

Hurray for seed donors!

Pauline Cooper, Seed Distribution Coordinator

A willingness to share knowledge, enthusiasm, and even plants, characterises many members. Some of us even go as far as collecting seeds from our treasures, and sending them to the Seed Distribution to be included in the annual seed list. As donors we gain enormous satisfaction from knowing that people we have never met, and who may live far away, will have the chance to grow in their gardens a plant we think highly of.

Our seed donors come from a range of backgrounds. Some make their living from growing and selling plants; others teach horticulture, open their garden to the public, or hold a national collection. Most, like me, simply love gardening and growing plants and want to share what we love with others.

Here six of our regular donors tell us a little about themselves, which plants excite them, and allow us a peek into their gardens.

Stella Hall, Lancashire

Our garden has evolved over many years, on a long, narrow, south-sloping field of fertile loam, open to the westerly winds whistling up the valley from Morecambe Bay.

The HPS Seed Distribution has proved a great source of plants for us – I tend to choose perennials and Chris likes experimenting with unusual trees and shrubs. Recently I have been collecting seed myself. A wonderful little plant I wouldn't wish to be without is *Viola cornuta* Alba Group. Grown originally from HPS seeds, it has a year-round presence, a bright green tight cluster of rounded leaves in winter, later spreading out to produce masses of white, typically viola-shaped flowers for many months, lightening areas of semi-shade. On a dry day when the seed pods are brown and ready to burst open, I cut off the stems with the seedpods, put them into a labelled envelope and store them in a cool place. Then I have a session separating the seed from the dried pods

and packing them ready to be sent in.

Another white-flowered favourite for brightening semi-shade is the taller biennial variegated honesty, *Lunaria annua* var. *albiflora* 'Alba Variegata'. I grow no other lunarias so the seed comes true here. Care must be taken in the first year not to discard the young plants as the leaves start out plain green, gradually becoming variegated with white edges. Clusters of white flowers appear in the second year, followed by attractive silver

'pennies' on the stems – the seeds are easy to collect when they're dry.

Tulipa sprengeri, a species tulip, has a gorgeous bright crimson flower. Another favourite, it grows happily in sun or semi-shade. The buff-brown seed heads are tightly packed with seeds, some of which I harvest to donate. It takes a few years to flower from seed.

We have grown many plants from "HPS Seeds" over the years, from the well-known to the more unusual. It's good to be able to give some back! 🌱

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Lunaria annua var. *albiflora* 'Alba Variegata'

Jeremy Spon, Canterbury

I have been growing plants from seed ever since I first became interested in gardening as a teenager, growing cacti in a small unheated greenhouse. Propagation is really, for me, the most rewarding aspect of gardening, and when I first joined the HPS, nearly 30 years ago, I was doubtless partly motivated by the chance to order seeds from the seed-list. Soon I was donating seed as well, at first for the selfish reason that I then qualified for extra packets of seed. But collecting seed becomes a pastime in itself, all the more so because seeds themselves are fascinating.

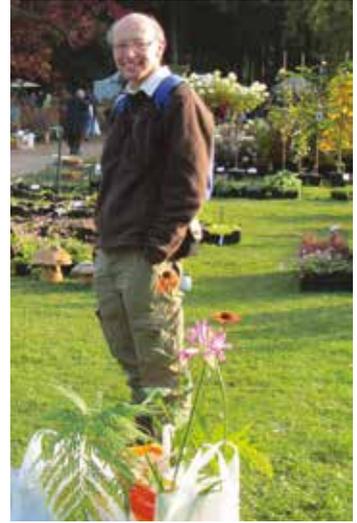
I freely admit that my gardening is partly driven by my 'stamp-collecting' tendencies, but I am excited by the endless variety of plant life, and the habitats in which they grow. The Southern Hemisphere exerts a particular fascination, so despite the handicaps imposed by our capricious climate I try and grow many plants from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, alongside hardier flora.

When it comes to deciding what seed to donate, a principal

factor is which plants actually set viable seed – sadly some produce none, or only sterile seed. But with the time needed to collect and properly clean seed not being trivial, I like to concentrate on plants which I think might be less common, seldom available or particularly well worth growing. I also try and avoid sending in seed of plants that I think might be weedy – having regretted one or two of the things I have grown from seed-list seed in the past!

Favourites which I try and send in every year include *Genista aetnensis*, which every summer is one of the highlights of the garden; *Campanula primulifolia*, with striking blue flowers with purple centres, which is attractive to butterflies,

another of my interests; and *Morina longifolia*, which can be short lived, especially in less-well-drained soils – it is worth growing fresh plants from seed at least every other year. 🌱



©Jeremy Spon



Genista aetnensis

©Jeremy Spon



Morina longifolia

©Jeremy Spon

Carol Madden, Clwyd

I love growing from seed. It is almost magical, sowing such small little bundles, sometimes minute capsules, and then they grow! When you collect both for yourself and to conserve the plants, it seems natural to pass on to members the pleasure of such flora, through the Seed Distribution.

Of course seed is not produced from every plant every year. 2015 was a dreadful year for seed, and 2016 not a lot better. I had always collected seed from *Gladiolus flanaganii*, but not in those years. Although my plant was planted upright, each year it has leaned from the vertical to horizontal.



Gladiolus flanaganii

©Carol Madden

©Carol Madden



Paris quadrifolia

©Carol Madden



Allium cernuum

In its native habitat, growing on cliffs, it looks as if it is trying to throw itself off. Its common name is the suicide lily! A very hardy plant and a lovely shade of Yardley lipstick!

I have collected seed from some of my favourites, including *Allium cernuum*, *Dierama argyreum*, and *Paris quadrifolia*, a woodland plant quite rare in our woods and forests, which I find requires two winters to germinate.

For me, donating seed has never just been about giving members the opportunity to grow something different. If a plant is unusual or difficult to obtain then donating the

seed is a way of safeguarding it. Also, I know that if my plant dies and seed has been donated then I might be able to obtain it again through the seed exchange. A savings bank with a difference!

I eagerly await the arrival of the seed list and try to get my request in the post by lunchtime. Then I carry on with domestic chores while daydreaming about the seeds that will come through the letter box. Some members might use a reference book to ensure they will like the resulting plants, but I am far too impatient to do that. So I get any number of surprises, just what Christmas should be! 🌸

Panny Laing, Moray, Inverness

Since 1991, when we first moved to Logie, on the banks of the River Findhorn, the walled garden has evolved from the traditional Victorian model to the beginnings of a woodland garden. I arrived with very limited horticultural experience but had enormous help from the late Gavin Dallmeyer, who was a knowledgeable plantsman and designer; he introduced me to a wide variety of unusual shrubs, and was a good enough friend to stop me planting the wrong things!

By 2009 it was apparent that the garden had developed its own microclimate so we did the second stage of 'softening', opening up the burn and planting more trees and shrubs. The aim is a low-maintenance

garden which is peaceful yet interesting. We have a certain amount of good ground cover (lots of geraniums) and I find it hard to resist growing a sizeable area of herbaceous perennials

providing extra interest for at least half the year. As all gardens do, the garden continues to evolve – indeed, I have often thought of gardening as like being the playground monitor:

©Panny Laing



The late summer border: *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm', *Eupatorium maculatum* Atropurpureum Group, *Molinia caerulea* 'Variegata', *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer' & *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus'

nurturing the quiet ones and fending off the bullies! We have a small but very dedicated team of propagators who produce plants for our Garden Shop – in addition to dividing and propagating from the garden, they are also assiduous in collecting seeds, many of which end up on the HPS list. I am always

on the lookout for different garden-worthy plants to grow and promote – and tend to favour species over many of the new hybrids. To see a plant growing happily and contributing to the overall beauty of the garden gives me enormous pleasure – as does sharing the garden with our many visitors. 🌱



©Panny Laing

Massimo Cantoni, near Milan
My husband, a lawyer, naturalist and passionate botanist, wanted to create a garden based on a harmonious blend of scientific and aesthetic principles. Work began on Caplez Botanical Garden in 1990, and it opened to the public in the spring of 2010. It has been reconfirmed as a member of the Botanic Gardens Conservation International.

The garden now covers over 10 acres of calcareous terrain and hosts 3,800 species and varieties of plants from all over the world. We cultivate a wide

range of herbaceous perennials and shrubs; in particular, we have two collections of shrubs: *Philadelphus* and *Spiraea*, which are accredited Specialised Plant Collections in Italy. We also take special care to cultivate local and endangered plants.

We are in contact with over 350 botanical gardens and arboretums throughout the world, and we like to exchange seeds for their greenhouse and seedling boxes where they can sprout and give the passionate gardener something to learn about and admire. Last year we donated seed to the Hardy

Plant Society including, just at the start of the alphabet, *Ampelodesmos mauritanicus*, *Anisodonteia capensis* and *Argemone grandiflora*, which we understand are hard to find as plants in the UK.

We participate in the yearly garden show in Milan, ORTICOLA, one of the most important in Italy.

The Garden receives no public funding. It is open to the public for free, only by appointment, four times a year in the months of April and May. We would like to welcome you!

Cristina Schindler 🌱



©Caplez Botanical Garden

Taking cuttings



©Caplez Botanical Garden

Spiraea nipponica Maxim

Walt Bubelis, Seattle, USA

I came into the world of horticulture when I began teaching it at a local community college. My undergraduate and master's degrees were in botany and ecology so it wasn't too much of a stretch, and I had also worked at three nurseries.

I found a paucity of specimens to use in classes so I began planting to have examples readily at hand, especially those of an unusual nature or uncommon in the trade. Through friends in the nursery business I was able to procure new introductions early on. Garden society plant sales brought more.

Many of my former students have gone on to assemble impressive collections of plants. I collect cuttings and seed from some of them, sharing the cuttings with both my former college and the Calvert Greenhouse at the University of Washington Botanic Gardens. The bulk of the seed I collect is from my own garden, with an eye on what is abundant for me but possibly scarce for others.

©Walt Bubelis



©Walt Bubelis



Lychnis yunnanense

My garden is about 90' by 110'. When we moved here some 45 years ago it had hardscrabble lawns, overgrown forsythias, Pontic rhododendrons and five tall Western Red Cedars (*Thuja plicata*). Oh, and loads of Himalayan Blackberry to grub out. It was a slow process to make the site what it is today. What has helped is being able to garden year round with sandy soil and usually benign temperatures.

The style is loose and woody. I prune for size reduction in many cases but maintain the shape of the plant. Some, though, including *Ilex crenata*

'*Mariesii*', *Abies procera*, and *Cleyera japonica*, are the tallest of their kind in Seattle according to a local tree expert.

I love to try my hand at a wide variety of plants. My extensive library is a back-up to my learning from growing something, preferably from seed or a cutting. Continuity is maintained by a number of rhododendrons, mahonias, hydrangeas and conifers. Broadleaf evergreens, both woody and herbaceous, are well represented. No one season dominates but there are a fair number of early-spring ephemerals. All in all, it's a very full garden! 🌱

Last year 187 members sent seeds to the Distribution, 30 first-time donors. Many started donating for the simple reason that they can ask for 10 extra packets of seed with their order, as Jeremy has confessed. It was my motive at first, too. Collecting seeds, however, soon leads to appreciating the many forms of seedheads and seeds.

Do you ever stand before a plant in your garden and wonder why so few other people grow it when it gives you so much pleasure? There is a simple way to spread the word. Collect seed and send them for inclusion in the next Distribution. Then many more people will have the pleasure of its company!