

HERGEST CROFT GARDENS

Newsletter June 2009

What a wonderful May!

This has been the best month for the garden that I can remember for 50 years. Just enough rain to keep things growing, lots of warm sunshine and no frosts worth the mention. Everything that had been held back by the earlier cool weather came out together to provide a spectacular display.

The Victorian Rhododendrons.

With all the wonders of the species and modern hybrid rhododendrons we tend to overlook the virtues of the older Victorian plants that flower in late May and early June; they are sometimes known as "Ironclads" because of their tolerance of cold conditions. My grandfather's original plantings in the Garden and Park Wood consisted entirely of these plants raised by Nurseries such as Waterers, Mangles and Slococks. Considering the very limited range of species parents that they had to work with the achievement of producing such an extraordinary range of colours and such a quantity of flower is amazing. There are three places in the Garden where you can see them at their best. The Avenue in the Azalea Garden up to the Wembley Gate and beyond include a number of huge plants well over 100 years old of which maybe *Rh* 'Fastuosum Flore pleno' is the most spectacular, though hybrids of *Rh ponticum* are not fashionable today. The Flower Fall below the pond in Park Wood starting with *Rh* 'Cynthia' at the top is a real coup de theatre and is, as far as I know, unique. Above the Pool is the area that my mother christened "Pearl Harbour" though it was planted long before that event, contains *Rh* 'Pink Pearl' and *Rh* 'Mother of Pearl' and is a symphony of pale pinks. The sad thing is that we do not know the names of many of the plants and few of them are available today in the trade – we must undertake a project to properly catalogue this historic part of the collection.

The Daisy Border

There is a fine collection of *Philadelphus* (Mock Orange) and *Deutzia* on both sides of the path which are at their peak this month. My personal favourite is *Philadelphus delavayi melanocalyx* 'Nymans Variety' on the north side near the lawn. This plant, which came here as a cutting from Nymans, has purple backs to its flowers and an almost overpowering scent. Amongst the *Deutzias* *D. x kalmiflora* is a very free flowering pale pink and *D x elegantissima* 'Rosealind' is just as good with deeper pink flowers, *D x hybrida* 'Mont Rose' is the deepest of all. You will notice that many of these *Deutzias* and *Philadelphus* are hybrids and the main source of these is the old French Nursery called Lemoine in Nancy; France. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude for producing such a range of great garden plants from the 1880's onwards. They are truly the stars of the show in June.

The Rockery

The self sown seedlings of *Lilium martagon*, the common Turks Cap Lily, range in colour from pink to deep maroon of *Lilium martagon* var *cattaniae*. They are the earliest lily to flower, the easiest to grow and will continue throughout the month. We are trying to establish the white form, *L m* 'Album' but it seems a little more choosy here. The huge range of ferns, which also seed where they will, provide a perfect green background for the lilies.

Peonies

These are now just beginning and the plants of *Peonia* 'Peregrine' with their scarlet flowers are now out in the Slate Garden. They will be followed on the Sycamore Walk with many of the old cultivars of *P lactiflora* in colours ranging from white through pink to deep red. For me they are the epitome of English gardens in June. *P.* 'Bowl of Beauty' in the old rose garden by the greenhouse in the Kitchen garden is one of my favourites with its deep musky smell. I remember the scent from a vase of them put in my room by my landlady when I was taking my finals in Oxford in 1961.

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The Kitchen Garden

The Spring Border is ending its season with a riot of aquilegias. Just as the double herbaceous borders begin theirs with the huge clumps of oriental poppies. The consensus of expert opinion is that these are P 'Beauty of Livermere'. We believe that these date back to the 1930s and appear to be immortal! They contrast well with the tall white and cream spikes of the eremurus and the herbaceous *Clematis recta* and its purple leaved form *Cl. recta* 'Purpurea'. As the month goes on they will be joined by a huge variety of plants building up to the climax in early July. The vegetables are beginning to explode into growth. Look out for the old heritage varieties that we are trying to grow. You will notice that the frame has been moved to cover the strawberries to produce an early crop

Plant Sales

Stephen Lloyd has a splendid selection of new plants for sale including a wide selection of *Acer palmatum* varieties in all shapes and sizes from the tiny; (are you tempted by Bonsai?) to mature plants ready for the garden or a pot.

RAIN and SHINE Company
Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew"
on **Saturday 27 June** at 7.30pm

Do join us for this most politically correct of comedies hopefully on a perfect summer evening

Buy your tickets now for this spectacular occasion.

The New Web site

Do pay a visit to www.hergest.co.uk that has been entirely redesigned; any comments would be gratefully received

The Receptionist, Jill, Sandra, Melissa, Pat and Veronica welcome any comments