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A good little earner

Rosemary Lindsay

Fig. 1 *Cardamine quinquefolia*

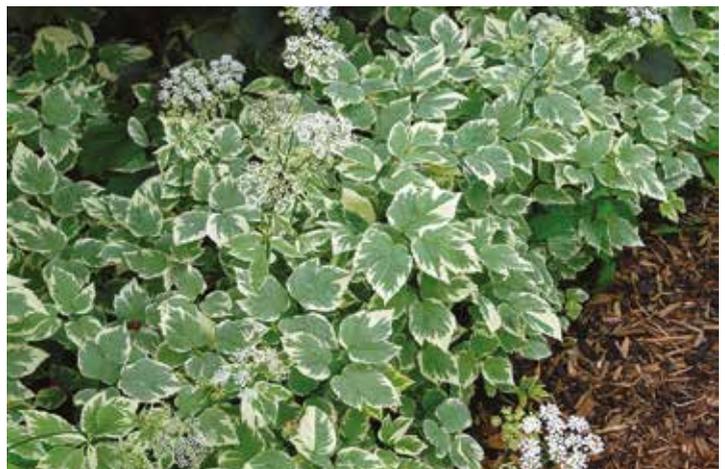
Everyone who opens their garden for the National Garden Scheme (NGS) knows that a plant stall is essential because it brings in the plant hunters. It is always gratifying to find a queue at the gate before opening time; people who head for the plants before giving the garden a glance. And what every garden opener also learns is that you can't do it without the help of family and friends.

The title of this article is how my late friend Kate Thorp would describe a plant that, however unpromising it might look in a nursery, could be divided into several more and potted on for sale, or given away. And it was Kate who over many years supplied us with hundreds of plants for our open days for the NGS and other charities. No seedling appearing in her garden would escape her sharp eye if it could be an earner.

I first met Kate in a local garden we were visiting. She told me she was about to open hers, which was nearby in south London. Having deduced from our conversation that she knew rather a lot about unusual plants, I of course noted the date.

Kate's garden was mainly shady so she grew a lot of shade-loving plants. Consequently, one of our

favourite trips together was to Washfield, Elizabeth Strangman's magical nursery near Hawkhurst in Kent. I still have in our garden many of Strangman's plants: epimediums, astrantias, pulmonarias, cardamines, corydalises, dicentras, polygonatums, disporums, hellebores and more, and the Washfield catalogue of 1997 is one of my treasured possessions.



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Fig. 2 *Aegopodium podagraria* 'Variegatum'



Fig. 3 *Asarum caudatum*

Many of those plants are on the immaculate lists that Kate prepared for our sales, propagated from her own garden. I would go to her house on the morning of our open days, and load into our old Volvo estate the many trays of plants that she so kindly provided, all neatly labelled and priced.

I have kept all her lists, dozens of them, and reflect on what could be described as her signature plants. They are what you might

call 'quiet', or 'modest' – one indignant visitor to her garden said "You can't sell that, it's a weed!". It could have been any from the following list, some of her favourites: *Cardamine quinquefolia* (fig. 1 – all over the shady far end of our garden in spring, then dies back); *Aegopodium podagraria* 'Variegatum' (fig. 2 – variegated ground elder, proceed with caution!); *Asarum caudatum* (fig. 3 – not to be confused with

the mouse plant *Arisarum proboscideum*); *Pachyphragma macrophyllum* (fig. 4 – needs to be kept within bounds); *Claytonia sibirica* f. *albiflora* (fig. 5); *Galium odoratum* (no shady niche here is without sweet woodruff); *Silene fimbriata* (fig. 6 – a frilly version of the seaside bladder campion); many geraniums, eg *G. phaeum* var. *phaeum* 'Samobor'; *G. pyrenaicum* 'Bill Wallis' (fig. 7); *G. macrorrhizum* 'Bevan's Variety'; and *G. rotundifolium*. These plants turn up in the gardens of her many friends, a constant reminder of her generosity.

I first came across *Begonia sutherlandii*, *Viola hederacea* and *Muehlenbeckia complexa* in Kate's garden, in positions which in many gardens would be dismissed as unpromising for growing anything: the narrow passage along the side of any number of Edwardian town houses which is so often the repository for dustbins, bikes and general rubbish; but that was not the case here. Kate's unfailing eye for an opportunity to grow sun-shy plants meant that the passage, not much more than a metre or so wide, was beautified with a collection of plants in pots and scrambling up the fence, a green haven: ivies, ferns, hostas, bergenias, notably the handsome, hairy *Bergenia ciliata* (fig. 8), and *B. emeiensis* (fig. 9) – rare, and a little on the tender side. We discovered it in the much-missed Blackthorn Nursery in Hampshire.



Fig. 4 *Pachyphragma macrophyllum*



Fig. 5 *Claytonia sibirica* f. *albiflora*



Fig. 6 *Silene fimbriata*

In spite of this article being mainly about shade, there was some sun at the far end of Kate's garden and there flourished a huge *Eriolarynx australis*, of which we have a descendant, by now also huge: if there is any plant that visitors are most likely to ask about on our NGS open days, it's that

one. The abundant blue, bell-shaped flowers, about 2.5cm long, appear all through the summer and well into autumn until knocked back by frost, and then it looks completely lifeless until early May.

When I put my gardening stuff away in the shed I pass the last plant that Kate gave me: *Corydalis ochroleuca*



Fig. 7 *Geranium pyrenaicum* 'Bill Wallis'

(less common than *C. lutea*, the ubiquitous yellow one). I am hoping to find some of its offspring as it's always popular. But for now I'm off to pot up some seedlings of *Angelica pachycarpa*, a good little earner, the original of which came from yet another friend's NGS open garden. 🌸



Fig. 8 *Bergenia ciliata*



Fig. 9 *Bergenia emeiensis*

Rosemary Lindsay is a botanical artist, a fellow of the Chelsea Physic Garden Florilegium Society and a member of the Society of Botanical Artists. She regularly contributes drawings and articles to the journal *Hortus*. Her watercolour paintings can be seen on www.rosemarylindsay.com. Her garden at 5, Burbage Road, London SE24 9HJ will be open for the NGS on 31 May 2020, 2-5pm.