



Cornwall Plant Heritage

Newsletter. August 2017

It has been great to have such a good turn-out for our summer meetings. The autumn will soon be upon us and I have included details of our last two meetings of the year below. It will be lovely to see you if you are able to get there.

In the greenhouse the first of the *Nerine* are already flowering. I have to keep going back and checking dates from previous years to see that they are on time. It feels far too early but my records show the first flowers always open in August and they will still be flowering in October. Last year I had late flowers until the end of February so I think we are safe.

The event at Tremenheere will be with us very soon. Next week I will start picking out the plants that I am taking, if you have anything you can spare please bring it along. It all helps to raise some badly needed funds for the group. I have put in an appeal for help below but if you can spare some time do come along and lend a hand (if only to eat tea and cakes and calm my nerves)!

Last Meetings.

Hidden Valley Gardens, 29th June 2017.

We had an overcast afternoon for our visit to Hidden Valley Gardens but Tea and Cake make an excellent start to an afternoon. Tricia and Peter Howard have built a beautiful garden in a valley to the north of Par filled with interesting plants. Tricia also has collections of a number of genera from *Agapanthus* and *Dahlia* to lavenders and ferns. Some she incorporates into the plantings and others she maintains in a series of parallel beds along the top of the garden. I think she said they were originally laid out for raspberries but the new planting shows a very effective way of growing and displaying collections of plants.



Hidden Valley Gardens.



Ducks around the pond.



Formal view to a seat.

Herbaceous beds near the house were beautifully maintained and had a wide range of interesting plants with hot red colours predominating. Tricia plants in blocks of colour

and repeats plants in the borders, which gives a sense of unity to the composition. She raises *Tagetes* 'Cinnabar' from seed every year to fill spaces. It is a tall growing marigold with rich brick red single flowers on strong stems. It made a very strong impression and it will continue to flower throughout the summer. Tricia got the seed originally from Great Dixter where the cultivar originated, selected by Christopher Lloyd for its robust constitution and splendid colour. The shadier border on the opposite side of a lawn was dedicated to pastel shades of pink and lavender.

As we passed under some trees I was pleased to see *Liriodendron tulipifera* in full flower. It is a relative of *Magnolia* and flowers readily once the trees are large enough, but this often puts the flowers out of sight. Here the tree was a moderate size and a beautiful rounded shape with flowers on the branches even at head height. I have photographed the species in flower before, but never looking as good as this.



Liriodendron tulipifera.



Tagetes 'Cinnabar'.

At the far end of the garden Tricia showed us some of her large collection of ferns. Later we were to see her fern propagation. Spores are sown on sterile compost and then sealed to prevent contamination. When the young plantlets develop they are pricked out and grown on. I have never tried it but Tricia is very encouraging and I think I will give it a go. Tricia is having great results and it looks well worth the effort. In the centre of the garden Tricia has a number of circular beds dedicated to annual meadow flowers. Usually she re-sows them every year with a balanced mix but this year they were allowed to develop from self-sown seedlings. Some species were becoming more dominant and it was interesting to see the way populations vary as they adapt to the local conditions. Tricia said she had enjoyed the experiment but would be re-sowing the mix next year.

Moving back towards the house we passed a barrow load of plants destined for the sales area. I thought it made a pretty picture with the annual meadow beds in the background. It is a useful reminder of the work needed to keep a garden like this in such good condition through the season.

In front of the house a raised pool created sound and interest and must be very relaxing in the evening from the comfort of a covered verandah.

As well as the beauty of the garden, I found there was a lot to learn from the planting and the way the details were managed. Many thanks to Tricia and Peter for showing us around and explaining it to us, it made for a very enjoyable visit.

Chairmans Open Evening. 29th July 2017.



View from the garden.



Herbaceous border.



The Agave House.

A great pleasure to welcome members to my garden in July. The weather behaved itself and the garden attempted to do the same, though it always tries to be unruly. I am lucky that in places the garden has magnificent views over the valley, and I manage to pretend I can't hear the noise of cars thundering past on the main road.

I have a long area of unruliness that I call the Herbaceous Border. For much of the year it is dominated by Red Campion seedlings but through the summer it is spotted with tufts of named *Crocosmia* and *Persicaria amplexicaulis*. I try to grow large spreading plant that will dominate the weeds because there is never enough time to maintain it properly. Plants also have to be able to survive the onslaught of rabbits. *Hemerocallis* are rarely touched but *Astrantia* and *Geranium* never survive for long. I haven't tried *Geranium pratense* yet and there is a hope that a native species might have a chance, but *G.sanguineum* disappears as soon as I turn my back so it is just a theory.

At the top of the garden I have an Agave house. There is no water available up there, so things have to be very drought tolerant. The *Agave* root through into the underlying soil (it's mostly rock) after a year or two, which means they have plenty of moisture in winter and then dry out through the summer. It's an arrangement that seems to suit them, and they are growing rapidly. There will be problems when they get to flowering size, but I'll cross that bridge when I get to it.



***Sarracenia flava* in various forms.**



***Sarracenia x moorei* 'Elizabeth'.**



***Sarracenia* seedling under trial.**

The greenhouse here houses a number of collections of plants. At the height of summer the *Sarracenia* are at their peak. It is a genus of North American pitcher plants with a distribution stretching along the east coast from Canada to Texas. There are eight or ten species (depending on your approach to taxonomy) and they are all interfertile, so natural hybrids are common. They occur in riverine swamps and marshes along the coast, habitat that is also prized flat land for agriculture and housing once it has been drained. As a result populations are declining and several of the species are under threat.

During the last year the larger part of the collection has moved to Chester Zoo and now I only keep *S. flava* in its many forms and a few of the best named hybrids. For the first time in a decade there is enough space to replot them all and I have made a start. The benefits should start to show next year.

The most northerly outposts of *Sarracenia flava* just about survive in Virginia. The species occurs more commonly as you travel south along the east coast of the USA. It reaches its southernmost limit, and the centre of its diversity, in the Florida panhandle. In the southernmost states it is extremely variable, the pitchers can be pure yellow-green, deep red or anywhere in between. They may have red veins or deep red markings. There are a great many in cultivation, particularly in the UK where we take the trouble to preserve the original location details when they are known.

Sarracenia flava makes a very good parent and hybridists have produced a large number of named cultivars. *S. x moorei* 'Elizabeth' is one of the best from the last decade, raised in North Cornwall. It inherits the pale pitcher lid and strong veining from the other parent, *S. leucophylla* which is a very decorative plant but it does not always grow strongly. 'Elizabeth' overcomes this drawback.

I have raised many thousands of seedlings in the last 30 years and I have cut them down to about 200 survivors. Those that don't make the grade make compost!

The last picture shows a red tubed seedling with a well marked lid. It is still under trial and has survived so far. I like the appearance but I do have a slight question about the strength of the pitchers. Last year they started to fall over towards the end of the season and the plant looked tatty as a result. It will get a few years more to prove its worth. After all (to misquote a Bond theme) Composting is Forever!



Disa uniflora 'Red River'.



Disa Diorens 'Inca City', a good hybrid with tall stems.



Disa peach coloured seedling.

July and August are also the months when the *Disa* flower. It is a widespread and variable genus from South Africa, but the species and cultivars in cultivation are predominantly bog orchids. They need high light levels, constant supplies of pure water and reasonable summer temperatures. Given those things they are easily pleased and the large scarlet and pink flowers always attract attention.

The modern enthusiasm for *Disa* is based on a small number of species with large, bright flowers. There are a hundred or more others in South Africa that grow in dryer habitats but often with small dull flowers. Hybridists are adding them to the gene-pool but the results are not always impressive.

The most significant species is *Disa uniflora* which is found growing on streamsides in the higher parts of Table Mountain. The large flowers are usually scarlet, occasionally pink and very rare yellow forms have been found. It has very large flowers on rather short stems. By crossing it with species such as *D. tripetaloides* and *D. racemosa* breeders have managed to produce plants with longer stems and multiple flowers. *Disa* Orchids are now a significant part of the cut-flower trade in South Africa. This has yet to develop in Europe, but the genus has significant potential. The tall stems are easy to pick and pack and the flowers are long lasting.

My own hybrids are all quite young, but I was very pleased with a pale peach coloured seedling with pink veins that flowered for the first time this year.

**Next Meeting: Plant Sale and Plant Nannies event,
Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens, Penzance TR20
8YL.**

Sunday 10th September, 10.00 - 2.00pm.

Our next meeting is a Plant Nannies event at the Tremeneer Plant Sale. I have included a note about Plant Nannies at the end of this newsletter, and thank those of you who are already playing a part. The key point for me is that I am wearing too many hats on the day, selling plants myself, selling plants for Cornwall Plant Heritage and promoting the Plant Nannies event. I desperately need some help with the Plant Heritage side of things and particularly help to enthuse people about the idea of becoming a Plant Nanny and playing a direct role in plant conservation in the county.

If you are able to help on the day, please let me know. If you can spare any plants for the Plant Heritage sale, please bring them along. If you have anything that would be suitable for a Plant Nanny, please bring it along!

The garden is beautiful and interesting, the sculpture is world class, there will be a lot of interesting nurseries in attendance. It should be a really good day.

**Advance notice: Carn View, 46 Lanner Hill, Lanner
TR16 6DA.**

Saturday 28th October, 2.00pm.

I am looking forward to seeing you again when the *Nerine* are in flower. There are hundreds of named cultivars in the greenhouse and this should be the peak of the season. It is usually quite pink.

Most of the plants are named cultivars of *N. sarniensis* representing the efforts of breeders over the last century or so. There are also a lot of *N. bowdenii* cultivars and some of the latest *x Amarine* hybrids.

Chaos of course. I have tried to arrange them so that it makes some sort of sense, but I have failed. There will also be an occasional mealybug on display - any suggestions very welcome.

Plant Nannies.

The Plant Nannies exist to encourage the cultivation, propagation and dissemination of uncommon, poorly known or endangered garden plants in Cornwall.

They are organised by the Cornwall group of Plant Heritage, a national charity that seeks to encourage the conservation of garden plants through cultivation.

Who can take part?

Anyone with an interest who would like to grow a plant and assist in the Cornish conservation effort.

What does it involve?

We have a few plants available that we think deserve some care to keep them in cultivation. We give them to the Plant Nannies to look after and enjoy in their own gardens. When the plant grows and they feel able to divide or propagate a small section then they return a young plant to us and keep the original. The young plants are either given out to a new Plant Nanny or we sell them to raise money for Plant Heritage.

What does it cost?

Nothing. We hope to raise money by selling surplus plants through regular Rare Plant sales in the region.

What do we ask?

We ask for an e-mail address so that we can send you Cornwall Plant Heritage Newsletters that will inform you of coming events and plant sales.

What do we get?

With your help we can keep plants in cultivation in gardens that are in danger of disappearing. Together we can raise the profile of plants that were once better known but are now endangered and we can raise some money to support the national charity.

Hope to see you soon.

John Sirkett.

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