



The Journal

Autumn/Winter 2024

Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland
Cumann Ríoga Gairneoireach na hÉireann

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"Stories from the Gardens" is an exciting new exhibition launching this Autumn 2024.

This project affords us a unique opportunity to look at the Gardens' social history and cultural heritage from the perspective of our visitors. The main aim is to highlight the rich cultural heritage that a site like the gardens builds up over time, reflecting the incredible transformation the country has undergone in the same period and demonstrating the gardens importance to its visitors locally, regionally, nationally, and beyond.

More information about the project Stories from the Gardens, and information on how to submit your story is available on our website "botanicgardens.ie".



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Note From The Chair



Our thanks are due to Peter Milligan and the editorial team of The Journal for their work in bringing us another super publication filled with news of the RHSI and a choice of articles to entertain and inform us during these darker months.

We've recently had the RHSI AGM and, apart from the procedural necessities of the meeting, it was an opportunity for an overview of the activities of the society. Trips and tours, Zoom talks, Partner Gardens, our own gardens at Laurelmere, Russborough and Bellefield, Bulletins, Journals and Plant Sales showing a society which is active in a wide range of horticultural areas. All of these activities are well supported by growing numbers of members from an ever wider geographical base across the island and beyond. Casual feedback in chat with members indicates that folk really enjoy being part of the RHSI and appreciate the membership benefits it brings. This is gratifying news indeed for those who work so hard to make things happen – our sincere thanks, as always, to all active volunteers, you're a great bunch of people!



The RHSI is not alone in experiencing increased interest and activity, it's happening right across the gardening world, prompted by many factors. Amongst them is an increased awareness of the physical, mental and spiritual benefits of gardening and growing interest in the positive effects which gardens can have on environment and ecology. The key aim of our society is to foster the art and love of gardening in all its forms. Let's do just that, encourage even more people to garden, to appreciate gardens, to join the RHSI and to become part of a community of gardeners. It's good for the individual, for society and for the planet.

Happy Gardening.
Philip
Chair, RHSI



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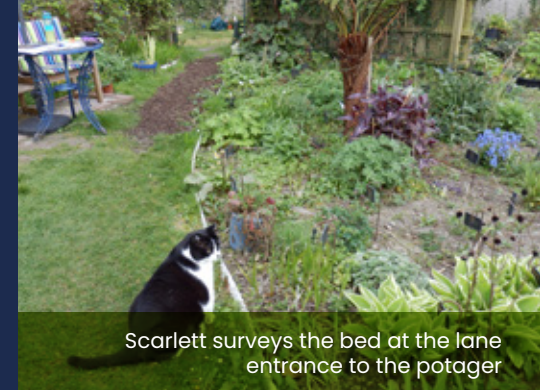
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Note From The Editor



Once again, the gardening 'clock' has ticked and we find ourselves in autumn with winter and Christmas looming large on the not-so-distant horizon. I wonder if I am the only one who thinks that the days, weeks, months, and years seem to be rushing past more swiftly that they did when I was considerably younger. Age brought retirement (many years ago now) and with it the ability to sit back and enjoy the garden in its various seasons – an opportunity to take life at a slower and gentler pace. At the moment the early autumn is bringing many seasonal bulbs into flower and the trees and shrubs have put on their crimson, yellow and gold finery and while the swifts and swallows have departed to warmer shores there are still plenty of local birds to enjoy as I sit on the patio with my morning coffee.

Once again, we continue to follow our aims of providing as wide a range of articles as possible. In this issue we offer a look at the production of primulas and auriculas, an insight into the wonders of the botany of Uganda, helpful guidance for the productive garden in winter, updates on the on-going work at Laurelmere and Russborough, and a wonderful look at the life of a well-known daffodil breeder and exhibitor and much more.



Scarlett surveys the bed at the lane entrance to the potager

It is with sadness that we learned of the death of Dr E Charles Nelson in May of this year. Dr Nelson was an outstanding figure in Irish horticulture with a wealth of publications both papers and books. I thank Mary Davies for providing a thoughtful memoir of this great Irish horticulturist.

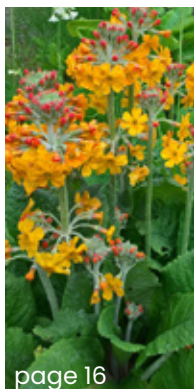
This issue, as with all issues of the journal, is a team effort and once again Mary, Noreen, Peggy, Orlaith and Astrid have worked with their usual determination and efficiency to provide another fine read for the autumn and winter.

In closing I have to say that I look forward to the Christmas season – an opportunity to sit by the fire with a warming beverage and to enjoy the various seed catalogues that have already started to drop through the letterbox. These, together with some favourite books – and hopefully a few new books for Christmas – will provide pleasure when the weather may delay work in the garden.

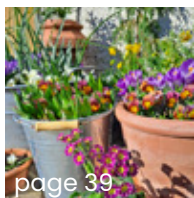
As always, I wish you good luck and good gardening – with my best wishes,
Peter
Editor, RHSI, *The Journal*



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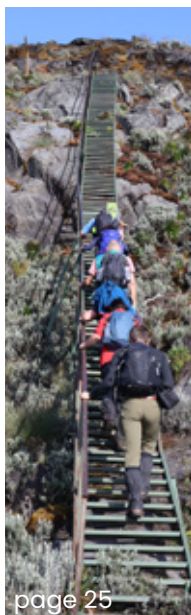
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The Journal

Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland
Cumann Ríoga Gairneoireach na hÉireann

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A Memoir of Dr E. Charles Nelson

Mary Davies

Photo © Dr Susan Nelson

Charles Nelson's sudden death in Greece in May 2024 aged 72 sent shock waves through the Irish gardening and horticultural communities. Born in Belfast in 1951, Charles arrived in Dublin in the late 1970s as taxonomist in the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, beginning his distinguished academic career, much of it involving Ireland, that was to span more than forty years.

Charles's connection with the RHSI seems to have been immediate: in 1978 he had already written on the Society's origins and early history in the British journal *Garden History*. The RHSI was preparing to celebrate its first 150-plus years in 1980 and Charles joined the Gardens' Director, Aidan

Brady, in editing the pioneering *Irish Gardening and Horticulture*, published in 1979 to mark the occasion. The wide-ranging articles included Charles's own contribution, 'Ireland's flora: its origins and composition'.

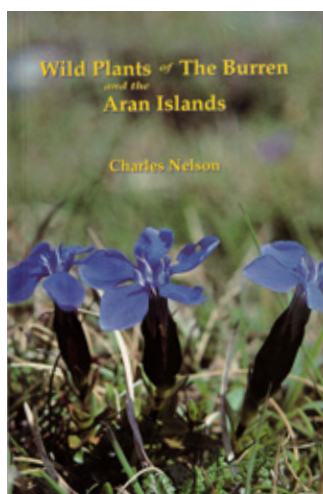
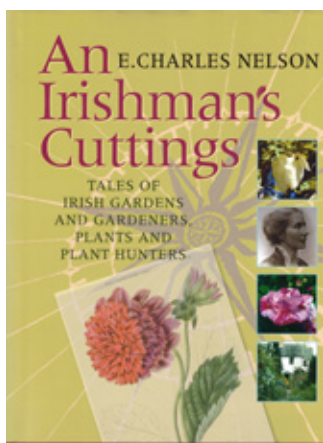
Charles and I knew each other only slightly then, but he asked me to write an introductory chapter on Irish climate and soils, a commission that was to change my life. It occurred to me that as a contributor I should join the RHSI: doing so began a lengthy involvement in Irish gardening and garden publishing. I was to repay Charles in a small way a decade later when he became one of the first contributors recruited to *The Irish Garden* magazine.

The direction his Irish work would take was clearly signposted not long after the RHSI's book appeared, when he published *An Irish Flower Garden*

(1984; expanded edition 1997). This was one marker in the early stages of Charles's long and fruitful collaboration with Wendy Walsh, the doyenne of botanical artists in Ireland. When the book was launched Charles organized an exhibition of Wendy's illustrations, and one of these Chinese ink paintings has hung on my wall ever since — a happy reminder of the start of their collaboration.

This warm rapport between author and artist was responsible for the handsome *An Irish Florilegium* (1983) and *An Irish Florilegium II* (1987), two large-format, beautiful volumes much sought after by collectors. Two more major works by Charles followed — *The Brightest Jewel*, a history of the National Botanic Gardens written with northern botanist and historian Eileen M. McCracken (1987) and the encyclopedic *A Heritage of Beauty: The Garden Plants of Ireland* (2000).

Photo courtesy RTE Archive



The latter was published by the Irish Garden Plant Society, which Charles had been instrumental in founding. Other substantial books were to appear over the years, as well as numerous articles in scholarly journals.

Another of Charles's undertakings in the 1980s, which RHSI members may remember fondly, was the RTÉ television series 'A Growing Obsession', which he hosted in 1987–9, showcasing gardens with unusual or exotic plants. Charles interviewed memorable gardeners across Ireland including plantsman David Shackleton, old-rose enthusiast Rosemary Brown and head gardener Mike Snowden. The very first in the series, shown in November 1987, featured a youthful Helen Dillon in her then developing Ranelagh Garden. Exploring the traces of these programmes today in the RTÉ Archives is a nostalgic experience.

Soon afterwards Charles began his many years of writing 'Plant History' in *The Irish Garden* magazine. When Gerry Daly and I started the magazine in 1992, Charles became a regular contributor. Pieces on Irish plant history, horticulturists, plant hunters and botanical artists materialized from his ever-inquisitive mind. He discussed articles well ahead and supplied the illustrations and text on time – a model contributor. He subsequently published forty of these articles as *An Irishman's Cuttings: Tales of Irish Gardens and Gardeners, Plants and Plant Hunters* (2009). Another forty or so also deserve reprinting, but without his personal involvement this is unlikely to happen.

After twenty years in Dublin, Charles moved to Norfolk when he

married Sue: the second half of his working life therefore had a somewhat different focus, although he remained committed to the Irish plant world. In 2016 he was involved in a second RHSI commemoration. As part of its bicentenary celebrations, the Society awarded Charles its Medal of Honour, one of many recognitions of his scholarship received during his lifetime. Moreover, it was Charles who in that October delivered a lecture in the RDS on the history of the RHSI. When the talk ended, a distinctive figure was hovering next to a large pile of books: the late Garech Browne of Luggala, an avid book collector, had brought along Charles's publications to be signed – and there were a great many of them.

“Charles was celebrated for his work on heathers and he wrote the award-winning *Hardy Heathers from the Northern Hemisphere*”

During his time in Dublin, the walls of Charles's house in Phibsborough were hung with Wendy Walsh watercolours, and these accompanied him to Norfolk.

He had a large collection, some of which the eagle-eyed may have seen on sale in a Dublin auction room last year when he downsized after Sue's death. He was also a keen plant photographer, able to call on his own images for publication, and he took pleasure in growing unusual plants. He and Sue had a base in Lanzarote for some years, and subsequently a second home in the Norfolk village of Burnham Thorpe (where his famous namesake Admiral Nelson was born). He enjoyed restoring the well there at 'Well Cottage', and lately he was starting a new garden in Lincolnshire.

The lighter side of Charles's personality came out in his choice of a house name and email address; affection for the Venus flytrap led him to use 'tippitiwitchet' in both – a spelling nightmare. A fan of the cartoonist Martin Turner, he compiled *The Irish Gardener's Three Year Diary* (1985), a mix of short articles and cartoons.

On the serious side, Charles was celebrated for his work on heathers and he wrote the award-winning *Hardy Heathers from the Northern Hemisphere*. Mediterranean landscapes and their floras were another passion, as was The Burren. Generous with his considerable knowledge, he was always willing to pursue an elusive fact: at the same time, he could be impatient, even harsh, faced with inaccuracy.

Charles, your scholarship and friendship are much missed; the loss will be felt by gardeners and horticulturists, as well as botanists, here and abroad, for many years to come. ■

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Duncan_N. Great Try



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**Time catches up with
Brian Duncan's world-
famous daffodil
hybridisation enterprise
in Omagh, Co Tyrone**

Challenged, enthused, intrigued. It says a lot about Brian Duncan that, having celebrated his ninetieth birthday in February 2024, when we sat down to talk about his long love affair with daffodils, this was still how he felt about the narcissus. After sixty odd years, his Omagh-based hybridisation venture is in the final stages of downsizing. By this time next year, the growing field will be gone and the polytunnel stock dug up. The best bulbs are going to other growers, to friends and to international collections. Brian and Betty Duncan are stoic. "We've had a great life with daffodils", Brian said. "We travelled widely and made friends all over the world". When houses cover that field outside Omagh, an important link in the story of Irish plant breeding will be complete.



Duncan_N. Cherry Glow



Duncan_N. Jammin



Duncan_N. Burt House

Ireland's tradition of daffodil hybridization is widely acknowledged in the world of international horticulture. Writing for the Irish Times in April 2016, Fionnuala Fallon pointed out how many Irish growers and breeders have introduced admired daffodils to cultivation. Guy Wilson, Brian Duncan, Frank Harrison, Willy Dunlop, Lionel and Helen Richardson, Josslyn Gore-Booth, Fanny Curry, Tom Bloomer, Kate Reade and Alice Lawrenson were all Irish breeders. Cultivar names like 'Colleen Bawn', 'Irish Splendour', 'Eire Gem' and 'Ulster Star' are listed in specialist collections. Mrs Helen Richardson of Waterford was the source of 'Rose Royale', parent of Brian's first registered daffodil 'Première'. A long list of prize-winning Brian Duncan hybrids followed, right up to an unnamed miniature seedling, awarded Best Miniature at RHS Wisley Show in April 2024.

The Duncans have received every daffodil award available. The apex was perhaps the RHS Victoria Medal of Honor awarded to Brian in 2022. He had already been given the RHS Gold Veitch medal in 2001 and an MBE in

2000. The National Daffodil Society of New Zealand gave him their David Bell Gold Medal and the American Daffodil Society (ADS) the Gold Medal for 'creative work of a pre-eminent nature' which is their highest award. In 2008 the Royal General Bulb Growers of Holland gave him the Dix Medal. He has won the RHS's top daffodil award, the Engleheart Cup, no less than twenty-six times. The ADS Gold Medal for Innovation and the RHS Ralph B. White Memorial Medal for 'best new daffodil cultivar' also came his way. Twenty-one cultivars raised



Duncan_N. Dena

by Brian received RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM). The showing tradition once so important in the UK is less active now, but Brian's daffodils triumphed wherever they were exhibited from the late 1960ies to the early years of this century.

What goes into breeding a show daffodil? Time is the first requirement. It takes five years from hybridisation to get a first flower. Crossing is not a random process. "The perfect daffodil has not yet been raised, but by crossing the near perfect of today we can hope to set new standards of perfection for the future", says Brian.

Improvements can be minute, but over years of crosses they can amount to big changes. The pleasure lies in anticipation. Brian might select a taller, longer or stronger stem, a more regular or more beautifully formed flower, perhaps a new colour or greater purity of colour. For years he aimed to achieve a greater depth of pink.

After seeing narcissus species in their native habitats in Spain, Brian realised how many species had not yet been used in breeding. Much of his later work focussed on miniatures. Brian Duncan cultivars are selected for their ability to produce consistent flowers of

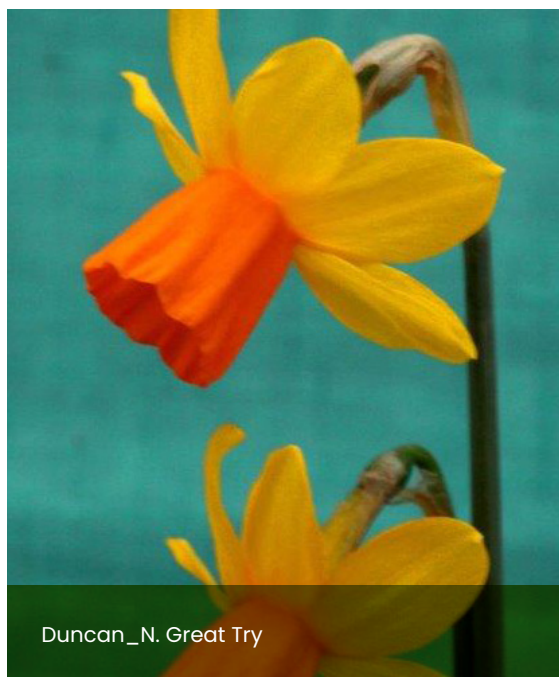
exhibition quality but also for retaining some of the beauty and informality of their wild forebears. As he closes his seedling beds and disperses his collections, Brian is acutely conscious of how much work there is yet to do. His parting counsel; don't try to do too much, pick specific targets, work within your capacity and capability. Not necessarily advice he always took himself.

Asking Brian about a favourite daffodil is to ask the wrong question. 'Burt House' showed well as a white pink, 'Jammin' as a Division Three white and yellow. 'Lilac Charm' registered in 1973 remains very popular. Miniature 'Great Try' won that Ralph B. White Medal in 2017. 'Dorchester' is excellent as a show flower but a poor plant. 'Dena', a sibling of 'Cherry Glow', showcased Brian's work on breeding deep colours. Hundreds of cultivars have been registered, exhibited, lauded and superseded. There is no 'best', just a proud list of excellence. "All any of us can do", Brian says "is provide stepping stones to the future". ■

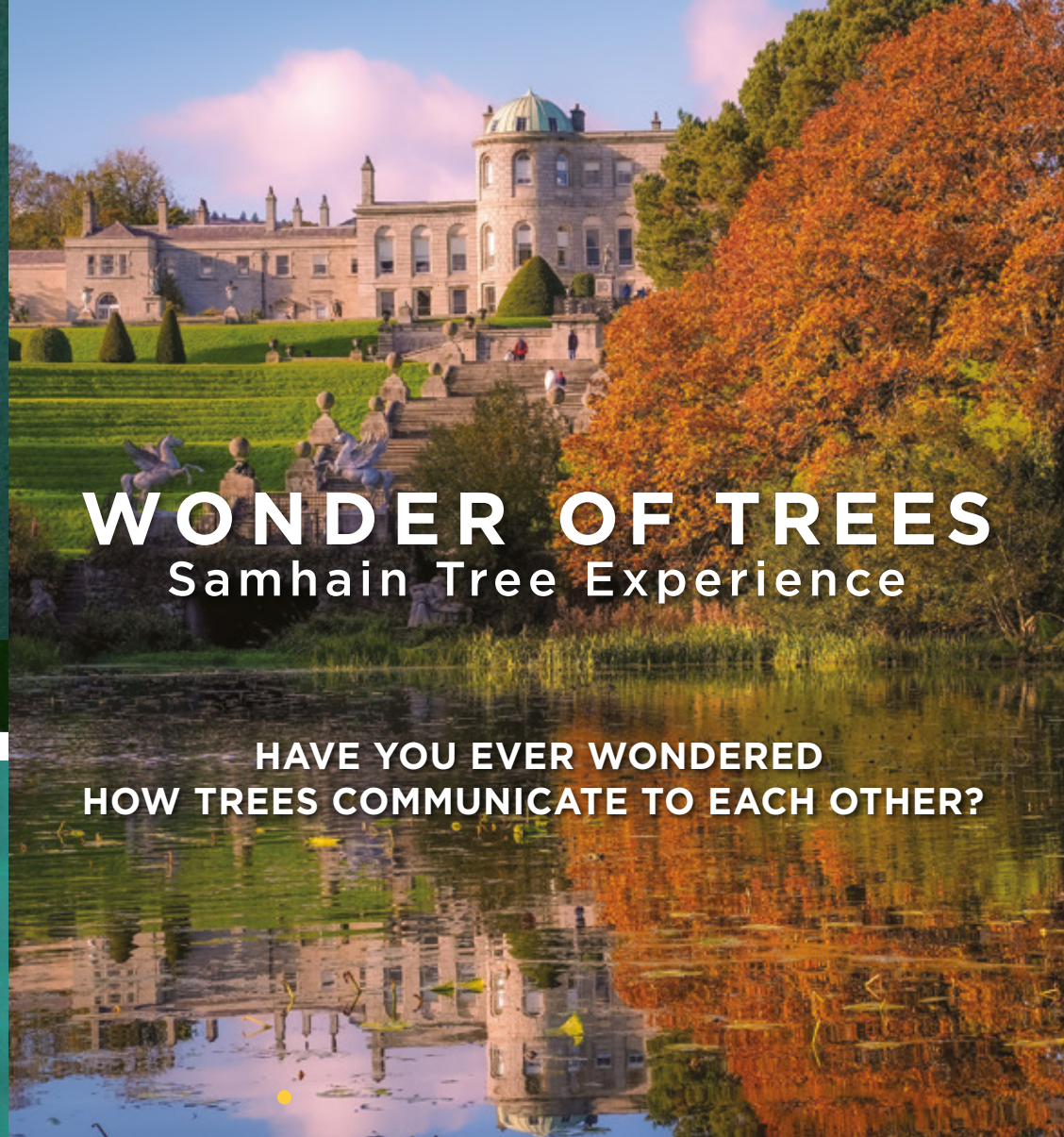
RHSI members interested in specialist daffodil cultivars should watch out for the Alpine Garden Society Shows and Irish Garden Plant Society (IGPS) plant fairs. Wonderful daffodil displays can be seen in many RHSI Partner gardens including Altamont, Co Carlow. The National Botanic Gardens in Dublin, Belfast's Botanic Gardens and RHSI Bellefield all grow a wide range of daffodil varieties. The Guy Wilson Daffodil Garden is on the campus of University of Ulster, Coleraine. The RHS Daffodil Show at Wisley is scheduled for 9-10 April 2025.



Duncan_N. Dorchester



Duncan_N. Great Try



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Primula bulleyana, a striking candelabra for early summer

A Life With Primulas

Philip Bankhead, Proprietor of Peninsula Primulas

Let there be light! That was a brilliant idea, though I say it myself. It was a lightbulb moment when after numerous failed attempts to grow primulas from seed I decided to sow seed on the compost surface and leave uncovered. Eureka! germination was prompt and abundant. This was over 40 years ago, and I have never looked back. I had 'discovered' that primula seeds require light for germination. I will return to my tried and tested sowing technique later in this article.

An interest in primulas started for me even further back when in 1976 I tried to naturalise *Primula bulleyana* in a local woodland glen. I had collected seed in August and rushed to the location which had dappled light, damp soil and


a reasonable opening in the coppiced hazel. I scattered the seed all over the area and waited. Two years later in June I returned to find small groups of my introduction doing quite well. Success! This launched a personal journey and lifetime love of this wonderful genus.

To me, primulas have it all. They jostle for position in popularity with such great garden classics as rhododendrons, camellias and even roses. The diversity of species and cultivars is immense. Everyone knows the primrose, cowslip and the multi-coloured polyanthus used as bedding, but this is only scratching the surface. There are over 450 species and many thousands of cultivars. *Primula auricula* alone has over 4000 cultivars, which

have been bred over centuries by enthusiasts. Auriculas are testament to human intervention within the natural world and what can be achieved.

Primulas produce burgeoning fresh verdant growth just before presenting their joyous springtime flowers. A most welcoming plant indeed and just at the right time of year when we all need cheering up! *Primula vulgaris*, our native primrose, is often the first garden plant to show.

It is possible to have a primula of some sort in flower at almost any time of year, albeit an out of season bloom. I think of *Primula poissonii*, an evergreen candelabra which flowers in late spring but often gives a surprise with a late



Primula auricula 'Yorkshire Grey', a grey edged show auricula



Primula secundiflora, is an unscented bell-flowered species

flowering flush during a mild November and December.

Primulas have many attributes; a vast colour range, huge variety of form and an ability to thrive in many different garden environments.

Some such as *Primula florindae*, the giant Himalayan cowslip, are delightfully scented. This is a summer flowering species, an extremely worthy garden plant. Given ideal conditions of a nutrient rich, constantly moist soil, it will produce huge clumps with 100 cm tall flower stems carrying hundreds of bright yellow flowers. It does best in good light, but dappled light will do. Other scented gems are *Primula alpicola* var *luna* and *P. sikkimensis*. These are examples of the bell-flowered group of Primulas.

Candelabra Primulas include some of the most desirable garden plants and are as popular today as they were when introduced from China and the Himalayan region over 100 years ago. They are clump forming perennials with unassuming leaves, but the floral display takes your breath

away. Flowering stems range from 60 to 100 cm tall and carry whorls or tiers of salver shaped flowers. Over several weeks, layer upon layer of flowers open to reveal their colour and form. They are truly magnificent. There are so many places in the garden where they will thrive. Damp, moist or even boggy ground with dappled light around ponds, stream sides and damp woodland are perfect. Recommended species include *P. bulleyana* (orange), *japonica* (white through pink to purple), *prolifera* (yellow) and the multicolours of *Primula x bulleesiana*.

The primula genus has many great woodlanders. The ideal woodland conditions include a cool, moist root run, lack of competition from surface rooting trees and a deep rotted leaf or organic layer into which the primulas can extend their root systems. Dappled light is ideal, but many will thrive where they can receive shafts of light coming through the tree canopy. Soil conditions must never become dry.

All Primulas can be grown in pots and positioned exactly where they will be happy. A cool spot, with sun in the

morning and shade in the afternoon is perfect.

All primula species can be raised from seed. Seed should be viable and true to type. Good seed can be obtained through reputable commercial suppliers and the various specialist societies.

Green seed can be sown immediately it is available from home collected seed. Most plants will produce seed from July to late summer.

I prefer to save seed and sow in early February. This way, I can produce a large plant before the onset of autumn. Seed should be stored dry, clean and cold. The domestic refrigerator is perfect for this. I store the seed packets in air-tight containers.

The technique is simple and there is no need for sophisticated equipment such as a heated propagator. A good quality multipurpose compost, clean dry horticultural grit, some form of container and a cold place for germination is all that is required. A cold greenhouse or covered frame is a luxury but anywhere which is not rained on will suffice. The temperature is critical during the germination process and should not rise above 10o Celsius. Too much heat and the seeds will be forced into dormancy and will not germinate.

Pots should be filled with compost, lightly firmed and given a covering of dry clean horticultural grit. This is the finished surface upon which the seed is sown. The dry grit is important as in this state it enables the seeds to fall between the particles and nestle in a perfect place. Moisture will collect



Primula japonica Postford White, an early spring candelabra

and the seeds can receive life giving sunlight so necessary for primulas.

Watering should be applied as an overhead mist 2 to 4 times a day to ensure the surface never dries out. No covering of any sort is required. Within 10 to 12 weeks the seedlings can be treated like any other plant. I prick out individual seedlings into plug trays to grow on before potting into a finishing pot. Plants are ready for planting late July into August giving them a great chance of establishing before the onset of winter.

So, what was the outcome of my wild sowing all those years ago of *Primula bulleyana*? I returned many years later to my childhood woodland glen and not a single plant could be seen! Not a failure but a reminder that primulas are not invasive, they need assistance, even nurturing. They will not out-compete other vegetation but with care and attention will give huge delight over many years. They have for me. ■

Mr Bankhead is the proprietor of Peninsula Primulas – the nursery is based in Co Down on the Ards peninsula.

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Irises in raised bed, Tourin

Iris Wisdom

The care and management of irises

Mary Hackett

In the Spring 2024 Journal we carried a piece by Paul Smyth, Head Gardener at RHSI Bellefield about digging out, dividing and replanting the Bellefield iris bed. We promised to come back to this topic and are indebted to Tara Jameson of Tourin Estate, Waterford, an RHSI Partner Garden, for her practical insights and advice.

the decision to dig up the Tourin iris bed, and offer select divisions to friends. Any bearded irises remaining at Tourin are in the herbaceous borders, of which more below.

The Site

At Tourin, the first iris bed was established in the footprint of an old greenhouse thereby meeting several absolute requirements for bearded irises: sunshine for at least two thirds of the day, excellent drainage and if possible, a raised bed. However, when the collection was dispersed and the raised bed no longer in use, Tara has found that the last of her bearded iris are thriving in the herbaceous border with no special feeding or drainage.

Tara's bed of multicoloured bearded irises was one of the glories of Tourin House garden for many years. Unfortunately, her collection is now dispersed. To grow irises well is a lot of work, as Tara explained to me. A neglected iris bed rapidly becomes the tangled mat Paul was addressing in Bellefield. Rather than allow this to happen with her collection, Tara took



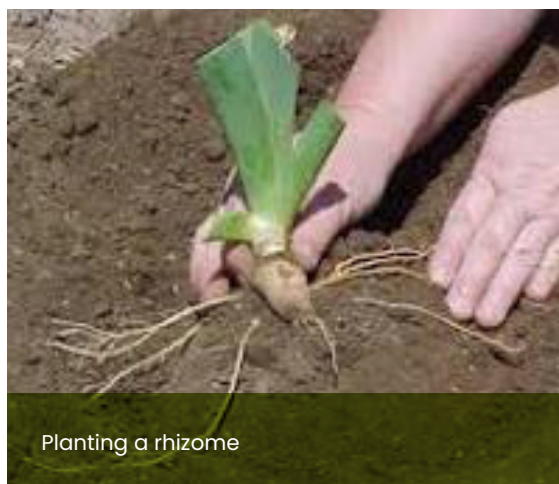
Named iris as obtained from Tara Jameson/Tourin

Selection

As always, grow what you like best. Tara Jameson's favourite irises included 'White City' from Olive Murrell. 'Quaker Lady' introduced in 1909 she says is 'absolutely gorgeous'. Two irises bred by AJ Bliss 'Mrs Valerie West' and 'Pioneer' did well at Tourin. 'Ambassador' was a favourite late flowerer. Many of the Tourin heritage irises came from Cayeux in France and Claire Austin was another source of good stock.

Planting

Planting needs to be done in the July-October window so that the plants are well established before winter. Tara described creating a little 'horse' in the planting area, a small ridge on which to place the iris rhizome to assist in drainage and to ensure that roots are facing downwards, into the soil. Never plant too deeply. The top of the rhizome should be exposed. Don't crowd iris. Tara planted hers about 30-40 cm apart.



Planting a rhizome

Maintenance

Newly set bearded iris need watering to help their root system become established. Once established, it is better to under water than to over water plants. The Jameson irises were fed bonemeal twice a year, in early spring and again in autumn. But, and this is an important point emphasised by Tara, do not feed an iris bed with a fertilizer high in nitrogen. It encourages rot problems.



The Iris Bed at Tourin

Disease

An iris bed must be kept clear of weeds and of decaying foliage to prevent disease. Cut dying stalks back to the ground and remove brown or rotting leaves. The Tourin irises had black spot and spraying was important. Root rot was also a challenge. This can be addressed by scraping out the mushy tissue with a spoon and then disinfecting with 10% bleach solution. It fizzes just like sherbet, says Tara!



Iris Root Rot

Division

Clumps should be divided every 3-5 years. They expand rapidly and if not split regularly will end up as a mat of choking rhizomes which compresses the ground. As this aspect of iris growing was covered extensively by Paul in his previous article, we will just restate the basics:

1. Dig up the entire clump.
2. Discard old/rotten rhizomes.
3. Choose healthiest young rhizomes.
4. Cut back leaves to 15cm 'fan' shape.
5. Replant on a slightly raised ridge, add a little bonemeal and water.



A replanted rhizome

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Group on Rwenzoris Hunswick camp
to Kharo camp

To Uganda's Mountains of the Moon

Seamus O'Brien

Having climbed the lofty peaks of Mount Kenya in January 2023 it was an exciting prospect to visit north-west Uganda in January 2024 to continue our exploration of the mountains of Equatorial East Africa and their peculiar flora. Our destination was the Rwenzoris, the famous Mountains of the Moon, a lofty range (5108 m) skirting the border of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the ancient world people spoke of a legendary range of peaks in East Africa, the Mountains of the Moon, that rose spectacularly at the source of the River Nile. In the 19th century the Rwenzoris were speculated to be the same mountain range since the peaks fed the White (or Victoria) Nile, one of the two main tributaries of the Nile.

We were once again on the trail of botanist Major Patrick Millington Syngé (1910-1982) who travelled to the Rwenzoris in 1934 on a collecting expedition for the British Museum (Natural History) and later wrote a book

Mountains of the Moon, an account of his expedition and the plants he met. His writings brought to attention the astounding flora of the region, particularly the giant lobelias and giant groundsels (*Dendrosenecio*), many of which are endemic to just a single mountain in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Syngé was fascinated by gigantism, a biological phenomenon which occurred frequently among plants on mountain slopes that straddle the Equator, lobelias soaring skywards on 10 m tall stems, lofty heather trees to 15 m overhead and giant groundsels forming forests in alpine canyons.

Our journey began at the city of Entebbe on the shores of Lake Victoria, the world's largest tropical lake. It was mango season and roadside stalls were piled high with these and other exotic fruits. Our route took us north-west, past vast swamps of towering papyrus and tea plantations. From time-to-time families of baboons crept out from the surrounding jungles, as we drove past



Dendrosenecio adnivalis

patchwork-like plantings of tapioca, avocado, bananas, papayas, cotton, taro and jack fruit. That evening we reached Fort Portal, the gateway to the Rwenzoris, from where we caught our first glimpse of the Mountains of the Moon.

Coffee and cassava were widely planted on the foothills rising above the city, people here are the Bakonzo, a Bantu ethnic group, and such is the poverty of the region that farmers cannot afford to drink the very coffee they produce. There is a sharp divide between the lands that are cultivated by the Bakonzo and the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, a UNESCO world heritage site, one of the most unspoilt landscapes in all of Africa.

Interesting plants appeared from the very beginning. Around basecamp the forests were lit up by trees of *Erythrina abyssinica*, the African coral



Ensete ventricosum above Fort Portal

tree, whose crowns were enveloped in fiery-red blossoms. Elder flower was not something I had expected to encounter in deepest darkest Africa, but there it was, *Sambucus africana*, not looking terribly different to our native Irish elderflower, but we were in search of far more exotic blossoms and so continued on our way.

Immediately on entering the National Park we crossed into a verdant jungle of rich tropical rainforest and surprisingly many of the plants were familiar including the false or Abyssinian banana, *Ensete ventricosum*, of which the purple-red foliaged form *Ensete ventricosum* 'Maurelii' is a popular plant in summer bedding schemes in Britain and Ireland. Close by, the aptly-named *Gloriosa superba* scrambled through surrounding thickets of rosy-pink flowered *Acanthus pubescens*, festooning the trackside with its spectacular yellow and scarlet blossoms.

The surrounding jungle vegetation was lush and exotic. Through the trees grew flowering plants of the African pepper, *Piper capense* and rampant vines of the white-blossomed *Begonia meyeri-johannis* (the fleshy petals of this species are edible though sour-tasting). The most spectacular of all these climbers however had to be *Thunbergianthus ruwenzoriensis*, a vigorous vine we met on the banks of a mountain torrent. There it festooned trees on the edge of the river and was absolutely bedecked with pendant inflorescences carrying foxglove-like blossoms which were rose-mauve on emergence, later fading to pink. If ever introduced it would make a wonderful addition to large heated conservatories.



Begonia meyeri-johannis above Fort Portal

Orchids abounded, the most spectacular of which was *Calanthe sylvatica*, a species widely spread over tropical Africa and along our route it carpeted the forest floor by streams, bearing spikes of large lilac blossoms above bold pleated foliage. The track we followed was painted white by the fallen scented blossoms of *Tabernaemontana stapfiana*, a particularly handsome tree with very striking magnolia-like foliage and enormous rounded fruits in season. Its range extends from Uganda to Mozambique and it became a firm favourite with our group on account of its beautiful foliage and sweetly-scented flowers.

Kigelia africana, the sausage tree, is one of tropical Africa's most



Porters Kharo camp to Forest View camp



Alchemilla argyrophylla



Papyrus on roads from Entebbe to Fort Portal

remarkable trees and from its canopy were suspended innumerable pendant sausage-like fruits which are eaten by baboons, elephants, giraffes and porcupines. Below, on the forest floor we had our first encounter with the spectacular balsam, *Impatiens bombycina*, a spectacular perennial to 60 cm tall bearing dense fascicles of cherry red blossoms dusted with a covering of fine white hairs. It has recently reached cultivation and is worth seeking out as an exceptionally good glasshouse plant.

Our porters soon passed us by, carrying on their backs the many provisions we need while we trekked our way deeper and deeper into the mountains. They were a cheery bunch, both men and women, who add to their annual income by acting as porters for those who come to explore the Rwenzoris. We were also accompanied by several guides and a guard provided with a rifle to prevent attacks by big game or worse-still, by armed bandits known to visit the area.

Rising higher, to 2400 m, excitement rose when we encountered the first of the giant lobelias, *Lobelia giberroa*, in bloom and bearing gargantuan flowering spikes fully 9 m tall above a column of echium-like foliage. They



Lobelia wollastonii Rwenzoris between Mutinda and Bugata camps



Helichrysum bequaertii Hunswick camp

were abundant on the steep slopes, in places creating scenes reminiscent of an abandoned garden in Cornwall and Kerry.

Tree ferns, *Alsophila deckenii* (syn. *Cyathea deckenii*) continued this exotic theme, while overhead enormous Tarzan-like lianas scrambled through the trees. Having previously read Syngé's account of the flora of this mountain range, one of the scenes I was really looking forward to seeing



Helichrysum formosissimum Bugata camp

were the forests of tree heathers, another example of gigantism. Syngé wrote beautifully, bringing the armchair explorer with him, and wrote of entering heather forest that resembled the haunted woods of an old fairy tale:

... suddenly we emerged into a zone of tree heathers. Imagine a haunted wood composed of ordinary ling heather magnified fifty times; there were trees fifty feet high instead of bushes of one foot, twisted into

weird shapes and gnarled so that each resembled a drawing by Arthur Rackham. Out of each trunk glared a face, sometimes benign, more often wicked and bearded with streamers of lichens and mosses.

We entered the heather forest just as a massive storm blew in. Only the silhouette of these giant heathers (*Erica mannii*) stood out in the heavy mist and the giant streamers of lichen (*Usnea*) certainly gave the woods a haunted feeling. Travelling with Synge was Stuart Somerville (1908-1983), the expedition artist, who compared the long strands of lichen to the locks of hair depicted in a Botticelli painting. Having visited the Uffizi Gallery just months previously this statement resonated as we walked beneath those ancient tree heathers.

It was not for the Rwenzori heathers to form dwarf carpets like our native species, on these lofty African slopes they formed great trees, forests of heather whose stems and thick trunks were wreathed in filmy ferns. We were in dense cloud forests and soon thunder and lightning drove us into a shelter as torrential rain drove across verdant slopes. This wet, tropical climate has allowed a rich flora to evolve and on the forest floor were great thickets of the Rwenzori endemic *Scadoxus cyrtanthiflorus*, a daffodil relative then bearing densely-packed umbels of tubular orange-scarlet pendant blossoms over bold foliage.

Alongside the giant heathers, another dominant tree in this cloud forest was *Podocarpus milanjianus*, which in places formed pure forest. On the mossy forest floor was a carpet of its fallen fleshy fruits, a boom for the



Erica mannii Kharo camp to Forest View camp

many primates that live there. It was also exciting to stumble across the African rosewood, *Hagenia abyssinica*, though it was by no means as common as what we encountered on the subalpine slopes of Mount Kenya just a year previously.

Great thickets of *Rubus runssorensis* appeared on the scene. Another Rwenzori endemic, it is an incredibly handsome plant with ghostly silvery-



Lobelia bequaertii

white stems and striking pink-purple blossoms. With it grew great thickets of another endemic, *Mimulopsis elliotii*, a bushy shrub in the bear's breeches family (Acanthaceae) bearing cymes of tubular white blossoms, with creamy interiors and it was abundant on the mountains mid-forested slopes. Cobra lilies soon made an appearance in the guise of *Arisaema mildbraedii*, we had met the same species in tropical forests in Kenya a year previously, and it was exciting to see it yet again.

We soon emerged out of the heather forests into an area of extensive bogland. We were approaching the Congo and the Great Rift Valley, one of the wettest parts of Africa and



Lobelia stuhlmannii with *Lobelia wollastonii* in foreground

we were to trek across vast areas of Afromontane bogland in the coming days; an exhausting exercise. On this particular bog however we met one of the most bizarre and spectacular plants of the trip, *Lobelia bequaertii*, perhaps the most spectacular of all the giant lobelias from the mountains of Equatorial East Africa. Rising above an orange-green carpet of *Sphagnum* moss we stumbled across hundreds of *Agave*-like rosettes of densely packed lance-shaped leaves, dusted with silvery-white hairs, each leaf with a striking rose-purple midrib. Mountains of the Moon seemed like a very appropriate moniker for this piece of bogland, as far as the eye could see the landscape was dotted with these



Climbing rock face near Hunswick camp

spectacular rosettes and elsewhere plants were in bloom and had thrown up great columns of jade-green bracts in which were perched exquisite ink-blue blossoms.

We trekked higher still towards our Bugata camp (4062 m), where the giant heather forests petered out, they were replaced by giant groundsels and a remarkable St. John's Wort that formed forests in places. *Hypericum bequaertii* is known from both the Congo and Uganda side of the Rwenzoris and also occurs on Mount Elgon, a peak straddling the Kenya-Uganda border. We stood in awe of 12 m tall trees then smothered with large saucer-shaped orange blossoms that were strangely reminiscent of *Paeonia* 'Anne Rosse'. Both the giant lobelia and St. John's Wort commemorate Joseph Charles



Helichrysum formosissimum
Bugata camp

Bequaert (1886–1982) a Belgian-American botanist who collected in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during Belgium's rather dark period of colonial rule.

Rising higher still we were to encounter another giant lobelia, the famed *Lobelia wollastonii*, a denizen of the alpine peaks of Uganda and Rwanda. Above a lush, leafy echium-like rosette of lance-shaped leaves it throws up to the skies giant flower spikes densely covered in long silvery hairy bracts protecting deep-blue blossoms which are visited by iridescent malachite sunbirds. It was an exciting sight, worth travelling to Africa to see and this species seems to confine itself to well-drained sun-baked slopes, unlike the bog-dwelling Lobelia, *Lobelia bequaertii*.

Helichrysum species (or everlasting flowers) abounded and by our camp at Bugata we encountered the most beautiful of all found on Rwenzoris slopes, the aptly-named *Helichrysum formosissimum*, a tall bushy silvery shrub that grows at heady altitudes of up to 4200 m. Many of Patrick Millington Syngé's Rwenzori collections were raised in botanic gardens across Britain and Ireland during the 1930s, but according to Syngé, the only garden that had any real success in cultivating this species was Glasnevin, so it was exciting to stumble across it in the wild where Syngé had made his collections nine decades previously.

Between Bugata and our next base at Hunswick Camp (3974 m) we entered a canyon-like valley dominated by tree-like giant groundsels which formed forests in places. Two species dominated, *Dendrosenecio adnivalis* occupied wetter areas, its 10 m tall stems were wreathed in persistent dead leaves. The second species, *Dendrosenecio erici-rosenii*, was less common but in was in flower in places bearing giant spikes of groundsel-like flowers. Both species are incredibly slow growing and many of the trees we walked beneath were likely to have begun life centuries previously.

Physically this was the most demanding expedition I have ever travelled on, the Rwenzoris are a wet range and the closer we got to the Congolese border the more sodden the landscape became. Some days were spent trekking distances of up to 22 kms across rock faces, precariously steep boulder scree and vast swampy boglands. The only way to cross these dismal bogs was by leaping



Carex runssoroensis Bugata camp
to Hunswick

across huge tufted tussocks of *Carex runssoroensis*, an Afro-alpine sedge whose woody base acted as stepping stones across the deep wet peat. Alas, many of us missed these perches, squelching deep into the bog. I had wondered why we were provided with wellington boots on arrival at basecamp and now I know. We had cause to be grateful to the great sheets of *Carex runssoroensis* that eased our journey across an exceptionally difficult landscape.

The pain and sheer exhaustion was worth it however, rising higher we entered a vast canyon dominated by ancient giant groundsels whose fat trunks were enveloped with the wiry stems of *Galium ruwenzoriense* while the forest floor was turned silvery-grey with the foliage of two species of shrubby lady's mantle, *Alchemilla microbetula* and *Alchemilla argyrophylla*, the latter perhaps the



Impatiens bombycina above Fort Portal



Rubus Kharo camp to Forest View camp



Couroupita guianensis Entebbe
Botanical Gardens

most spectacular of the two with foliage smothered with tiny silvery hairs that act as mirrors to repel sunlight, an adaptation also found in the New Zealand celmisias and the silver trees of Table Mountain in South Africa.

A massive fire had devastated this part of the Rwenzoris fifteen years previously. Lichen-encrusted skeletons of tens of millions of tree heathers was all that remained but another giant lobelia, *Lobelia stuhlmannii*, had invaded what had formerly been dense woodland. It was a spectacular species to say the least, non-flowering plants formed leafy rosettes up to 3 m tall, but those in flower had thrown out gigantic spear-like flowering spikes over 6 m covered with violet-coloured bracts along their stems. They made an exotic other-worldly sight and it was exciting to meet yet another Equatorial giant.

Not far from Stuhlmann's giant lobelia we stumbled across a family of rock hyrax *Procavia capensis*, sunbathing on rocks. They made a lovely sight, mother, father and several children, basking in the Ugandan sunshine and not in the least intimidated by our presence. In this part of Africa, they are found at elevations of

up to 4,200 m, and, are rather strangely, are distantly related to elephants.

Our travels came to an end on the shores of Lake Victoria where we took time to visit the National Botanic Gardens of Uganda at Entebbe. Founded in 1898 the gardens proved to be full of interest and contained a myriad of spectacular primates, exotic birds and tropical trees, best of which was the cannonball tree, *Couroupita guianensis*, a tree I had last seen in the gardens of the Taj Mahal at Agra, but in full spectacular bloom in the shores of Lake Victoria. It made a fitting finale to an exotic adventure in East Africa's Mountains of the Moon. ■



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	ZOOM	EVENT	TOUR
Wed 16th Oct	Zoom Talk, 7.30 pm. Mary Keenan.		
Wed 30th Oct	Zoom Talk, 7.30pm. Thomas Pakenham – The Tree Hunters and the Cult of the Arboretum		
Wed 13th Nov	Catherine Fitzgerald – Some Irish Design Projects		
Wed 27th Nov	John Anderson – Trees for the Future		
Wed 4th Dec	Karen Robinson – Floral Art		
Sat 7th Dec	RHSI Christmas Lunch, Dunlaoghaire, Co Dublin		
2025			
Wed 15th Jan	Zoom talk, 7.30pm		
Wed 29th Jan	Zoom talk, 7.30pm. Seamus O’Brien – 2024 Plant Hunting Expedition to the Himalayas		
Fri 7th to Sun 9th	Bellefield Open for Snowdrops		
Wed 12th Feb	Zoom talk, 7.30pm. Ben Preston – Cliff Bank Nursery, a New Chapter		
Sat 15th Feb	Tour to snowdrop garden in Thomastown, Co Kilkenny		
Wed 26th Feb	Zoom Talk, 7.30pm. Marcus Chilton Jones – The Making of RHS Bridgewater. Plans and Progress.		
Wed 12th March	Michael Kelly – GIY – Vegetable Growing		
Sat 22nd and Sun 23rd March	Bellefield Open Weekend		
Wed 26th March	Dr Cara Daly – cultivating resilience..		
Sat 12th and Sun 13th April	Bellefield Open Weekend		

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	ZOOM	EVENT	TOUR
Wed 9th April	Zoom talk, 7.30pm		
Wed 23rd April	Zoom talk, 7.30pm		
Sat 26th April	RHSI Plant Sale – Shankill, Co Dublin		
Mon 12th – Fri 16th May	Tour to Dumfries and Galloway, 5 days		
Sun 18th May	RHSI Russborough Garden Show		
Sat 7th, Sun 8th June	Bellefield Open Weekend		
Wed 11th June	Tour of Cork Gardens – ex Cork		
Sat 5th July	Tour of gardens of Wexford – ex Dublin		
Sat 19th July	Day tour to Bellefield and Heywood Gardens – ex Dublin		
Sat 19th and Sun 20th July	Bellefield Open Weekend		
Sat 6th Sept	Day tour ex Dublin to Tullyally castle and gardens		
17th Sept	Zoom Talk, 7.30pm		
1st Oct	Zoom Talk, 7.30pm		
Sat 4th – Sun 5th Oct	Bellefield Open Weekend		
15th Oct	Zoom Talk, 7.30pm – Wild Acres Wicklow		
5th Nov	Zoom Talk, 7.30pm		
19th Nov	Zoom Talk, 7.30pm		
3rd Dec	Zoom Talk, 7.30pm		
Sat 6th	Christmas Lunch in the National Yacht Club, Dunlaoghaire		

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Crocus Viola and Primrose in Lasagne pots

Lasagne Planting

Paul Smyth

Here at RHSI Bellefield visitors will notice we have a lot of pots around the back Courtyard and entrance to the garden. Pots are a great way to brighten up a dull corner and can be constantly replaced and spruced up to make them look their absolute best, even when the garden has a lull period.

We tend to have two major changes in the season. Once in early summer for the summer display and sometime in late autumn to tidy up and plant the spring display

Bulb lasagnes offer a great solution to that age old problem we gardeners



A riot of colour using different tulips



Crocus and viola start off these pots

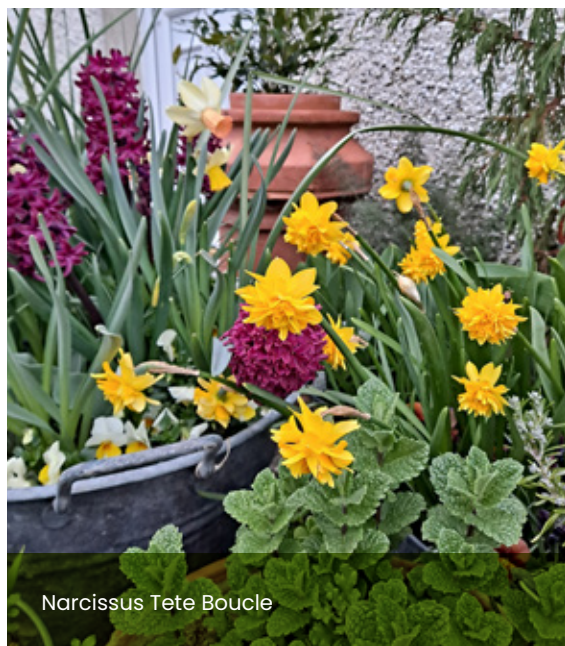
encounter- where to put all the hundreds of bulbs we buy but never have space for. Very simply it is layering up bulbs in a pot to fit four or five times more bulbs that you would in a single layer, hence the name lasagne planting.

The Method:

I try to half fill whatever pot I'm using with a mix of peat free compost, homemade compost, leaf mould and grit. About ¼ of each, but it all depends on what I have to hand. This isn't an exact science and like cooking a lasagne you adapt the recipe to what's available!

Once the pot is half full, I put my first layer of bulbs in. As a rule, put the largest bulbs deeper in the pot, generally speaking that means daffodils or tulips. When we read about bulbs we are told to plant them 2-3 times the height of the bulb deep. When doing these lasagne pots, you may have to stretch that rule a bit, but fear not the bulbs will all make their way up.

When placing the bulbs be generous but leave them some space and certainly don't allow them to touch. You are cramming them in and contradicting



Narcissus Tete Boucle

the instructions on the packet. If you follow those guides, you won't have nearly as impressive a display. More is more when doing pots. Remember they won't spend more than one or possibly two years in the pots - so go wild!

Once the bulbs are in the first layer cover them with a small layer of compost, just enough to cover the bulbs nicely so you cannot see them and then do your next layer, with the slightly

smaller bulbs. Then repeat this process until you make it to the top of the pot. Usually, I do a bottom layer of tulips, a middle layer of dwarf daffodils and a top layer of crocus and fritillaria as these are similar sized bulbs.

Then simply place the pots and wait. You can add winter bedding if you like. I tend to use violas in single colours on pots. They may need water if it's a very dry winter but generally apart from being watered to settle them they won't need anything until March. Once they flower it is important to keep on top of watering and feeding to get the maximum from the display. If you get the combinations right, you'll have something in flower for nearly four months. Occasionally I'll take a few snowdrops from the garden as they emerge and add them to the pots too, its cheating but no one notices and snowdrops are always appreciated here in RHSI Bellefield

Here are a few of my favourites for a long flowering period:

- *Galanthus nivalis*
- Iris 'Harmony'
- Crocus 'Firefly' and 'Remembrance'
- *Muscari* 'Babys Breath'
- *Narcissus* 'Tête Bouclé'
- *Fritillaria meleagris*
- *Tulipa* 'Fly Away' and 'Ballerina'
- Viola to finish the pot

I try to do all my bulb planting in November but inevitably I end up doing some in January, again they bulbs should be fine but flowering for that year will be delayed.

Many would say this exhausts the bulbs and means most need to be treated as annuals, but I've found that you can get at least two flowerings from



Freshly planted bulb lasagne pots



Tulip Daffodil and Fritillaria meleagris combination



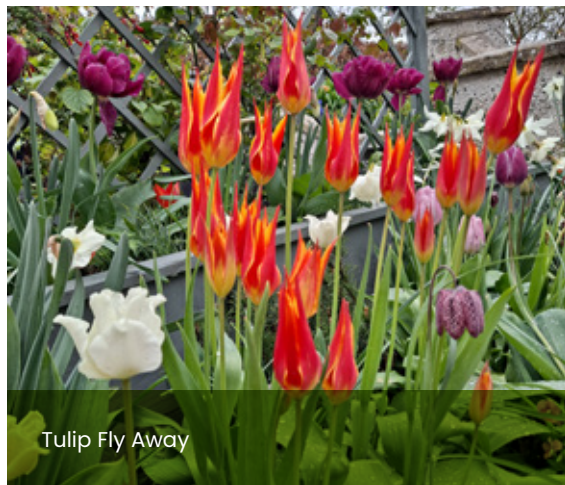
Lasagne pots in February with conifers and violas



Tulip and daffs flowering together

a lasagne pot. Once they start to die back in early summer, we move the best of the pots into the back yard and simply forget about them until next November when they are topped dressed and some new Violas are added to them. They tend to be fine for year two. For year three we empty the pots in early summer and add any of the bulbs we want to the woods. We tend to discard tulips as tulip fire has started to become a problem which we try to curtail.

It is worth taking the time to plant up even one lasagne pot. It will give you months of joy and needs very little attention. A pot or two also make a great and alternative Christmas present for someone who's keen on plants but short on space! ■



Tulip Fly Away

The lasagne pots in RHSI Bellefield will be in full display for our April opening on 12th and 13th April 2025 and our plant fair on the 23rd March 2025

From the Editor's Garden

Peter Milligan and Nicola Milligan

As summer slips into autumn the borders and beds can start to look somewhat jaded as the summer perennials prepare for their winter sleep. At this time, we have found that bulbs (and here we will allow 'bulbs' to cover bulbs, tubers, rhizomes, corms, etc.) can provide superb colour right up to Christmas and on into the New Year.

Flowering for us at the moment are the first of our colchicum collection namely *C. x agrippinum* a beautiful chequered species and *C. 'Glory of Heemstede'* a deep violet-mauve tessellated form.

Already showing buds and hopefully to flower very soon (October) are some of our nerines – these autumn beauties add a welcome touch of colour to borders, beds, or pots and a search of



C. agrippinum

the bulb suppliers' catalogues will give you a wide range to choose from. We are fortunate in having some harder to find cultivars such as *N. bowdenii* Dark Form (a gift from Nigel Marshall who was Head gardener here at Mount Stewart), and *N. bowdenii* 'Mount

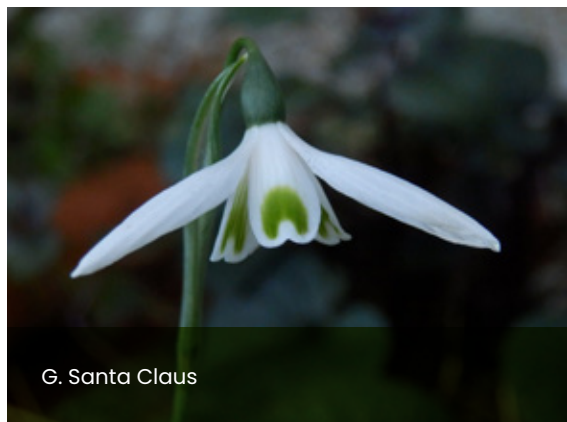


Galanthus elwesii var. *monostictus*
Remember Remember

Stewart' but there are many cultivars available such as *N. b.* 'Lipstick' and *N. b.* 'Alba'.

You can look to the wonderful snowdrop family to provide some great early flowering beauties, e.g. in October we will have *Galanthus elwesii* 'Rainbow Farm Early' Hiemalis Group, November brings *G. elwesii* var. *monostictus* 'Remember Remember' and December ushers in *G.* 'Santa Claus' which is always in flower for us on Christmas Day.

The crocus family will also provide good examples of late flowering forms, e.g. *Crocus mathewii* and some of its cultivars *C. m.* 'Dream Dancer' and *C. m.* 'Dark Eye' will all flower before Christmas. We have found the other autumn crocus very miffy (e.g. *C. sativus*) but the *C. mathewii* cultivars do exceptionally well with us in pots. Do bear in mind that rodents (including squirrels) find crocus particularly fine dining.



G. Santa Claus



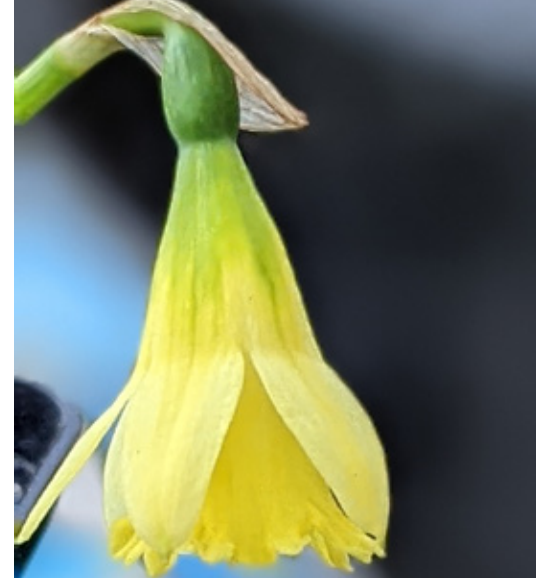
Crocus mathewii Dream Dancer

Of course, and perhaps surprisingly, you should not forget the daffodil family. Many of us will be aware of some early flowering cultivars such as *Narcissus* 'February Gold' – as the name suggests if you have a favourable position this cultivar can be in flower in February. However, there is at least one that will flower before Christmas, this is *N. minor* 'Cedric Morris' and comes from Benton End – the garden of the late artist-plantsman Cedric Morris. Admittedly we grow this quite small cultivar in pots so that it can be protected from the worst of the elements. If anyone knows of any other pre-Christmas flowering narcissus, please let us know.

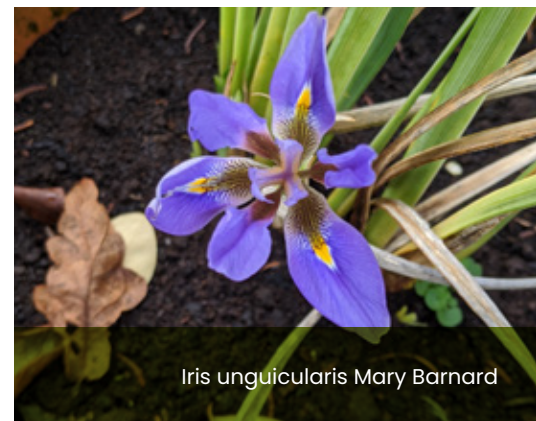
Finally, do not forget the iris family. *Iris unguicularis* and its cultivars (among the better known are *I. u.* 'Mary Barnard', *I. u.* 'Walter Butt', etc.) will flower before Christmas if they are placed in a sheltered position and will flower in January in more exposed locations.

If you have the space for a clematis, we would recommend one of the *Clematis cirrhosa* family, e.g. *C. cirrhosa* 'Freckles' (as shown on the front cover). As a long-flowering winter plant, it is great for adding height and colour to your walls or trellis and provides a food source for early bumble bees.

We hope this has given you some ideas for adding colour in the run up to Christmas and the New Year. No matter how small a space you have all of the plants mentioned here will do well in pots (remember to feed and refresh the compost if you are growing them from year to year) and can be positioned at your front door, window ledges, or patios to provide points of interest. ■



Narcissus minor Cedric Morris



Iris unguicularis Mary Barnard



Iris unguicularis

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A cross view of the bog garden

Dawros Gallery & Garden

Mary Hackett

**Gardening outside Kenmare
with her husband Andrew,
the artist Charlotte Verbeek
has created a garden both
startlingly contemporary
and as old as the stone walls
that define it.**



There are gardens that tame nature and gardens designed to enhance a particularly spectacular natural feature. Beautiful though these are, for me the most empathetic gardens are those where nature and garden are utterly at one. This is what you'll find at Dawros. There are no signs to guide you. You turn left at the pub and then it's the second farm track and over the bridge. You'll wonder whether you've found the right house. But there's an RHSI Partner garden sign on the gate and you hope for the best. And the best is what awaits you with a friendly greeting from the Verbeek family just up the lane.



The garden at Dawros is nestled into the landscape of the Beara peninsula

This is woodland space divided by a spine of bog stream and filled with drift planting in the Piet Oudolf style. Charlotte and Andrew garden five acres of their ninety-acre property, leaving the rest to natural woodland and wildlife habitat. At house level there is a modernist terrace in polished concrete with water trough features and ever-changing planting. The rocky Beara peninsula crowds the horizon. Falling away to the sides are plantings of exceptional trees beloved of Andrew, offset by sweeps of colour and shape in flower and leaf curated by Charlotte's creative eye.

It was a step into the unknown for the family to leave a busy life of international postings for a small house on a farm track in Kerry in the 1990ies. "We rooted here with the trees

we planted", Charlotte told me. One of her earliest plantings is now a superb mature *Parrotia persica*. Andrew has planted a collection of pines including *Pinus patula*, *P. x schwerinii* of the long droopy needles, *P. densiflora* 'Umbraculifera' the umbrella shaped Japanese red pine, *P. pinea* the Italian stone pine and a magnificent *P. montezumae*. A *Cryptomeria japonica* and a *Sequoia sempervirens* planted in the very early years are also growing exceptionally well. Oak woodland is native to this area and is prized by the Verbeeks for its leaf drop. Recycling is fundamental to Dawros and oak trees make excellent leaf mould.

The Verbeeks readily acknowledge how much they have learned from other gardeners. Brian Cross was a mentor. Jimi Blake continues to be an inspiration



Drift planting in plant communities at Dawros

in the development of their woodland garden. There, under a multilayered canopy of oak and acer, Schefflera, Epimedium, Rhododendron and Rodgersia thrive. Annual rainfall here averages over 1.5 meters annually. Ferns love it. Specimens from Billy Alexander's collection are tucked in everywhere. The woodland garden is surrounded by the old stone walls, ghosts of the hill farm of long ago, a feature of Dawros the family value and protect.

In the wider garden, Charlotte has turned to her countryman Piet Oudolf for inspiration. "As an artist, I enjoy the creative process of working with plants. I also make jewellery and paint. It is all about the process. The medium is secondary for me". Life in Africa and in Asia developed her love for abundant planting and accustomed her eye to a wide palette of shapes. An early convert to naturalistic planting, the idea of working with drifts of plants and specifically with grasses, was something with which she felt very comfortable. However, not all Oudolf-recommended plants thrive in Kerry.



Magnificent pines at Dawros

After multiple attempts to establish Echinacea, Charlotte admits defeat.

The Verbeeks resisted the temptation to bring in machines to reshape the site choosing instead to live and work with its natural shape. The lower part of the plot is a natural bog area. *Lythrum salicaria*, *Myrica gale* and *Molinia caerulea* flower in abundance along a raised walkway. The air is alive with dragonflies. Frogs and newts prosper. The bog walkway is a peaceful place, with cross-glimpses of specimen trees, various art installations contributed by family and friends and 'plant communities' of clumping perennials.

The Dawros site is mostly acid soil with pockets of heavy clay soil in several areas. Managing the garden with little outside assistance, the Verbeeks find that 'chop and drop' cultivation works well for them. They cut back herbaceous growth in late winter/early spring before the first bulbs emerge. The cut is done in sections, each about 30cm in length. Having participated



Drift planting at Dawros

in the soil study group run by Conall O’Caoimh of Ardán Garden last winter, they are enthusiastic converts to the benefits of mycorrhizal fungi. Andrew is developing a small arboretum. Planting trees into grassland, he aims to change the soil from a bacterially dominant soil culture to a fungal culture. When planting, he now favours a smaller root hole, minimising disturbance to the soil in this area of heavy rainfall. The holes are backfilled with mycorrhizal-rich soil taken from the local woodland. Trees establish more quickly with a robust colony of mycorrhizal fungi at their roots.

Kenmare is a glorious place. Dawros is an exceptional garden. Please do call Charlotte to arrange a visit. I promise you a few hours of garden heaven. ■



The woodland garden at Dawros

Dawros Gallery and Garden, Kenmare, Co Kerry is an RHSI Partner Garden open to visitors by prior arrangement. Not suitable for strollers or wheelchairs. Lots of comfortable seating. Contact details on RHSI website.

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Czar runner beans

The Kitchen Garden in Winter

Wendy Nairn

I have been growing my own organic vegetables and fruit for many years and I am continually learning. In the last while, I have been using a no-dig system for growing vegetables as I think it conserves the soil along with its wonderful microfauna and flora. There are less weeds and it also saves my back!

The winter is a good time to start a no-dig garden by spreading cardboard to kill off the grass. Cover the cardboard with well-rotted manure or compost.

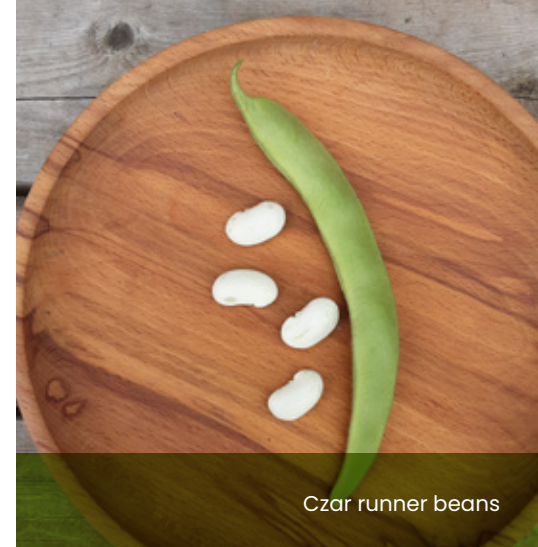
Some perennial weeds may come through but can be dealt with early. If you already have no-dig beds that are not in use, this is the time to cover them with compost and/or cardboard. Some people use black plastic silage covers. In the spring these can be lifted and the worms will have incorporated the organic matter into the beds.

Each winter I go through any seeds I have saved to clean and sort them. I save lots of peas and French beans to plant the following year. I also save

some French beans, such as the variety 'Abundance', to dry for eating. If the autumn is very wet, I freeze the beans. I grow 'Czar' white runner beans for that purpose also. I save lettuce, rocket and parsnip seeds too. I find home grown seed germinates much better. It just takes time to sort it all. I do not save the more difficult seeds which cross easily for example courgettes.

November is a good time to collect deciduous leaves and make a leaf mould heap. If you have lots of leaves, try making a square of chicken wire around four posts, with each side about sixty centimetres, and pile in the leaves. Fungi break down the leaves but work best if they are wet. If you only have a small amount of leaves you can add them to your compost heap as a source of carbon or pile them into an old compost bag, tie the opening and make air holes in the bag. Hide it under a hedge until next year. After one year the leaves will be partly broken down and can be used for mulch. After two years the leaf mould is a wonderful substance, mostly weed-free. It is what the old gardeners used as seed compost.

Over winter is a good time to prune fruit trees and soft fruit bushes but avoid frosty periods. Blackcurrants fruit on younger wood so it is best to cut away about one-third of the old wood. They can be mulched with old, rotted manure or good compost. Jostaberries are similar to blackcurrants. Redcurrants and gooseberries are like apple trees and need to have new growth shortened to a few buds. It is also good to take out any crossing or branches that are too low. A bowl shape is best for these.

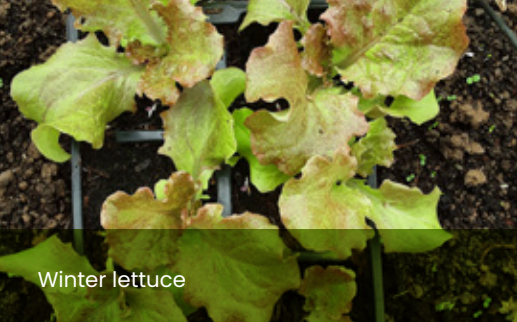


Czar runner beans



Asian salads

If you want to grow more soft fruit bushes, take some hardwood cuttings of new wood from this year's growth with a heel or cut below a leaf node. In a sheltered part of the garden make a sideways slit in the soil and, if badly drained, put in some horticultural grit. Slide your cuttings into the slit at an angle. They will all root and will be ready to dig up next autumn to plant out.



Winter lettuce



Lettuce seed

What to plant in November

Broad beans are a wonderful over-winter vegetable to sow in October or November. The best variety for overwintering outside is 'Aquadulce'. I sow these in deep modules or small pots and plant out in December when the plants are well grown and more than four centimetres high. They will not grow as tall as spring grown beans but may need some support in the spring when heavy with beans. By planting now, you should be eating broad beans in June as a great early crop.

It is important to sow garlic in November–December as it needs a period of cold to form cloves and grow well. Split the bulbs into cloves and push into a well-prepared bed leaving about 15 centimetres between rows and between cloves. The bed could be mulched with a layer of compost. I have had rust on garlic over the last few years. It spreads from leeks to garlic and back again. This year I will grow garlic in the polytunnel instead of outside. Apparently, that will break the rust cycle.

In the last few mild winters, I find that I can still sow Asian salads, winter purslane, rocket and corn salad in the polytunnel right up to the end of December. They provide us with a daily

supply of fresh salads right into the late spring. Some go to seed and I have lots of volunteer salads coming up all year. In the spring the flowering Asian salads provide a wonderful supply of early pollen and nectar for honeybees and bumblebees.

A favourite polytunnel crop that I grow every year is 'Winterkefe' sugar snap peas. I originally bought the seed from Irish Seed Savers but now I save my own seed each year. These are a very hardy crop but they do climb as high as you allow them to, so they need a strong supporting net or strings. I sow in deep modules in October or November and plant them out when well grown. I plant them about four centimetres apart as a single row – not a double row as with most peas. A row two metres long will give a big crop. They are beautiful too with bicolour purple flowers.

Over the winter, I like to review what I grew this year and plan the vegetables to grow next year. Seed catalogues are published in the winter and it is fun to try a new vegetable or a new variety that you have not grown before. It is also good to think about what you and your family like to eat, what space you have in your garden and, most of all, what time you have available for gardening. ■

Blanchardstown Gardening Group

Connecting People, Places and Plants

Michelle Griffin

The beginnings of Blanchardstown Gardening Group (BGG) are thanks to horticulturist Aoife Munn, who gathered a bunch of strangers together at Blanchardstown Library when we began to emerge from the Covid pandemic in 2022, and friendships grew. The diverse community that exists within BGG is fostered by each and every member. We are people who fill the world with love for nature, creativity, and collaborative spirit.

BGG is steered by a small but mighty steering committee of six volunteers at present, but all of our members provide contributions

and time in various capacities, as horticulturalists, plants people, environmentalists etc. While writing, I'm reminded of our first purchase decision as a group sitting around a dining room table – RHSI membership which continues to be a teacher that guides our group to knowledge two years later. We don't charge BGG membership fees currently and this is something we could re-evaluate in the future but for now we remain as inclusive as possible, with the goal of creating connections in a sustainable way.

BGG owe a debt of gratitude to Fingal libraries, as we meet at our local library for skill sharing, seed swaps and

the opportunity to invite guest speakers who visit and impart their knowledge to our group. We invite the communities of Dublin 15 and Fingal along to join us for these free, informative and engaging talks and activities. We also organise inspiring garden visits, plant swaps, connect with community groups near and further afield, and we continue to forge meaningful relationships along the way.

BGG has registered with the Public Participation Network (PPN) as we feel we meet the three pillars set out by Fingal County Council: community & volunteering, social inclusion and environment. If you or your club are also in line with the socially engaged ethos of addressing exclusion, increasing access, enabling creativity and critical thinking about our environment, it could be helpful to look up the community development officer for your area and you will be walked through the whole process. This opens up various funding sources to support community spaces.

Projects designed to be accessible, focussing on giving young people a voice to express themselves through visual planting spaces is important to BGG. Gardening for wildlife and biodiversity is often used as a coping mechanism and the catalyst for improving quality of life. We connect with schools to assist with community projects funded by Fingal County Council, whether that is planting orchards, designing a pollinator bed or sowing seeds together.

Although we are interlinked with other organisations offering funding and mentoring, BGG doesn't rely solely

on funding. We hold plant sales, with the proceeds supporting BGG, though we have also fundraised for St Francis Hospice, a charity that is dear to many of our members. We partner with other groups and organisations that are a good fit.

There are various sources of funds and grants that come together to make community spaces possible, offering us a less traditional revenue base than membership fees, such as the €27 million fund for community climate action launched in January, community heritage grant schemes or Dublin City Council's recently increased Arts Grant funding of €800 million.

BGG's most recent project is supported by VOICE Ireland and Community Foundation Ireland. We look forward to the launch of our polytunnel and seed library, where we will propagate together, and provide biodiversity boxes for our communities. It's going to be a real treat. Here's to developing awareness and seeking sustainable solutions. We are willing to make some mistakes. And we remember, there's always next year. That's the beauty of growing, we always get another chance next year.

We would utterly love to hear your seed stories if you have some. Experienced gardeners, plants people, ecologists, botanists, or horticulturists offer a wealth of knowledge to new groups and help us to connect with our past generations, navigating us to a place of further learning. We love sharing with our neighbours too.

So please feel free to contact us at blanchgardeninggroup@gmail.com ■



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The Bellefield Library

George Cunningham

An important aspect of RHSI's Bellefield project will be the development of a library with two main strands: collections of good research materials and popular horticultural works for the general reader. Four embryonic collections, forming the nucleus of what hopefully will be a major library, are now in place in Angela's Jupe beloved home which she so generously bequeathed to RHSI.

Firstly, there is Anjela's own eclectic collection of well over 1000 volumes, comprising mainly, but not exclusively, gardening books. At the beginning of the year the RHSI archive and library, formerly held in Laurelmere Cottage in Marlay Park was moved to Bellefield. To add to these with relevant volumes for the proposed student research centre, the Society has acquired this writer's arboricultural and antiquarian collection. A fourth major strand to

the present collections has been the donation of fourteen boxes of top-class books from a RHSI Cork member who wishes to remain anonymous. The total collection, numbering between 5000 and 6000 volumes have been variously brought together in the main house with journals being held in the coach house mezzanine.

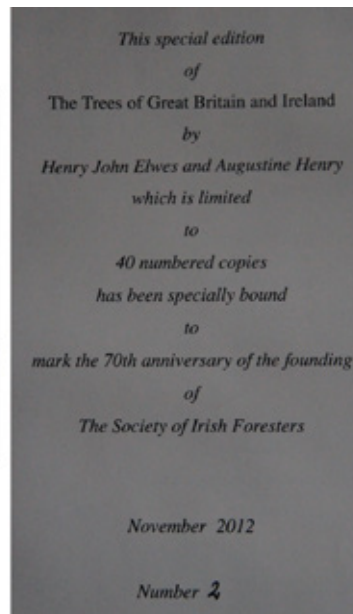
A working category arrangement of four main areas within the main house has been established for the present. In the main, duplicates have not yet been culled and many volumes will need to be relocated. The front office/house entry room holds relevant biographies of gardeners and horticultural pioneers, and herbal and floral arrangement works. The middle landing alcove, with its library ladder, displays books on all aspects of gardens and gardening, both national and international. The downstairs bedroom holds the volumes on the various species and plant books. Next door to it the former veterinary surgery has been newly shelved to house the more valuable works and the arboricultural collection. At present, in the coach house mezzanine, long runs of relevant journals, magazines and periodicals are shelved.

Bellefield contains most of the modern Irish volumes on horticulture published in recent decades. Many of these are signed limited editions and of special note are the species volumes,

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particularly on Spring bulbs, more particularly on snowdrops which were Angela's passion.

A bookshop has been created in the main area of the coach house with all proceeds going to the library development fund. RHSI gladly accepts donations of good books with the proviso that duplicates, and non-relevant volumes may be sold for library funding. The main task at the moment is to relocate volumes to the arranged categories and to identify duplicates for sale at either auction or through our own book sales. Members willing to assist in the development of the library either with the ongoing assessment and the rearrangement of and proper housing of the collections, or with donations are asked to contact



Former Surgery

this writer - georgencunningham@gmail.com. 0877926991; Parkmore, Roscrea, Co Tipperary, E53YK02; specific library times or days could be mutually agreed. Together we could add another treasure to the gardens, one that would be warmly welcomed by Angela. ■

Floral Art

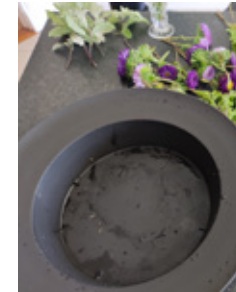
Karen Robinson

Hello everyone, I hope you had a good Summer despite the less than perfect weather. I'm busy planting some Allium bulbs at the moment for a good show next year.

I have set out below a nice design for you to try and it is particularly nice at this time of the year.

Construction in a low container

- Low Container of your choice, round or square, (roughly 8-10inch width)
- Enough Twigs or Woody stems cut into chosen length to form a grid for your low container, i.e.: rose stems, pheasant berry stems, bamboo, Cornus, straight willow etc. no more than ½ inch thick.
- Foam to fit container or you can do this design foam free if you are making it at home and are not moving it about.
- Paper covered wire to tie the sticks to make the grid.
- Flowers or Berries – 1 or 2 types of flowers which will be cut low, e.g. Small Roses, Chrysanthemums, Spray Carnations, Viburnum tinus flowers, Asters, Sedum or any small flowers or berries from the garden.
- Foliage: 3-4 types of any of the following: small to medium Ivy leaves, Heuchera leaves, Buxus sempervirens (Box), Pittosporum varieties, Conifer/ thuja varieties, Laurus nobilis (Bay), Eucalyptus, Skimmia, Drimys, Hebe, Rubus tricolor, Diosma, etc (not too large a leaf). The list is endless... All the foliage will be short.



Method

Place the wet floral foam in the container if using or pour water into the container if doing the design foam-free.

Make the Grid by tying together with the paper covered wire. Place on top of the container. This takes a while but you can use it again and again. See photo of the grid.

Place the foliage throughout the design in groups. Place smooth or shiny leaves beside rough or curly leaves for contrast in texture. Place the flowers and or berries in small groupings throughout the design. The Flowers and foliage are kept short and close to the foam. ■

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Partner Gardens Mount Congreve Gardens

We are delighted to welcome Mount Congreve Gardens as our sixtieth RHSI Partner Garden. This renowned County Waterford house and garden was left by Ambrose Congreve in trust to the State on his death in 2011. The gardens famously hold one of the world's largest collections of acid-loving plants. While the house was built in the 1760s, the superb gardens surrounding it were created by Ambrose Congreve, mainly with his Dutch garden director Herman Dool over forty years from the 1950s. The house and gardens are currently in a new exciting phase of renewal and restoration helping to bring Mount Congreve very deservedly back to the wider attention of plant enthusiasts and garden lovers throughout the country.

Twenty seven kilometres of pathways and trails lead you around all the mystery and magic of these 70 acres of gardens. The renowned spring display of acid-loving plants starts the year in the large woodland area with a stunning magnolia display followed by colourful swathes of camellias, rhododendrons and azaleas. Huge banks of sequentially flowering varieties complement mass plantings of spring bulbs. Watch out for some lovely features such as the classical temple where the ashes of Ambrose and his wife Margaret are placed, and the Chinese Pagoda referencing his time spent in the Far East.

A four acre walled garden with an enormous wisteria, a large glasshouse, herbaceous borders, roses, shrubs and



climbers and a large kitchen garden is currently under restoration. An exciting but dauntingly big project with a recent significant increase in gardeners which should help progress greatly. Watch this space over the next few years! Further into the summer the woodland area is back in play with terraces of herbaceous plantings and a rockery area. And don't miss the fabulous one kilometre display of hydrangeas running from the walled garden to the pagoda.

After your garden tour pop into the Stables Cafe or the Tack Room and visit the Foxford shop. So get your 2025 diary out now and pencil in a Spring visit to Mount Congreve!

Mount Congreve Gardens

Kilmeaden, Co Waterford X91 PX05
Landline: 051 384 115
Mob: 087 116 7044
Email: admin@mountcongreve.com
Web: mountcongreve.com

Visits: please check Mount Congreve website. Half price entry to RHSI members on presentation of current membership card



Partner Gardens

Douentza Garden

Douentza Garden is well known to readers of The Irish Garden magazine as the creation of its regular columnist Rachel Darlington, and we are delighted to welcome this lovely rural hive of horticultural activity as an RHSI Partner Garden. Situated deep in the picturesque Wexford countryside, the one-acre garden was a field just 20 years ago and now is the repository of a huge selection of rare and unusual plants laid out both in a series of peaceful interlinking garden rooms and in a handsome spacious greenhouse.

The overall atmosphere is that of a sheltered oasis with a lot of lush planting, not least the rich, beautifully kept lawns. The large leaved *Tetrapanax papyrifer* 'Rex' and *Paulownia tomentosa* provide an exotic green backdrop in many of the 'rooms'. Each one with its large herbaceous or shrub borders provides a new surprise – from a growing collection of outdoor carnivorous plants, to an expanding collection of unusual Himalayan *roscoea* perennials or a raised bed of various varieties of succulent. There are also lots of familiar herbaceous perennials providing great splashes of colour as one moves around the garden under lovely painted arches, past clusters of box balls, beech pillars and small ponds. A wonderful summer feature is a very big dry shale bank that is densely planted with *Persicaria affinis* providing a stunning wall in shimmering shades of pink.



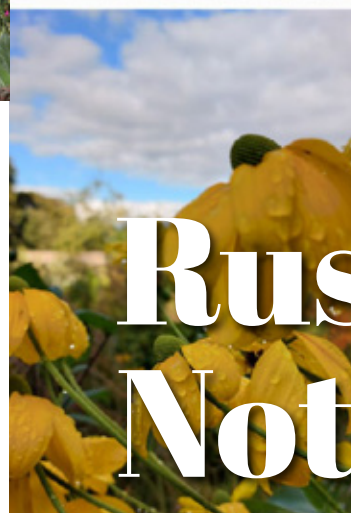
A huge amount of what now grows in her garden, began life in Rachel's excellent greenhouse, grown from seeds, cuttings, tubers and bulbs. Here you'll find a superb tiered collection of potted treasures, including among others, many caudex plants – more likely seen in a desert setting than in north County Wexford. Bookings now open for your Summer 2025 group visits to this terrific new Partner Garden!

Douentza Garden

Knocknlaour, Bunclody, Enniscorthy,
Co Wexford, Y21 X651
Contact: Rachel Darlington
Mobile: 089 276 0609
Email: rachel.darlington65@gmail.com
Web: [YouTube.com@gardeningatDouentza](https://www.youtube.com/gardeningatDouentza)

Visits: Garden Open Days 2025– Sunday
June 29th, July 30th, Aug 10th. Noon–
5.30pm. Otherwise, June to August to
groups (min 10 people) by appointment

Entry: €7. Half price entry to RHSI members
on presentation of current membership
card.



Autumn

Russborough Notes

Bernie Roddie

The season of mists and mellow fruitfulness is upon us.... autumn has arrived in the garden. Despite the fact we had a non-summer event weatherwise, the plants all seemed to be very happy with our rainy summer with the odd interspersed sunny days and coped well with the climate change. Work has continued through the season with our volunteers all carrying out the seasonal jobs to be done as we watched as the herbaceous beds unfurl their new growth and gorgeous colour palette.



We had a very successful Garden Day on May 8th 2024 and were blessed with good weather on the day and had lots of interesting plants for sale due to the hard work of volunteers dividing, potting up and running a very successful plant stall in the garden. Music added to the general air of entertainment and conviviality in the garden on the day.

There was a bumper crop of fruit, gooseberries, raspberries, loganberries and redcurrants to supply Lena for making her delicious jam and it proved very popular to visitors displayed on Jacob's Trolley at the entrance to the garden along with various plants for sale. The vegetables were also very popular, new potatoes, carrots, courgettes, cucumbers, Florence fennel, melons and several different varieties of tomatoes. A new addition to the garden this year was a bed created on the east wall to grow cut flowers for sale, these included *Ammi majus*, *Cosmos*, *Amaranthus caudatus* 'Mira', *Antirrhinum majus* 'Black Prince', *Helychrysum bracteatum* 'Copper Red', *Helianthus*, *Zinnia elegans* 'Giant



Cactus' to name a few. The cut flowers were a great success in sale terms too. Work has commenced now on the new urban garden with clearing the soil in the planting area, sowing grass seed, and marking out the paths.

We enjoyed an Indian summer for a week in September to compensate for our lack of summer sunshine, let us hope the weather will be kind for our new gardening year in 2025. ■



14th Annual Gala on Saturday 25th January 2025

At Ballykealey House, Ballon, Co. Carlow

Speakers

Keith Wiley (UK) "Wildside -Gardening on a different Plane"

Owner and creator of Wildside, Devon, author, and TV appearances.

Callum Hallstead (Scotland) "Life After Snowdrops-Celebrating the Snowdrop at Cambo and Knowing how to move on"

Senior gardener at Cambo Gardens and curator of a national collection of snowdrops at Cambo.

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Tickets include morning tea & afternoon tea, lunch, lectures, and plant sales at Altamont, plus, a tour of the snowdrop collection at Altamont Gardens.

Payments by PayPal via sales@altamontplants.com or

For online tickets, visit: <https://altamontplants.digitickets.co.uk/tickets>

Credit Card- contact Robert Miller on 087-9822135 (if no reply, please leave a voice message with name and number)

For further information contact Hester Forde on 086-8654972 or hesterforde@gmail.com
Nurseries attending include Altamont Plants with Avon Bulbs collection, Cold Blow Nursery (Claire Beumer), Assumpta Broomfield, Rosabell Plant Supports and Esker Farm Daffodils (Dave & Joules Hardy).
This is an opportunity to buy rare and other spring flowering perennials from these specialist nurseries.



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Laurelmere Cottage Garden

The diseased tree

Cherry Sleeman

The arrival of a few cold nights has brought an array of leaf colour to the garden. Leaf drop has also commenced – we sometimes feel that all the leaves in Marlay Park find their way to Laurelmere.

We are fortunate that we have an amazing construction and production team in the Compost Area. More bins have been constructed which are carefully managed. Material is collected, then mowed and layered. A separate leaf mould bin provides a beautiful tilth to the great benefit of the garden.

The raised vegetable bed, provided by a DLR County Council grant, has been invaluable in raising



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The tree removed

seedlings, helped by two shower doors placed over it for protection and watered diligently by a volunteer during the week.

The 'no dig' bed was a partial success; we should have removed more of the serious long rooted weeds before laying cardboard and soil. The potato harvest was small due to lack of soil depth and dry conditions. We are delighted a long garden hose was donated by a volunteer to water this far end of the garden.

A couple of trees have been removed due to old age and disease – see photographs. We are continuing to tidy and clear this forest

edge of the garden. We also plan to reorganise the East Long Border.

Two plinths have been installed by DLR County Council near the cottage for seating and we have been informed that estate railings will be provided around the garden.

Unfortunately, as of last year, we have lost the use of the room in the ground floor of Laurelmere Cottage. We have no sheltered space within the grounds of Laurelmere leading to more cancelled Mondays and we are unable to pursue any educational programmes. We do hope a resolution can be found in the near future for this very enthusiastic group of volunteers. ■



G. elwesii Claud Biddulph

Something Special

Peter and Nicola Milligan

I grow several snowdrops (and my other favourites colchicums and daffodils) whilst Nicola enjoys crocus, epimedium, roscoea, and species tulips. However, we both agree that certain groups of snowdrops are very special.

I refer to snowdrops generally called virescent (sometimes written viridescens). Such snowdrops should exhibit noticeable green colouration on the three outer perianth segments (let us just call them the outer petals for simplicity).

Some of these virescent cultivars will have green marks on the tips of the outer petals, e.g. *Galanthus* 'Pusey Green Tips'. Others will have thin green stripes along the length of the outer petals, e.g. *G. elwesii* 'Claud Biddulph', and *G. 'Cowhouse Green'*.

G. 'Pusey Green Tips' is a selected form of the well-known *G. nivalis* f.

pleniflorus 'Flore Pleno' (syn. *G. nivalis* 'Flore Pleno') and as far as I can discover is named for the village of Pusey in Oxfordshire.

G. elwesii 'Claud Biddulph' is named for a member of the family that have owned Rodmartin Manor (in Gloucestershire) for several generations. There are numerous other snowdrops associated with the Manor including *G. 'Rodmartin'*, and *G. 'Maragret Biddulph'* and while these are worth acquiring, we think that *G. elwesii* 'Claud Biddulph' is very beautiful.

G. 'Cowhouse Green' was found in Susan Gowdy's garden at Rushmere in Buckinghamshire in the late 1980's.

All of these snowdrops are worthy of a place in any garden and should be found in the lists of numerous nurseries both at home and in the UK. ■

Book Review

Noreen Keane

THE OPEN GARDENS OF IRELAND

By Shirley Lanigan

This indispensable book is very simply the bible for anyone visiting gardens in Ireland – be they plant enthusiasts, addicted garden visitors or just opportunist garden explorers. It follows Shirley Lanigan's earlier 2017 edition, and is as it says on the cover, "the most comprehensive guide ever to the open gardens of Ireland". Meticulously researched again, it is complete with a whole new set of photographs. In addition to many newly added gardens, (and inevitably some are no longer open) there are lots of fresh, revised garden visits, documenting how they may have changed over the intervening six to seven years. Laid out county by county, each of the 375 garden entries has concise visiting information, now also including a post code and most helpfully indicating if they are in the RHSI Partner Gardens Scheme.

Every possible type of rural and urban garden throughout the 32 counties is represented – from small cottage gardens to very grand castles, from peaceful commemorative and old abbey gardens to posh hotel gardens, from well-labeled gardens around teaching centres and plant nurseries to bucolic farm gardens. There are many nostalgic old walled gardens and exciting new suburban creations, large country house gardens, huge estate gardens and lots of busy village and



community gardens. The state-owned Heritage gardens, the National Botanic Gardens, public parks, Georgian squares and even the President's garden – they're all here.

With each garden description one is drawn in by Shirley's wonderful ability to record the atmosphere of a garden, picking up the individual nuances and quirks while her keen horticulturalist's eye is meanwhile clocking the contents and describing them for us with her customary botanical accuracy. Since 2001 she has visited well over 400 gardens, building relationships with many owners and gardeners throughout the country. This sense of continuity and revisiting has given her a unique perspective on the open gardens of the country, observing how some owners or their creations quietly fade into the past while new and burgeoning gardens are always in the wings waiting for their time to shine.

Whet your appetite with some armchair reading first and then keep this most valuable guide in the glove compartment of your car and you'll always find a garden jewel to visit wherever you are in the country! ■

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Ardgillan Castle, Gardens & Demesne



Ardgillan consists of a 194-acre park, 8 acres of gardens including a wide variety of winter flowering shrubs, snowdrops, hellebores, spring bulbs, rose garden, national collection of Potentilla, herbaceous border and a walled garden containing collections of herbs, fruit, vegetables, ornamental plants and glasshouses.

At the Castle itself, there are Castle Tours & Craft Shop, Tea Rooms and Playground, Fairy Tree Trail and Wild Flower Meadows.

Ardgillan Castle Gardens & Demesne,
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