

November 2016

The usual appeal for items. As we move towards the winter months re-live the high points of your gardening year by telling us about them. Just write it down and send it to wasjsime@gmail.com, preferably with a couple of pictures.

(1) Plant of the Month: *Sorbus frutescens*.



This elegant shrub is a plant for the understory, happy in part shade and, once established, able to take quite a dry site. It is a plant for all seasons. The framework of dark brown branches with black overwintering buds becomes covered in ferny, bright green foliage. In the spring there are clusters of typical white flowers, which are followed in the summer by masses of pure white berries. These are said to be unattractive to birds and to last into November. The avian fraternity in our area has not read this and they are gone by the end of September, but the brown turning to fiery red autumn colour makes up for the loss. All this on an arching, non-suckering shrub that does not get bigger than 6 feet.

I was given our plant by a friend and former colleague, Liz Carter, who in turn had it from Hugh McAllister at Ness Botanic Gardens. It originally came with the name *S. koehneana*, and for a couple of years I submitted seed under this name to the distribution scheme. However, McAllister changed his mind and told Liz that it was in fact *frutescens*.

There is an interesting section in McAllister's book 'The Genus *Sorbus*' in which he tries unsuccessfully to trace the history of this species from their receipt of it in Ness as seed from Copenhagen and Leningrad botanical gardens to its origin, probably in South Western Ganshu.

Ours is growing at the edge of the canopy of two very large, old oak trees with nearest neighbours being a sugar maple and a twisted willow. It is mostly in shade, but is not overhung directly. The site is on a slight slope, and although moist in spring can be quite dry in late summer and early autumn. The soil is unimproved and on the acid side of neutral. It is a very happy plant.

The species is apomictic and thus will come true from seed. It is also quite quick to grow and flowers early in its life. It deserves to be grown more often.

(2) Name this Impatiens: An item from Gill Reagan



At this year's AGM I bought a pot of seedlings labelled *Impatiens* sp. as I already grow *Impatiens balfourii* which is a very pretty, useful plant in the shady autumn garden (see last month's shade monthly) and I hoped that these seedlings would also do well in our dry Kentish soils. These two pictures were taken in September and I am delighted with this plant which is still flowering at the start of October after the very dry autumn weather. I have had two suggestions for a name, *Impatiens scabrida* and *Impatiens noli-tangere*, (a rare native) which I think is probably the correct name but I would welcome any other suggestions. I am assuming that like *I. balfourii* it will self-seed but I have collected some seed as a back up. I find the perennial *Impatiens* species such as *omieana*, which are good for adding colour to shady places late in the year, much more difficult to grow in our dry part of the UK so these two species are a great addition.

(3) More on Impatiens:



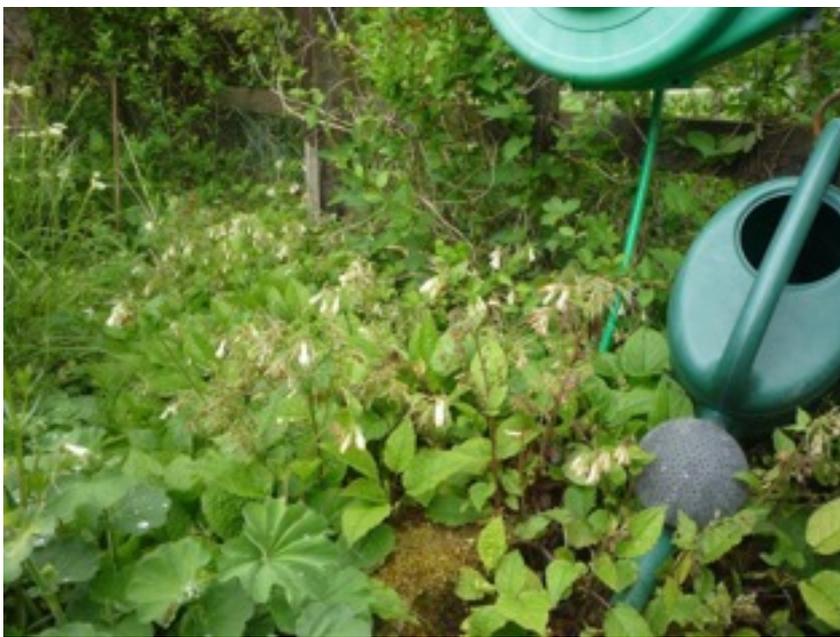
Clockwise from the bottom: balfourii, scabrida, arguta

Gill's note reminded me of an observation I made whilst collecting Impatiens seed for the distribution scheme. We grow three species that have fruited this year: balfourii, arguta 'alba' and scabrida. All three have typical impatiens seed pods consisting of five lance-shaped segments fused together along the edges and at the tip to make a sort of pointed tube. The well known 'touch-me-not' pop occurs when the edges fail and split. However, how this happens seems to differ between the three sorts we grow. In balfourii and scabrida all of the joins fail and the seed pod ends up as a 5 legged 'octopus'. In arguta one join (or two joins on either side of one of the segments) fails leaving a tight, rolled spring formed by five (or four) of the segments still joined together. I cannot claim that this is a scientific study. It relates only to the plants we have grown this year, but I wonder if other species split in other ways, and whether any one pattern is more effective at catapulting seeds than another. A mathematical model of the splitting of impatiens fruits would make a great candidate for an Ignoble Prize!

(4) Nice Thugs:

(a) Diana Garner describes *Symphytum ibericum*.

I find *Symphytum ibericum* to be a very friendly thug. It grows vigorously in shade under my tulip tree, and mingles beautifully with snowdrops, alchemilla and pulmonaria. It has really cheerful little flowers with red buds which open to a pale lemon/white in March/April/May. It pulls up easily whenever you want to be rid of it, and is easy to transplant small clumps if you want to introduce it to a new area. It's also quite happy in sun!



(b) *Fragaria chiloensis* 'Chaval'.



This species from Chile is one of the parents of *Fragaria x ananassa*, the hybrid that gives us most varieties of edible strawberries. *F. chiloensis* is also supposed to have large, edible fruit if given some sunshine, but I grow it for the carpet of glossy, evergreen leaves that spreads out in even quite dry shade. In addition to looking good all year round it is easily pierced by underplanted bulbs. I grow both erythroniums and arisaema underneath mine. It will spread, but the rooted plantlets are easy to pull up. Unlike varieties of *F. x ananassa*, the runner length on *F. chiloensis* is short and the plantlets grow close together giving a nice mat. I also grow *F. x ananassa* 'Red Ruby' and 'Pink Panda' in the shade. These run about but I quite like the way plants pop up where you don't expect them.

**(5) Third Meeting and AGM on Saturday 6 May 2017 at
Harrietsham Village Hall, Church Road, Harrietsham, Kent, ME17 1AP**

Our third AGM and meeting will be in Harrietsham, Kent. After the short AGM there will be a talk on "Designing a Woodland Garden" by Keith Wiley of

Wildside Garden and Nursery. Wildside will have plants for sale, and there will be a Members' plant stall. Before lunch we shall have a rare plant auction and a raffle.

The afternoon will be spent exploring the woodland garden of Henny and Peter Shotter, a short drive away, which features many woodland and shade plants. Erythroniums are a particular favourite together with a collection of magnolias and rhododendrons with contrasting foliage and scent. The garden also houses many rare shrubs and trees often sourced from France.

The price for the day will be £10.00 for members of the Shade and Woodland Plants Group and £20.00 for non-members of the group. To book for the event, please email our Secretary, Diana Garner on montana@cholesbury.net or mail to Montana, Shire Lane, Cholesbury, Herts HP23 6NA giving your name, address, telephone number, email address, and HPS membership number. If you wish to pay by electronic transfer the details are as follows:

Branch sort code: 40 32 02

Account number: 21574647

Account name: Shade and Woodland Plants Group

Reference: Your HPS membership number and last name

or cheques should be made payable to HPS Shade and Woodland Plants Group.

(6) Available Seed:

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

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

SPECIAL OFFER: Paeonia wittmanniana

This seed is very fresh and the donor says that they should reliably show above ground in 2018. Old seed apparently has a very poor germination rate and/or takes a long time to come through. So if you want some please act quickly. The seed is large and will need to be packed with some padding, so please use a 'large packet' stamp on your SAE.

(7) Notes from Seattle ... The latest update from Walt.

Fall has arrived here in the usual manifestations of lower temperatures, rainfall increasing and shorter days. Coming back from two weeks in Vienna (our first time), I'm finding that I

have to hurry up now on many garden tasks before the weather curtails them for a long time.

I've collected seed for the exchange for many months now but am still waiting on some things to finish ripening. The Kirengeshoma palmata is still blooming happily along with no ripe pods as is the Delphinium staphisagria and Lobelia tupa. Impatiens omeiana and I. o. 'Ice Storm' finally came into bloom earlier this month; seed may be out of the question with the change in the weather. It's been an odd year in how some plants have very little seed to offer such as Tropaeolum speciosum and Potentilla gelida.



Impatiens omeiana

Asiatic Mahonias are beginning to bloom as is my Camellia sasanqua 'Showa-No-Sakae'. The colchicums have finished with Sternbergia lutea replacing it for a change of color and size. The Seattle branch of the Hardy Plant Society had a bulb sale earlier and was offering potted fall bulbs such as 'The Giant' Colchicum and Crocus speciosus 'Oxonian'. Bulbs of others I couldn't resist included Fritillaria uva-vulpis, Fritillaria acmopetala, Galanthus woronowii, Chionodoxa forbesii 'Blue Giant', Brodiaea ixiodes 'Pink Diamond', and Tulipa dasystemon.

Getting these and others has forced me to revamp some portions of beds; so out with some regular phlox, Platycodon grandiflorum 'Apoyama' (moved elsewhere), Oenothera tetragona 'Sundrops' and seedling Helleborus x hybridus. These will be offered to the plant donations center at the University of Washington Arboretum. Nearby tree and shrub roots have taken advantage of these beds and now some must be shortened. The usual sandy loam has become tight over the years and so I am working in crushed gravel and compost.

And when it rains, it pours. A friend offered me her 8' tall Michelia figo var. crassipes that no longer fit into her scheme. This too was too good to let go and so it is now at home in dappled shade under a western red cedar with Asarum caudatum and Polygonatum x hybridum underneath it. She also gave me divisions of three Podophyllums, namely delavayi, 'Kaleidoscope' and pleianthum.



Hedychium yunnanense



Decaisnea fargesii

Fall color is in full swing here as evidenced by a recent visit to the Kubota garden in south Seattle. The image I've included shows a site still being revamped. Altogether there are over 120 named Acer palmatum varieties on the 26 acre site.



(8) Name this Plant H**** P*****

'Herbaceous perennial plants green, glabrous. Rhizome 1.5--2 cm thick, stout. Petiole 20--40 cm; leaf blade ovate-cordate, -orbicular, or ovate, 14--25 × 8--16 cm, glabrous, veins in 6--10 pairs, base cordate, margin slightly undulate, apex abruptly acute. Scape 40--80 cm. Raceme several to more than 10-flowered; bracts 2 subtending each flower,

outer one ovate or lanceolate, 2.5--7 × 1--1.5 cm, inner one very small. Flowers solitary or sometimes in clusters of 2 or 3, fragrant; pedicel ca. 1 cm. Perianth white, funnelform, 10--13 cm. Stamens slightly shorter than or subequaling perianth; filaments adnate to perianth tube near base. Capsule cylindric, ca. 6 × 1 cm, 3-angled. Fl. and fr. Aug--Oct.. Forests, grassy slopes, rocky places

The solution to last month's puzzle was *Actaea rubra*, a common plant but a good one. Happy in shade it gives good leaf form, flowers and wonderful spikes of (usually) red fruit. It grows easily from seed, and is often distributed for you by the birds. Individual plants however do seem to take some time to bulk up to flower and fruit well. There is a variety with bluish leaves ('Misty Blue') which seems to come true from seed.

Actaea rubra

