



HERGEST CROFT GARDENS

Newsletter

June 2011

Lawrence's birthday present

If you look in the conservatory you will see a large bucket with an exotic plant just coming into flower which is *Lotus* 'Debbie Gibson'. Last year we tried to raise Lotus from Japanese seed but failed to carry them through the winter so this one has been bought as a replacement. The story of the lotus is a fascinating one and is well told in Mark Griffiths' book *The Lotus Quest* which I strongly recommend; it covers the fields of Japanese and other history as well as the plant itself which has mystical significance in many parts of the world.

Lotus Debbie Gibson



Chelsea Show

This was Elizabeth's first occasion as President in the show and I know many of you will have seen her on television escorting Her Majesty The Queen on the royal visit with me making a cameo appearance in the background; she is surprised to find herself reaching celebrity status – she was approached on Paddington station by a lady saying "you are the President of the RHS" The garden basks in reflected glory. Maybe you will be tempted to go to the RHS AGM at Wisley on July 1 to hear her in action.

The Garden this Month

Thankfully we have now had some rain following the dry spring – not so good for visitors but the plants love it and everything is looking green and fresh, including I am afraid the weeds! As always there are a host of plants to welcome. It is a spectacular year for peonies and the borders by the Hergest Croft potting shed are at their peak. The north end of the border is planted with white and pink cultivars, it has taken a long time to get going but finally it looks marvellous this year. Peonies here seem to take a long time to settle in but it is well worth the wait.

The scent of the Philadelphia species and hybrids is everywhere, almost overwhelming at times. I much prefer the scented ones over the hybrid Lemoine plants that have wonderful flowers but are usually without scent. The roses in the Kitchen Garden are coming to their early best but I remain frustrated at my failure to find a really good and reliable old fashioned red rose. David Austin's LD Braithwaite is the right colour but, here at least, is a poor doer. Darcy Bussell is a wonderful doer but not quite the colour I am looking for – any suggestions would be very welcome. The Herbaceous Borders are beginning their summer spectacular and will be at their peak for the next two months.



Abies Species, The Silver Firs

These conifers have the most beautiful cones of all especially the Asiatic ones with purple and violet cones. At present in the Maple Grove looking wonderful are *Abies densa* and *Abies spectabilis* from the Himalayas, and *Abies firma*, the Mount Fuji fir from Japan. There are a number of other species as well for those with time to explore.

Abies firma—in the Maple Grove

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The Aftermath of Winter

We are now beginning to assess the damage done by the cold weather. Some things we thought were dead are beginning to break into leaf but others have given up the ghost from the effort and collapsed. We have lost the spectacular *Tetrapanax paperifer* 'Rex' by the Hergest Croft Potting shed though we hope that it may throw up root suckers later in the year. The young *Arbutus menziesii*, the Madrone from the west coast of America, on the Sycamore Walk appears to have been killed which is surprising since the 100 year old plant nearby is unharmed; it seems to be a difficult plant to get established. To my delight some of the newer introductions from the North of Vietnam have come through unscathed, including *Rhododendron protistum giganteum* and *Acer chapaense*.

The Herbaceous Border

Many birch species are showing signs of stress with limited amounts of leaves, I hope a good drenching will restore them to health; I guess the problem may have been the early October and November frosts last autumn which caught the twigs before they were completely dormant. Evergreen broadleaves, but not conifers, did not enjoy the extreme cold and I fear that we have lost the Chinese, *Acer paxii* that I have been nursing through winters for years. Hardiness is much more complicated than many people think and the only way to establish it is to experiment; we will go on trying plants that are on the edge of hardiness here and rejoice in our successes but there are some that I am tempted to apply the US baseball principle "Three strikes and you are out"

Plant Sales: There are a wide range of plants and some rare trees. **Tea Room** in the Dining Room
Gift Shop: unusual gift displayed in the Hall

EVENTS

Rain or Shine Theatre Company
Shakespeare's 'Much Ado about Nothing'
 Saturday 30 July at 7.00pm

RHS Celebration of Apples
 Saturday 15—Sunday 16 October
 Apple displays by RHS Wisley,
 Frank P Matthews and
 Marcher Apple Network
 Apple Identification & Tasting
 Local Apple Products
 Demonstrations of Cultivation
 Talks on the Heritage of Apples
 See the spectacular Autumn Colour in the gardens

The Receptionists, Jill, Sandra, and Melissa welcome any comments

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