

NORTHERN Leaves

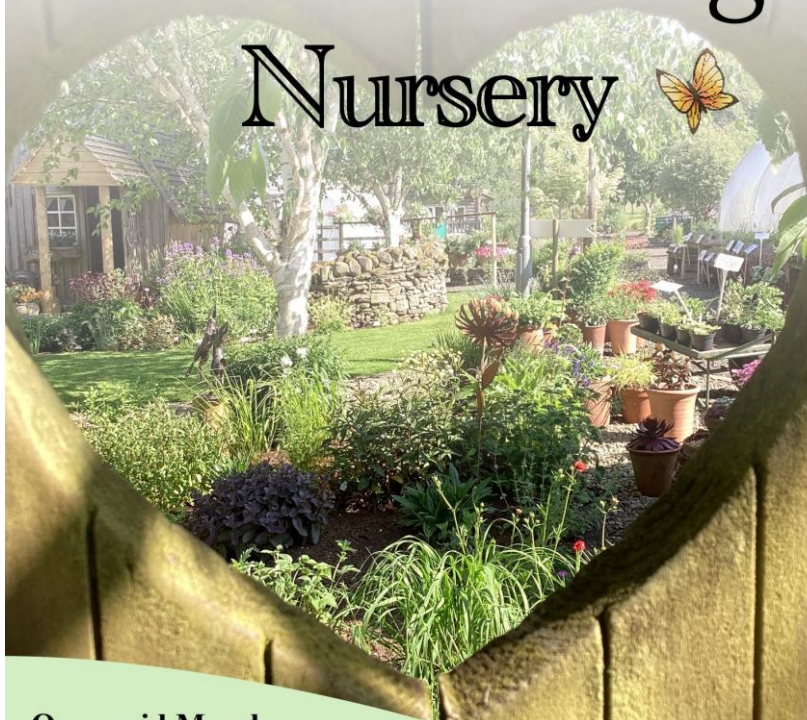
Issue No. 55

May 2025



The Newsletter of the Hardy Plant Society

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The Hardy Plant Society

The Hardy Plant Society was formed to foster interest in hardy herbaceous plants. It aims to give its members information about the wealth of both familiar and less well known plants and to ensure that all garden-worthy perennial plants remain in cultivation and have the widest possible distribution.

HPS website: www.hardy-plant.org.uk

The Scottish and Northern Borders Group has members all over Scotland and several in the north of England. The group organises garden visits in spring, summer and autumn, with lecture days in the winter, arranged at a variety of locations throughout Scotland.

website: www.scothps.co.uk

This is the final issue of *Northern Leaves*, it will be replaced by an on-line Newsletter. Details of this will follow. Many thanks to all of you who have contributed articles, reports, poems and images and to our advertisers.

It would be appreciated if members could set up standing orders or direct debits to pay their annual subscription promptly.

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We are grateful for the financial support of our advertisers and ask members to mention *Northern Leaves* when replying to advertisers by post or when visiting them to buy plants.

Photographs on the covers

Front Cover: The Herbaceous Border, Willowhill

Back Cover: Snowdrops, Scone Palace

Sally Lorimore

Brenda White



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From the Editor

Back in 1963 the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan, who later made a memorable appearance with Woody Allan in *Annie Hall*, published his famous doctrine ‘The medium is the message’. What he meant by this was that the form in which information was presented was becoming more important than the actual content. The rise of the internet, social media and ‘fake news’ in recent years has made this even more significant.

Northern Leaves has however gone against this trend, what matters is the content, the reports, articles, poems and images sent in by you, the members. I hope I have, with a great deal of help from Linda, managed to put it all into a decent format, but it is your contributions that have made *Northern Leaves* – so thank you all!

Chris Sanders

From the Convenor

Visits and other activities

The last of the summer visits was to Braco and Drummond Castles. Many members defied the dreadful forecast and enjoyed a lovely visit – and the rain held off. We then had our annual Lecture Day in Auchterarder and in January a zoom talk from the No Name Nursery in Kent. We saw the return of Spring in February with a visit to the gardens of Scone and Branklyn with their snowdrops and other winter goodies.

In the autumn a questionnaire was sent to members which we hoped would allow the committee to plan the activities of the group in line with the members wishes. Thanks to those who responded, apparently the percentage of returns was well above what could have been statistically expected. The general view of members seemed to be that they were reasonably satisfied with things as they are with most of the negative feedback involving distances to drive and wanting visits nearer home. We are totally sympathetic to those concerns but unless we can put Scotland in a boil wash and shrink it a bit, those problems remain. The Group tour might be the answer for some as at least someone else does the driving!

The AGM in March was held in the House for an Art Lover in Glasgow, a popular venue, especially for its big scones. We had two excellent speakers and not one but two very successful plant sales. We thanked Christina McLachlan and Chris Sanders as they are both standing down from their positions. We are very grateful for the hours they have put in for the benefit of the Group. Christina seems to know everyone in the Group, both now and previously and she knows everything we need to do which makes her invaluable to a new Convenor. Margaret Roberts has been shadowing Christina for the past year and now takes over as Secretary. We welcomed Sheena MacGregor and Sally Baldon who have agreed to join the committee.

Chris is standing down as Editor of *Northern Leaves* after nine years. We have been very fortunate to have had Chris producing a newsletter of such outstanding quality for all this time. It is the passing of an era and this will be the last issue of *Northern Leaves* in its current format. It has been suggested that a twice yearly Newsletter is produced for online distribution, with printed copies sent to those members not online. This will contain news, reports on garden visits which will consist mainly of photographs and articles which it is hoped that members will contribute.

Constitution

The revised Constitution was circulated to all members before the AGM and some useful comments were received which we intend to take up. These included a couple of typos and also the proviso that, although the Secretary and Treasurer will have a finite maximum term of five years, it will be possible to re-elect them immediately if necessary.

We intend to circulate the final version to the members with a note explaining the main changes and assuming agreement unless we receive any objections within a finite period. As, however, we had a quorum the members at the AGM agreed the new constitution.

I wish you all a pleasant summer in your garden and hope to see many of you on the visits we have planned.

Hilary Bailey

My Favourite Plant?

Looking at the piece by Hilary in the last *Northern Leaves* led me to think what is my favourite plant in the garden? That then led me into thinking “all-time” favourites? “seasonal” favourites? Much easier, from the first snowdrops, usually on New Year’s Day, through the species daffodils, wild primroses naturalised all over the garden, summer lilies and the spectacular late season display from hundreds of naturalised and hybridised colchicums. Shrubs to match each, hamamelis, camellia, magnolia, *Euonymus europaeus* all in their season.

“Favourites” then seemed too easy a term and brought about the question of what plants I would be most upset to lose. This perhaps rules out the ones easy, albeit sometimes expensive, to replace such as most of those above. That leaves me with a smaller number of plants and shrubs that were either difficult to obtain or raise or have established themselves and thrived against the climatic odds here in Pitlochry and always seen as at risk. In the first category *Euphorbia pasteurii* or *Boehmeria sieboldiana*, quirky favourites but the result of several initially unsuccessful attempts at raising from seed as was *Lilium canadense*. Climatic strugglers include the spectacular *Geranium palmatum* which fortunately can be seed raised fairly easily. There are however two shrubs which are thriving in a tiny microclimate by a southwest facing wall that have required special nurturing into maturity, *Daphne bholua* and *Argyrocystis battandieri*, the Pineapple Broom. The daphne has been raised from a tiny specimen at an HPS plant sale from a garden in the west, nurtured through -15° frosts in 2009 and 2010 and now at two metres tall produces in most Februarys and March a wonderful garden pervading scent from a myriad of pink flowers. It gets occasional protection but should survive especially as it now suckers.

The “plant I would be most upset to lose” must however be the Pineapple Broom. Coveted since I saw a wonderful specimen against the wall of Inverleith House in the Edinburgh Botanic Garden around 1980 (which was lost to cold weather a few years later). I planted one with care about position and soil (poor and full of builders’ rubble!) 12 years ago in hope but resigned to loss. The alternative name “Moroccan Broom” and

country of origin give an indication of tenderness, but it is in fact found in the Atlas Mountains. The RHS consider it as hardiness H5 but from observation over the years this seems extremely optimistic, especially for inland Scotland and I know the cold winters of 1982-3 and again 2009-10 wiped out large numbers. It has lovely felty silver-grey leaves and although the extremities get nibbled by severe frosts as well as regular pruning it is now three metres tall and flowers every summer over a considerable period. And what flowers! In most years a solid mass of erect golden yellow flowers and the strong characteristic pineapple scent. It gets admired by garden visitors and the scent always comes as a surprise. I have tried striking cuttings without success and donated cuttings to Branklyn where they also failed in their propagator so I must continue to cherish my specimen and recognise its status as a “favourite” plant.

Andrew Holmes



CHERRY BLOSSOM

Cherry blossoms --- symbol of Spring,
of revival and renewal ---
optimism, new beginnings.

Sadly its flowers are transient
signifying humanity's
ephemeral mortality.

Fruit of the tree, bright red and round ---
creation to infinity.
A sign of lush prosperity.

People blossom when they can be
vigorous and flourishing
like the fruit of the cherry tree.

*May Howie
March 2025*



Helensburgh April 2025

Plant Profile: *Sanguisorba*

This genus of herbaceous perennials originates from the cooler areas of the Northern Hemisphere and is commonly known as burnet. As a herb *Sanguisorba minor* has medicinal uses and its Latin name describes its use: sanguis (blood) and sorbeo (to soak up). The species and cultivars of this genus make fantastic ornamental plants and are one of my must have plants in the garden due to its long flowering period, lovely flowers of varying shapes and shades of red, pink and white and its self-sufficiency in the garden. It is a tough, hardy and long-living plant, doesn't need staking or fussing and will grow happily in partial shade or sun. It also has good autumn foliage colour as the flowers start to fade.



Sanguisorba 'Pink Brushes'



Sanguisorba 'Blackthorn'

Sanguisorba livens up a border with its tall, airy flowers, growing happily in amongst grasses and other perennials and it will tolerate most soils, even our heavy clay soil here in the nursery. Left to its own devices it will form a sizeable plant after three or four years, but is not invasive and stays in a well behaved manner in the border. The decorative leaves form a basal rosette from which the flower spikes grow. The flowers are not

dense or overpowering, but add structure and interest amongst other plants in the border, almost like gypsophila in a vase of flowers.



The lovely white
Sanguisorba canadensis



S. 'Pink Tanna' with
Polemonium 'Purple Rain'

The plants vary in size and colour: from the short variegated leaves and small red bobbles of S. 'Little Angel' at 20cm to dancing tall light stems of showy and flamboyant, fluffy pink S. 'Pink Elephant' at 240cm, there is something for everyone. They also vary from pale delicate pinks through to pink and white and then the dark reds. I love them all but perhaps especially the dark reds amongst tall grasses and perennials.

Because of their toughness and ability to cope with most soils (except very dry soils), sun or light shade they are great in mixed borders, prairie gardens and the more exposed colder gardens of Scotland. We very successfully grow them in the nursery on the side of an exposed hill at 850 feet above sea level, in clay soil.



S. 'Pink Elephant'



S. 'Crimson Queen' and
Calamagrostis in the nursery garden

If you have a space in your garden, I would recommend you give these plants a go. Which one to go for depends on your colour preference and height of the plant. I have grown all these cultivars in exposed gardens on clay soil and recommend the following:

Sanguisorba canadensis

A big, regal-looking plant with long, tapering, white candles on sturdy, well-branched stems to 1.8m or more in sun or part shade and moist soil.

Sanguisorba officinalis

A mass of raspberry-red baubles appear to float in the air on tall stems over a clump of pale-green leaves to over 1m where happy. Tolerant of a wide range of conditions owing to its large tap root. Flowering from mid-summer into autumn and self-seeds. Looks great against a lighter background of white render or amongst grasses.

Sanguisorba 'Crimson Queen'

Brand new cultivar with striking crimson flowerheads, July to September.

Sanguisorba 'Pink Tanna'

Lots of smallish, elongated, pale pink flowerheads on a taller plant to 90cm. Great with small-flowered asters and against a dark background. Looks like lots of wee fireworks pinging off in all directions.

Sanguisorba 'Tanna'

A compact little plant with nice shiny green crinkle-edged leaves and swarms of small wine red baubles to 60cm.

Sanguisorba tenuifolia 'White Tanna'

A recent introduction with neat, white caterpillars, around 1.4m tall. Would create a beautiful transparent screen for solid perennials such as lythrum and veronicastrum.

Sanguisorba 'Pink Brushes'

Narrow, light-pink bottlebrushes, to 20cm long, on upright stems. 1.8m.

Sanguisorba tenuifolia var. *alba*

A cracking plant that is both tall and graceful with cascades of long, white, tassel-like flowers that create a waterfall effect in the border. Brilliant against *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple'. To 2m in any reasonable soil.

Sanguisorba tenuifolia 'Pink Elephant'

Long, pinkish-red spikes on tall stems. 1.8m.

Sanguisorba tenuifolia 'Purpurea'

Similar to *Sanguisorba tenuifolia* var. *alba* but with maroon purple flowers, foliage turns butter yellow in autumn. To 1.8m.



Autumn colour of *S.* 'Pink Elephant'



S. 'Little Angel'



Sanguisorba tenuifolia var. *alba*

Sanguisorba are good for cut flowers, bees, insects, long flowering, sunny border, partial shade, clay soil.

Rona Dodds

Decisions, decisions

Last summer the lining of our garden pond was fatally punctured. It turned out that, as the lining material that had been used for the pond was designed for the base of driveways, it really could not be effectively patched. So we gritted our teeth and had the pond dug out to the shape we had wanted in the first place, with a proper shelf left round the margins. Now marginal plants do not just collapse into the middle of the pond.

We are really happy with the new pond. It is a slightly different shape from the previous one, with a gently sloping gravel shore. The birds really approve of this, possibly because their wee feet no longer skite on a shiny black liner.

The pond is now smaller – and has given me a new oddly-shaped flower bed just in front of the pond. In younger days I would have been delighted. But with advancing years, yet another flower bed is not quite so welcome.

In Helensburgh the default weather conditions are rain, in varying amounts. So the garden was very much designed to be seen from inside the house, for the many days when it was too wet to be in the garden.

Both being keen bird watchers, we feed the birds every day and often sit at the window, reading and watching the antics of the wildlife that frequents the garden. Mostly it is a selection of birds – but there are also cats, squirrels or even bats, with the very occasional fox. Recently we had a ferret! They all seem to enjoy using the pond, either to drink from or to have a refreshing bath.

We like to have colour and interest in our plants spread over the whole year, so there is always something to look at somewhere. In winter, this specially applies to the plants near the house. So we have several winter-flowering shrubs and lots of hellebores close to the house. Now I am trying to work out what plants would look good the entire year. And it has made me think about plants rather differently – what in my personal opinion would give us the best value for the space? Small evergreen

shrubs come to mind. But my record for choosing small evergreen shrubs that have the decency to actually stay small is not good.

When we first acquired this garden twenty years ago, we purchased a *Photinia* ‘Little Robin’. It quickly grew into a 3-4 metre high tree. Fortunately, where it had been planted, there was plenty space for it to grow – and very handsome it looked. Sadly, it blew down in a recent storm, completely flattening the neighbouring pittosporum. The photinia was removed – and the pittosporum happily moved itself to fill the space in about a week. It also turns out to be 3-4 metres high.

Then there was the variegated leucothoe. I had grown different varieties of leucothoe previously, lovely small colourful mounds of colour in the winter. This one is now about 2 metres high and is in the process of swallowing up the neighbouring viburnum.

In previous gardens I had grown various daphnes, which always stayed as small well-behaved clumps. Eighteen years ago I bought a *Daphne bholua* ‘Jacqueline Postill’ – which is now 3 metres tall. Wonderful though, when it is in flower in February, when it just fills the garden with perfume.

Sometimes I feel that the more you know about plants, the harder it is to make a sensible choice. I tried to think what I really valued – not to mention what would cause me the least work!

So: my requirements now for the ideal plant would be: does not require coddling; comes up faithfully every year; does not tantalise by sending up tiny bits of growth, while the rest of the plant is obviously an ex-plant; does not outgrow its space; does not outgrow its welcome and flatten everything round about; has pretty foliage even when its flowers are finished; has a long flowering period; does not need too much pruning, so we can still get up our paths; does not seed all over the blooming garden *and* paths *or* sucker all through the bed it’s in.

Fran Scott

Visit To Perthshire

16th October 2024

Braco Castle

This trip was our regular “Autumn Tints” trip and making a second attempt at Drummond after floods caused abandonment of the 2023 trip.

The forecast threatened heavy rain (again) but we only had a half-hearted morning drizzle, enough to add the appropriate autumn subtlety to the wonderful range of colours on view. The two gardens were designed landscapes but from very different periods, Braco originally a 19th century design while Drummond is the classic 17th century courtly garden, modified by the Victorians and then restored to its original form and carefully conserved.



We started at Braco with an introduction by Jodie Simpson, who has been the Gardener at Braco since 1987. While the Castle dates in part from the 16th century with subsequent modifications up to the 19th century the core garden design is Victorian but much of what we saw was the result of a comprehensive replanting programme overseen by Jodie with much of this new planting now mature and providing a range of colour. Particular features were the range of birches (Jodie recommends *Betula ermanii* rather than *Betula utilis* for the bark effects in central Scottish conditions) and sorbus species. The latter came in a range of sizes and berry colours a particular favourite being *Sorbus ulleungensis* ‘Olympic Flame’ however

the overall range of varieties was impressive and included the largest *Sorbus vilmorinii*

your correspondent has encountered and *Sorbus americana* with huge fat red berries. All this was mixed in with mature forest specimens from earlier plantings and interspersed with the open water features from the original design.



There were some less commonly seen single specimen shrubs encountered including the *Heptacodium miconioides*, the seven-son flower, and the Wingnut, *Pterocarya fraxinifolia* and others such as *Eucryphia* 'Rostrevor' of an unusual size and in flower. The time and season did not allow for a visit to the herbaceous garden, an excuse for a return visit on some summer trip.

Andrew Holmes
Pictures: Chris Sanders

Drummond Castle

The second garden of the day at Drummond Castle was another wonderful but completely different garden. The largest example in Scotland of a formal French style garden (it doubled for Versailles in an “Outlander” episode) and of European significance, it has an unbeatable “wow” factor in the first view from the Castle courtyard set above the garden structures, formal parterres, backing woodland across a valley and a wider borrowed landscape. The original castle dates from the 15th century or earlier with later additions and then the development of the adjoining mansion from the 17th century.



The garden was designed in 1631 and laid out but was subsequently abandoned after the Jacobite risings then remodelled and finally restored to its original plan. We were shown around by the garden custodian starting with the overall view from above. The range of autumn colours I think demonstrates that this garden looks at its best in October with all the autumn tints complementing the evergreen topiary and specimen conifers. The topiary comes in a range of species and shades of green and is carefully trimmed after the garden closes to the public at the end of October.





The garden is maintained by a team of six gardeners aided by a fleet of robot mowers! Formal steps lead down past a range of marble classical statues through upper terraces featuring rows of *Prunus lusitanica*, a specimen blue budded *Magnolia acuminata* and tumbling *Rosa* ‘Alberic Barbier’, interspersed by summer herbaceous displays and some 6000 annual bedding plants across the terraces and parterres. Passing a 650-year-old sculptured yew we reached the box parterres and their 11 miles of low hedging, using a hopefully blight resistant box variety. One can wander through the formal garden with specimens, including a good range of acers and the striking topiary

creating a unique experience. Queen Victoria visited in 1842, planting a striking copper beech, but this is only one of the features. The centrepiece of the formal garden is the columnar sundial, designed by James Mylne in 1630, and the oldest in Scotland. Reputed to tell the time in 65 cities it cost £32.18 when commissioned and has recently had a complete overhaul and restoration.

Behind the formal garden is a range of greenhouses providing both permanent features such as a handsome plumbago and a winter home for a variety of containers. Not least is the range of heritage apple trees, offering some members an opportunity for some scrumping.



A unique garden of international significance and one to be visited by all enthusiastic gardeners, preferably in autumn.

Andrew Holmes
pictures: Chris Sanders

Memories



Harrogate Gardens Tour – June 2013

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Northampton Gardens Tour – June 2015



Gloucestershire Garden Tour – July 2016

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Lincoln - 2017

Lincolnshire Garden Tour – July 2017



Ulster Garden Tour – June 2018



Peterborough area Garden Tour – June 2019



Shropshire Garden Tour – September 2021

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Cheshire Garden Tour – June 2022

LECTURE DAY – Auchterarder Church Centre 11th November 2024

The Tangled Bank project, re-modelling St Andrews Botanic Garden *Harry Watkins*

The garden was originally run as an integral part of St Andrews University. At that time, it was a beautiful, quite formal garden, with lots of well-filled flower beds – and a very large number of greenhouses, which were costing an increasing amount of money to keep heated.

All this entailed high and expensive maintenance. The university decided to divest itself of the garden so it was taken over quite some time ago by a new charitable trust, mostly run by volunteers. The garden is now focussed around a better understanding of plant habitats, ecology and adaptation to climate change. As such it is part of a wide collaborative research and education project.

Harry, the current Director, took the decision to set up the Tangled Bank Project. This plan completely changed the garden. For a start, all the many expensive, and increasingly in need of repair, greenhouses were dismantled and dispensed with. Then the intricate flower beds were replaced by informal grassed areas and designed habitats for certain species types. A huge variety of unusual trees and shrubs were planted and the garden completely reworked. Now, the whole effect is of a large pleasant informal area to wander round – but still with plenty of botanic interest, especially around a range of “sentinel” species that provide indicators of reaction to climate change and very different from the much more formal earlier garden, with its multitude of greenhouses. And much better for the planet.

The first question from our members was “When can a Society visit to the garden be arranged?” The answer, happily, was “Any time soon”.

So, watch this space!

Fran Scott

Stars of the Celestial Mountains, flowers of the Tien Shan

Frazer Nelson

This was a fascinating, beautifully illustrated talk about the flora of three areas in the Tien Shan Mountain range of Central Asia. The range, which Frazer described as like corrugated cardboard, is about 1500 miles long, extending from Uzbekistan to Western China and, between 400-600 miles wide. It has two peaks of over 7000 metres and gets higher each year due to the movement of the tectonic plates. On the fault line the soil becomes more alkaline. Temperatures range between -40 and +40°C and, in the many glacial valleys, the glaciers are receding fast.

Across the range, scree on the heights provides a home for lichens and oxygraphis, whilst at lower levels, rich meadows full of insects and fields of poppies can also be found. The richness of the flora is indicated by the fact that in places 100 species can be identified in one square metre. There are at least ten species of eremerus, and convolvulus, delphiniums, aquilegia and fritillaria are also common. Frazer, who is a self-described ‘tulip nerd’ said that there are many varieties of tulips with huge variations, with tulips three metres high being found in one location.

The first area he described was the Song Kul plateau in Kyrgyzstan at 4000 metres, where alpine plants thrive. The snow goes in May and returns in September, with huge growth in the interval, featuring violas, primulas and trollius. Natural rock gardens are found and insect pollinators, including Apollo butterflies, operate even at these heights. Seasonality is having a major impact, with temperature and precipitation changes coming at different times. Snow loss is increasing rapidly, with long stem plants being damaged by frosts.

The Sary Chalek, also in Kyrgyzstan, known locally as ‘the yellow bucket’ because of the autumn leaves covering its seven lakes, has more alkaline soil. It is famous for its upland flower meadows and ligularia and pedicularis are common. Here again, however, the flora is being affected by, and reacting to, environmental changes.

In the third area he described, the Chingan Mountains in Uzbekistan at 2,400 metres, the plants are different, with bulbous species such as crocus,

colchicums and tulips growing well. Tulips include *Tulipa julia*, *Tulipa kaufmannii*, and *Tulipa butkovii*. Some areas of tulips are expanding as it gets warmer, whilst other varieties need to go higher to find the cooler temperatures.

Frazer's ambition is to record all 65 varieties of tulip to be found in the Tien Shan. So far, he has recorded 40, but quite apart from finding them, recording in his eyes requires at least 30 photos of each plant!

Patrick Callaghan

Scotia Seeds

Giles Lavarack

Giles started Scotia seeds with his wife in 1994 at Mavis Bank farm near Brechin. They bought a field without trees or hedges which was set in an agricultural area but this now has an area of woodland and is divided into sections by hedges. The native wild flower seeds are mostly used for growing on completed new road schemes and after cable or pipe laying.

How to create a wild flower meadow

Divide the area into equal sized sections and spread seed as evenly as possible one section at a time. The seeds will not fall in an even pattern as they are different sizes. The plants will develop slowly. Cutting the meadow annually and removing the cuttings will reduce fertility quickly and will encourage the growth of the plants.

Climate change

As the climate changes plants move and evolve. Bluebells need a cold spell to grow and may not be viable in the south of England as the climate warms. The Scottish primula only grows on the north coast and in the Northern Isles and may disappear altogether.

Why use local seeds

The local climate and geology will affect the growth of wild flowers. Those growing in cooler parts of the country will mature later than those growing in warmer parts. Insects have evolved alongside and with the plants so that they benefit each other. Research has shown that plants grown from local seeds grow better, produce more flowers and benefit local insects. Imported seed from other countries do not benefit insects. Seeds from other zones never produce better plants and the further the distance the seeds come from the poorer the performance. Growing native plants increase their population even over small areas. It is important to encourage nature to flourish by using local seeds and species in the garden.

Catherine Holmes

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Zoom Talk

9th January 2025

The Long Border ***Steve Edney***

In January we had our Zoom Talk by Steve Edney of the No Name Nursery which is near Sandwich in Kent. There has been a No Name street and No Name shop in Sandwich since the 16th century.

Steve grew up wanting to be a gardener and was the head gardener for 17 years at the beautiful Salutation Garden, designed by Gertrude Jekyll to complement an Edward Lutyens house. When the Salutation Garden changed hands and purpose, Steve decided that he wanted to 'go it alone' (well with his partner, Louise Dowle, in fact).

Steve makes it clear that they are gardeners first and growers second, with sustainability and care for wildlife an integral part of all that they do. They hold four national collections including for dark leaved dahlias.



Steve and Louise

In 2019 he and Lou had the opportunity to buy three acres on the edge of Sandwich which they intended to be their retirement garden for pottering about and going to seed in. However, Covid and leaving the Salutation Garden meant a change of plan and the land became the basis of their own business.

The Long Border forms part of the periphery of the nursery, it is 100 metres long and six metres wide which Steve believes could be the longest uninterrupted border in private hands. In the photograph, it runs up the left hand boundary and then across part of the top.



The three acre garden



The Long Border

The garden is in an area which has among the highest sunshine hours recorded in the UK and the lowest rainfall. These are conditions loved by bumblebees and one of the highest concentrations of these bees is found in the garden. Deep silty soil has had organic matter added but no drastic changes have been carried out to change the existing conditions.

When Steve and Lou first started the project, the area was covered in eight foot brambles and, since then, they have cleared the area and planted 400 perennials and 2,500 beech hedging plants. At the time they were both working full time and so the work was carried out in evenings and at weekends. The clearing was done in stages and took five years which allowed wildlife to relocate. A layer of hedging was added and learning from experience with a previous large border, a path was laid at the back of the border, thus allowing access from both sides. This path makes an enormous impact on ease of ongoing maintenance and was part of the careful planning at the beginning of the creation of The Long Border. The first alteration to the plan took place at the end of the first year when they realised the border, at five metres wide, had a pokey feel to it and so another metre was cut off to give the current depth of six metres.

Further thought was given to placing the car park at one end of the garden and the nursery at the other so that they walked and enjoyed the border at least once a day, often several times. Consideration was given to limiting maintenance by using plants which need no staking or tying and used tight planting to allow plants to support each other. This has resulted in one third of the plants used being grasses. Other plants are mostly perennials with a few annuals. Thought was given to the siting of perennials which do not like to be moved such as peonies and baptisia. Steve is very fond of malus varieties, including *Malus* ‘Scarlett’ and is not afraid to plant them at the front of the border.

As far as colour is concerned, it was felt that, as the border is viewed most in the evening then the moodier pinks, purples and violets should predominate with very little white, gold, yellow or orange.

They planned for six days per annum maintenance – this has in fact turned out to be nine days including two very strenuous days cutting back. They love the beauty of the winter seedscape which also offers shelter and hunting grounds to wildlife and so they leave cutting back until February by which time a lot of vegetation has been eaten or rotted. They found many insects in large hollow stems and so these are cut and then put to one side to allow the insects to leave.

Steve went on to talk about the enormous variety of plants in the border. Apart from the grasses there are roses, shrubs and a number of evergreen perennials as well as bulbs and herbaceous perennials. Favourite roses are ‘Bengal Crimson’ and *Rosa Glauca*. He has *Paeonia* ‘Coral Charm’ with lovely foliage and the felted jester’s hats of seedheads and also lots of baptisias instead of lupins which do not like the dry conditions. He particularly likes the unfortunately named *Baptisia* ‘Gloomy’ which he considers a lovely plant which will last forty to fifty years, like peonies.

Steve has many dahlias, including those in his national collection. These include ‘Mystic Dreamer’ and ‘Diva’, and as with all plants with less than attractive stems, he likes to hide the stems with lower growing plants. These include *Geranium* ‘Sirak’ which he finds very amenable and bombproof, also *Nepeta* ‘Blue Danube’ and *Geranium* ‘Anne Thomson’.

Steve is particularly fond of summer flowering alliums and combines *Allium* ‘Ambassador’ with *Brizia media* which results in a lovely airy effect.



Allium ‘Summer beauty’

The herbaceous *Clematis recta*, and also the purple form are favourites as are the various forms of persicaria including ‘Janet’ which is a standout variety and not thuggish. Steve also grows the annual *Persicaria orientalis* which grows to 12 feet in his garden. Still on the subject of

persicarias, Steve recommended ‘Pink Elephant’ which belies its name, being short, amenable and particularly floriferous!

When asked about plants he would not be without Steve mentioned

- *Geranium renardii* ‘Terre Franche’ good for rain shadow as accepts dry, shady conditions
- *Lunaria annua* ‘Chedglow’ – biennial with glorious standout colour
- *Aster* ‘Red Star’ – very cold hardy, 1 metre, no mildew
- *Salvia nemorosa* ‘Jan Spruyt’ – outstanding
- *Aster* ‘Pink Buttons’ – 1m, profusion of tiny flowers, self-supporting, no mildew
- *Vernonia lettermannii* – needs more moisture than he has, supposed to be 30 cm actually 90 cm in his garden!

While on the subject of what he would not be without Steve mentioned the Merlin bird app which allows him to identify the calls of the birds sharing the garden with him. Steve answered lots of questions and was delighted to learn that baptisias are flourishing to a height of 10 feet in Aberdeenshire!

Steve’s talk was fascinating and welcome at a time of year when we can enjoy pictures of lovely plants to remind us of summer. It was, however, quite tiring to think of the work involved in such an undertaking, even if the aim was ‘low maintenance’!

Hilary Bailey



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Snowdrop Day

14th February 2025

Scone Palace

At the end of a week of February gloom and freeze, a sizeable number of intrepid Hardy Planters assembled in the Old Kitchen of Scone Palace near Perth to take on sustenance for the promised two-hour guided tour of the grounds and gardens. Eventually, suitably fortified by freshly-made scones and hot coffee, we sallied forth into the cold air to meet our guide, Brian Cunningham the Head Gardener, also of Beechgrove Garden fame. If enthusiasm could warm you up, Brian could have done it single-handed!



Brian Cunningham

Scone Palace is steeped in history: but it's part of gardening history as well as the Stone of Scone variety! The Palace that we see now was built in the early 1800s, and the 100 acres of grounds were designed at much the same time by J. C. Loudon, a notable Scottish landscape designer. As Brian pointed out, at this time of year you are able to see the bare bones and the structure of a garden, and of its trees. It's the trees that are the crux of this place. And they go back much further than 1800! A major feature is the King James Sycamore, said to have been planted in front of the Palace by King James VI and I on his only visit to Scotland following the Union of Crowns in 1603.



King James Sycamore

We moved off the Palace lawn and into the woodland gardens. Here there are not only trees but also prolific Rhododendrons, most of them already in

bud. And one actually in flower! Brian observed that managing this whole area is a gamble because of the wildlife – rabbits and deer are dominant, and plant survival depends on their tastes – but they do take chances, for instance, the planned introduction of magnolias, which might or might not survive! Something wonderful occurred while we moved from the woodland into the Pinetum – the sun came out! Our steps lightened . . .

The Pinetum is in effect a botanic garden of trees, and there are numerous rare species including the giant Douglas Fir raised from the first seed sent home from North America by David Douglas, himself a son of Scone. It is an impressive collection, and one of its huge conifers was selected by the Tree Council in 1962 as the Scone Douglas Fir, one of fifty great British trees. It is indeed a marvellous sight!



The Scone Douglas Fir



The Walled Garden

The next stop on our tour took us to a completely different environment – the Victorian Walled Garden, whose high brick walls enclose four acres of productive ground, including the Kitchen Garden, from which the Palace itself is stocked all the year round with herbs and vegetables, and fruit from the many pyramid-trained fruit trees. It also provides cut flowers for seasonal displays in the

Palace, and the rose grower David Austin is taking part in a joint venture to test roses for their ability to flourish in Scotland. This is also the scene for the Palace business of weddings and similar events held in the open air.



And everywhere there are snowdrops . . . what else do we go for on February visits! They are in all the areas of the gardens, under trees, through grass, round corners, and spectacularly, up the long straight drive between gardens and Palace, lightening the day with their nodding white heads. They are apparently almost exclusively the common variety *Galanthus nivalis*, but no less beautiful for that. Definitely worth going for!

*Brenda White,
Pictures: Brenda White and Helen Ostrycharz*

Branklyn Gardens

Kate White, Head Gardener, welcomed us to the garden. The garden once belonged to Dorothy and John Renton. They bought the site in 1922 and built a beautiful Arts and Crafts House, part of which is now the cafe. Neither were gardeners at that stage. Dorothy copied the fashion of the time set by Gertrude Jekyll. The first planting was a formal rose garden softened by other planting and a rockery for alpine plants. The couple were inundated with garden ornaments as housewarming presents that took some time to tactfully dispose of. As time went on, Dorothy became a very enthusiastic gardener, and the tennis court was dug up to provide more planting space.



Kate White

The Rentons subscribed to Plant Collecting expeditions, funding a percentage of the costs and getting a percentage of the seeds in return. By the 1960s the garden was full of a wide range of shrubs and plants, making a magnificent display; even in February the garden was full of colour. The National Trust took over the garden in 1968 on the advice of Kew Gardens that it was a treasure worth preserving.



Text and pictures: Helen Ostrycharz

AGM – House for an Art Lover 8th March 2025

Over the Garden Wall

Sally Lorimore of Willowhill, Fife

Sally Lorimore took us on a delightful virtual tour of her three-acre cottage garden at Willowhill describing how she and her husband had developed it from scratch over 25 years.



The garden is situated in Newport-on-Tay, Fife, just south of the Tay Road Bridge. The soil is predominantly neutral, well drained loam with a few rocky outcrops. Challenges include ground elder, deer and pigeons with a penchant for phlox! In addition, in the early years of the garden's development, early morning 30 minute sessions of double digging had to be squeezed in around previous unpredictable working hours – that's dedication for you! A key objective in the garden's development is to achieve seasonal colour providing food for invertebrates.



Sally is an advocate of Beth Chatto's advice to defer mulching beds in their first year of establishment and to hoe regularly instead to inhibit weed seeds.

The garden tour included: the beautiful mixed borders around the house, two 'no-dig' borders developed in more recent years,

a stunning alpine garden, a pond, and grass areas with naturalised bulbs throughout the seasons, a rose path and some lovely sculptures including a glass hare made by Sally!



There was a particularly striking vibrant colour scheme in the series of mixed borders around the house of orange, lime green, and magenta inspired by the memory of a friend's coffee set. Plants contributing to this scheme included:

Alstroemeria aurea 'Orange King', *Lupin* 'Towering Inferno', *Lupin* 'Gallery Red', *Helenium* 'Moerheim

Beauty', *Euphorbia donii* 'Amjillasa', *Euphorbia stricta* 'Golden Foam', *Geranium* 'Ann Folkard', *Geranium* 'Rozanne', *Allium* 'Globemaster', *Salvia nemorosa* 'Ostfriesland', *Dahlia* 'Purple Gem' and *Dahlia* 'Black Prince'.

The lime green of the euphorbias was used in beds throughout the garden to keep them fresh as the summer progressed.

The colour schemes on the garden's outer perimeters were more muted to blend with the natural landscape. The grass areas with naturalised bulbs through the seasons were planted with: snowdrops, *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, *Narcissus* 'Pipet', and *Narcissus* 'Pheasant's Eye', followed by euphorbia and bluebells and then camassias.

The planting surrounding the pond included: flag irises, loosestrife, gunnera together with crocosmia naturalised in the long grass on the slope behind.



The Hidcote inspired rose path featured the following David Austin roses: *Rosa* ‘The Lark Ascending’, *Rosa* ‘Alexander’, and *Rosa* ‘The Lady’s Blush’.

Other plants referenced during our tour included: *Rosa* ‘Port Sunlight’, *Achillea* ‘Terracotta’, and *Lupin* ‘Desert Sun’.

Sally concluded by highlighting her passion for hellebores and said she had over 200 *Hellebore orientalis* planted at Willowhill. Sally advised that she was trying to develop a relationship with hellebore specialists, Ashwood Nurseries, in the Midlands and Scotland’s Gardens Scheme to promote the growth of hellebores locally.

I found this a particularly inspiring talk as I hope to embark on my re-designed garden later this year – albeit on a very much smaller scale!



I am now really looking forward to visiting this garden in person and understand that an HPS visit is being organised for later this year. However, if you cannot wait until then, details of this garden’s opening times (as well as the opportunity to purchase a 2025 season ticket) are to be found in the ‘Yellow Book’. Willowhill opens for the Rio Community Centre in Newport-on-Tay.

Many thanks to Sally for a very interesting talk.

Sally Baldon

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

Brian Young of Holmes Farm Plants

Brian entitled his talk ‘The Good, The Bad and The Ugly’ explaining that he had had the opportunity of seeing plants being offered by growers for 2025 and frankly he had seen entrants in all these categories during his various visits. However, he had seen quite a number of plants he liked and had put together a parade of introductions he felt we might be interested in.

Bedding

Bidens ‘Bee Happy’. Double orange with feathery foliage, Growth 30cm x 60cm

Calibrachoa ‘Double Vintage Coral’. Good doer and tidy grower. Little or no dead heading; and ‘Double Smitten Pink’. Light rose pink bitone. Tidy plant too.

Heliotrope aromatica. Purple with good scent.

Supertunia. Advertised as standing up well to rain. Vigorous grower. Bright pink version called ‘Vista Bubblegum’. Good colour despite the name.

For the border

Dahlia ‘Virtuoso’. Short, semi-double. Plenty of flowers, nice leaf and choice of colourways.

Digitalis purpurea ‘Apple Blossom’. Semi-evergreen biennial/short lived perennial. RHS New Plant Award. Compact growth.



Perennials

Nepeta ‘Cat Walk Queen’. Neat front of border plant flowering late spring to late summer
and ‘Lemon Purrfection’. Tidy plant with golden foliage and lavender blue flowers.

Hosta Shadowland Series ‘Miss America’. White flowers and white star on foliage.

Dicentra ‘Hearts on fire’. Good in shade and long flowering. Golden foliage, bronze tips, red flowers.

Epimedium ‘Woodland Elf’. Lots of yellow flowers. Good ground cover.

Thalictrum ‘Cotton Ball’. Good one with white flowers. Dark stems, upright growth. Butterflies and bees like it, deer and rabbits tend not to.

Rudbeckia ‘Treasure Trove’. Said to be a good doer even in a poor summer.

Shrubs and Trees

Spiraea ‘Walberton's Plum Carpet’. Very hardy and compact with bushy dark foliage.

Rosa ‘Reminiscent Coral’. Pink flowers and light scent. Prefers slightly acidic soil and needs plenty of sun.

Rosa ‘Oso Easy En Fuego’. Red/Yellow bicolour. Robust. Good cut flowers.

Philadelphus ‘Petite’. 1.5m high when mature. Pink/white. Perfumed.

Prunus ‘Crystal Falls’. 2x2m after 10 years. Hardy, scented. Buttery yellow autumn foliage. Upright growth with weeping branches.

Leucothoe 'Curly Gold'. Orange/red/golden yellow foliage. 60cm x 40cm. Hardy evergreen. Likes acidic, moist soil.

Reading through my effort, I hope I haven't turned what was a lively, amusing talk into a rather dry list, but I felt there was a lot of useful information here. Brian was his usual, bright, cheerful self despite having very recently had his appendix removed (i.e. the week before), and I think we owe him an extra special 'thank you'.

Joan Gilchrist

The advertisement features a large photograph of a garden nursery with various plants and a greenhouse in the background. Overlaid on the right side of the image is a white box containing the nursery's logo, name, and contact information. The logo is a circular emblem with a green leaf and a red apple. The text is in a mix of green and black fonts, with some parts in bold.

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Visit to Edinburgh 24th April 2025

Kevock

We gathered together for a coffee at Dobbie's garden centre before moving on to Kevock Garden. Here we were greeted by the owners, David and Stella Rankin. Stella gave us the history of the house which is perched on the edge of the steep hillside garden overlooking the North Esk Valley and explained they bought the property so they could indulge their passion for rock garden plants. Instructions were given to take great care on the very steep paths and, armed with walking poles, we made our way down the many paths to the bottom of the garden.



Every path revealed treasures – a wonderful collection of trilliums, peonies, anemones, camassia, cowslips and primulas; one area I found very special was an area of longer grass planted with *Tulipa humilis*.

Beyond the house was an Alpine House with a lovely display plus plenty of pots of plants being grown on. There were also plants to buy.



A wonderful garden to visit and thank you to Julie for organising the visit. Plus for me the end of volunteering to write a report in the future!

Marjorie Allen

Redcroft

We were welcomed by the garden owner, Anna Buxton, who gave us a history of the property, a Listed Category C Arts and Crafts house which had undergone a number of changes and rebuilds during its lifetime. The current Redcroft was built in 1911.

The garden has also changed over the years. In the early 20th century it had a paddock, a kitchen garden, some glasshouses incorporated from nearby, a rose garden, a rockery, a long herbaceous border and an orchard. Some of these have been uncovered and have survived.



The family moved into the house in the winter of 1986 and had to spend a considerable amount of time unearthing what was hidden in the garden. The Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh supplied a number of plants to get them started. The current garden is very large, much of it being lawn, but there are some interesting features and many magnificent mature trees. A high wall surrounds and shelters the garden. Rhododendrons were in flower, as were the cherries and apple trees, and acers provided a striking contrast with their red or bronze foliage.



Ribes speciosum

Some very skilful cloud pruning had been done, and on the front wall of the house a semi-evergreen *Ribes speciosum* had been attached and trained flat against the wall upwards and outwards in a very intricate pattern. It bore innumerable slender rich red flowers in hanging clusters and was quite a sight.



Cloud pruning

The orchard had an underplanting of daffodils, and a burn wound its way down into a lilypond, with stone bridges across it and an attractive circular mosaic of small stones at one side. Many species such as erythroniums, *Hacquetia epipactis* and a pale blue pulmonaria thrived in the rock garden, and large clumps of iberis flowers provided a bright contrast to the surrounding foliage. One plant which caught my eye was a *Fritillaria (pallidiflora?)* about 15 inches tall with a large creamy-yellow flower. Further into the garden blue camassias were clumping up beautifully, and there were more shrubs and trees.



Fritillaria pallidiflora

Colour was provided on the patio by tubs of glowing orange tulips with contrasting muscari, and a pale clematis climbed up the house wall heading for the roof. The deep blue sky set off all the other colours in the garden, especially looked at through the branches and blossom of the trees. And to end a great day (thank you Julie) we had our tea and cakes on the patio in the warm sunshine!



Sheila Phillips
Pictures: Julie Young

Douneside House and MacRobert's Reply

We spent the three days of summer at the end of July last year at Douneside House, an hotel in a lovely location, with a fascinating history and, above all, a beautiful garden.



Douneside House

Douneside House is on the northern edge of the Howe of Cromar, a bowl in the hills to the north of Aboyne, with fine views of the rich farmland in the Howe and the Deeside hills beyond.

Alexander MacRobert was born in 1854 on a poor farm in Aberdeenshire, and left school at twelve to sweep the floors in a paper mill, however by hard work and studying he qualified in physics and chemistry and lectured at Robert Gordon's College, while still a teenager. In 1883 he travelled to India to take up the post of a chemist in a woollen mill in Cawnpore (now Kanpur); when he arrived he found that the position had been filled, however he was offered the managership of another near bankrupt mill. He turned this round and three years later it had become a lucrative manufacturing company with over 2000 staff. In the following years he purchased other mills, setting up the largest textile empire in India and making a huge fortune. He bought the Burnside Estate at Tarland, as a holiday home in 1888 and expanded Douneside House in the early 1900s.

After the death of his first wife, he met Rachel Workman, who was 30 years younger, on a voyage back from India in 1909. She came from a very rich and adventurous New England family, her mother Fanny Workman was a pioneer climber and explorer, making several first ascents in the Himalayas in the early years of the 20th century. She and her husband cycled from Germany to India soon after Rachel was born, parenthood was not a priority for them. Rachel was educated in England, and acquired degrees in Geology from Imperial College London and Edinburgh University and became the first lady member of the Geological Society in London, against much opposition from many of the existing members. Rachel and Sir Alexander were married, very simply, in a Quaker Meeting House in July 1911. After marriage she continued research on mineralogy and petrology in Scotland and Sweden, publishing a number of scientific papers. However she still had three sons, born in 1912, 1915 and 1917.

Alexander was made a baronet (Sir Alexander MacRobert of Cawnpore and Cromar in the County of Aberdeen) in 1922, but died of a heart attack later that year, leaving Lady MacRobert, as she then was, to run the estate and his companies. Sadly, her oldest son Alasdair, was killed in a flying accident in 1938, and the two younger sons, Roderic and Ian, both officers in the RAF, were killed in action within six weeks of each other. To commemorate her sons Lady MacRobert paid for a Short Stirling bomber named “MacRobert’s Reply” (a name that was kept in the RAF until 1985) and four Hawker Hurricanes.

Lady MacRobert died in 1954, and is buried at Douneside, leaving her fortune to the MacRobert Trust a charitable trust which focusses on:

- advancing academic and practical education and training;
- encouraging and rewarding excellence in the arts, science and engineering;
- promoting best practice in agriculture, horticulture, the environment, biodiversity and rural skills;
- promoting good practice in farming and horticulture, and
- keeping The Trust and its work at the heart of the Tarland area and supporting local charitable projects and activities.

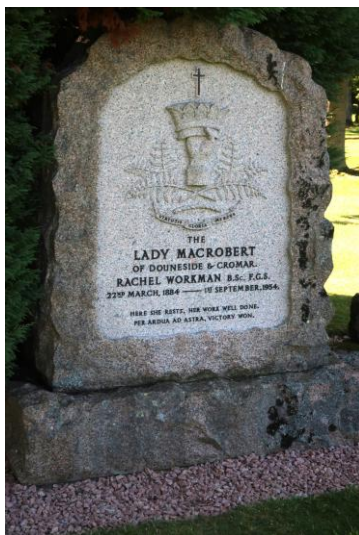
The most obvious feature of the gardens at Douneside is the Infinity Lawn, which stretches out in front of the house to a viewpoint with magnificent views of the Howe of Cromar and the Deeside hills beyond; this also contains a monument commemorating MacRobert's Reply and Lady MacRobert's grave.



The Infinity Lawn



MacRobert's Reply



Lady MacRobert's Grave

To the side of the lawn, a stream runs down through a series of small waterfalls planted with candelabra primroses, flag irises and ferns.



There is an immaculately kept walled vegetable and flower garden which supplies the hotel and surrounding areas.





To the side of the house there is a formal garden with herbaceous borders, fountains and topiary, with an arboretum under development behind that.



Douneside House is a Royal Horticultural Society partner garden and an RHS Qualifications Approved Centre and runs training schemes providing hands-on experience in all aspects of plant cultivation, garden design, and maintenance. The two gardeners that we spoke to said it was a wonderful place to work, which was providing them with an excellent experience.

Chris Sanders
With material from the MacRobert Trust website

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