



Fig. 1 *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Blue Wave'

Our favourite plants for brightening up summer shade

Shade and Woodland Plants Group committee members

As we write these plant profiles in the heatwave of summer 2018, garden shade seems even more necessary and desirable. Going from blisteringly hot sun to an area where the temperature is several degrees cooler and you can literally feel the transpiration of the trees is sublime.

Shade is no longer considered a problem area to plant – in fact, with the wide range of shade-tolerant plants with wonderful foliage now available, shade has to be seen as a real advantage.

We start with our chairman, **Nigel Parkes-Rolfe**, who is also the Derbyshire Group's representative with the HPS Conservation Group. He likes to squeeze as many plants as possible into his relatively small suburban garden.

Peucedanum ostruthium 'Daphnis' (fig. 2) looks horribly like the variegated Bishop's Weed that goes everywhere if you plant it out in the garden – though I've always loved it in a big pot standing in a summer shade bed.

This plant is a lot better behaved, however, even if it is called a masterwort like Ground Elder, *Aegopodium*. I'm sure it's my imagination, but I love it because one minute it's not there and I'm looking at a patch of spring shade perennials gently going over... then next minute beautiful creamy-gold-edged leaves suddenly appear as if out of nowhere, followed by lovely delicate white flowers.

I got my plant from a Northants HPS Plant Fair in 2014. Apparently it is a fairly 'recent' introduction from France, where it was found in a garden in the '90s. According to the blog of one of the guys who found the plant, Philippe Ferret, the

young leaves can be cooked and eaten and the root used to flavour certain gins and other alcoholic beverages. Probably not ideas to be tried at home!

'Daphnis' forms fairly tidy clumps growing 20–25cm tall and has spread to around a metre, so far. In early summer the flowers look like Queen Anne's Lace on 50cm stems. For me it grows well in an average, woody-type soil in full-to-partial shade, but I'm experimenting with a bit of it in full sun and moist soil to see how it copes. It's bone-hardy, surviving –13°C this year. Propagation is by my preferred method of digging a bit up with a spade.

Why the name 'Daphnis'? It seems Mr Ferret and his friend had named a new aster as 'Chloe' (said to be very nice as well) and the names are from the title of a 2nd century Greek classical romance. Who knew that? I certainly didn't.

I am always so pleased to see *Cypripedium parviflorum* (fig. 3) come back each year because the first year after planting it didn't come back at all. Every year since it has steadily increased in size, along with my appreciation of it. I know it's not meant to be the most difficult orchid to grow in the garden but it's the sheer size (7x7cm) and beauty of the flowers that really do it for me.

I have looked at photos of *C. parviflorum* online and mine doesn't always seem to match, so I suppose it could be a hybrid; but I don't really care. It's a North American species and even their botanists say it is extremely variable but that it's broadly similar to the British and European natives.

I purchased the plant at a 2013 Plant Heritage Spring Plant Fair at Felley Priory in Nottinghamshire. It was in an 8cm pot with one stem showing. The seller had split the plant from one in her own garden, it was the only one on the stall and she wanted a very reasonable £5, so it had to be worth a try. The only advice she gave me was to make sure it had good drainage.

I've said that this orchid was easy, but perhaps I just need to qualify that a bit. When I first planted it in the dappled shade of a silver birch I was careful to mix a lot of bark and grit into my acid-side-of-neutral clay soil.

I also sat the plant on 5cm of grit. I left it unprotected the following winter and it didn't reappear until two springs later. With that in mind, I now mulch and cover it from December to February using a big plastic dome cloche sat on a metal Peony support frame. Not wildly attractive, I accept, but it seems to do the job and saves the dog flattening it while chasing pigeons!

There are now eight flowering stems on my plant. Here in Derbyshire their noses first show in April, it finally flowers in late May and just about lasts until July.

Dactylorhiza foliosa x saccifera (fig. 4) Dear reader, while I have still got your attention, please can I seek a bit of your expertise? I was asked to recommend two plants but I would really like some feedback on this one – there seems to be very little information on it.

Again it's a plant I love and it grows really well for me, as you can see. However, is this a case of 'nice plant, shame about the virus' or are the leaves meant to look like this?

I purchased it at an AGS Show in April 2015; it didn't have yellow marks initially, they appeared later that year. Looking online I see there are two *dactylorhizas* with similar yellow leaf markings and they are being sold as 'Aurea' or 'Variegata'.

Can anyone help me, please?



Fig. 2 *Peucedanum ostruthium* 'Daphnis'



Fig. 3 *Cypripedium parviflorum*



Fig. 4 *Dactylorhiza foliosa x saccifera*



Fig. 5 *Disporum* aff. *cantoniense* ex Guizhou 'Leigong Chocolate'

Sue Lander, vice chairman of the Group, has for once experienced moist shade this spring.

Disporum ('di' meaning two and 'spora' meaning seed) are otherwise known as Fairy Bells. They are one of my favourite perennials for adding height and grace to my shady plantings. In the *Colchicaceae* family there are around 20 species which come from a huge area from northern India to Japan, south to Indonesia and north into the Russian Far East. The North American species have now been reclassified in the genus *Prosartes*.

*Disporum*s are rhizomatous, have deeply veined foliage, bell-like flowers and attractive berries in the autumn. They are easy to grow, even in dry shade once established – I have recently

read of them being planted underneath a Norway spruce! I grow several forms in neutral, woody-but-well-drained soil in part shade. According to the books they are evergreen in milder climates, relatively disease free and scented. The flowers are usually greeny-yellow but recently different flower colours have been discovered.

Unfortunately I no longer have the name of my first acquisition – when I was new to gardening, keeping the label or logging the name wasn't important, but of course it's now highly relevant to identify and be able to recommend a plant. Arising from a golden, jagged-leaved petasites, the *Disporum* attains a height of over a metre with bamboo-like stems that emerge like asparagus spears in late

spring, topped with terminal bell-like flowers.

D. longistylum 'Night Heron', from the famous Heronswood Nursery, originated in China and was selected by Dan Hinkley for its wonderfully sinister dark-hued stems that remain throughout the winter. A classy plant. *D. cantoniense* 'Blueberry Bere' was found at altitude in Manipur, north-east India. It's an exciting new colour break having plummy-pink/lilac flowers. *D. longistylum* 'Green Giant' was discovered by Dan Hinkley in Sichuan province; its stems emerge pink, white and green and mature into green, growing to 120cm. But my favourite has to be *D. aff. cantoniense* ex Guizhou, collected in 2010 by Paul Barney of Edulis Nursery and now named 'Leigong Chocolate' (fig. 5). It flowered for me this year. A plant to be drooled over.

Pittosporum illicioides var. *angustifolium* (fig. 6) was found in the mountain forests of Taiwan. This is an evergreen shrub tolerant of shade – in fact the leaves elongate in shade to 20cm in length but only 2cm in width, dark green and glossy. Useful in the garden to shine out from a shady position. The flowers are pale yellow and fragrant. Growing up to 2m, mine is planted a metre away from an imposing glaucous conifer, therefore the situation is very dry and shady. I have just started to 'lift its skirts' to reveal a pleasing

underplanting of epimediums, wood anemones, winter aconites and snowdrops, and to provide a host for climbers later in the year.

I first saw it in the garden of Crûg Farm and was fortunate to purchase one, almost 10 years ago, from Sue and Bleddyn Wynn-Jones. Although it enjoyed a much higher rainfall in north Wales, my plant seems to have adapted well to its new situation in Essex, needing no additional watering and coming through every winter unscathed. It is a very tolerant, elegant shrub, useful for dark corners though it will grow in



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Fig. 6 *Pittosporum illicoides* var. *angustifolium*

sun. Many evergreen shrubs drop their old leaves in spring, which can be unsightly in a small tidy garden, but

this very narrow foliage is hardly noticeable when shed. Altogether a lovely shrub for shade.

Beccy Middleton is our newest committee member. In addition to looking after our Facebook page, she works as Systematics and Display Collections Supervisor at St Andrews Botanic Garden.

***Ourisia* 'Loch Ewe'** (fig. 7) is a hybrid between *O. macrophylla* (native to New Zealand) and *O. coccinea* (a native of

Chile). It produces a slowly spreading, neat mat of evergreen leaves, with clear-pink flowers which reach 50cm in Fife. It needs cool, damp soil in shade or part-shade, and associates well with primulas and smaller ferns.

Climbing ***Dactylicapnos*** (syn. *Dicentra*) ***macrocapnos*** (fig. 8) is a delicate herbaceous plant, with ferny

foliage and pendant yellow flowers from late spring. It needs some kind of support, and is great growing through shrubs: it never becomes so dense as to swamp its host but adds extra interest when the shrub has finished flowering. We have it growing in full shade. It prefers good, leafy loam and doesn't mind slightly alkaline soil.



©Beccy Middleton

Fig. 7 *Ourisia* 'Loch Ewe'



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Fig. 8 *Dactylicapnos macrocapnos*

Jan Vaughan looks after our website pages as well as being chairman of the Society. She has based her choices on the theme of 'a whiter shade of pale'.

White flowers in a shady spot have an ethereal quality, especially on misty days or in twilight when the light falling on their petals is reflected. White is the perfect foil to a tapestry of green leaves in both the deep shade at the base of a wall and the dappled shade under trees and shrubs.

There are many white-flowered hardy geraniums, and many of them are easy to grow even in dry shade. One of my favorites is *Geranium nodosum* 'Silverwood' (figs 9 & 10), a more compact plant than *G. nodosum*, with large silver-white flowers held on wiry stems above palmate apple-green leaves.

A rhizomatous perennial, it forms a slowly spreading clump, 20–30cm in height, with light green foliage that is glossy early in the year. The funnel-shaped flowers are white with silvery veins, 2.5–3cm in diameter; after the main flush of flowers in early June it continues to bloom sporadically throughout the summer.

It was first discovered by Joan Taylor, a nursery owner from Hampshire, in a friend's garden in Herefordshire. Mrs Taylor, who holds the National Collection of *Geranium nodosum*, decided to name the plant in memory of her husband and to donate any money raised from sales to the Motor Neurone

Disease Association. The cultivar name was first published in Birchwood Plants' catalogue in 2003.

Melittis melissophyllum subsp. *albida* (figs 11 & 12) also has white flowers. A member of the *Lamiaceae*, this herbaceous perennial is 40cm tall and will form a clump around 40cm wide when mature. Native to Southern Europe, it is tolerant of quite dry

conditions once established.

The large, pure-white flowers are borne in the leaf axils on upright stems above a mound of bright green leaves. The flowers are a typical mint-like shape with petals that flare open at the end of a short tube into 1 upper and 3 lower lobes. *Melittis* flowers are honey-scented and the leaves, in true mint fashion, are aromatic.

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Figs 9 & 10 *Geranium nodosum* 'Silverwood'

Figs 11 *Melittis melissophyllum* subsp. *albida*



Figs 12 *Melittis melissophyllum* subsp. *albida*

Wilma Keighley, treasurer and membership secretary.

I first saw *Rubus spectabilis* 'Olympic Double' (fig. 13) during a visit to Eggleston Hall Gardens near Barnard Castle, flowering in a very shady position inside some church ruins in their good demonstration garden. That's for me, I thought, and hot-footed it back to the nursery to find one. They warned me it might sucker a bit. When I got home I looked it up and see that the RHS say it should have full sun. Don't care, it seems to be doing perfectly well, and what else will have little double carmine flowers in full shade.

Diana Garner, secretary since the Group was formed in 2015.

I took on the post knowing that many people

knew far more than me about woodland plants and HPS committee work, but I thought it would be the perfect way to learn – and it has been! I would recommend anyone who is slightly interested in getting a little more involved with their local or specialist group to give it a go – just ring or email someone on the committee!

I live on the Herts-Bucks border in the Chiltern Hills at 185m, and handmade bricks were made on the site in the 1960s – so we are on clay. My unmanicured garden is open by appointment March–July for the NGS.

I couldn't decide which of the plants in my garden to write about, because I am sure, like many of you, my favourite plant is the one currently flowering, or



Fig. 13 *Rubus spectabilis* 'Olympic Double'

anticipated to flower soon. I was hoping my martagon lilies would make a stunning show, but only one appeared this year – no sign of my new white ones.

At that time, this June, *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Blue Wave' (figs 1 & 14), also known as *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Mariesii Perfecta', was already forming its flowerheads. I planted this deciduous lace-cap in 2008 amongst some young acers, and top all the bed up with leaf mulch every winter. In this position it has small fertile violet-blue flowers in the centre and the sterile flowers around the margin are almost white. Fig. 1 photograph was taken in early July and the flowerheads hold their colour for many weeks. I gave it a can of water every few days as we had no rain for weeks.

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©Wilma Keighley



Fig. 14 *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Blue Wave'



Figs 15 & 16 *Saxifraga stolonifera*

The variegated green and white tall shrub to the right in fig. 14 is *Callicarpa bodinieri* var. *giraldii* 'Profusion' AGM which I planted in 2006, purchased at the Tatton Park flower show from Bluebell



Arboretum. The foliage shines out beautifully in the shade, but as a bonus in late summer it is covered with metallic-purple berries which complement the blue of the hydrangea.

Saxifraga stolonifera

(figs 15 & 16) hugs the ground with beautiful small kidney-shaped green leaves with pale veins and a pinky-purple marking on the leaves. The flowers have long red stems and are white with a pink edge. It spreads very gently by making new little plants attached by red stems – in fact, it is also known as the Creeping Saxifrage.

It's planted at the edge of my camellia bed in an area that gets wet in the winter. This year it has been in flower for more than a month. I bought my plant from Daisy Roots Nursery a few years ago, and it has been no trouble at all. 🌸

For details of the Shade and Woodland Plants Group meetings, talks and garden visits, see www.hardy-plant.org.uk/meet-us-at/specialist-groups/shadewoodland or email montana@cholesbury.net