



# HPS

HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

Gardening with hardy perennials



STAFFORDSHIRE GROUP E Newsletter

Autumn 2020

Picture on page 1:

Lilac *Erigeron* 'Sincerity', *Achillea millefolium* cultivar and yellow *Anthemis tinctoria* 'Wargrave Variety' all taken by Ruth Plant at Yew Tree Cottage Garden.

*Erigeron* 'Sincerity' is a beautiful variety with single lilac flowers in June and July. Prefers a sunny site with good soil. Easily grown. Height: 45cm (18") Typical cottage garden plants. (<https://www.farmyardnurseries.co.uk/shop/Erigeron-Sincerity-M14754>)

*Anthemis* 'Wargrave Variety' is a clump-forming perennial with finely-divided, evergreen, aromatic leaves. The pale yellow daisy flowers are produced over a long period in summer. (<https://www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/120176/Anthemis-tinctoria-Wargrave-Variety/Details> )

*Achillea millefolium* 'Lilac Beauty' is a mat-forming perennial, to 80cm tall, with ferny, green basal leaves and stems that carry flat-topped flowerheads of lilac-purple freely borne but fading with age. (<https://www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/56958/Achillea-millefolium-Lilac-Beauty/Details> )

This E Letter is very similar to our paper version Newsletter but has a few links included for you to study the websites. Please let me know what you think and how we can improve on this!!

Editor, Yoke van der Meer

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## **Welcome to another autumn 'Hardy Planters' E-letter!**

It has been a most odd year and will never be forgotten in our history no doubt, but I like to remember it as a year when the Himalayas were visible again for the first time in 30 years due to lack of air pollution! And closer at home; who didn't enjoy the quiet roads and sounds of birdsong?

So in this edition we have a few positive items about what members have been up to during this year of 'the Plague'.

We are starting off with an account of monthly jobs and observations during this year by Jackie on page 6.

Then Fiona decided to get rid of some surplus plants and raise a good amount of cash for the 'Little Hearts Matter' charity.

Ruth has written two articles for the month August. There was the Sandon Plant Fair, where our group had another successful stand as well as a visit to our member Alison Rose's garden at Top Yard House.

Clive, who is our honoured Photographic Competition organiser as well as our group's Conservation Group Coordinator, has something to tell you about both and also found a poem on God's Garden!

Ruth also lets you know about the art of zooming and this E-letter has been adorned with many of her plant pictures taken at their Yew Tree Cottage Garden.

Helen has send an article on an interesting and unusual houseplant. Houseplants have always been important for me since I was a young girl as I think they really make a home 'homely'. Similar as in our garden we just have to find the right plant for the right place!

Finally I would like to treat you with a small extract from a study visit to Tromsø Arctic-Alpine Botanical Garden by Giulio Veronese, who works as a Senior Horticulturist at Birmingham Botanic Garden and was partly sponsored through the HPS Kenneth Black Bursary Fund. It is well worth having a look on the main HPS website for his, as well as various other fascinating bursary reports.

Hope you enjoy the read!



*Inula magnifica* (above); an autumnal scene in Yew Tree Cottage Garden and *Persicaria* 'Pink Elephant' (right).

## Chairman's Letter

Welcome to the Autumn issue of the Newsletter. I hope that you and your family are keeping safe and well. I, like most members, have spent more time than usual gardening and been very thankful to have the open space.

I enjoyed the E Newsletters and thanks Yoke for keeping us all together.

Our group's activities were severely curtailed this year? You will find a report of the Sandon Plant Sale on Page 12, the only one attended by the group, all this after the committee had spent many hours planning Spring and Summer events for your enjoyment, these are now all things we can look forward to in the future, as they say "watch this space".

The first group Zoom lecture was a great success and more are being planned. Our thanks must go to Bernie as "Host" Carol for organizing the speaker and Ruth for coordinating the evening. As one member said it was very nice to sit in the warm with a drink to hand but missed the company of friends. The stop-- start regulations for Covid19 make it a very strange world and difficult to plan into the future, but we are all on the case and in planning mode ready for 2021/2022 so do let us have any ideas that we can investigate. If we stay vigilant we can but hope that our plans for next year will all go ahead.

I am personally hoping for a bright Autumn and a mild Winter so that I can still get outside and keep up the good work in the garden.

***Hymenocallis festalis* or the Peruvian daffodil or spider lily.**



It is not hardy so will need protection in the winter.

The flowers are ivory white and highly scented. It can be grown in containers or be planted straight into your garden.

(picture by Graham Lees)



***Salvia involucrata*** above and  
***Hesperantha coccinea*** 'Major' (in  
Iridaceae) all pictures from Yew  
Tree Cottage Garden.

<https://www.rhsplants.co.uk/plants//hesperantha-coccinea-major/classid.3579/>

***Hemiboea subcapitata*** or 'False  
Sinningia' (in Gesneriaceae or  
African Violet family)

<https://www.farmyardnurseries.co.uk/shop/Hemiboea-subcapitata-M5302>



## **A Gardener's Chronicle in Summer 2020** (by Jackie Hemingway)

**March:** Some vile disease has imprisoned us all. Family and friends now the enemy. Retail centres shut. What we haven't got we cannot get. Gaze out into the garden from the lounge window whilst listening to the morbid news. Hydrangea looking bedraggled. Give it a hard prune.

**April:** Open compost heap. Does not look like potting compost. Lever out blacker bits from between last year's stems and veg peelings. Use to plant dahlia tubers and over wintered cuttings from my glorious 'Helen Harrison' chrysanthemum. Stalky stuff that's left use to mulch rhubarb. Check winter planted onions, garlic and broad beans. All doing well. Find potatoes in fridge drawer with chits so long they walk out and plant themselves. Mulch greenhouse with remaining 'compost'. Unseasonal hot sunshine which surely can't last? Rummage in shed for garden chairs. 'Queen Elizabeth' rose is out! That's a first for April. Always wish she had some scent.

**May:** May Morning. Hares boxing on the lawn, bell-clear birdsong, forget-me-not blue sky. Greenhouse full of veg seedlings germinated from my 'compost'. Courgettes? Pumpkins? Squashes? Pot some, leave some, plant some out. What looks like tomatoes leave in situ. Shoo out the greenfly. Celebrate VE Day with tea and sandwiches in the garden beneath the apple blossom. Just the two of us. No sign of dahlias emerging? Must be the cold nights? 'Helen Harrison's disappeared? Broad beans and rhubarb for supper in front of reruns of Chelsea Flower Show.

**June:** Still no dahlia shoots. Tip pots out to find large extended families of monster slugs. Eggs must have over wintered in my 'compost'. Plant tubers out in garden and hope for best. Also explains disappearance of Helen Harrison. Frances rings. Do I want some Sungold tomato plants? She has reared 37 from a packet of seeds. Due to dubious provenance of my volunteer tomatoes, I snap her hand off and trade for a tin of custard powder via box at farm gate. Long neglected strawberry patch bearing fruit faster than we can eat. Make jam.

**July:** Harvest garlic and last of broad beans. Saving seed for next year just in case. Dig first new potatoes. No idea what variety they are but taste wonderful. String up tomatoes, inside and out. Greenhouse resembles jungle. Family come for outdoor socially distanced tea. Plenty of fresh air and plenty of strawberries. Coats on throughout. Rather a windswept affair.

**August:** Tomato glut. Cherry, beef, yellow, orange, chocolate.

Frenzy of squashes, marrows, courgettes and pumpkins. Discovered Turks turban hiding at back of greenhouse. Very excited. Buy wide based ladder for picking Discoveries. Storm Florence kindly picks them all for us the following day. Invite neighbour to help himself to windfalls. He leaves me bags of beetroot and watercress. Bishop of Llandaff has flowered but alas, Helen Harrison seems to have disappeared altogether.

September tomorrow. Feels like Autumn already. Wondering why the hydrangea isn't flowering?

**September:** Apples, apples everywhere! Ellisons Orange, Annie Elizabeth and Blenheims in abundance but not a single Keswick Codling? Wasps having a bonanza. Labrador feasting. Pick bagsful and make chutney, drop on doorsteps as 'Harvest Festival' gesture in absence of church service. Fill freezer and hope at least some will keep in trays. Kitchen full of earwigs. I have back ache. Dog has wind. Spring Bulb order arrives. 'Autumn is the new Spring' says Monty. Plant your annuals, divide perennials, get it all started now, capitalise on global warming! Well, in a minute, greenhouse still full of tomatoes and borders radiant with rudbeckias, not wanting to be heaved out of the ground quite yet. Harvest Conference pears before dog does. Separate various squashes from mildewed leaves and set out to cure on greenhouse staging. Hedgerow dripping with elderberries, rosehips, hawberries, sloes, crab apples. Pick and make ruby red jelly which looks amazing on the pantry shelf, summer captured! Neighbour drops in 10lb box of Quince. More jelly making. Neighbour drops in bucketful of beetroot. Pickle and redistribute amongst community.

**October:** Already! Still so much to do! Dig last of potatoes, bucket equally full of slugs. Replant with strawberry runners. Meant to order currant bushes, is it too late? Frost last night. Bring pots of pelargoniums and other tender plants into greenhouse leaving precious little space to sit and drink gin. Still, no time for that. Joy! Discover Helen Harrison flowering away in a little pot hiding behind the sunflowers. Bring her in. Plant garlic and broad beans. Spring bulbs still languish in bag in porch. Loads more apples waiting to be picked up from amongst the fallen leaves. Maybe I'll leave them for the fieldfares, they'll be along soon. Clear golden autumn evenings but nights are drawing in. Carve a happy face in one of my squashes and set it on the garden wall. Find candle, pop it in and light. Hope it will raise a smile.

## **My Lockdown Plant sale (by Fiona Horwath)**

When the lockdown started, I felt I needed to have a project. Not quite on the scale of “What did you do in the war, Daddy?” but just something I could - locally - bring through the whole sorry mess that Covid-19 has wrought upon us all.

So I set up a plant stand at the end of my drive, where many more folk than usual were perambulating past on their daily hour’s exercise. As many of you know, there are a few of us in HPS who propagate far too many plants. So we need an outlet. Alas, the Big Staffs HPS May Plant Sale has been a casualty this year, so innovation was needed.

I decided to raise money for “Little Hearts Matter”. This nationwide charity is headed-up by a neighbour and friend, whom I first met many years ago, when my youngest son had a heart repair job when a six-week-old baby at Birmingham Children’s Hospital. Thankfully he is now nearly 30, but many children and young adults live with life-limiting heart conditions. Do google ‘LHM’ to find out more.

During the succeeding weeks I met many locals - neighbours, friends, new-to-gardening folk, and enjoyed socially-distanced horticultural talk. All went off bearing new plants, and several have been in touch to tell me how their purchases are faring.

To date, £1027 has been raised for the Little Hearts Matter charity, and I’ve plenty more plants available if you have any bare patches!!



**Fiona's Plant stand**

## **Sandon Plant Fair August 2020** (by Ruth Plant)

It was a clear and quiet August morning as we set off with loaded cars to the Sandon Plant Fair.

This was an exciting and nerve-racking event, not only because it was our first fair to be held at Sandon in August, which is traditionally a holiday month and so I would have thought would be short of customers, but also because many changes had to take place so that we were as they say Covid secure.

The first change was that the fair itself had moved to the front of the house, the gardens, we were told, less than perfect as the staffing had been reduced, and the usual entrance for the public was tight so a new one-way system had been set up. The time also changed as the entire estate had been given over to an afternoon and evening Drive-in Movie, so we had an earlier start and finish for the fair. Despite all of this we were glad to be out.

We arrived and found our pitch, and then another big change for our helpers- as they arrived they had a copy of our Covid Risk Assessment to read so everyone understood what the safe working practises were.

We didn't have long to set up before the visitors started to arrive- a nine o'clock opening is ambitious, but we made it! The visitors patiently queued (distantly!) at the gate as they left their contact details for Track and Trace if they should be needed, and they came in with serious shopping in mind. The stands all looked glorious, certainly the nicest selection of plants that we have seen in any of our visits.

The first shoppers at our stand certainly were a challenge for the servers....no handling of cash was our aim so shoppers placed their money in a sealed box, and if any change was needed it came out of a sanitised box. The Plant household had been laundering money all week...its amazing what you can do with a bottle of Dettol and drying in a conservatory! All the servers wore gloves and the stand had two hand sanitizers which everyone was encouraged to use.

Bag packing was also a change, I discovered that we actually like to bag up peoples plants, it seem to properly finish off the transaction. We didn't get the opportunity on this occasion but asked shoppers to help themselves and bag up...

The boxes of bags really got under their feet and caused a trip hazard!  
Seems you deal with one issue and cause another!

Another first as we could take payments directly into the HPS bank account.  
Very straightforward and great for anyone who had run out of cash and had a smart phone!

It was wonderful to see so many friends again at the event, we were steadily busy all day and didn't have to ask anyone to move away or improve their distancing. We took more money than at any previous event and against all expectations made £140, which when to take off the stand cost was a profit for the group of £110.



My favourite plants? I tracked down a very rare *Actaea* 'Elstead' variety, a lovely *Anemopsis* grown from seed, a chocolate corydalis and a magnificent *Sarracenia* for our pond, all plants grown by our members. Fabulous.

We had such a lovely time, and it was a thrill to hear people say "it's the first time I have been out", we cheered people up, passed on rare and unusual plants in line with our charitable aims, and made a contribution to Group finances.

We are due back at Sandon next year on April 25<sup>th</sup> & August 1<sup>st</sup> and hopefully by then the Covid risk assessment will have been put away and not needed again.

xx

***Actaea matsumurae* 'White Pearl'**  
(Ranunculaceae) in Yew Cottage Garden

'White Pearl' is a tall cultivar with pale green stems, leaves and flower buds. Narrow spires of slightly fragrant white flowers appear in late summer-autumn

## Scenes from the Sandon Plant Fair August 2020:

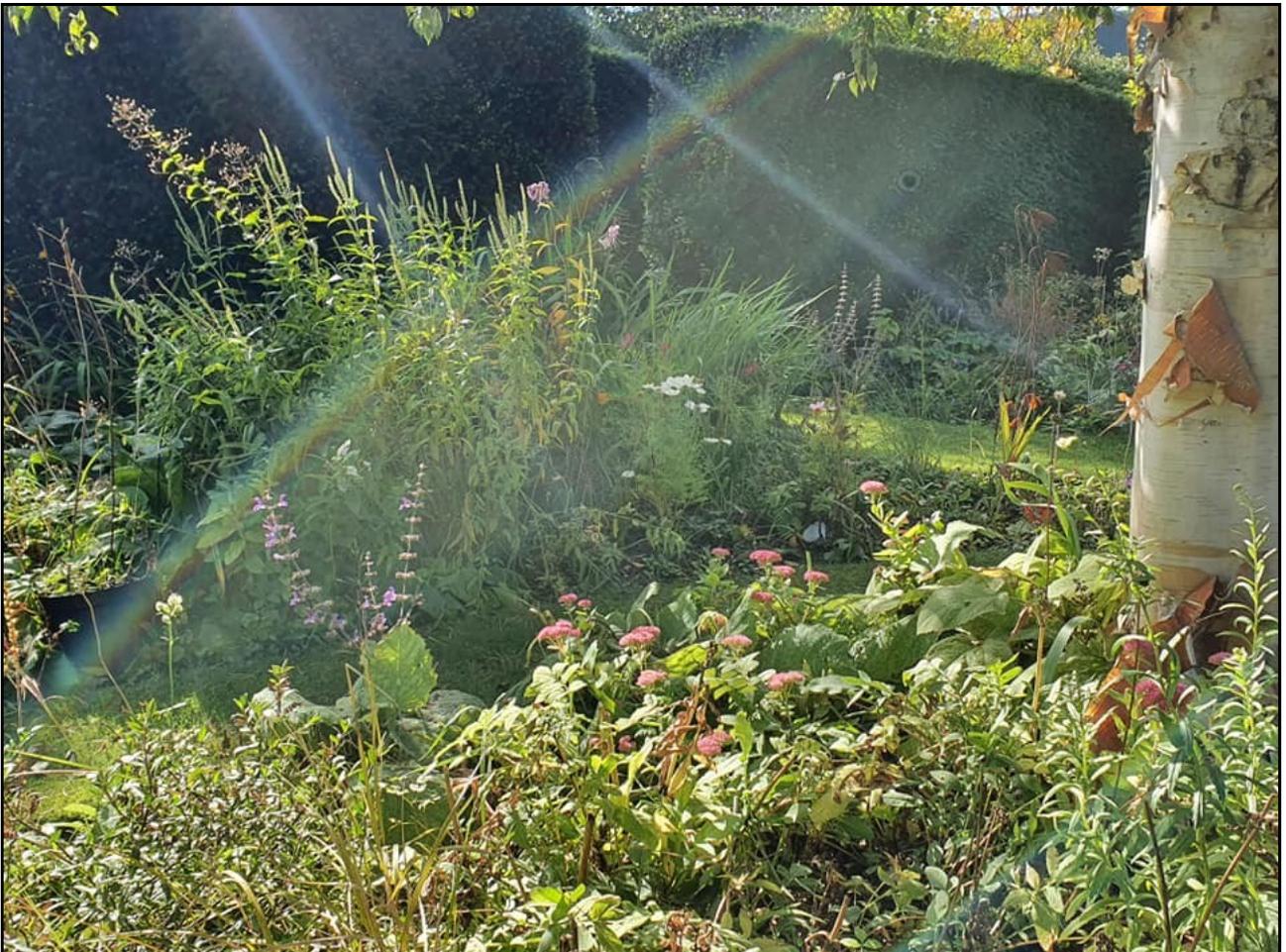


Part of our Group's stall and Fiona and Trish having a rest!



## God's Garden

God made a beauteous garden  
With lovely flowers strewn  
But one straight, narrow pathway  
That was not overgrown.  
And to this beauteous garden  
He brought mankind to live  
And said, 'To you, my children  
These lovely flowers I give.  
Prune ye my vines and fig trees,  
With care my flowers tend  
But keep the pathway open;  
Your home is at the end.'



## Ruth's National Plant Collection of *Dierama*

(a much edited version of article in Spring 2018 Newsletter by Ruth Plant)

It all started when I saw the most incredible border full of flowering *Dierama* at Bodnant garden. I was entranced. Following this I bought some plants at various plant sales and then got stuck – Where to plant them?

I tracked down the text book (by mail order from Johannesburg of course!) and discovered there are possibly 96 species and so the collecting begun in earnest. I now have 31 species and 21 cultivars and caretake my own National Collection of *Dierama* Species.

The advice I give for growing them in the UK is:

They are evergreen bulbous plants and if transplanted can take months (sometimes 12!) to re-establish themselves. During this period the foliage dies away and you have the impression the plant is dead – it may not be and do not disturb it! With luck leaves will reappear eventually and the plant will be fine.

For the whole article see Spring 2018 Newsletter (Editor note). Below some pictures from HPS Staffs Facebook page.

***Dierama* 'Carmine'**



***Dierama x adelphicum***

(with narrow curved petals)





***D. nioxianum*** dark eye pattern (grown from Plant World's seed)



***D. insigne***





***Anemone* 'Honorine Jobert'**



***Anemone* 'Pamina** is perfect for the middle of a sunny or lightly shaded border, it is more compact than other varieties.



***Crocosmia x crocosmioides*  
'Castle Ward Late'**



***Strobilanthes atropurpurea***



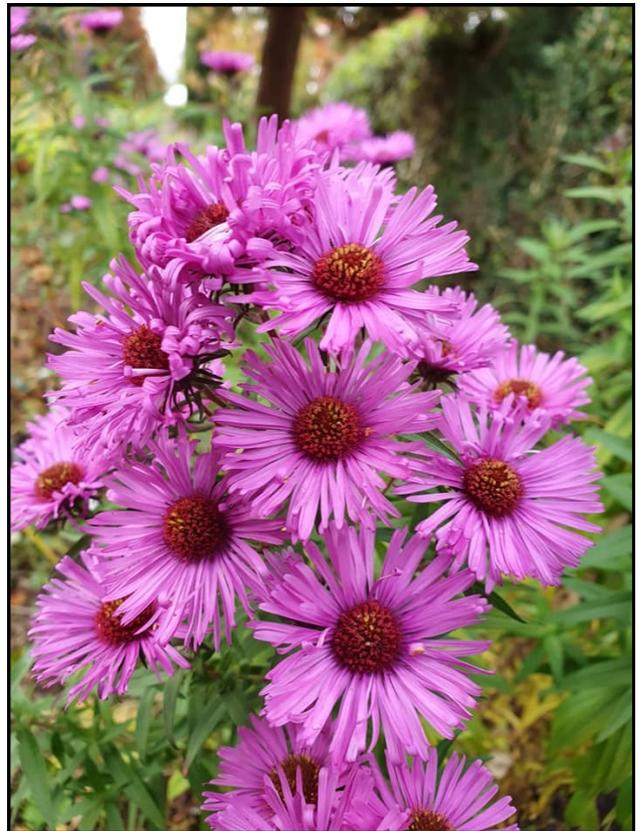
*Aster amellus* 'Breslau'



*Aster* 'Chilly Fingers'



*Symphyotrichum novi-belgii* 'Tonga'



*S. novae-angliae* 'Red Cloud'

## A visit to Alison Rose and Richard Jackson's Garden on August 27<sup>th</sup> (by Ruth Plant)

Of course our only member's garden visit this year was blessed with rain! It started at the point where members arrived, and kept it up until we departed, but that didn't dampen our spirits!

It took a lot of organising as we had to make sure that we were in accordance with the Covid pandemic rules, with limited numbers, track and trace details of attendees, a one way system, sanitisers and bringing our own mugs for tea, never mind the paraphernalia we needed for the plant sales table, but all was arranged with unfailing good will and support from Alison and Richard.

The garden is an 'L' shape around an ancient barn and is incredibly beautiful. There are many plants all grown very well and what's more placed so that they coexist and show one another off beautifully. I particularly liked the shade area with *Hosta*, the rustic raised lettuce bed right outside the kitchen (so sensible) and the raised herb area.

There was also a spectacular red *Echinacea* which almost fooled us into believing we were in the tropics it was such a hot colour!

A cunning plan was the placing of a large *Hosta* under a hanging basket... so wa-

ter runs through the basket and into the *Hosta*? Must try that!

Thank you so much to Alison and Richard for hosting us safely, and we look forward to maybe being able to visit again, without the rain or the pandemic would be lovely!



## Some scenes from Alison and Richard's Garden:



The Rustic Lettuce Planter

The raised bed with herbs.



The giant *Hosta* below the Giant Basket.



**'In the rain' and the 'Shade Garden'**



## The Barn at Top Yard House (by Alison Rose)

I've been asked to write a note about the history of the timber-framed 'barn' which is in the garden of Top Yard House. How come this old building is in the grounds of a 1980s house?

The 'barn' is actually 2 barns, one built in Jacobean times with another small Victorian barn joined on at the back. The timber-framed barn is thought to have been constructed after Milwich Hall, originally a yeoman's house, was built in 1610. The land around the Hall was a working farm for nearly 400 years, with stables, pig-sties, the barns and probably much more besides. Milwich Hall is a Grade 2 listed building and the farm buildings are listed as part of its curtilage by English Heritage.

When the previous owner of the Hall moved into the converted stables towards the turn of the last century, the land and Hall were sold off. We had the opportunity to acquire the barn and double the size of our small modern garden. The parcel of land included a small frontage to the local brook, where village children have played for centuries.

It was a unique experience to host an unexpected gathering in August for nearly 30 HPS members who hadn't met for many months; so glad to see all who were able to come and who braved the weather.



## The Staffordshire Conservation Group

(by Clive Plant Conservation Group Coordinator)

Our Staffordshire Group currently has a membership of 26 propagators, who have 'adopted' a selection of plants from the National Conservation Scheme. The aim being to grow these plants on to a size whereby the plant can provide vegetative cuttings. It is important that all plants in the scheme are propagated by vegetative means to ensure that the correct identity is maintained.

Depending on the plant this could take a year or two.

These plants appear on the National Conservation Scheme list, mainly because they are plants that have fewer than **four** entries in the Plant Finder Book, and indeed may not be in the Plant Finder at all.

So many of our HPS Groups around the country have members who are part of the National Conservation Scheme. We look after and help to preserve the plants that are not always available within the nursery trade because they may not be easily propagated or can take time to bulk up. If we can keep them surviving then the future is very bright for some very nice plants that are still worthy of a place in our gardens.

There are currently 55 plants on the Conservation List, all in need of adopting to preserve their future.



*Arabis alpina* subsp. *caucasica* 'Arctic Joy'

***Arabis alpina* subsp. *caucasica* 'Arctic Joy'** was introduced in 2010 by the Shropshire group, for its unusual variegated form of a popular plant. It is a compact, clump-forming evergreen perennial, growing to 30cmx40cm.

The white, cruciform flowers are borne in clusters, while the evergreen, lanceolate, grey-green leaves have a cream edge. It flowers April-May time in full sun or part shade. Prefers a neutral to alkaline free draining soil.

Being part of the brassica family, they can be susceptible to flea beetle damage, which appears as small holes in the leaves. Club root can also be a problem.

### **Cultivation**

Remove any shoots that have reverted to plain green.

### **Propagation**

Semi-ripe cuttings root easily without heat. Pieces of rooted stem can be detached and grown on.



***Astilbe* 'Sheila Haxton' (*chinensis*)**

**Astilbe 'Sheila Haxton'** was introduced in 2002 by person(s) unknown. It has been included from a selection of a more compact long-flowering plant by Adrian Bloom, named for his wife, Rosemary (previously A. Rosemary Bloom).

It is a clump-forming herbaceous perennial, 30cmx30cm. and having loose panicles of pink flowers, with dense, fern-like, dark green leaves with red tints at it's edges.

Flowers July-August time in full or part shade. Slow growing but very hardy. Likes any moisture-retentive soil and may be affected by powdery mildew in dry weather.

**Propagation:** Can be divided from an established clump.

XX

### **.Staffordshire Group 2020 Picture Competition**

A reminder that the 2020 Picture Competition closes at the end of the year, December 31<sup>st</sup>. It's a good idea then, to sit down with your computer and sift through those snapshots you took during the year. You may be surprised at how good they look, now that all our gardens have finished performing for the year, and who knows if you are not staring at a winning picture!

There are **three** categories for Members to enter:

A Garden Landscape

Flower Portrait

Wildlife in the Garden

There will be prizes in each category.

Don't forget you can only submit **one** picture in each category and simply send your pictures to me, Clive...at **Pottyplantz@aol.com**

The results will be announced in February 2021, either, by our usual Friday meeting should the Covid situation change, or by e-mail. Not forgetting that your pictures are used in next year's group publicity... so fame may well await!

***Euphorbia atrispina*** (by Graham and Sue Lees)

The succulent *Euphorbia atrispina* (meaning black/dark spined) hails from the Great and Little Karroo in Cape Province South Africa.

It has a most unusual mode of flowering. The flowers are tiny, only c.5mm across at the most and situated at the end of long spine-like peduncles. Under a hand-lens they are typical Euphorbia flowers. Graham assumes that this plant puts out both sterile thorns and fertile ones which bear the flowers.

This however is essentially a greenhouse or conservatory plant and certainly would not survive a normal British winter.

(Editor) You may think this euphorbia looks like a cactus but there are differences:

Cacti have spines, which are modified leaves, and they come from areoles, which are structures that all cacti have. Euphorbias most often have thorns, usually in pairs, which are modified stems. Euphorbias do not have areoles.

...

Both Cacti and Euphorbias flower, but the flowers usually are very different!



## **Zooming In! Thoughts from a novice household.**

(by Ruth Plant)

If anyone had told me this time a year ago I would be using video conferencing technology I would have laughed! But things change as we all know and by the summer of 2020 the committee were tentatively starting to meet using the dreaded Zoom! We are hugely indebted to Bernie Norbury and her daughter who had some experience using it and held our hands (metaphorically) as we started.

Our first session was a practice and we spent plenty of time getting people connected, phoning people when they became unconnected as some internet services were a little wobbly, and then once we were connected finding the right buttons so we could be heard and seen! What a revelation as we saw people in their homes with bookcases or garden views. Pippa's roses stood out and she wrote a piece on them for our summer electronic newsletter. And it was a success, all were connected and we felt a little more confident going forward.

Then we had our real first meeting and had to get to grips with managing business when you are not in the same room. Not as nice as the real thing, and you had to bring your own coffee, but we managed it!

Then the HPS Conservation Group said their annual meeting would be by Zoom and Clive as our representative said...No way am I doing that! So a bit of cajoling was needed and he was persuaded and so we set up his computer. He had a long meeting and he looked pretty tired at the end of it... lots of talk about individual plants, it was tea and feet up afterwards, but he said he would do it again. That's progress.

As the committee watched cases rise we realised that we were not going to be able to meet in the autumn season and we started to talk about having a zoom presentation. Carol quickly contacted our booked speakers to see who would switch from the hall to Zoom and she had a steep learning curve trying to understand techno speak! Great news was that the October speaker was happy to speak on Zoom and suddenly it was action stations to contact members so that we could make arrangements to go ahead.

In the meantime we were invited to an Alpine Garden Society Zoom presentation, it was Clive's birthday but we ignored the pub and dialled in.

My goodness it was enjoyable and suddenly we were looking forward very much to a season of Zoom talks.

As I write this we are four days to go before our inaugural October presentation. We should see many of you there and hopefully it will be super. Mind you, the real prize will be when we can get into the hall.

Happy Zooming to you.

Ruth



***Nerine* 'Baghdad'**

Crinkled deep salmon flowers fade more to purple, shiny dark olive-green pedicels Flowering in Oct-Dec, 65cm.

<https://www.cotswoldgardenflowers.co.uk/product/nerine-baghdad/>

## Natural Principles of Rock Gardening

### *Work experience at Tromsø Arctic-Alpine Bot. Garden*

(by Giulio Veronese | Hardy Plant Society website | December 2019)

<https://www.hardy-plant.org.uk/docs/bursaries/guilo-veronese.pdf>

Giulio is a Senior Horticulturist at Birmingham Botanic Garden who visited this Botanical Garden during its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations in June/July 2019, where he gained inspiration for the new rock garden at Birmingham BG. All pictures by Giulio.

The **Arctic-Alpine Botanic Garden** is the world's northernmost botanic garden. It is located in Tromsø, Norway, and is run by the Tromsø University Museum. It opened in 1994. The garden displays Arctic and alpine plants from all over the northern hemisphere. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic%E2%80%93Alpine\\_Botanic\\_Garden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic%E2%80%93Alpine_Botanic_Garden)



**View of the Rock Garden** (by G. Veronese)

When I first started considering the idea of a work experience with focus on alpine flora and rock gardening in 2019, my compass naturally pointed north of Birmingham, which is my current nest and workplace. And because the intention was to have a little “busman holiday” too, why not to travel abroad? I started looking into relevant Scandinavian gardens. Soon, my attention was drawn to the Tromsø Arctic-Alpine Botanical Garden. As the name suggests, this is a highly-specialised garden, entirely dedicated to cultivation of “rock plants”, as well as the most northerly botanical garden in the world. And when I found out that they were also going to celebrate their 25th anniversary in midsummer under the rays of the midnight sun, my hesitations faded and the airplane tickets booked.

I stayed in Tromsø 10 days from 23rd June to 2nd July 2019. The aim was to join the horticultural team for a practical work experience programme, mixed with theoretical learning and hiking expeditions in the wild.

I believe the gardeners were particularly happy to have two extra hands in the Gardens, as the horticultural preparation and presentation in view of the anniversary day on 28th June was in full swing by my arrival! It was a very full-on 10 days of horticultural exploration, in a remote and unexpected land and garden.

There are comprehensive collections of *Gentiana*, *Saxifraga* (including *Micranthes*), *Meconopsis*, *Calandrina*, *Primula* and *Ranunculus* held, and thriving splendidly.

Also *Rhododendron* (e.g. *R. lapponicum*), *Aster*, *Polemonium*, *Codonopsis*, *Erigeron*, *Rosa* cultivars, *Allium*, *Silene*, *Tellima* and *Heuchera* according to Wikipedia (Editor).

### **Natural Inspiration:**

The layout of the outcrops at the Tromsø Arctic-Alpine Botanical Garden have been inspired by naturally-occurring rock formations. Different types were chosen for different groups of plants and phytogeographical representation. Since at Tromsø alpinism from all the four corners of the world are cultivated, not only Scandinavian, geology has been replicated. Mountainous landscapes that have been alternatively considered and “borrowed” for the creation of the rock-scape at Tromsø are:

1. Granitic outcrops
2. Subalpine thickets
3. Tall meadow landscapes
4. Vertically laminated outcrops
5. Cuestas
6. Terminal moraine
7. Screes
8. Pro-talus rampart
9. Ponds, waterfalls and rivers

In the report it focuses on the description of these rock formations, and how they can be used for the foundation of a modern, naturalistic rock garden.

## **The Tromsø Principles of Rock Gardening**

1. In proximity of human constructions, geometric lines may be used.
2. In all the other cases, simulate nature, without geometrical patterns.
3. Think big, use some very large boulders.
4. Mix different stone sizes.
5. Create rooms and surprises by blocking views.
6. Prefer rocks with a cover of lichens and mosses.
7. Do not mix rocks of different geological origins.
8. Use free draining soil, and absolutely avoid air pockets.
9. Find suitable top dressing.
10. For the planting, avoid geometric patterns and plant in odd numbers.
11. Use modest labels (white or black) and only few panels and interpretation.

## **Some Other Tricks That I've gathered there...**

- a. Absolutely do not lay horizontal stones or hardcore at the bottom of the rockery. This is important in order to keep water capillarity going.
- b. A sand backfill can be used but needs to be minimum of 30cm.
- c. It is possible to create a natural feel and illusion by juxtaposing broken rocks, but they have to be of the same colour and texture.
- d. In lowland rock gardens, consider irrigation with draining pipes inside the outcrops; to be used for the first 2-3 years, when young plants are establishing.
- e. Avoid the use of sharp-angles and rounded shapes in combination.
- f. North-facing aspects tend to be better planting places, especially in lowland gardens.
- g. To grow lichens use a mix of egg and old milk. Brush the egg and milk on the stone first, then blow the lichens on the mix.

Some of the plants to be seen at Tromsø:



***Cypripedium calceolus***  
(above)

***Fritillaria camschatcensis***  
(right top)

***Caltha palustris* var. *barthei*  
& *Meconopsis* 'Lingholm'**



**THE END!**