

Shade Monthly... June 2016

We need more articles. Please do write something for us and send it to wasjsime@gmail.com

(1) Plant of the Month.... *Saruma henryi*



The true plant of the month is, of course, *Primula sieboldii* in its many varieties. They look stunning at the moment, but it was selected by Gill Mullin for her column on the HPS website, so I have to choose another.

Saruma henryi is a far less showy plant, but it contributes over a much longer period. It forms a mound of attractive, mid-green foliage about 18 ins tall and 2 ft across, studded by small, three-petaled yellow flowers for several months (longer if it is dead-headed). It comes from densely wooded valleys

and stream sides in western China. It is closely related to *Asarum*, but has an advantage over this genus in not being quite so attractive to slugs. Crossword addicts will already have noticed that the genus name is an anagram of *Asarum*. I think this counts as a joke amongst botanists.

The plant is easy to grow from fresh seed or from divisions made in autumn or spring.

(2) Tim Longeville writes about two of his favourite shade plants.

MUTTON BIRD SEDGE This is an intriguing 'common' name for a useful and too-seldom-seen plant. (Only three nurseries are listed as offering it in the 2015 Plant Finder.) Its botanical name is *Carex trifida* and it makes imposing arching clumps of evergreen foliage to half a metre or more, which are studded in summer with bulrush-like flowering heads on sturdy wind-proof stems. Like most (all?) sedges it prefers damp, is happy in light shade and will even accommodate itself to considerably more funereal conditions. It seems rather surprisingly hardy (it survived the two recent hard winters here, when temperatures briefly touched -16C); the only maintenance it needs is the occasional removal of dead leaves; and though like most (all?) sedges it self-seeds it doesn't do so (here at least) in unmanageable quantities and seedlings are easily removed if caught when young.

As for the strange name: the mutton bird or titi is a New Zealand seabird, a traditional staple of the Maori diet because of its high fat content and (reputed) mutton-like taste. (Visit <http://jeroxie.com/addiction/mutton-bird> for more than in all probability you'll ever want to know about how to prepare it for eating.) And the mutton bird sedge can be found possibly on the actual Mutton Bird Islands, off the south-west coast of Tasmania (a nature reserve for seabirds and other rare endemic creatures, such as the splendidly named metallic skink) and certainly on the Chatham Islands and in parts of Chile.

I'm not myself a fan of variegated foliage but if you are – or if you have a real need for some to lighten a dark corner – there is a form of *C. trifida* in which the leaves have a yellow-gold edging. It is available under the name 'Rekohu Sunrise' from rather more nurseries than the simple species. (Rekohu is the Maori name for the Chatham Islands.)

GERANIUM CANARIENSE (SYN. *G. reuteri*)

For some reason, this is the least frequently seen of the evergreen Canary Island geraniums yet it has all the virtues of *G. maderense* and *G. palmatum* – in particular, the wonderful year-round effect of handsome, boldly cut foliage - on a plant of somewhat more modest dimensions, which also offers the bonus of a profuse supply of charming soft-pink, white-backed



flowers – a supply which begins in April and goes on for months. Its great advantage for a shade gardener is that it seems, despite its Canary Islands origins, actively to prefer damp semi-shade to bright hot sun. Its great disadvantage is that of course it is far from fully hardy: -6-7C is probably about its limit. But it plays fair with the adventurous gardener who gives it a try by producing masses of seed and self-seeding reliably and profusely. (Far more so, here, than either *G. maderense* or *G. palmatum* do.) As a result, even if mature plants are killed in a hard winter, new seedlings always, in my experience, spring up to take their place. In this garden, a gravelled area at the base of a stone-edged raised



bed, shaded by a tree-sized olearia, a loquat and a myrtle, is its favourite spot for that useful activity: a very well-chosen one from the gardener's point of view since each spring's healthy scattering of new seedlings is easily removed from the gravel and potted-on. (The sooner and smaller seedlings are lifted and potted, the better their survival chances, since the main tap-root extends at remarkable speed and is then all-too-easily broken off when trying to lift the plant.)

If any members are interested in giving this delightful species a go, I'll happily collect seed this year and send it to Joe.

(3) Nursery Report

Tim reports on a welcome continuation of an old friend, particularly for those who, like me, are addicted to Epimediums.

Sometimes nurseries seem to imitate ageing pop-stars, giving what are announced as Final Tours which then turn out to be Not-Quite-Final Tours after all. One delightful current example is Sarah and Julian Sutton's Desirable Plants, of Crosspark, near Totnes in Devon, which always stocked a fascinating range of unusual plants, many of them suitable for shade. The nursery-as-nursery ceased to trade a few years ago but the good news, for those of you who didn't discover the Suttons in time, is that they still issue two on-line-only lists a year - one in spring, one in autumn – and the plants are still as Desirable (and as reasonably priced) as ever: and what's more Dr Julian, ex of Ness, still writes about them as passionately, learnedly and wittily as ever. A particular feature of the latest list, for example, was its range of epimediums, many of them of the Suttons' own raising. To ask for their latest list, simply email desirableplants@gmail.com.

(4) Nice Thugs.

No one else has yet contributed a favourite thug, so here is one of mine. *Chrysosplenium davidianum* is a little golden saxifrage from western China. It needs a cool, shady, moist spot, but given this it will soon spread to form a green carpet of soft, hairy leaves. The yellow flowers are born in cluster surrounded by larger, greenish yellow bracts. They appear in spring and are quite long lasting. It will continue to spread happily, but is shallow rooted and easy to pull up if it out-grows its bounds. Its only real enemy is a dry summer, which can be disastrous. I keep a small colony in a raised bed close to the house that can be easily watered as an insurance against losing the main patches in the garden.



(5) Available Seed:

If you are a paid up member of the Shade and Woodland Plants Group and would like any of the seeds listed below, please send a SAE to S.J.Sime, Park Cottage, Penley, Wrexham LL13 0LS.

If you have woodland seed to donate, please send it to the same address.

Akebia quinata
Arisaema candidissimum
Arisaema ciliatum
Gentian asclepiadea
Geranium psilostemon
Kirengeshoma palmata

Actaea cordifolia ex 'Blickfang'
Adenophora takadae var. *howazana*
Astilbe rivularis CC6857
Cardiocrinum giganteum var *yunannense*
Cornus capitata
Fothergilla major Monticola Group
Hydrangea paniculata ex 'Tender Rose'
Lochroma australis (both blue and white forms)
Phytolacca japonica
Disporopsis aspersa
Abies koreana
Lonicera setifera

Epimedium seed.

Success in growing epimediums from seed depends critically on getting fresh seed before it dries out. Thus

rather than waiting for seed to be ripe, and then listing it and waiting for replies etc, I thought I should ask for orders in advance. If you would like seed from named seed parents (all progeny will be hybrids) then please send me a SAE with a note as to how many types (up to a possible max of 5) that you would like to try. The seed will be ripening from late June.

(7)Shade Charade

Guess the species. Two words:

First word: 4 syllables

all four, sounds like a parrot meaning clothes

Second word: 3 syllables

1st syllable, an old fashioned terrine made from calf or pig cheek.

last two, that yorkshire expression of surprise and agreement again!

The solution to last months puzzle was *Chrysosplenium macrophyllum*, a fine running plant for a moist shady site looking more like a bergenia than a golden saxifrage. I think there is more than one clone in circulation, and some are easier than others, so if you fail with one, try buying it again from a different nursery,

or better still get one from a friend for whom it grows well.

