



Fig. 1 *Anemone hupehensis* var. *japonica* 'Pamina'

The learning curve

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I never know quite how I feel about the first autumn-flowering cyclamen when it pops up its head in August. I don't know whether to be like Cinderella on hearing the first chime at midnight, knowing that the ball is almost over, or to embrace its arrival with open arms. One thing's for sure though, those naked white or pink flowers flag up the end of summer and the beginning of autumn – with winter not far behind.

They've sprung up by the gate, the autumn-flowering cyclamen that is, *C. hederifolium*, and they've started to turn up around the box balls and chickens as well, just the odd one or two. They're waiting for cool rain and the summer's been dry here, and so far there is only one colchicum in sight and it isn't my usual first, *C. autumnale* 'Nancy Lindsay'. I think it's *C. tenorei*, an Italian species that's smaller and shorter, although I can't see

the 'purple stigma crooks' it's meant to have. No matter, it's flowering well and it's the earliest this year. Many more will follow, and I've learnt to tolerate the ugly brown foliage of some in order to have them now – magical flowers that appear straight out of the ground.

The garden phloxes haven't done fabulously well in this dry summer, although certain ones have shone and these include the pale-pink 'Monica Lynden-Bell'. This is the phlox to try if you failed with others. There's also a new purple phlox called Purple Flame sold in garden centres and widely propagated in Holland. It was selected from plants grown from a strain produced by Syngenta Seeds and there are lots of different 'eyes' of different colours. Both 'Monica L-B' and Purple Flame are short enough to be incorporated into the rose and peony borders, and both

have shone this year along with 'Uspek' (syn. 'Laura') a white-eyed purple, shorter phlox with a good scent.

I admire phloxes greatly and grow many named forms of *Phlox paniculata*, which are well-behaved clump-formers. I'm safer with them, because plants that ramble tend to take the garden over and I'm reluctant to cull them, despite the fact that I think of myself as a ruthless gardener. If I don't like something it goes, but when it creeps through the garden over a number of years I'm less likely to mind.

Anemone hupehensis var. *japonica* 'Pamina' (fig. 1) has romped down and through one side of the rose and peony borders. There's a gravel path running through them, and last year my favourite gardener, Sibylle Kreutzberger, asked me what I was going to do when it popped up on the other side, having crossed the path.



Fig. 2 *Crocosmia* Bright Eyes

Sibylle is a skilful gardener, most famous for working at Sissinghurst Castle, but I was unable to provide her with an answer because I'm not quite sure. Perhaps in ten years' time there will only be 'Pamina' left!

The trouble is that Japanese anemones tend to roam, which can be part of their charm. When Robert Fortune spotted the dark reddish-purple, double-flowered *Anemone hupehensis* in Shanghai c. 1843 it was growing in a Chinese cemetery, no doubt rambling away. And yet the fine bootlace roots of Japanese anemones are not always amenable to being dug up and planted elsewhere, and I've often failed to pass 'Pamina' on successfully despite her being far more thuggish than the single, two-toned-pink *A. hupehensis* 'Bowles's Pink'.

When a good combination appears and works for two or three years it becomes a great combination. Here the papery buds and silver-blue of *Catananche caerulea* or Cupid's Dart, easily grown from seed, mingle with *Stipa tenuissima*, along with the pink *Potentilla nepalensis* 'Ron McBeath' and a willowy penstemon that I believe is 'Evelyn'. They're particularly good in August and September, a fresh mix of summery blue, pink and harvest-gold.

I'm also enjoying a trio consisting of *Crocosmia* Bright Eyes (fig. 2), *Sedum telephium* Atropurpureum Group and the herbaceous clematis 'Cassandra' (fig. 3). Bright Eyes, bred by Walberton Nursery of West Sussex¹, is a warm-orange crocosmia with a morello-cherry-coloured



Fig. 3 *Clematis heracleifolia* 'Cassandra'

middle. It resembles 'Emily Mackenzie' in colouring, but the flowers are neater and rounder. Its hardiness worried me, because 'Emily Mackenzie' isn't hardy here. But crocosmias, rather like alstroemerias, push themselves down deeper over the years, and I'm hoping that Bright Eyes (which has already survived for 2 years now) will have done the same. Its deep-red eye picks up the sultry colour of the sedum which is upright and rangy, and both the crocosmia and the sedum set off the rich-blue herbaceous clematis called 'Cassandra'. This is the deepest blue of all of the *Clematis heracleifolia*

¹*Crocosmia* Bright Eyes is difficult to find, but Walberton Nursery tell me it will be available in some garden centres next year.



Fig. 4 *Clematis tibetana* subsp. *vernayi* 'Glasnevin Dusk'

types, with tubular flowers in whorls, although I don't find it as scented as some. I grow it to remember the journalist Cassandra Jardine who once came to my garden whilst very ill.

'Cassandra' came from the Staudengärtnerei Gräfin von Zeppelin nursery in Germany, famous for irises, peonies and oriental poppies. An RHS trial of oriental poppies in the late 1990s gave AGMS to the following Zeppelin poppies: 'Aglaja' – a frilly orange, 'Effendi' – sockeye-salmon pink, 'John III' – cardinal red, 'Khedive' – faded tangerine, 'Leuchfeuer' – blood-orange red, and 'Karine' – dainty, small, shell-pink saucers blotched with beetroot.

'Karine' was a border stalwart here. It wasn't big or blowsy, but bore lots of stems with refined flowers. However, three to four years ago it succumbed to a fungal disease, a widespread problem unfortunately, and eight plants went under in a summer. One has struggled back, and this year that one survivor had one flower, which is good news because oriental poppies have more or less disappeared from the market. Beth Chatto was a great supplier of them, but every poppy on her website is out of stock. I fear that the Zeppelin poppies may die out owing to this disease.

I like subtle plants, not sock-it-to-me ones, and I

am charmed by a clematis called *C. tibetana* subsp. *vernayi* 'Glasnevin Dusk' (fig. 4). It has thick, orange-peel segments in chocolate brown and the prettiest silvery seedheads I've ever seen, smaller than *C. tangutica*. It was found at The National Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin near Dublin by Seamus O'Brien in 2003. Again not easy to acquire, but I had mine from Marcus Dancer (www.clematisplants.co.uk) and although he has none this year he may well have plants next year because he's taken some cuttings from mine!

Finally, I've been wowed once again by the impressive plant E A Bowles dubbed the queen of the umbellifers, *Selinum wallichianum*. It has bright-green intricate foliage, purple-bloomed stems and sheaths (which pick up the colour of asters and early cool-pink colchicums), and domes of white flower. You do need good soil and a cool position, but I love this umbellifer in August because it provides such a cool presence. It comes up year after year and doesn't suffer from being monocarpic, flowering then dying, as so many umbellifers seem to do. 🌿