



Plant Heritage

CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY OF GARDEN PLANTS

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Group



Autumn Flowering Rhododendron

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2020



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Cover photo: An unnamed Rhododendron. Reliably flowering in September and again in the spring, both flushes are quite substantial. Believed to be an American hybrid. *Any ideas?* Photo by Doug Smith taken 9 Sep 2020

Editor's note

A big thank you to all those who have been generous with their time and contributed to this issue. The deadline for the Autumn Newsletter is 15 February 2021. I would really appreciate short articles on a wide variety of topics from members and Collection Holders. Contact the editor: Juliet Bloss: Tel: 023 8084 8085. email: sevenmeads@aol.com

Chairman's Letter

What an extraordinary year. Where do I start? The end of last winter, thankfully gave us no nasty surprises, with only a few light frosts, all over by 1st April, however, February was recorded as the wettest on record. In late March lockdown started in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. The spring months, March to May were notable by the number of days with cloudless skies, not even interrupted by jet trails, once transatlantic air travel came to a halt. A record 626 sunshine hours, smashing the previous high of 555. Moving into summer, rainfall levels rose across the country, but tended to miss the central south. Official reports of 2020 being 'one of the wettest and coolest summers of the last 7 years' is not true of our local area, which was actually one of the driest of the last 5 years. So here we are in September and summer is officially over.

We've missed a lot. Lockdown put an early stop to both garden visits and organised talks and, even now, the latter are not feasible. This basically killed the programme of events for the year, and this section of the newsletter has been omitted. We avoided cancelling events until as late as reasonably possible, in case restrictions were lifted at short notice. Of regret to us all was the loss of both our Plant Fairs which, in addition to depriving members and the general public of two excellent days out, will make a huge dent in our income for the year. Outgoings have been small, so we have no problems with liquidity, but it seems unlikely that we will be able to make a contribution to central funds this year.

Linda and I were particularly sad not to be opening the garden for the usual early September event. However, given that there could be no teas, that inside toilets were to be out-of-bounds, pre-booking and pre-paying was required, together with gate checks and some sort of marshalling system on the day, we decided that the only realistic option was to cancel. Our hearts go out to those keen and hard-working garden owners who put in great efforts to prepare their gardens for show, but who were ultimately unable to share the results of their efforts.

Before I finish with past events, there are two I feel I need to mention. Firstly the AGM. This was planned as a full open event in May, but was conducted as a video conference. Lynsey Pink will be covering this in a separate article, but there are a couple of important points. After last year's suspension of all non-essential expenditure and control of finances being taken over by the trustees, the figures for the year ending November 2019 showed a net income of over £93,000, compared with a loss of over £66,000 in 2017/2018; a remarkable recovery. Even with the likely loss of income from groups this year (£60K in 2018/19) this will hopefully reduce the chances of the charity having to call on reserves in the current, or next, year. Secondly the Virtual Talks programme. I trust some of you have availed yourselves of the opportunity to experience a quality presentation, without the need to leave your home. Check on the Plant Heritage website for upcoming events.

Now for the future programme. An uninformative single word answer: Uncertain! I'm sorry we are unable to give you a clearer picture. We will be pencilling in speakers and visits, where possible, and re-inviting those who were cancelled from this year's programme, While we will try to communicate this to you at the earliest opportunity, if the rate of change of things over the last few months continues into next year, we are, inevitably going have to have to rely on short term updates.

I wish you all good gardening for the rest of the year and the year to come. May it be a little more relaxing than this one.

Doug Smith, Chairman

New Members

The Hampshire & Isle of Wight Group welcomes the following new, or re-joining, members. We look forward to seeing you at some of our events.

Isabel Osborne, Rob Gibbs, Alex Graham, Julian Noble

Sad News

It is with regret that I convey the news that John Gammon passed away recently. He has been a long standing Hampshire member and held the National Collection of Liquidamber, one of the earliest of our county National Collections, in addition to an excellent collection of other shrubs and trees. His wife Daphne has asked to be named as the collection holder for the time being and she's hoping that her son Oliver will take it on. That would be a good outcome for the collection. We wish them both the very best.

Doug Smith, Chairman

Highly Desirable, or just Thugs?

When one starts a garden, there is a tendency to add plants that might give a dramatic display in a few years' time. Exuberant growth is really welcomed, but after a few decades, things can get a bit out of hand.

Phyllostachys vivax 'Aureocaulis'

Golden Chinese Timber Bamboo. An impressive, large, graceful and fully hardy



species. It is generally described as a clump former and not a rampant spreader, like many other of its family relatives.. Unfortunately that only seems to be the case for the first 10 or 20 years. Once it is established, it can indeed get a bit naughty, sending out its rhizomes up to a metre or

so, even under grass paths into nearby flowerbeds. Whilst the resulting new shoots, and any others that are surplus to requirements, can be pruned out, the height is a bit more problematical to control. This bamboo can get to 30ft, ideal as a screen, both visually and as a sound barrier; spectacular in the right spot but, in the wrong one could be a bit much.



Tetrapanax payrifera 'Rex'

Known by all as T rex, it can ultimately turn into be a giant.

Perfect for exotic planting schemes, rice-paper tree, *Tetrapanax papyrifera* 'Rex', is a fast-growing, woody shrub bearing huge, deeply lobed, fresh green leaves up to 60cm across.

Native to Taiwan, it's a hardy plant and is suitable for cultivation across the UK. In milder regions it's almost evergreen, the older leaves dying off, leaving a central boss of young ones. In extreme winters (that we have failed to get for several



years, it can be cut to the ground, but will shoot back from the root the following year. Once well-established, T. Rex will sucker prolifically, running under paving and walls without difficulty, in our case springing up in beds several metres away and even inside a nearby greenhouse. These are easily removed and can be potted up to produce new plants. The specimen (right), some 25 years old, is now some 5metres tall. Grow in moist but well-drained soil in full sun to partial shade. Remove faded leaves as and when they appear tatty, and prune out/back unwanted stems in autumn. Be careful when doing so as the hairs on the stems and leaves can be quite irritating.,



Clerodendrum bungei,

Clerodendrum bungei, commonly known as rose glory bower, glory flower or Mexican hydrangea, is a species of flowering plant in the deadnettle family, Lamiaceae. Native to China, it is commonly grown in gardens as an ornamental shrub. The flowers are slightly fragrant; the crushed leaves have a much stronger, rather unpleasant odour. It is a very attractive shrub, flowering in late summer and early autumn, on stems of 1-2 metres. *Clerodendrum bungei* is noted for its suckering habit and rapid growth which allow it to form spreading colonies. It is valued for its flowers but its aggressive spread makes it suited best for somewhat isolated areas. Like



the *Tetrapanax*, it will run happily under paving and send up new shoots some distance from the parent plant. Unwanted stems can be chopped off at the base. It has escaped from cultivation and is naturalized in the Americas. It is fairly hardy, certainly with us, although it can, reportedly, be cut back to the ground in a very hard winter, another similarity to T.Rex..

Doug Smith

Nothoscordum

This is a new one to me. I discovered it in the garden a few years ago. Thinking it was a sort of Allium, I crushed a few leaves and found them odourless. The flowers however, appearing throughout spring and summer, are sweetly fragrant, and good for cutting. A bit of research clearly needed.. It took a while to identify it as a Nothoscordum. Whether it is *N. gracile*, *N. entrerianum* or *x borboricum*, a hybrid between the two, is unclear but I would plump for the hybrid. All hail from South America. Very pretty, and very nice in a vase, but further reading generated a bit of a concern. The common names 'Fragrant False Garlic' and 'Honey Bells' seemed appropriate, but two alternatives, 'Onion Weed' and more particularly 'The Devil Bulb' are less appealing.



It seems to have found its way across the more subtropical and mild temperate regions, but not well recorded in the UK, although it has escaped successfully to the Channel Islands and has been recorded in a few places in the south east of England. It would appear to be a pest in mild locations such as the southern states of the USA, along the lines of *Allium triquetum*. How it got into our garden is anyone's guess. .



It appears to spread both by seed and by the distribution of the small bulbils produced at the base of the stem, which can lie dormant for months on end. It would appear that the immature ones are pale, the really small riper ones are black and difficult to pick out amongst the soil particles. One to keep an eye on, I think. If it does spread too far, care will be needed in disposing of unwanted bits; perhaps not on the compost heap. I am informed, however, by our newsletter editor, that it grew at Spinners, where it did not appear to want to take over the garden

Doug Smith

Papaver somniferum – rogue out the wishy-washy pale lilacs.

We have had Opium poppies appearing in the garden for many years source unknown. I personally am not impressed with the single, wild-type pale lilacs and the doubles are much worse. However, in recent years we have seen a number of much more attractive colour beaks.

By removing the less interesting before they go to seed, we seem to have been able to produce a strain which is far more impressive. Those remaining tend to come reasonably true. So easy! You can of course purchase named strains of this plant, but just seeing what come up is a bit more fun.



Doug Smith

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