Plant of the Month: *Saxifraga* ‘Rubrifolia’

*Joe Sime*

I think I may have mentioned a few years ago that we were building a raised bed to house *fortunei* saxifrages and miniature hostas. I really like both, but they tend to get lost in the garden. We built the bed from the trunks of a large leyland hedge that we had brought down. It was sited on the route we take from the house to the vegetable garden and utility area, so we would pass it every day and enjoy the plants the more.

For the first couple of years it was not a success. The saxifrages remained small and a bit sickly and the hostas were ravaged by slugs, but time, some replanting and the use of slug pellets have had their effects and this year it is beginning to look right.
The most successful of the saxifrages is ‘Rubrifolia’. As the name suggests, the relatively large leaves are tinted red, but you cannot see this once the plant is in flower as it is covered in a white froth of petals. It is relatively easy to source and makes a good introduction to the group. However, please don't stop at one. There are many varieties with flowers from white through pink to dark red. The red ones seem to be flowering a week or so later than the whites, but are worth waiting for!

September/October 2018 Notes from Seattle
Walt Bubelis

In the last few days before departing for Paris with my wife, I watered everything that was still new enough that it hadn't developed a large enough root system to withstand being forgotten by my cat-sitter/garden waterer. Happily a short rain occurred just before we left, followed by more afterwards. This summer has been the third driest in over a hundred years here. The current outlook is for an El Niño weather pattern with warmer temperatures and possibly more rain. We depend upon a snowpack in the mountains that then feeds the rivers and fills some low elevation reservoirs. Some years, we don't get a good snow depth and then we must ration the water in the summer, something not unfamiliar to Great Britain, but a shock to us when it occurs.
Shade lovers under my thirsty Western red cedars (\emph{Thuja plicata}) look good for a long time, and then quickly give up the ghost. I have to remember to add supplemental water to my \emph{Impatiens omeiana} ‘Ice Storm’, \emph{Pulmonaria saccharata} cultivars, \emph{Omphalodes verna}, \emph{Vancouveria hexandra}, various ferns and so on. Overhead watering is wasteful giving up some to the atmosphere so I often take to using a water probe that can be driven into the soil and then inject water into the root zone.

Some local gardeners have given up on thirsty plants, but for the moment I’m still in love with a variety of moisture-lovers. My \emph{Pinellia tripartita} is still bulking up happily in the shade of a large \emph{Magnolia stellata} and \emph{Rhododendron desquamatum}. Close by is an ever enlarging patch of \emph{Coptis groenlandica} and \emph{Polypodium scouleri}.

\emph{Pinellia tripartita}
A large, old *Daphne x burkwoodii* ‘Carol Mackie’ that died (15 years and once transplanted is a good run) gave me the space to put in both *Triostemon himalayanum* and *T. pinnatifidum* and a young *Daphne* ‘Summer Ice’. Dappled light most of the day gives the triostemons, so far, enough sun to flower and set fruit.

*Triostemon pinnatifidum*

Nothing yet has been planted under an *Itea ilicifolia* but who cares when you get those elegant, pendant racemes. My plant is free standing but I saw one once that made a compelling espalier.
Lastly, I’m looking forward to seeing what root system comes with an earlier gift this year, one *Impatiens flanaganae*. It is said to have a tuberous-like root. It certainly made the plastic pot bulge. I would like to divide it and plant some outdoors this fall, the remainder to keep in the cool greenhouse just in case.

**Beauty – or a beast?**

*Tim Longville*

*Pollia japonica* is a hardy herbaceous plant which is remarkably effective at adding a lush, jungly look at low levels of shady woodland areas. Yet it is seldom seen in British gardens and only two nurseries currently appear to stock it. In the wild it can be found as ground-cover in damp areas throughout many forests not only as the species name suggests in Japan but also in Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and parts of China. It would be easy to imagine that it’s a miniature hedychium, since the dark-green, glossy leaves, on upright stems usually to around 18 inches tall, look very like those of a ginger and even appear in ginger-like whorls or spirals. However, its mid-summer panicles of individually short-lived but collectively striking and very un-ginger-like white flowers soon remove any illusion of ginger-ness.
Pollia japonica is in fact a spiderwort - a member of the Commelinaceae – and those striking white flowers are followed, in late summer and autumn, by equally striking fruit, which begin white and then turn blue. The blue of P. japonica's fruit is quite vivid but it pales into insignificance compared to the colour of the fruit of its African cousin, P. condensata, the marble berry, which have ‘the most vivid blue of any natural biological material’, and are, as the common name suggests, so hard that they have often been strung together and turned into necklaces and bracelets. The Japanese common name of P. japonica, by the way, is yabu-myoga, because the leaves do indeed resemble those of myoga, the Japanese ginger, Zingiber mioga. (As an aside, Zingiber mioga is a plant I’ve only recently acquired. I’m not brave enough to try to over-winter it in the ground here yet, though it is reputed to be reasonably hardy. I wondered if any other members have tried and if so what their experiences have been?)

So there you have it: a hardy plant with the triple whammy of attractive foliage, flowers and fruit and in addition one which is tolerant of a wide range of soils and situations (though moist shade in soil which is mildly acidic probably suits it best). Admittedly, it is not evergreen – something of a demerit mark for a ground-cover plant for shade - but, even so, it isn’t on the face of it easy to see why it is so little known and grown in Britain.

There is one aspect of its ‘way of life’ which so far I haven’t mentioned, and it’s the aspect which may explain that relative unknown-ness. It is stoloniferous and roots as it goes. In informal woodland gardens, that can often be an advantage. But apparently, given the right conditions, P. japonica can become a serious pest, spreading at a rate of knots and suppressing almost any other plant in its path. Visit the website of the Missouri Botanic Garden, for example, and you’ll find it treated as a dangerous alien invader. My suspicion is that ‘the right conditions’ (which I imagine involve the combination of high temperatures and high humidity) are more likely to occur in parts of the U.S.A. than where I garden, by the Solway Firth in Cumbria! Certainly, at the moment, I’m impressed by its ornamental value and I’d describe its rate of spread as being modest at best; but I’m keeping a careful eye on it, in case it suddenly begins to feel sufficiently at home to ‘take off’. If any others members already grow it, I’d be fascinated to hear how it has behaved with them.

Photograph courtesy of Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Flowers.
Available Seed

The following late seed should be ripe by the middle of the month. If you would like some and are a paid up member of the Shade Group send a S.A.E to S.J.Sime at Park Cottage, Penley, Wrexham, LL13 0LS. Please include your email address in case there is a query.

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

*Anemonopsis macrophylla* ex double flower form

*Ampelopsis megalophylla*

*Arisaema ciliatum*

*Kirengeshoma palmata*

*Kirengeshoma palmata* Korean Form

*Rhododendron yakusianum*

Name this Plant

*Joe Sime*

Name this Plant A***** t********

‘perennial, deciduous, 2.5-5 dm, glabrous. Rhizomes extensive, branching, producing 1-few foliage leaves or flowering shoots per year. Aerial stems absent. Leaves basal, alternate, 3-foliolate; petiole long, slender. Leaf blade orbiculate in gross outline, 20-40 cm; leaflet blades fan-shaped, entire or lobed, lateral leaflet blades strongly asymmetric, margins entire to coarsely sinuate; venation palmate. Inflorescences terminal, dense scapose-pedunculate spikes of inconspicuous flowers. Flowers 3-merous, white to cream, 6 mm or less; bracteoles absent; sepals absent; petals absent; stamens 8-10(-13); anthers dehiscing by 2 apically hinged flaps; pollen exine striate; ovaries asymmetrically ellipsoid; placentation marginal, placenta developed only near base of ovary. Fruits follicles with transverse dehiscence, purplish red or brown, curved, furrowed. Seeds 1, brown; aril absent. x = 6. Plants , 2-4 dm. Leaves: petiole 1-3 cm. Central leaflet blade 4-11 × 4-8 cm, proximal margins entire, distal margins (1-)3-4(-8)-lobed. Inflorescences 2.5-5 cm excluding peduncle. Flowers: stamens 3-4 mm; ovaries 1-1.5 mm. Follicles red-purple, 3-4.5 mm. 2n = 12

Flowering spring-summer (Apr-Jul). Mountain regions in Cascade Range and Coast Range of California in coniferous forests; 0-1500 m; B.C.; Calif., Oreg., Wash.

Medicinally, Native Americans used preparations of the leaves to treat tuberculosis, for a hair wash, and as an emetic (D. E. Moermann 1986).’
The solution to last month’s puzzle was *Saruma henryi*. This is a robust perennial growing to about 18 ins with 3-petaled yellow flowers. It is closely related to the asarums (the genus name is an anagram of asarum) but is much easier to grow and not as susceptible to slugs. It is relatively easy to grow from seed, which is usually available from the HPS Seed Distribution.

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