and Garden, Burtown House & Gardens, Loughcrew Gardens, Collon House Garden.



**Ulster:** Ballyrobert Gardens, Glenarm Castle Walled Garden, Killreagh Garden, Mount Stewart House and Gardens, Rowallane Garden.

**Munster:** Blarney Castle and Gardens, Hester Forde's Coosheen Garden, Fota House- Victorian Working Garden, Ballymaloe Cookery School Gardens, Bantry House and Garden, Coolwater Garden.

### Please:

- Check visiting details on the RHSI website before you set off for your visit.
  - Remember to bring your current RHSI membership card for free or half price garden entry.
  - Please support the Partner Garden owner by taking some non RHSI member friends along with you, having coffee and buying some plants.
- Happy Winter Partner Garden visiting!

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# Russborough Notes

**Bernie Roddie**

It was a summer of four seasons weather-wise quite literally. Beginning with Spring, the season where plants begin to surface from the ground once again to the delight of all us gardeners, the snowdrops, daffodils and tulips to name a few. The RHSI Russborough Show was held on Sunday 7th May, we were very lucky to have a beautiful sunny day to show off the walled garden. After all our work during the months beforehand we had a great variety of plants to sell at our plant stall and visitors were delighted to find different varieties of a plant they were sourcing. The next generation gardeners were delighted too with the children's stall where Nuala and Agata demonstrated to the little ones how to sow a seed selection of their choice and they each took home a planted sunflower on the day also. Our new book stall was a huge success thanks to

the volunteers who generously donated some lovely gardening books for sale to the visitors.

The garden continued to burst into bloom with all the lovely spring colours through a very cool and wet month of May and then into a very warm and sunny June. The rejuvenated Wild Flower circle was full of colourful bloom after its makeover. The rose garden and rose beds along the east wall put on a splendid display of colour all the way through the sunny month of June. The vegetable beds were sown with a great variety of edibles to enjoy later in the season. The weather in July was very wet, the wettest on record according to Met Eireann, but the main herbaceous beds survived as did the outdoor vegetables and the roses were deadheaded regularly to produce their second flush at the end of the summer.

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Our planned Urban Garden which will be housed in part of the holding area, was cleared of weeds and membrane was put down until we are ready to plant it up and plants were saved for transfer into the new garden. Elaine one of our Saturday volunteers, who is a garden designer, drew up a terrific design plan for this space. We are looking forward to working on that beginning with planting up lots of bulbs and then putting lots of ideas on paper about succession planting to keep interest in the space right through the seasons.

There was a healthy crop of loganberries, raspberries, redcurrants, and blackcurrants which survived the wet spell of weather in May and were picked for Lena to make some more of her delicious jam to sell to the visitors.

In the glasshouse the pelargoniums put on a spectacular show and as we progressed into August, the many different varieties of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and melons, tended by May, were all growing well promising a good harvest for sale at the gate and also to be tasted and enjoyed during lunch by the volunteers; a treat we all enjoy.



And so, another great gardening year is ending. Apples to be picked, leaves to be swept up, plants to be overwintered, seeds to be sown and bulbs to be planted, all tasks keeping the volunteers very busy until we will hopefully have our Christmas Wreath Making day with Denise before we finish in December. Our visitors always enjoy visiting the garden and taking home its produce, including the many tours we have guided also. There is wonderful camaraderie amongst the volunteers in the walled garden at Russborough and we look forward to new volunteers joining with us in 2024. So, if you think you might like to join us, do not think twice, we would be delighted to have you for the new season in 2024. ■

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Raspberry 'Autumn Bliss'



# Fruit bushes

Deborah Ballard

**W**e have three blackcurrant bushes, two redcurrant bushes, and three gooseberry bushes (for jam and Eton Mess). We also have three blueberries, in pots, and a patch of raspberries (which keep escaping). You may not be able to fit so many plants in, but blueberries, raspberries, gooseberries, blackcurrants and redcurrants, with strawberries, are great for making jam, one bush each. We freeze the berries and make jam in the autumn and winter, when the kitchen smells lovely, and it is not so hot for jam-making. (We have a lot of space).

It's a good idea to lay a little compost under fruit bushes, or pile on some blood, fish and bone.

About blackcurrants, you prune them from the ground up, when 'stooling' occurs, and you get branches from the roots. Blackcurrants grow most fruit from one-year old wood, so make sure you keep it. Redcurrants and gooseberries you prune, basically to keep them within bounds, so you keep the side-shoots, but shorten them (and reduce the height if they are getting out of hand).

Blueberries are delicate, so cut out a few old stems a year. We grow autumn raspberries, so we cut them back in mid-February, but you can keep a few old stems, and you get summer raspberries.

Strawberries you grow from runners, and the best year is Year Two. We grow Cambridge Favourite, and they last from five to six years. It's a good idea to grow strawberries in pots in the polytunnel, for an early harvest – they produce earlier, last week in April.

What's lovely about having a big garden, is that you can go out there when the weather's nice, although we are getting rather old now to keep the garden going.

We rent the field to a neighbour, who gives us lamb. We need to cut back. I dug a bed last year, and I don't know that I can keep up with it -- it's full of weeds, so I may grass it down. Carole keeps up with the vegetables, although I weed the asparagus and seakale. I do the yard, so it's lovely for visitors. ■



Blackcurrant



Gooseberry 'Greenfinch'



Blueberry 'Patriot'

# Autumn Plan

# October

Deborah Ballard

Plan your vegetable rotation for next year, and order seeds in mid-winter.

## Vegetables

The plan now is to cut back the vegetables (not in the polytunnel) and ladle on the compost.

This is to save the tomatoes, lettuce, spinach, sweetcorn, cucumbers and squash, which will be getting lots of sun in the polytunnel.

## Flowers

Early flowers need to be cut back now; late flowers not, Michaelmas daisies, crocosmia, and late-flowering salvias.

## Mulch

Grass from the lawn, hedge-clippings cut fine, straw, hay, compost, bark – the compost is very scarce now. Cut vegetables as a mulch, or pile on garden waste.

- Weed and cover your vegetable beds.
- Sow tomatoes, chillis and peppers in late January.
- Enjoy your little bulbs and blossom.
- Netted iris are always the first, followed by winter aconites and snowdrops, followed by Tete a Tete daffodils.
- Plums are the first to bloom, followed by cherries and then apples.
- A late frost will reduce magnolia blossoms to brown rags, but they will come back.



# Bellefield Volunteers

## A year in the garden

Mary Hackett

**W**e came together in late November last year, perfect timing to see the new RHSI garden at Bellefield through a full season.

That first day we started with coffee and goodies and a chat from Paul on the jobs planned. Our first task was to tidy up the site, clear paths, edge grass. We spent a wonderful, cold morning spreading a lorry load of wood chip on the woodland path. We planted hundreds of spring bulbs and violas in containers around the garden entrance, a cheerful sight for months ahead.

In February we weeded meadowsweet out of the front border, carefully tiptoeing around cyclamen, snowdrops, iris, and aconites in full

Bellefield volunteers



K. Prince Igor towering over the garden



# Profiling Kniphofia

bloom. March's highlights included picking buckets of daffodils for Mabel, our 100-year-old neighbour who still fundraises for the Irish Cancer Society. In April, we learned how to divide snowdrops and replanted thousands of them in the front lawn.

We worked on the borders through the summer, constantly delighted by the vigorous plants that popped up from one week to the next. Walking through the walled garden with Paul, learning plant names, and about optimal growing conditions has become a regular part of our volunteer gardening day.

This winter there are plans for border renovations, new paths and new vegetable and cut flower areas to be created in the walled garden.

**“In April, we learned how to divide snowdrops and replanted thousands of them in the front lawn”**

Volunteering at Bellefield has been a joy and an inspiration. If you would like to join us, please get in touch our email is bellefield@rhsi.ie. We garden on Wednesdays starting about 10am. Bellefield is just outside Shinrone, Co Offaly. ■

Peter and Nicola Milligan

The kniphofia is another welcome visitor to our gardens. Originating in South Africa, kniphofia can be found in all nine provinces of that country with a broad range of species and cultivars available to us.

The kniphofia provide both height, form - beautiful strap-like leaves, and colour to our herbaceous beds and borders and have been incorporated by many people into their garden designs. Here in Co. Down we have planted them in sunny, well-drained locations and, to date, have not experienced any winter losses to either the cold or damp.

Depending on the final height cultivars can be selected to take middle or back positions in a traditional long border or can occupy central places



K. Bressingham Comet



K. Prince Igor

in circular beds where their height provides a focus that draws the eye from the edge of the bed towards the central feature.

Over the years we have grown some twenty cultivars including many raised by the late Alan Bloom – a well-known plantsman and owner of the Bressingham Gardens and Nursery in Norfolk and the first gardener to suggest the use of ‘island beds’ – beds constructed to be free-standing in the garden and not backed by a hedge or wall as was, and is, the case with traditional borders.

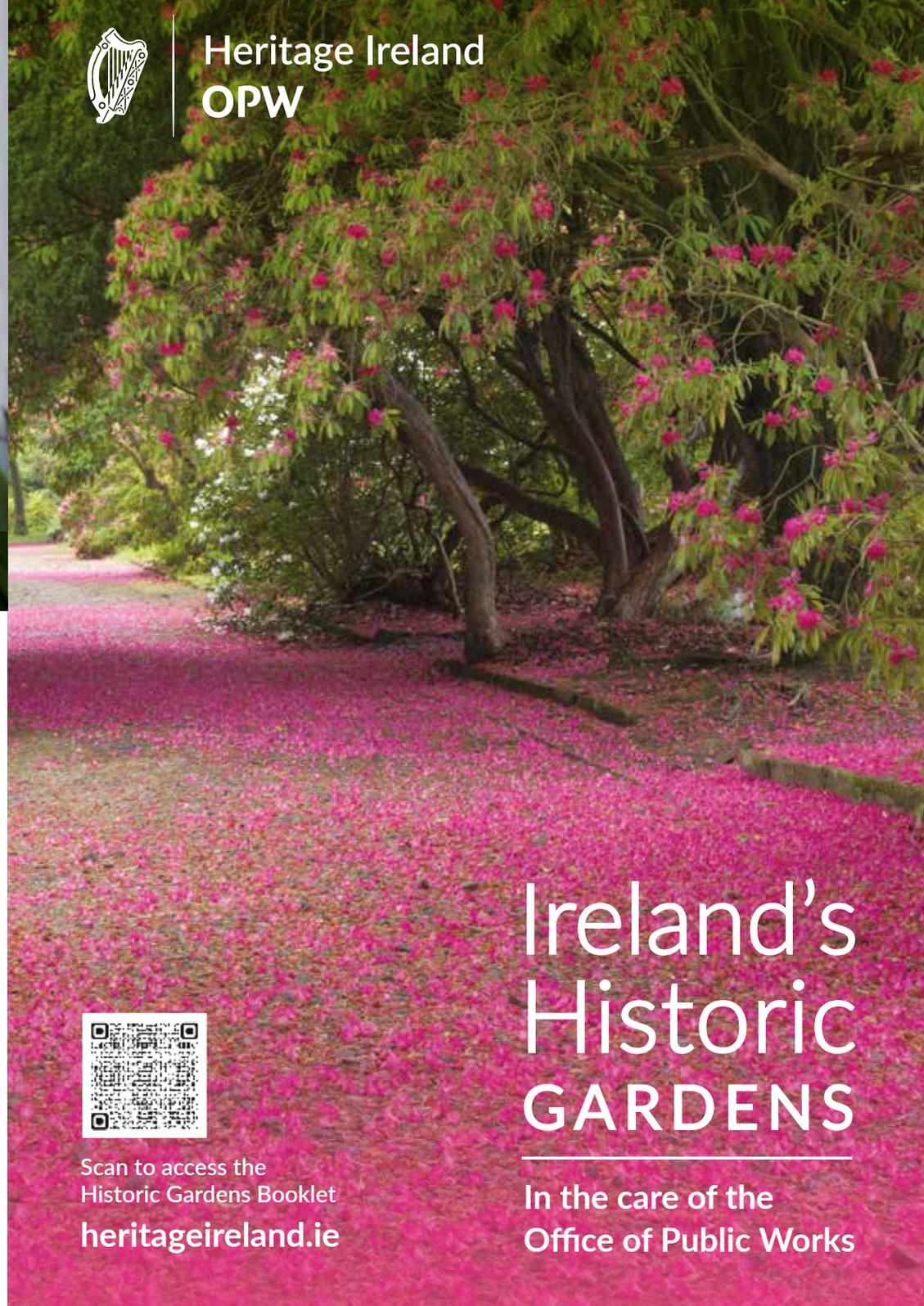
Among the cultivars we have grown are K. ‘Bressingham Comet’ a fine yellow, K. ‘Bressingham Gleam’ a beautiful salmon colour, K. ‘Brimstone’ a fine reddish-orange, K. ‘Timothy’ – a soft apricot, and K. ‘Prince Igor’.

Now K. ‘Prince Igor’ is well worth a special mention and should be sought and bought for the impact it will have in any garden. The old photograph shows *The Prince* towering over other plants in one of the beds in front of Bressingham Hall. The newer photograph shows the plants in flower in the bed outside our sitting room window. The height is superb and eye catching. When Nigel Marshall, then Head Gardener at Mount Stewart, saw this plant in flower he asked us for divisions for his garden – a real recommendation in anyone’s terms.

If there is a complaint against kniphofia it is the tendency of the individual flowers at the bottom of the spike to finish before the flowers towards the top have opened but this is a minor sin in an otherwise great plant to add to our gardens. ■



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