



ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Dublin Group



NEWSLETTER NO. 54 – SUMMER 2010

NOTES

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Front cover illustration is of *Pulsatilla ?grandis* and Back Cover, Top, *Cyclamen coum*
and, Bottom, *Narcissus bulbocodium*

(Photos: Billy Moore)

EDITORIAL

For many members the Annual Show is the highlight of our year's activities. Because it is competitive, exhibitors aim for the highest standards and the quality of many of the plants on view would be envied by professionals. The artistic section shows the depiction of alpinists in various art forms including photography, and here also standards are very high. Among the major benefits of the Show are that it attracts new members and encourages members of the public to grow alpinists. The fact that alpine plants are available at our own plant sale and also from top class commercial growers is a significant added attraction.

The Show has huge educational value for exhibitors, members and the general public. Exhibitors learn how to produce better plants and are encouraged to expand the range of plants that they grow; members who don't exhibit are sometimes motivated to have a go; and visitors come to appreciate the beauty and diversity of alpine and woodland plants. It is also a terrific social occasion, enhanced by the participation of members of the Ulster Group. New friends are made, cultivation tips, and often plants are exchanged.

The high standard of many of the plants on the benches as well as having an inspirational effect on some people can have the opposite effect on others, creating the feeling that they couldn't aspire to that standard. This is a great pity. Most, but by no means all, of the best plants at a show will be in the open section, but the novice and intermediate sections are there for new and improving exhibitors so that they can gain the experience necessary to compete in the open section. Judges will tolerate faults in a plant and in its presentation in the intermediate section, and particularly in the novice section, that would be unacceptable in the open section.

One of the things our Group prides itself on is our friendliness and willingness to share our expertise. New exhibitors shouldn't have any hesitation in approaching their more experienced colleagues for advice and help and at our spring local show there is always a session on showing. We need more exhibitors so in 2011 if you haven't done so before commit yourself to showing at least one plant next April. You will not regret doing so and you will find that it will greatly increase your enjoyment of alpinists and perhaps lead one day to the coveted 'Farrer'.

ALPINE MISCELLANY

In This Issue

As usual in our summer issue we have Reports on the two Shows, ours in Cabinteely and the Ulster Group's in Greenmount written by the official reporters, Joan McCaughey on Dublin and your editor on Ulster. **Liam Byrne** contributes another in his popular practical series on plant matters, this time with advice on easy bulbs for showing. In our featured article **Dermot Kehoe** reminisces on his four gardens and will follow this up with a future piece on notable alpine plants that he has grown. In my early days in alpine gardening Dermot was something of a mentor and I well recall his generosity with both advice and plants.

I offer my sincere thanks once again to those of you who have written so well about our various fixtures in the first half of 2010. I know that you all put a lot of effort into these reports and the newsletter is very much the better for them. It is especially nice to have a report from our very newest member on the visit to **Patricia McGuire's** garden. Thank you **Fionnuala**. On two occasions I forgot to ask someone to write up the events so had to do so myself – I mention this in case anyone thought I had run out of volunteers.

Fixtures

The autumn fixtures were listed in the last issue but I promised to provide more details in this one.

On Thursday, 16 September at the NBG **Phillip Cribb** will talk about 'Shangri-la, a Botanist in the Tibetan Marches'. Phillip is a highly polished and experienced lecturer and a renowned botanist. Formerly Deputy Keeper of the Herbarium and Curator of the Orchid Herbarium at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, he has specialized in the taxonomy of Old World tropical orchids, participating in many expeditions to study orchids in the field. He is the author of several books and over 370 papers on these plants. He has been awarded the Linnaean Society Gold Medal for Botany, and several other prestigious awards for his work on orchids. He will be talking about a region that has been a Mecca for plant hunters for over a century and a half. Its flora contains a wealth of garden-worthy hardy plants, including many of the choicest.

This lecture is a joint one with the **IGPS** and will be very worthwhile.

Dr John Good will give what should be a fascinating and timely talk on 'Climate change and alpiners' in Stillorgan on 21 October. John is a plant ecologist and keen gardener, with special interests in alpiners, dwarf shrubs (especially Ericaceae), and woodland plants. He gardens on the N. Wales coast where the wind often blows savagely but it is rarely very cold for very long. His interest in linking the factors that influence the distribution and abundance of alpiners in the wild with their cultivation led to him writing 'Alpine Plants: Ecology for Gardeners', in collaboration with a geologist colleague, David Millward. John has been Director of Publications for the AGS since 1995, is a judge at AGS Shows, and an AGS member of the RHS Joint Rock Garden Plant Committee. He is a member of the Rock Garden Committee of the RHS. The Group visited his very fine garden in 2008 where we were made most welcome and were impressed by his enthusiasm and friendliness which are very evident in his lecturing style. You will enjoy this talk.

On Thursday, 11 November, also in Stillorgan I will be talking about 'Alpiners at home and away'. I will be showing you some of the most interesting plants that I've seen in the wild over the years as well as plants that I've grown in my own garden, plus some tips on cultivation and propagation. I hope you'll be there.

If the annual Show is the highlight of the year for some members the annual **Discussion Weekend** in Termonfeckin is for many others. This year it takes place from 19 to 21 November in the usual venue. We have had a full house for the past several years and given the line-up this year we can expect another scramble for places. In recognition of the recession we have managed to reduce the residential rates although there is a small increase in the daily rates. Our speakers are **Christine Skelmersdale** who is described as 'an inspirational lecturer', **Zdeněk Zvolánek**, or ZZ as he is known, the world authority on crevice gardening and an entertaining speaker, and, finally, one of the featured speakers at the Alpines 2011 Conference, our own **Martin Walsh** who will be talking about his highly successful trip to Yunnan in 2009. Christine and Zdeněk will give two talks each and we will have one talk from Martin. You will get more information about the talks and the speakers in the programme for the weekend. Book early.

We finish the year in Stillorgan on 9 December with a **Christmas Miscellany** which this year will be more plant focused. But it will also be a relaxed social evening and should be fun. Jamie will be looking for contributions.

George Sevastopulo writes about a recent excursion.

Over the water

Class 55

1st Liam Byrne, Dublin 16

2nd Anthony Dickerson, Carshalton

3rd Robin Pickering, Goole

Well, the first name is no surprise. But what about the other two?

Few of our members have exhibited at AGS shows outside of Ireland. For some years, I have nurtured the idea of persuading Liam and Billy Moore (he also won a first) to cross the Irish Sea to compete against the best of England and Wales. So, on the Friday following our show in Cabinteely, Liam, Billy and I took the early morning ferry to Hollyhead bound for the East Cheshire Show, held not far from Manchester Airport. Of course, Aberconwy Nursery lay directly on the route and fortunately Billy's car has a capacious boot and we were able to ensure that the show plants did not overturn by wedging a few purchases between them.

We were at the show venue early on Saturday morning to find that many of the exhibitors and judges were already known to us - **Jim Almond, Vic Aspland, Lionel Clarkson, Peter Cunningham, John Good, Val Lee, Robert Rolfe, and Geoff Rollinson**, amongst others. We were made most welcome and were invited to accompany the judges on their rounds and afterwards to join them at the judges' lunch.

But what of the Show? The standard of the exhibits was excellent and we saw several choice plants that were new to us. Three plants were up for the Farrer – *Androsace cylindrica* x *hirtella*, *Saxifraga pubescens* 'Snowcap', and *Trillium grandiflorum*. The first named triumphed to gain Geoff Rollinson his thirtieth Farrer Medal, an AGS record. There were many more high alpine than at our shows and the judges did not seem to have the same regard for some of the woodland plants that we have in Ireland. Given that exhibitors travel from far and wide to the English

shows, it is perhaps not surprising that so many outstanding plants were on the bench. As Billy remarked, it was if mere mortals (like me) were competing with ten Liam Byrnes and Harold McBrides. In other aspects, our own show compared very well: the hall, which had not been used for this show before, was less roomy and less well lit than the Cabinteely Community School or Greenmount and the lack of space meant that the benches were overcrowded and catering and number of plant stalls were limited. In addition, parking was a problem.

We returned on the Saturday night, happy in the knowledge that the Irish Groups of the AGS could hold their heads high with regard to the Cabinteely and Greenmount Shows but determined to grow more of the true alpine plants to the standard that we had seen in England.

Alpines 2011

The 8th International Rock garden Conference ***Alpines without Frontiers*** takes place in Nottingham from Thursday, 14 April to Sunday, 17 April 2011. This decennial event is a major one in the alpine world featuring the top speakers on alpines from around the world including our own **Martin Walsh** and will be very worthwhile. Those of you who are members of our parent body will find full details of the Conference in the June Bulletin and also on the main AGS website. A special discounted rate is available if you book and pay before 31 August.

Carol McCutcheon and Frank Brown

The recent deaths of Carol and Frank have brought great sadness to the Ulster Group. Carol was a very talented plantswoman with a real artistic flair. She enjoyed great success on the show bench and had a beautiful garden. She will be greatly missed by her family to whom we send our sincere condolences.

Frank, husband of **Dorothy**, died after a long illness. He was a lovely, generous man who provided the warmest of welcomes to members of the Group when we visited their enviable garden some years ago. I met him several times over the years and was always struck by his warmth and friendliness. While Dorothy was the gardener she had tremendous support and help from Frank. Again we send sincere condolences to her and the children.

Pots

Michael Meagher has seven and nine cm, rigid, square, plastic pots for

sale at ten and twenty cent each respectively. If you want any you should phone Michael (01 8382368) well in advance of any meeting and he will bring your order along.

Editor



Hugh McAllister's miniature garden at the Dublin Show. (Photo: Billy Moore)

Ulster Show 2010

After the most miserable winter for many years the weather was ideal for the 2010 Ulster Show, held as usual in the splendid surroundings of Greenmount Agricultural College near Antrim, although the lateness of the season was very evident throughout the campus. The day was sunny, mild and calm, providing perfect conditions for the exhibitors to transport their plants from car to show-bench. Worries that the Show would suffer as a result of the hard winter proved unfounded and the exhibits were well up to standard, although numbers were down a little.

There were significant differences in the range of plants shown as compared to 'normal' years. For example, there were no gentians or cassiopes, usually plentiful on the benches, North and South, and several dionysias, which rarely appear, were shown. There were lots of primulas, trilliums and cyclamen, and pulsatillas were more prominent than usual. The overall display was very colourful and visiting members of the



public were duly impressed, hopefully to the extent that some will want to grow alpines themselves. The number of visitors was well up due to the fine day and favourable publicity for the event.

There was a warm welcome for the President, **Val Lee**, whose last visit to this Show was some ten

years ago when she was a popular Director of Shows. The panel of judges was drawn from members of the two Groups, plus Val, and she ensured that the whole operation ran smoothly.

Trilliums grow well in Ulster and a fine specimen of *T. chloropetalum* earned a Certificate of Merit for **Gordon Toner** of Limavady and was a contender for the premier award. His plant was much admired for its unusual colouring with one observer suggesting that it had an aura of mystery about it.





The Alpines '96 award for the best plant from Australasia along with a Certificate of Merit went to **Ian Leslie** who had travelled from Bangor, (not Bangor, Northern Ireland but Bangor, North Wales) for a splendid specimen of *Celmisia spedenii*, grown from seed sown in

2003, a truly silver-foliaged plant. Ian has several plants of this species, all from seed, and finds that to avoid losses the greatest care is needed when repotting.



Harold McBride received a Certificate of Merit for a magnificent large pan of a white *Primula marginata* hybrid, smothered in flowers as did your reporter for a pan of *Dionysia aretioides* 'Phyllis Carter'. Both plants were on the short list for the Farrer.

There were several specimens of *Primula* 'Broadwell Milkmaid' on the benches, all with the flowers completely covering the foliage, the most impressive of which was the plant shown by **William and Hilary McKelvey**, Newry. The McKelveys also showed *Benthamiella patagonica*, the genus making its first appearance on a show-bench in Ireland.

The President authorized the awarding of two Certificates of Merit in the artistic section and these went to **David Lapsley** for his three

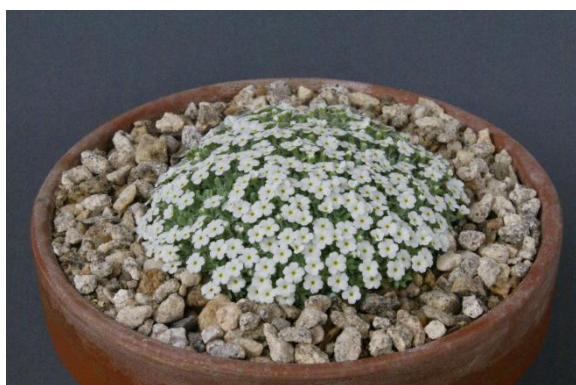


photos of *Pulsatilla alpina apiifolia* and to **Joan and Liam McCaughey** for their striking picture of *Gentiana alpina*. **Jon Evans**, Farnham got the award for most first prize points in the photographic section and **Jean**

Morris, Berkhamstead the prize for the same achievement in the art section.

Congratulations to **Kay McDowell** from Limavady who won the award for the best plant in the novice section in flower, a very nice *Androsace vandellii*. Kay also received the cup for the most first prize points in her section for the second year in a row; obviously an exhibitor to watch.

Paddy Smith, Navan, picked up the SRGC Quaich for the best plant in a pot not exceeding 19cm for a sumptuously flowered *Cyclamen coum* - see back cover. Paddy also received the trophy for the most first prize points in the intermediate section. I also liked his *Pulsatilla albana*.



The trophy for the best plant in the intermediate section went to a good *Androsace vandellii* exhibited by **Gavin Moore**, Dublin. Interestingly



three plants were brought up by various judges for consideration for this award and the other two were Gavin's as well. He was also awarded the AGS Spoon for a first in class 65, six pans rock plants distinct.

Hugh McAllister won the Garratt Cup for his attractive group of three rock plants for foliage effect.



Liam Byrne, Dublin, is on track for his ninth gold bar having achieved most first prize points in the open section. His eye-catching large pan of *Erythronium californicum* 'White Beauty' was widely admired as was his

well-flowered *Trillium rivale*. Liam's admirable record as an exhibitor has to be acknowledged especially given that he is effectively confined to two shows. This reporter won an AGS medal for the 19cm six pan class in the open section.



And finally to the best plant in the Show: Harold McBride, Lisburn, was a deserving winner of the Farrer Medal for his beautiful exhibit staged as *Pulsatilla alba* – see front cover, grown from seed sown in 2002. He also had two other pasque flowers on the bench: a lovely pink *P. ambigua* x *rubra* and a white *P. ambigua* subsp. *ambigua* both also raised from seed. Harold is a committed seed sower and generously distributes many of the plants he raises to other AGS members and friends. He also makes a large donation of seed to the exchange each year. Unsurprising then that he won the Phebe Andersen Trophy for the hotly contested Class 62, three pans rock plants raised from seed. He was also awarded the Festival of Britain (Northern Ireland) Trophy for his fine entry in Class 2, three pans rock plants distinct.

274 plants were exhibited by thirty exhibitors and **Pat Crossley** and her team are to be congratulated on a fine and immensely enjoyable Show.

Text: Billy Moore. Images: Val Keegan and Billy Moore

Dublin AGS Show 2010

It was a warm spring day for the Dublin AGS 25th Annual Show and while the tree buds were just opening, the hall at Cabinteely was ablaze with colour with more entries than ever and many beautiful plants on show. There seemed to be a wider range of plants than usual perhaps due to the extremely cold winter followed by a late spring. Of the two AGS Shows in Ireland, this year it was Dublin's turn to have the later date in April. There is always a friendly rivalry between the two groups and this year it was also very welcome to have entries from across the water, Wales and England, to give more of a challenge and put local competition on its mettle.



The Millennium Cup for the best plant in the Novice Section was won by **Pat Kennedy**, Dublin, for her *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Oscar Schoaf', and Pat also won the Termonfeckin Trophy for the most first prize points in her section. A more mature plant won an Award of Merit for **Susan Tindall**, Ballynahinch. Susan's beautiful exhibit is kept sheltered in a polytunnel, fortunately, considering this winter, and was chosen as background for the logo of the 'Garden Festival at Hillsborough Castle' on 21 – 23 May this year.



Several peonies were on show and Susan again was given an Award of Merit for her plant of *Paeonia mascula ssp russoi*, grown from seed sown in 2001. This peony is a native of Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily and the Ionic



petraea 'Lydora', shown by **Lionel Clarkson**, Blackpool, who was also a visiting judge. This daphne was introduced by **Peter Erskine** in 1997 and named after his two granddaughters, Lydia and Flora.

Islands and most peonies are easy from seed and quite hardy.

The perfume of daphnes permeated the whole hall and an Award of Merit went to *Daphne*



Three generations of the Moore family were at the Show and granddaughters Alice and Roisin were there to see Billy Moore, Dublin, win both the David Shackleton Trophy and the Farrer Medal for *Primula bracteata*. This plant appeared perfect from every angle, grown for four years in a mixture of one part J.I.3, one part Perlite and two parts grit, and never watered from above. Billy also won the E.B. Anderson Prize for six pans rock plants distinct against stiff opposition.



Billy's son, **Gavin** has obviously inherited the family gene for growing alpines and was awarded the Waverly Trophy for his *Androsace vandellii*, best plant in the intermediate section. This is grown in a frame and time had been taken to ensure the plant was presented with perfect flowers for the showbench.

It was lovely to see **Liam Byrne** winning the ACC Cup for most first prize points in the Open Section - as he did last year and indeed does most years! Among his many excellent plants, *Ramonda myconi*, white form, grown from seed sown in March 1998, was a worthy winner and a



true test of an experienced grower.

We are more used to seeing **Keith Lever**, Aberconwy Nursery, selling plants here than showing but it was no surprise that his expertise won an Award of Merit and the Margaret Orsi Bowl (best plant from North America)

for *Jeffersonia dubia*. This plant is grown outside in North Wales and apparently the very cold winter this year allowed the flowers to be more obvious above the leaves.

However when it comes to growing ferns Keith's wife, **Rachel**, is the expert and her *Cheilanthes wootonii*, a



fern with very attractive spring growth, won first prize in its section. Ruth was not there to give growing information, but apparently it is kept on the dry side over winter as one would expect from a plant from California and the west side of North America. The Levers also got an Award of Merit for a large plant of *Vaccinium nummularium*.

There were many lovely primulas on display but the blue of *Primula x pubescens* 'Blue Timpany' caught the eye and won a first prize for **Pat and George Gordon**, Bangor. George noticed this plant growing in a corner at Susan Tindall's Timpany Nursery and bought it, fortunately, as he thinks Susan has since lost it. Let's hope it can be propagated and spread.

Many beautiful plants were shown by **Paddy Smith**, Cavan, who won the Barney Johnson Trophy (most first prize points in Intermediate Section) and among them some attractive cyclamen.



Hugh McAlister, Ulster, once again showed his skill in winning first in the class for a pan planted as a miniature garden – see page 9. He has often planted pans for both groups and generously donated them as prizes and it was great to see his work recognized.

The Ulster Group Trophy (3 pans rock plants distinct raised from seed) was won by **Harold McBride**, the plants being of Harold's usual high standard. Unfortunately he was unable to attend the Show - unfortunate in another sense as he was originally to write the Show report and it fell into this less skilled scribe's hands at short notice.

Many more plants are worthy of note but alas time and space do not permit but they can be seen via the web.

The photographic and artistic section is always an interesting feature at the Show with a very high standard of excellence and hopefully more members will be encouraged to participate.





The Show Secretary, **Val Keegan** and her team deserve congratulations for all the work that is involved in organizing a successful Show. There was great attention to detail such as the attractive little alpine floral arrangements on each 'cafe' table where public and members were treated to delicious home baked cakes. The Members' plant stall proved a colourful entrance and the seven commercial stalls

tempted everyone with good plants. **George Sevastopulo** gave a practical demonstration on trough planting while both book and raffle stands were kept busy.

It was lovely to have the New President of the AGS, **Val Lee**, over as a judge and so willing to talk to members after the judging, giving advice and tips to both novice and not so novice exhibitors. The emphasis was once again placed on a good plant form, in a fresh and pristine state, neatly labelled (and in a clean pot of course), rather than on rarity.

The Show came too quickly to a close and members went home tired but content after a day catching up with friends and furthering their knowledge of alpiners.

Report: Joan McCaughey; Photos: Liam McCaughey

Easy Bulbs for Showing

Why show? Because it's fun and is a wonderful opportunity to make new friends who share your interest in plants. As you show and learn, your skills in growing plants in the garden and in pots will improve immensely. The shows are very important milestones in the gardening year but their survival depends on the exhibitors. We are all very grateful to Valerie and her team who give so generously of their time and expertise to make our Show so successful, but without exhibitors their efforts would be in vain. If you have never shown make a resolution **now** to exhibit at least one plant in the 2011 Show.

Bulbs are a good way to start. Growing bulbs in pots is simple: get suitable bulbs, pot them up and wait. The compost I use is made from



equal parts of John Innes No. 2, leaf mould (oak or beech is best), peat moss (avoid sedge peat) and granite chippings. Some growers use Perlite and if you can't get leaf mould just double up on the amount of peat. Whatever compost you use it must be free-draining, moisture retentive and must contain nutrients. I pot up the bulbs between the second week of August and the third week of September, apart from tulips which are best left until November. When

potted the bulbs should ideally be placed in a shaded cold frame. As I no longer have space for a frame the pots are placed in a shaded area near the house. I have a small greenhouse into which I bring the pots just before the bulbs come into flower to protect the blossoms from inclement weather.

Many bulbs are suitable for showing but the following are good ones to start with. *Narcissus bulbocodium* is a variable species which flowers in early April. The flowers can be pale to deep yellow and vary in height from 7.5 to 20cm. For later April the delightful *N. rupicola* is hard to beat. The fragrant, deep yellow flowers are solitary on stems 10 to 20cm in height.

The very desirable spring-flowering erythroniums make excellent show plants. *E. californicum* 'White Beauty' is my favourite. The leaves are slightly mottled and the pendant flowers are creamy white and as well as being good on the show bench it is also a wonderful garden plant. *E. revolutum* is a beauty with more heavily mottled foliage and large pink flowers, up to three per scape. The form *johnsonii* is particularly good.

The fritillaries are popular show plants. The much loved snakes-head fritillary, *F. meleagris*, is widely grown in gardens and is also good on the show bench. It grows 15 to 30cm in height and has solitary broad bells which are usually purple or pinkish purple. There is also a very beautiful pure white form.

We all love to grow trilliums in our gardens and sometimes envy our northern colleagues whose conditions are more conducive to the successful growing of this lovely genus. A most attractive species is *T. rivale* with its lovely white flowers in early spring, often with varying degrees of pink spotting. It is the most popular species for showing and is really easy. It grows from 5 to 10 cm in height but elongates to 15cm as it matures. The flowers of *T. rivale* 'Purple Heart' have a purple eye at the centre. *T. ovatum* can be variable with plain green leaves and white flowers like a small *T. grandiflorum*. *T. ovatum* var. *hibbersonii* is a lovely smaller version with pink flowers.

I will end with the deservedly popular *Tulipa batalinii* which is ideal for pot culture. The leaves are grey green and the flowers are yellow carried on 15cm stems. 'Bronze Charm' is a nice cultivar with bronzy yellow flowers.

The above are just a few suggestions but the range you have to choose from is enormous and you will have your own favourites. Grow them and show them and I hope you will get as much enjoyment from doing so as I have.

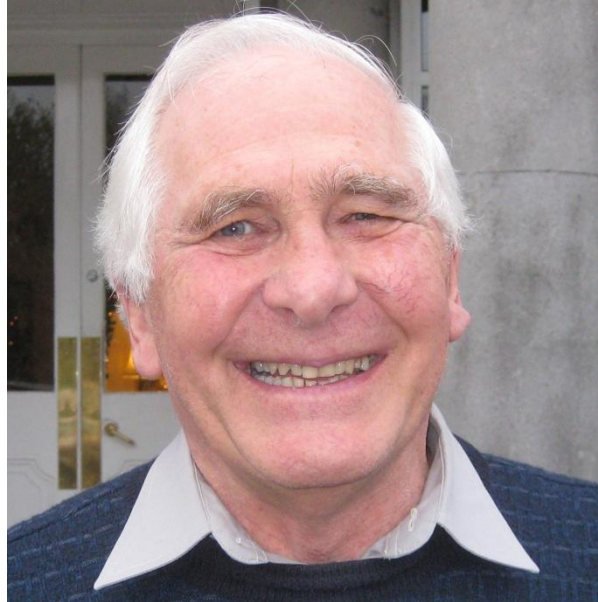
Liam Byrne

FORTY YEARS A GROWING

IN THE BEGINNING.....

My first garden was on a rather sunless hill in Rathgar. I started a herbaceous border at the back of the house and had ambitions to grow alpines in a particularly unsuitable area in the front. This latter interest arose because there was a pile of mainly granite rocks in a corner and I had come across some books on the subject in the library.

Unfortunately it was virtually impossible to buy alpine plants at that time in Dublin.



This rather basic problem remained unresolved until I spotted a notice in the *Irish Times* for an R.H.S.I. plant sale on Stephens Green. Among the plant sellers was **George Lonergan**, an old friend from U.C.D. George was an enthusiastic alpine grower, a member of the A.G.S. and knew where to buy plants in Britain. Joining the A.G.S. around 1970 signified how serious my interest had become. I also joined the “Alpine Cactus and Houseplants” group of the R.H.S.I. and bought an alpine house. Despite the strict phytosanitary regulations I was soon importing plants.

Propagation was then an absolute necessity and has remained a core activity. The annual arrival of the A.G. S. seed list in the depths of winter was an important event in the gardening year.

I exhibited for a few years at the R.H.S.I. Spring Show and later at the Ulster Show where I made many friendly contacts. Apart from George other keen alpinists whom I got to know were **Helen Dillon, Gordon Quin, Joseln Otway Ruthven, Keith Lamb, Philip Shuttleworth, Betty Guinness, Bill Moore** and **David Shackleton**. It was most stimulating to visit the gardens of all these growers and rewarding in another way also. Some of the best plants in my garden to this day testify to their generosity. All were long-standing members of the A.G.S.

Later I joined The Scottish Rock Garden Club, The American Rock Garden Society, The Hardy Plant Society and was a founder member of the Irish Garden Plant Society. All had seed exchanges in which I enthusiastically participated. Some restraint would have probably have led to better results. I became a serial plant murderer!

A bigger and more open garden became an absolute necessity and within three years I had moved with my alpine house further down Orwell Rd. Huge tonnages of sand, rocks, gravel, spent hops and mushroom compost were bought in. Material arising from building renovations came in very useful in the building of the numerous raised beds which I prepared. I grew a wide range of genera from all five continents and was never inclined to specialise. Nor were the larger-herbaceous plants neglected. I developed one and eventually two traditional borders.

Because of other commitments my attachment to the R.H.S.I. declined and I was glad to receive a visit one Saturday from **Carl Dacus** and **Richard Sullivan** who outlined their ideas on setting up a branch of the A.G.S. in Dublin. I joined the first committee and the foundation of the group gave a major boost to the alpine cult not only in the Dublin area but throughout Ireland. We received tremendous support from the Ulster Group and at our first show in Kilruddery every serious alpine grower both north and south lent their support. Heady days!

MOVING ON....

In 1990 I was on the move again, this time to an atmospheric half acre on the outskirts of Bray. Five metre high walls enclosed an ancient house over which old roses and wall shrubs fought for dominance. The climate was extremely mild and only once in the nine years there did I suffer plant losses from the cold. I experimented with a wide range of climbing roses and other wall plants which were new to me. Herbaceous borders became of major importance, but rock garden plants were of no less interest, thriving happily in a raised area to the front of the house. An old crazy paving area proved to be ideal for the sturdier growers and provided a unique opportunity for summer long colour in what I grandly christened my Pavement Garden. When my neighbours got planning permission to build apartment blocks overlooking what was a wonderfully private oasis I had little option but to move again.

HOVE TO....

My forth garden is at Kilquade known to me previously as the location of the old Calumet Nursery. The area extends to .75 acres surrounding a modern bungalow. The soil is thin and as it was once the site of an old quarry there is little in the way of natural goodness. Once more I had to import huge quantities of soil, humus and gravel. I had space to expand again and every year the grass area seemed to shrink and the number of beds increased. There was room to grow a range of interesting shrubs and two large parallel herbaceous borders. I made no attempt to copy nature in setting out my rock plants. Three long narrow raised beds shored up with old railway sleepers provide a pleasing environment for a wide range of alpine. A very shaded area at the end of the garden allows me to provide a comfort zone for woodland plants.

This year the exuberance of youth has finally deserted me and the lawn is fighting back and has regained some of its long lost ground. The writer E.B. Anderson famously wrote about his seven gardens. That seems excessive to me. Believe me; four is enough for anyone!

Dermot Kehoe

REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

AGM and 'Introduction to Digital Plant Photography' by Edwin Davison, 21 January

The business of the AGM was dealt with expeditiously with the meeting noting a deficit of around €4,000 for the year, part of which was as a result of the Society's Silver Anniversary celebration at the Botanic Gardens. Following a discussion the Committee's proposal to increase the membership fees was unanimously approved. The Chairman, **Valerie Keegan**, thanked the committee for all their work in the past year and spoke of the great loss of **Joan Carvill** and then **Anna Nolan** to the Group. Val then said that she was stepping down as Chairman and Billy Moore was elected to the post. The other members of the Committee were reelected *en bloc*.



After the AGM we were treated to a very informative presentation by Edwin Davison on digital photography basics and the management and storage of photographs. Photography is a very wide and varied subject and setting the level of information to present to an audience of varying camera use experience could not have been easy to pitch, however, Edwin achieved this admirably.

He started his presentation by briefly discussing the merits and advantages of using the digital camera for the person who is willing to have a go at snapping their favourite plants in all their glory for future browsing and reference.

Nowadays there is a good range of digital cameras available relatively cheaply that everyone can set in the automatic mode and take photographs that will be generally acceptable. However if you want to improve your photography skills Edwin gave us general points to consider, including:

- Exposure - the importance of setting the camera at the correct exposure to get true colour balance and to avoid the dreaded over-

exposed yellow pictures. Consideration is given to the three elements of the 'exposure triangle' by manipulating the shutter speed, aperture, sensitivity and ISO equivalence.

- White Balance – getting the right white balance by experimenting with the WB settings will give a better balanced colour in your photograph.
- Calibrate camera and computer screens to provide correct image colour- this can save much image editing and provide better pictures.

It was proposed by Billy Moore that the Group purchase a calibration unit and rent it at a nominal fee to members. (*For various reasons this proposal proved to be impractical. Ed.*)

Edwin then discussed what to look for when purchasing a camera and for us gardeners who wish to take close-ups of good plants – a camera with good macro capabilities.

He also discussed the merits of purchase and use of various programs for managing our images on computer. He suggested the website – www.colourconfidence.com as a good starting point to help understand the uses and benefits of various software packages.

The safe storage of images was discussed and Edwin stated that the life of a hard-drive constantly in use can be as low as three years – however if a storage device is used periodically for backing up images it will have a longer life.

At the end of the presentation, there was a good discussion with plenty of interest as Edwin answered questions that were mostly related to various computer software programmes and their uses. This was a very good start to the 2010 programme. **Gwenda Wratt** is now feeling positive that there will be an increased entry in the main show photography competition in April!

Paddy Smith

Annual Lunch, 13 February

It was yet another cold but bright February weekend that saw us gather for our annual lunch in the Royal St George Yacht Club. There was a

good turnout, including eight visitors who had travelled down from Northern Ireland.

After we had enjoyed our meal, medals from the Show were presented. **Marie Cunningham** and **Maeve Spotswood** won bronze medals, and **Liam Byrne** was presented with a Farrer medal for his *Lewisia tweedii*, and his eighth gold merit bar, meaning he has now won 450 first prizes! Congratulations to all of them.



Then we were invited to join Jamie for a tour of New Zealand, from a plant perspective of course. The first part of his talk, entitled 'Home thoughts from abroad – a Kiwi gardener in Ireland' focused on educating us as to the many plants which originated in NZ but which are quite familiar to us in this part of the world, for example, cordylines, phormiums, pittosporums, hebes, olearias, hoherias, celmisias, and griselinias to name a few. Many of the plants are commonly known by their Maori names in NZ, so, for example, *Dodonaea viscosa* would be known there as 'Akeake'. There are only eleven native trees that are deciduous, so much of the landscape is evergreen and changes very little through the seasons.

The islands of NZ were cut off from other land for 80 million years, so 80% of the 2,500 varieties of flowering plants are endemic and not found naturally anywhere else in the world. NZ was largely forested – or covered in 'bush' as they say there – until the arrival of humans around the 1200's. There were no mammals on the islands, only birds and bats, until the Maoris introduced rats. Due to the absence of any long-tongued bee species for pollination, flower forms have had to adapt to this. Sophora trees, which have a magnificent display of large yellow flowers in February, are pollinated by the Tui bird. Seeds from this plant were originally brought to Europe by Captain Cook. *Pseudowintera* species, which only grow to around one meter in height in Ireland, will

grow to full-sized trees in the NZ climate, and flourish as they are not eaten by goats or sheep.

Jamie filled us in on some climatic and geographical aspects of NZ, to help us put the flora into context. The country is 1,000 miles long and rests between latitudes 34 and 47 degrees south, the equivalent of lying between Greece and northern Africa in the northern hemisphere. This explains the warm climate enjoyed there. An earthquake fault line runs up the centre of both islands, and there is a high mountain range running up the western side of the south island. Large inland lakes are fed from glaciers. The east coast enjoys a modest 80cm rainfall annually whilst the west coast experiences an average 6.4m, three times that of the west of Ireland!

We were then taken on a tour of different areas of the South Island to see the contrasting vegetation, and were introduced to various members of Jamie's family. We started on Bank's Peninsula on the eastern seaboard, named after Joseph Banks, the botanist on Cook's expedition. Walking around the rim of the volcanic crater, and looking down onto Lyttleton Harbour, we were entranced by magnificent views, and introduced to more familiar plants growing in abundance in the wild such as huge fuschia trees with peeling trunks, pseudopanax, mersine, brachyglottis, and corokia in a range of colours of both flowers and berries. In Ireland berries are rarely produced on corokia plants because a specific insect is needed to pollinate it.

We then moved on to Arthur's Pass in the mountains where the climate ranges from very wet to quite dry. When dry, you can drive up the two mile wide river bed. The roads are rough and flocks of sheep can often slow the journey. Beautiful purple-flowered *Solanum laciniatum* grows here but is often regarded as a weed! There are also seven types of clematis which grow in the wild. Unusual varieties of olearia and rubus are found in this area, along with a leafless weeping tree broom and a weeping cortaderia (pampas grass). Aciphylla, named 'Wild Spaniards' locally, has very sharp spear-like leaves. We were shown smaller alpine plants such as raoulia, swamp musk, and ranunculus, including the white Mount Cook buttercup. I was very impressed to see five different types of celmisia in one small area.

Finally we moved on to the west coast, a former gold mining area, where at one time 20,000 people would have lived. Wonderful long sandy

beaches feature a variety of vegetation influenced by the strong west winds. I envied Jamie's mother living in a house on the beach here with such a view! Different types of tree ferns flourish here, along with the Rimu, an unusual red pine with weeping foliage, and species of cordyline. In these remote areas it is still possible to discover new species, such as *Gentianella scopulorum*, found only twenty years ago.

Jamie certainly made NZ sound a destination worth visiting, and opened my eyes to the origin of many of the plants I see every day in Ireland. Hope all of you who were there were listening carefully in preparation for his quiz later in the year!

Janet Mathias

Daffodils in the Wild

John Blanchard is a world authority on daffodils – he calls himself an 'enthusiast'. On the night 'we wandered lonely as a cloud', through lots of lovely slides!

Daffodils are only found north of the equator. None are found in the Americas and Spain is the epicentre. They have a long flowering season – you can find one for every month of the year. Daffodils grow in acid and limestone soils. *Narcissus asturiensis* appears on acid soil and is very similar to *N. jacetanus* growing in limestone areas.

There are fifty species of daffodils in the wild, divided into ten Sections. These Sections have enough differences that any interbreeding (natural or artificial) between sections produces only sterile hybrids. Those produced by parents within a section produce viable seed.

John has spent his life travelling to see and photograph all the wild species possible. He was also the expert advisor to Geoffrey Smith when he made a BBC programme about daffodils.



He showed us valleys carpeted with daffodils, many still there and some that have now disappeared under new hotels and roads.

“You cannot give the plants too much water when the leaf and flower are out”. This was shown by John’s hunt for *N. jonquilla* along the Douro River in Portugal. He eventually found them growing in the river itself with the flowers just above the surface of the water. They did get a chance to bake in the sun when the levels fell in the summer.

The species in his slides showed us everything from tiny squinny little plants like *N. viridiflorus* to those we love to grow. The only native daffodils in the British Isles are *N. pseudonarcissus* and the Tenby daffodil *N. obvallaris*.

Early descriptions of *N. cyclamineus* were known but the plant could not be located. Dean Herbert described it ‘as an absurdity that would be found not to exist!’ In the ‘50s a customer of Brian Duncan’s in Chile made contact and told them where to find it in Western Galicia in early April.

It was a fascinating journey through John’s slides From Iberia down to Northern Morocco. So many species needing different requirements. This all before anyone started breeding and introducing the hundreds of crosses available today. John himself introduced twenty varieties, the best known being ‘Purbeck’ and ‘Tuesday’s Child’.

John’s superb lecture finished with questions – his advice to growers was to use neutral soil or John Innes in raised beds for good drainage and plenty of grit and chippings!

Val Keegan

Spring Local Show, Workshop and Members’ Plant Sale, 6 March

There was a good attendance at the show and the standard of plants on the benches was high although numbers were down a bit. The non-competitive exhibits added to the colourful display.

Pat Kennedy’s lovely potful of *Galanthus* ‘Straffan’ was adjudged best in show and **George Sevastopulo** was the overall winner with most points in show. Other good performers were **Paddy Smith** and **Gavin Moore**. **Patricia McGeown** achieved a first in the novice class and hopefully we will continue to see her plants on the show bench.

There was great interest in George’s demonstration of the technique of twin scaling bulbs which is particularly suitable for propagating galanthus and narcissus species. Up to thirty two twin scales can be

obtained from each bulb so it is easy to see how productive the technique can be if you want to bulk up your stock of, say, a rare snowdrop cultivar. Strict attention to hygiene is essential at all stages, otherwise all you will achieve is the loss of your bulb. George's explanation was a model of clarity and I feel certain that several members of the audience will have plastic bags containing vermiculite and twin scales in their hotpresses come June.

Jim Almond discussed twin scaling at Termonfeckin last year and kindly gave us an illustrated detailed account of the process and if anyone would like a copy of this just ask any member of the Committee. Unfortunately for copyright reasons we can't put it up on the website. There were some very good plants available in the plant sale and these went quickly.

A very pleasant and informative afternoon concluded with tea and biscuits.

Editor

Saxifrages – Across the World and in the Garden, Malcolm McGregor, 18 March

In March we were very lucky to have a genuine world-renowned expert speaking to us at the National Botanic Gardens. Malcolm McGregor has quite literally written the book on saxifrages. His publication *Saxifrages: The Definitive Guide to 2000 Species, Hybrids & Cultivars* is now accepted as the most complete guide to their cultivation. Malcolm's talk was compiled in tandem with the writing of the book, and proved to be a comprehensive tour of the many habitats and growing conditions of this most beautiful, varied and amenable genus.

Throughout the talk, we were presented with one reason after another as to why everyone should grow saxifrages. With more than 1,000 garden species, saxifrages are beautiful and varied, they are readily available and have a very long season, flowering from January until winter's first



frosts. Before Malcolm embarked on his sixty-minute sales pitch on why we all should grow saxifrages, he answered a simple, yet rarely asked question: What is a saxifrage? Linnaeus not only invented a naming system for plants, but his system was based on their physical attributes, a system devised in the 18th century that is valid today. In answer to the question, if a plant has two female and ten male sex organs, it's a saxifrage.

We got a global tour of the saxifrage habitat – a habitat explained by several million years of ebb and flow of the northern ice cap. Starting in Europe, Malcolm gave us a detailed description of the different groups of saxifrages. One of the London Pride group (Gymnopera) – *S. spathularis* – is native to Ireland and grows in Killarney. Another notable European native is the magnificent *S. longifolia*, an easy and easily obtainable saxifrage that should be in every alpine garden. There are many beautiful hybrid saxifrages now available, mainly derived from two saxifrages from the Dwarf Cushion group (Porphyron)– *S. burseriana* and *S. aretioides*. This group also contains the very desirable species *S. lowndesii* and *S. stolitzkiae*. The Dwarf Cushion group is widespread in Europe and Asia. The Yellow Summer group (Ciliatae) is uncommon in cultivation in Europe and includes the very difficult *S. jacquemontiana* and the very beautiful *S. nigroglandulifera*, which is currently not in cultivation. The tour was completed with an account of the flora, fauna and challenging habitat of Alaska and Siberia adjacent to the Bering Straits, and finally the Rocky and Olympic Mountains, the habitat of other genera within the saxifrage family, namely *Micrathus*, *Heuchera* and *Tiarella*.

Malcolm finished his talk with a two sobering accounts. The first was the plight of *Micrathus tischii*. Due to global warming, this diminutive plant now inhabits only two peaks in North America. The second was of once popular species of saxifrage that are no longer in cultivation, specifically *S. sherriffii* and the only scented saxifrage, *S. meeboldii*. Not wanting to end on a gloomy note, we heard some potentially useful and amusing advice on the perils of plant hunting in North Morocco where marijuana is the local crop and the local 'farmers' are less than keen on foreigners plant hunting in the undergrowth!

Malcolm set out to convince his audience of the merits of growing saxifrages. I already grow several, but I left the room realizing that this

genus deserves far more than passing interest and should be a cornerstone of any collection of garden alpinists.

Gavin Moore

‘Between a Rock and a Hard Place’, Carl Wright, 6 May

For many in the large audience this lecture proved to be the most enjoyable of the season. I don’t think I’ve ever heard such sustained applause at the end of one of our talks. Carl was concerned that if he went over the stipulated time he would be in trouble, but he left his listeners longing for more. He had a fascinating story to tell and although he is quite new to the lecture circuit his presentation was exemplary, as were his slides.

Carl’s garden is in the Burren, near Fanore and he welcomes visitors so if you’re in the area be sure to call. What he has achieved on the evidence of his talk is another good reason to visit the region. About ten years ago he bought a derelict cottage on three hectares of typical Burren woodland, i.e., hawthorn, hazel and blackthorn. Using all his skills as a plantsman, an ecologist, a stonemason and a builder, coupled with prodigious energy and stamina he has created a superb garden that sits comfortably and harmoniously in the natural landscape.

Making a garden on a site with soil of only a couple of centimeters deep would intimidate all but the most determined. A certain amount of site clearance was necessary. Carl retained those trees which had a pleasing shape, but moved them to where they would contribute most to the garden. He overcame the shallow soil problem by building raised beds for his plants and making holes between the rocks to accommodate bulbs such as snowdrops and crocuses (Carl is something of a galanthophile and has a collection of more than 200 varieties.). But he had to import many tons of soil for this purpose, the quality of which was so bad that he had to sieve it all by hand. Whew! He also uses lots of troughs and other containers strategically placed around the garden planted with hostas and other plants as well as alpinists such as saxifragas, rhodohypoxis, primulas etc.

The garden is adjacent to an old double-arched stone bridge which Carl has echoed in the overall design as the bridge is visible from most parts of the garden. He has also used the same stone to create a network of dry stone walls throughout the site, some dividing one section from another and others supporting the many raised beds. There are also

paths through the garden which were made by exposing the underlying rock and where appropriate steps are carved into the paths. Carl's skills with stone are amazing with the wonderful Moon Window built into one of the walls being perhaps his best creation.

Again using the natural features of the site Carl built a pond which is fed by the river that flows under the aforementioned bridge. The pond is planted with a mixture of native and garden water and marginal plants.

Carl is a consummate plantsman and his passion is evident throughout the garden with its eclectic mix of rare and common plants none of which ever conflicts with the natural feel of the garden. He grows, roses, sambucus, celmisias, clematis, hemerocallis, primulas, ferns, hellebores, dianthus, bergenias to name a few, along with bulbs like fritillarias, arisaemas, irises and narcissus as well as the already mentioned snowdrops and crocuses. He has a great eye for a good plant and an unerring instinct for its suitable placement.

As well as developing his garden Carl had to make the broken down cottage habitable, habitable for humans that is, because when he bought it the building was being used as a breeding ground for pine martens. Indeed in the early years he shared the house with these creatures. Other wild life abounds on the site and for some years a fox was Carl's constant companion as he struggled to wrest a garden from the wilderness.

The Burren is often described as a jewel of the Irish landscape and I think Carl's garden is on its way to being a jewel within a jewel. I can't wait to see the real thing. We will be hearing more of Carl Wright.

Editor

Visit to Waterford Gardens, 8 May

Mr and Mrs John and Iris Riley. Tara, Co. Waterford

The trip to Waterford proved very popular – a full coach which is very gratifying for the fixtures' secretary. After a sight-seeing trip around Mooncoin we arrived at the Riley bungalow perched on the side of a hill with a magnificent view over the river and the hills beyond. A very warm welcome awaited us from John and Iris who had the kettle on and what a lovely morning repast.

The garden was only started seventeen years ago when they returned to live in Ireland. Along with their van load of furniture etc. they brought with them many of their plants from their previous garden that accounted for the most interesting collection of species, all well suited to the new site. A really good garden always has a great eye catcher to entice the visitor in to view and this garden certainly had it. Entering the front garden one was immediately struck by the group of Birch Trees underplanted with *Chrysanthemum* 'Little Princess' – a stunning combination. *Betula jacquemontii* 'Trinity Form' is easily one of the best white stemmed birches to be had. *Chrysanthemum* 'Little Princess' is not listed in the current 'Plantfinder' but there are similar varieties to be had. Not surprising to see so many taking photographs of the arrangement. The next feature was the pergola leading to the back garden planted with *Laburnum*, either *vosii* or *waterei*. The Laburnum when in flower gives a stunning display though we were too early for this show.

Two lovely trees that often cause confusion but should be more frequently planted in the smaller garden as neither take up too much room are *Acer griseum* and *Prunus serrula* with their mahogany bark. Both were well pruned to show off the peeling bark, a most attractive feature particularly when the winter sun turns the colour to an almost deep glistening red. A small plant that is seldom seen is *Fothergilla monticola* that prefers an acid soil but will do in neutral. The *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb' was thriving and this specimen showed no damage from the harsh winter and neither did the other Australasian plants including *Pittosporum* 'Mrs Stirling', *Callistermon* sp., *Olearia traversii*, *Astelia* 'Silver Spear' that glistened in the sunlight and *Pseudowintera colorata*, a plant I have never warmed to.

The back garden was in two levels with a retaining wall and at its base in one section were large *Trachycarpus fortunei* that were very fine specimens, but Iris felt that they were getting too big and were due for the chop to be replanted with smaller plants, a swift intake of breath at the thought. They were only about two feet tall when planted yet in so short a time they had reached fifteen feet, yet a line of them in the Walled Garden at Malahide had taken almost twenty-five years to reach a similar height. On the upper level is a most natural looking pond with a lovely waterfall and extremely well planted. One always thinks that one will remember every plant, and unfortunately I forgot to write a few names down being distracted by noting the very small *Gunnera magellanica*, the tiny South

American native, that was romping away. It is so hard to believe that it is related to *Gunnera manicata*. A small section was given over to some vegetables and fruit mainly blueberries and black and red currants and a small nursery with plants for sale propagated from their own material.

Other plants that stood out were *Embothrium coccineum*, *Crinodendron hookerianum*, *Feijoa sellowiana* (syn *Acca sellowiana*), *Ceanothus* 'Emily Brown', this plant rarely seen outside the very large gardens; *Prostanthera cuneata*, *Geranium phaeum* 'Sambor', *Gunnera manicata* and *Salix yezoalpino*. This is a garden that should be visited again just to see it maturing and note how the trees and shrubs merge together without crowding each other out.

Time to move on, but on hearing that we were to picnic in the bus John and Iris invited us to picnic in their garden. No need for a second invitation everyone sat down immediately, some on the seats while others availed of the steps. With the sun shining, bottles of wine being uncorked, it was a most pleasant end to an enjoyable visit.

(The large Silver leaved tree with the tiny unopened flowers in panicles that many enquiries were made of was *Olearia traversii* – just a narrow leaved form of the species that occurs from time to time and here possibly due to either the wind or exposure. It is an excellent seaside plant, evergreen, and is often used as a hedging plant and frequently seen around Clare).

Mount Congreve

I was surprised to learn that I was not the only one who had not visited Mount Congreve before, so it was a treat in store for many of us and we were not disappointed. The garden is extensive and with its winding paths running in all directions one needed to be both fit and have a good sense of direction. A good map of the layout of the garden is essential if you intend walking around on your own or better still avail of the guided tour. Our tour guide was **Michael White** and excellent he was; his knowledge of the history and planting of the shrubs was incredible, but most of all he was entertaining and made the trip through the maze of rhododendrons truly enjoyable.

Gardening on an alkaline soil, my interest in rhodos is limited, though there are always a number that will take one's fancy and every effort is made to acquire them and hope for the best. Three such rhododendrons are *R. macrosepalum* 'Linearifolium' with its feathery leaves and red funnel shaped flowers, *R. williamsianum* – a small compact plant, with bell

shaped pink flowers very suitable for most small gardens and will grow reasonably well in neutral or a light alkaline soil. It has given rise to many hybrids. The third plant is *R. spinuliferum*, again a plant that doesn't grow much beyond 1.8m and again will do reasonably well in neutral to light alkaline soil. The latter two flowered consistently well at Malahide, though when originally planted the soil was ameliorated. One species that Michael recommended for alkaline soil was *R. schlippenbachii* – a deciduous species that has purplish-red leaves in spring turning to coppery orange in autumn and large pink to rose pink flowers in April/May.

Rhododendrons may have dominated the gardens but magnolias and camellias were also well represented including *MM campbellii*, *grandiflora*, *stellata* and its several forms, *M soulangiana* and its varieties; and many varieties of camellia. I would recommend getting the nursery catalogue and perusing it: numerous varieties are listed and described.

Besides the above there were lovely specimens of *Davidia involucrata* 'Vilmorin' the Handkerchief Tree, so called because of the white bracts that surround the flowers in Spring. *Agathis australis*, a lovely New Zealand conifer is seldom seen outside the larger garden. It grows to 45m in New Zealand but here in Ireland is a small tree. *Sciadopitys verticillata* – the umbrella pine, a Japanese pine of medium size nearly always making a lovely specimen tree and well worth growing if there is space. It invariably turns up at identification tests principally I believe to hear us all pronounce the name incorrectly. *Pittosporum dallii*, a lovely plant but possibly too large for the smaller garden is reputed to have scented flowers, but seldom flowers in our climate. For scent the species *P. tobira* which comes from China and Japan should be planted. In summer it produces in profusion cream coloured orange scented flowers and is reasonably hardy.

It was a long tour but one that I think everyone thoroughly enjoyed and again a return visit is a must at a slightly different time to catch many other species in flower. This may not have been a tour of alpine gardens but certainly one I am glad was chosen for a change.

Anne James

Workshop - Basic Botany, Dr Matthew Jebb, 3 June

The evening was warm and sunny, and the Botanic Gardens never looked more beautiful. In these idyllic circumstances the fortunate twelve members who turned up followed horticultural taxonomist Matthew Jebb around the family beds for a virtual masterclass in elementary, and sometimes not-so-elementary, botany.

Those of us, myself included, who were botanically challenged, were to benefit from his erudite explanations and demonstrations. His enthusiasm for his subject was infectious, and over a period of two hours he maintained our fascination and attention. No mean feat, as by the second hour after sundown it had become a bit chilly, but everyone hung-in there and stayed the course.

Matthew came armed with three explanatory sheets for each person: a student's guide to the family beds, and two pages of illustrations of the reproductive systems of the different flower families. He imparted basic botany on the main flower parts – calyx, sepals, stamens, carpels, etc. Then, proceeding through the family beds we dissected flower heads under Matthew's watchful eye, and viewed the minute parts with the aid of hand lenses that he had thoughtfully provided.



Some features to look for in plant identification were explained, such as whether petals were fused, as in campanula, or not, as in the case of buttercups; whether the ovaries were superior (above the receptacle), or inferior (below the receptacle), arrangement of stamens, etc.

Referring to the classic Bentham & Hooker *Genera Plantarum* (1862-83), Matthew said that their notions were eighty five percent confirmed by DNA today. However, he insisted that peeling apart flowers and looking at them through a lens, was the best way to familiarise ourselves with the subject.

He told us an interesting tale about *Aristolochia clematitis* (folk name birthwort). Its flower resembles the human birth canal with the uterus, and in former times this plant was used in childbirth. This was in keeping with the Doctrine of Signatures, where plants were named for

the body parts they resembled and could treat, e.g., heartsease, lungwort, navelwort, etc. It was grown in herb or physic gardens near hospitals.

Matthew's talk was laced with many fascinating nuggets of information. All arrangements in nature are governed by a mathematical sequence known as the Fibonacci sequence. This was discovered by Leonardo of Pisa in the 12th century. For instance, the number of petals on a buttercup (5), on a bloodroot (8), and on a Shasta daisy (21) are all numbers in this sequence.

Ever since that magical evening in the Botanic Gardens I look at flower heads with new, more educated eyes (as I suspect my colleagues do too), while I reach for my penknife to commence the sectioning process! Thank you Matthew.

Anne Nolan

Garden Visit: Patricia McGuire, Sandyford, Co Dublin, 11 June

A day so happy

Fog lifted early, I worked in the garden ...

There was no thing on earth I wanted to possess

I knew no one worth my envying him

A quote from a poem by the Polish poet **Cselaw Milosz** is handpainted by Patricia's son on a wooden plaque in her greenhouse. It's clearly a sentiment that Patricia holds close: her beautiful garden is testament not only to her artistry and love of gardening but it's also obvious that in the twenty years that she and her husband Michael have lived here that many a "day so happy" has been spent in it.

Over twenty members found their way to Patricia's garden on a June Sunday, helped along by balloon markers and, in some cases, the 44 bus. Happily, the rain held off for long enough for all to appreciate the garden, and when it did come, a huddle of us enjoyed delicious refreshments under the umbrellas on Patricia's deck. Had the weather



been finer, there would have been no shortage of places to sit, as there are no fewer than seven peaceful spaces from which to enjoy the beauty of a garden that has been put together with an artist's eye and a gardener's skill.

The main garden is L-shaped and reached through a garden gate that can't prepare you for what lies ahead, although the lovely geometric raised bed of alpiners, the gravel beds and a small but perfectly formed Japanese maple at the front of the house are a bit of a clue!

Coming through the gate, a greenhouse on the left contains ordered arrays of trays and pots, as well as some healthy-looking tomato plants. Leading from the greenhouse along the side of the house is a box-edged lawn with a collection of alpiners in the middle, housed very contentedly in a raised bed made of nicely weathered sleepers. In this bed, as in others, was the tiny willow *Salix boydii*, outshone in this instance by an exquisite pale yellow *Roscoa* and surrounded by frothing *Gypsophila* and saxifrages.

Around the corner of the house, and in front of the deck, is a well established pond with a glowing white water lily, in bloom on the day of the visit. The pond also contains a well-behaved *Equisetum* and water mint which, Patricia told us, attracts lots of dragonflies a bit later in the season. The flawless large lawn contains some lovely specimen trees. In pride of place is a blue cedar underlain with a wide circle of blue slate pieces that provide just the right home for many Sedums, sempervivums and the like. A new addition to the trees on the lawn is *Cornus kousa* "Venus" that Patricia got from Johnstown Nurseries and planted just this year. It was covered in large pure white flowers about 15cm (6" in old money) across.

A stand of *Betula jacquemontii* in the corner is enhanced by a mirrored tall pyramidal sculpture in the middle, more proof of Patricia's artistic eye. Finally, in keeping with current trends, an octagonal raised bed, a mini-potager really, sits comfortably in a curved area of the lawn. The bed is brimming with a lovely mix of fruit and veg, laid out in geometric shapes: from an artichoke in the centre, supported by a metal obelisk, radiating groups of strawberries, cabbages, lettuces, and scallions sit happily side by side. Each corner of the octagon is marked by the purple heads of giant chives, and the whole is kept safe from marauding pigeons by subtle netting.

The curved lawn is edged with brick and bounded by beds of herbaceous perennials, shrubs and trees. A delicate *Sambucus nigra* ('BlackLace?') was in blossom on the day and attracted a lot of attention, its deep burgundy colour echoed throughout the border by, e.g., *Knautia macedonica* and, subtly, a bronze fennel. A neat dome of weeping beech in front of the deck picks up the colour again.

As the new kid on the block, I was roped in (very nicely!) by **Mary O'Neill Byrne** to write a report for the newsletter on this visit. I thought this would be a hard task, but the main difficulty was keeping the article short enough. I would like to thank Patricia and Michael for the chance to see their garden, **Val Keegan** for a tour of some of the more arcane alpine plant names, and many others for sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm on the day.

Fionnuala Broughan

FIXTURES

Thursday, 16 September, 8 pm, Philip Cribb, ‘Shangri-la, a Botanist in the Tibetan Marches’, NBG, Glasnevin. (Joint with IGPS.)

Thursday, 21 October, 8 pm, John Good, ‘Climate change and Alpines’, St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Thursday, 11 November, 8 pm, Billy Moore, ‘Alpines at Home and Away’, St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

Friday, 19 to Sunday 21 November, 27th Alpine Weekend, Christine Skelmersdale, Martin Walsh and Zdeněk Zvolánek, An Grianán, Termonfeckin.

Thursday, 9 December, 8 pm, Christmas Miscellany, St Brigid’s Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Chairman:	Billy Moore
Hon. Secretary:	Mary O'Neill-Byrne
Hon. Treasurer:	Tessa Dagge
Show Secretary:	Val Keegan
Webmaster:	Jamie Chambers
Fixtures Secretary:	Martin Walsh
Librarian:	Anne-Marie Keoghan
Committee Members:	Arthur Dagge
	Michael Higgins
	Barbara O'Callaghan



Billy



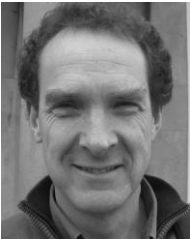
Mary



Tessa



Val



Jamie



Martin



AnneMarie



Arthur



Michael



Barbara



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