

Plant of the Month: *Hedychium spicatum*

Joe Sime

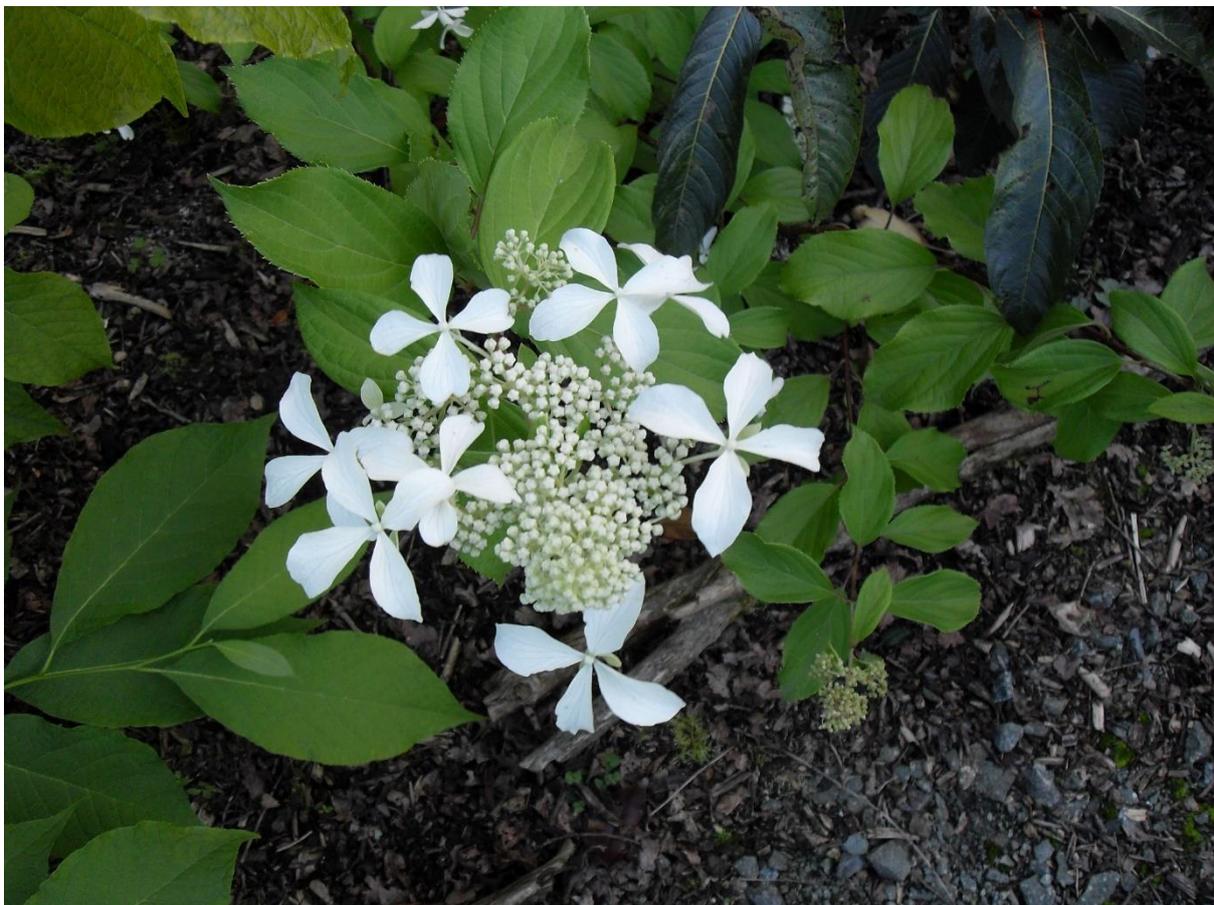


When we moved into our current house about 20 years ago it was during a period of several mild winters, and amongst other barely hardy things we tried were the ginger lilies. They were not a success. They lasted about three years, looking a little worse each year before finally disappearing. Therefore, when we received seed of *H. spicatum* CC7004 as part of a share of one of Chris Chadwell's expeditions in about 2008 we did not hold out much hope. However they germinated well, and after a few years in a pot we decided to risk them outside. I planted out four clumps in 2011. They were in good woodland soil in an area that was well drained but not dry. Since then, they have gathered strength, their strap-shaped leaves being larger and more impressive year on year. These emerge in July and, once grown to their final size of about 3 ft., are impressive in themselves. This year however they have been outshone by the first flower spikes. These are about 4 ft tall. The flowers are white with an 'peach-ish' cast, spidery, opening slowly up the spike. They are sweetly scented.

H. spicatum comes from forests and forest margins across the Sino-Himalayan region. One source of the tubers online recommends planting them close to the surface in full sun, and warns that they are not very hardy. This is entirely contrary to our experience where they are planted relatively deeply in part and full shade and have survived some quite cold winters. If you want to try something a bit exotic, I would recommend it.

Not another hydrangea: *H. paniculata* ‘Le Vasterival’ syn. ‘Great Star’

Joe Sime



There are 74 varieties of *H. paniculata* listed in the Plant Finder, and even more have been named. It is far too many. There are six things that can vary in a flower of this species: the length of the panicle, its breadth, the density of sterile florets, their size, the degree to which they colour on ageing, and the flowering time. Assuming two distinct values for each parameter, this would mean a maximum of 64 varieties, however this is reduced when you realise that many combinations (e.g. a long panicked, early flowering form with large sterile florets) do not exist. There are probably no more than about 20 truly distinctive forms. ‘Great Star’ is one of these.

The inflorescence is a short, flattened panicle. There is not a very high density of sterile florets, but they are very large with four fairly narrow petals that make the name truly descriptive. The flowers start bright white and age to pink. It is a strongly growing shrub to about 6 ft. Like all *paniculatas* it flowers from buds on the current year's growth and so can be hard pruned if one wishes. This leads to larger, heavier flower heads. Whether you do this is a matter of personal taste. I am a lazy gardener and let the shrub get on with it, hacking it back only when it is a nuisance to its neighbours or it blocks the path. It will flower well in shade, where the white stars shine out, but it probably 'pinks-up' better in sun.

Available Seed

There will be no seed available this month so as not to interfere with the main Seed Exchange. Late ripening seed will be offered again in the November edition.

Name this Plant

Joe Sime

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Rhizomes robust, ca. 5 mm in diam. Stems 0.5-1 m tall, gray-brown pubescent. Petiole 3-12 cm, pubescent; leaf blade cordate, 6-15 × 5-13 cm, both surfaces pubescent, base cordate, apex shortly acuminate. Pedicel 2-3.5 cm, pubescent. Calyx lobes ca. 10 × 7 mm. Petals yellow or yellow-green, cordate-reniform, clawed, ca. 10 × 8 mm. Stamens overtopping ovary; filaments ca. 2 mm; anthers oblong, with connectives slightly extended beyond anthers. Style absent; stigma decurrent along ventral surface of carpel. Fruit follicular, 6-8 × 4-6 mm. Seeds deltoïd-obconic, ca. 3 mm, densely transversely rugose. Fl. Apr-Jul.

Dense forests, valleys, stream banks; 600-1000 m. Gansu, Guizhou, Hubei, Jiangxi, Shaanxi, Sichuan.

The solution to last month's puzzle was *Xanthorhiza simplicissima*.



This is a pleasant small shrub, growing to about 2 ft. with unbranched, woody stems with spirally arranged leaves with five leaflets. The dark, purplish flowers are borne in early spring. It spreads by rhizomes in moist, shady ground. It colours nicely in autumn and this is said to be more intense if it is said to be more intense if it is grown with some sunshine. In spite of occurring naturally in moist ground it is said to deal with dry shade without many problems.

From the editor...

Joe Sime

This is the second month in a row that there have been no contributions from members. If this continues then we must assume that there is not sufficient interest to maintain Shade Monthly beyond the end of the year. If you do have something to contribute, please send it to wasjsime@gmail.com.

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SHADE MONTHLY is compiled by Joe Sime
and this web-friendly version was produced by Tony Bays.