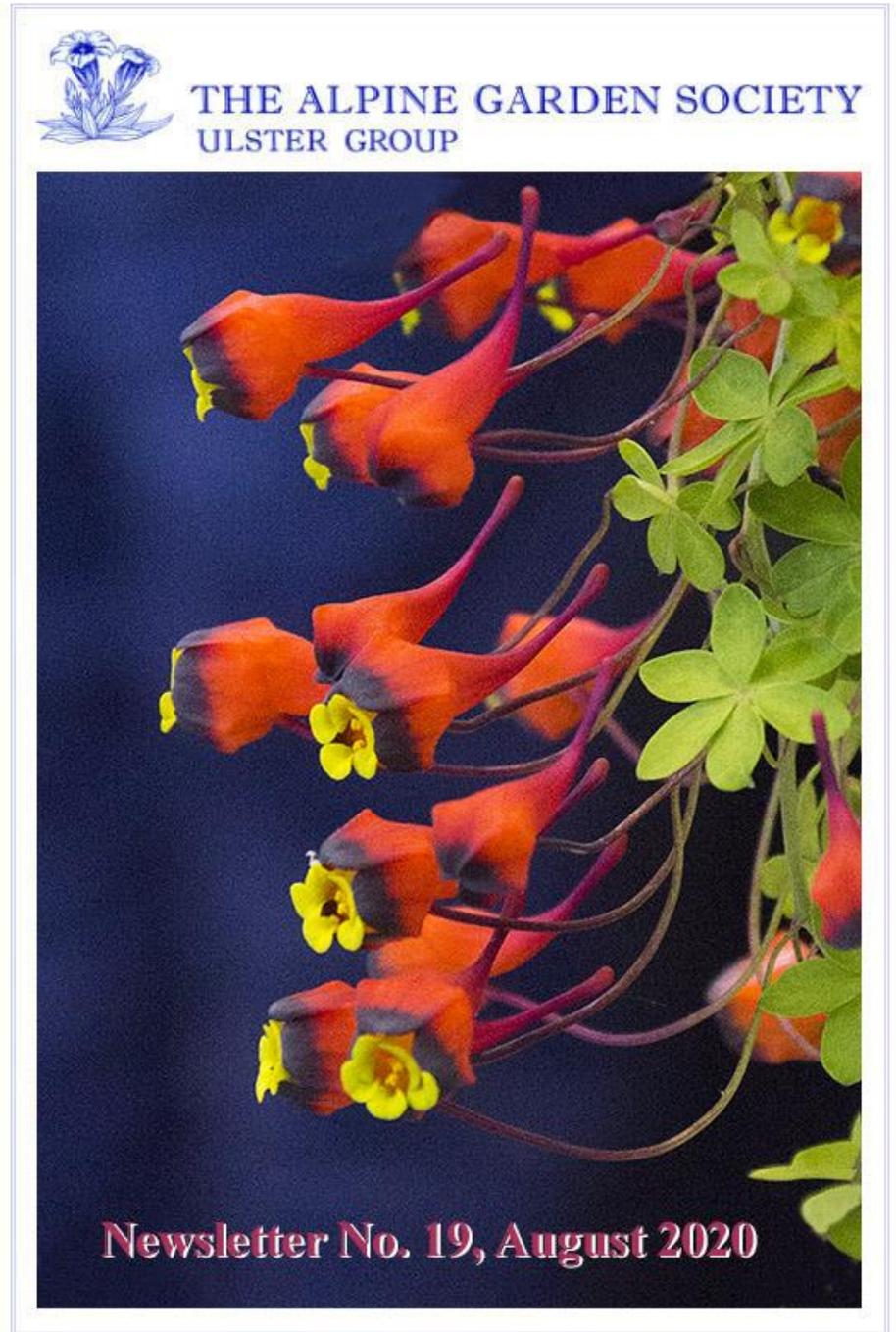




Above : *Ranunculus pyrenaicus*  
Fontanalba, Alpes Maritimes

Front Cover – *Tropaeolum tricolor*  
Gordon Toner





**Newsletter No.19, August 2020**

**Contents:-**

**Editorial :-**

**Articles**

**Lockdown in Turkey – Chris & Başak Gardner**

**Garden Thugs – Kay Dunlop, Sandra Munro, Gertie Baxter  
and Agnes Peacocke**

**Chilean Lanterns**

**Gardening with Kathleen Mavoureen – Tom Ennis**

**Montalto Diary – Gordon Finch**

**Show – Pat Crossley and Virtual Show**

**Information or ‘Non Information’ !**

**Programme ? and Website**



**Editorial**

What strange times we are living in! Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine using terms like lockdown, social distancing, zooming etc. let alone wearing face masks to travel and shop. We have all had to be philosophical about disappointments with cancelled meetings, garden visits and holidays and yet Nature has tried her very best to compensate. In April and May we had one of the warmest and sunniest springs on record. Every morning I woke to a dawn chorus like a full-scale orchestra, more bees and butterflies invaded the garden than other years and flowers bloomed better than ever – even if I did complain about having to water every day. While some of us have been fortunate to have a garden, even those with just a pot or window box have found pleasure and solace in the joy of seeing plants grow, especially from seed.

As we tentatively come out of lockdown with so many unknowns the committee is trying to find the feasibility of having our winter meetings, real or virtual. We were shocked to hear that Zoe Devlin, who was to be our speaker in September, had lost her son to Covid19 at the very beginning of the pandemic in March. She has understandably cancelled all meetings and our sympathy goes to her and her family on their sad loss. It does bring home the deadly seriousness of this virus and as many of our members are in the vulnerable age group, the safety of everyone must come first.

Again, I would like to thank all our contributors both near and far - the theme of ‘Thugs’ seem to drive many of you to put pen to paper - and also everyone who sent photographs of their plants to the virtual show. Lockdown diaries has brought us a taster of the flora of Turkey and hopes of a garden visit to Montalto.

Of course we are all missing the social aspect of our garden societies but hopefully it won’t be long until we all can meet up again, especially our newer members who were just getting to know everyone.

Meantime we must all try to learn new ways of communicating but, whatever way do try to stay in touch (even if by pigeon post) and above all take care and keep well.

Joan McCaughey, Ed.

## Lockdown in Turkey

During lockdown Liam and I have greatly enjoyed the pictures of mountain flowers sent online by Chris & Başak Gardner. We were fortunate enough to be led on wildlife holidays by both – Chris in China and Başak in Turkey. Both have an encyclopaedic knowledge not only of flowers but also birds, insects, etc. in addition to great local knowledge. All this ensures that people like us have an informative, relaxing holiday with a great feeling of security when visiting ‘off the beaten track’.

Chris & Başak live with their family in the hills above Antalya in south-west Turkey where not only do they write books including ‘Flora of the Silk Road’ and ‘Flora of the Mediterranean’ while Chris has also contributed to ‘The Plant Hunters’ among others, but they now also run botanical & photographic holiday tours under the name of Vira Natura. - [www.viranatura.com](http://www.viranatura.com)

While the following short extracts from their lockdown diaries does not do justice to their wonderful photos and writing, they have very kindly allowed me to bring you a small flavour of the beautiful wild flowers of Turkey (watch out for a new book on Turkish endemics). I hope this will help to cheer everyone up - although letting us know what we are missing - but perhaps give us all hope for holidays there in the near future.

- using some excerpts of Chris’ words and his photos



The flared golden bells of *Fritillaria carlica*

## Turkish Lockdown Diary

### April - ‘Our back garden’

‘Our surrounding area just happens to be one of the most diverse parts of Turkey. There are over 600 endemic plants in the south-west Taurus.



A shimmer of blue coating the mountains near Gaziantep. It was the sight of countless *Iris aucheri*, a fabulous juno

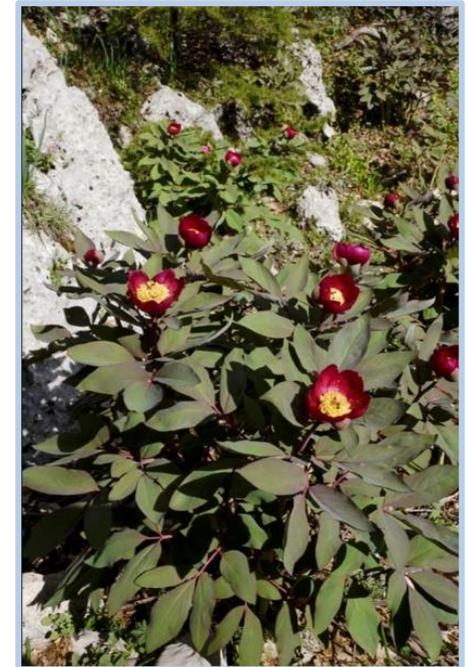


### May – ‘Walk on the Wild side - White and - Magic Mountains’

From our balcony on the edge of the city we can see the snow streaked heights of Ziyaret Dag, an important plant area just a one-hour drive from us.

Inside the cedar forest there were some stunning clumps of perfect *Paeonia mascula*

One particularly flowery gully led onto bare, greenish serpentine slopes, where I first found lovely *Onosma nana* with its unfurling snow drops (picture on the next page)





- and the red goblets of *Tulipa armena* -- the fiery colours of more tulips combined with patches of the even more intense *Adonis flammea*

**June** - 'Summer Arrives, and High Tops'



Before you realise it in the Med, spring has raced away and summer is knocking on the door

This week I have visited two superb above the treeline locations, Ak Dag (White Mountain), and an exposed ridge on Susuz Dag



Everywhere there seemed to be delightful clumps of *Linum hirsutum* in variable shades of soft pink, joined by *Salvia pisidica* -



the higher stony flats and rocky outcrops at 2700-metres had plentiful *Androsace sericea* in low mats or neat buns wedged in the rocks

An altogether different delight ran through the heavy scree below and it was the plant I had set out to see on this mountain - *Lamium cymbalarifolium*. A classic alpine scree plant, it popped up between the stones crowded with outside pink flowers.



The boulder-strewn canyons that drop down from our house are fascinating and it's here we find faint streams or springs with stands of pretty *Campanula peregrina* alongside tufts of maidenhair ferns.

## July The Big One and the Late Show

Though I've been chasing various endemics all across the south-west Taurus this season, one of the richest places of all looms directly behind our house - Tahtali Dag, also known as Mount Olimpos - a modest but nonetheless wild 2325-metre lump of limestone that rises abruptly to this height directly from the



*Salvia caespitosa*

Mediterranean Sea. Given its position close to so much cheap and cheerful tourism, it was inevitable a teleferic would be constructed to whisk the sun-seekers to the top and back. But, this is no bad thing when you've lots of photographic equipment to carry and I took full use of it this week to get me straight into the high alpine zone

- the stunning big pink flowers of *Salvia caespitosa*, a gorgeous spreading alpine with outsize flowers emerging from among fine foliage.



*Acantholinum acerosum*



*Echinops emiliae*

This is an impressive plant, bristling with spines, the leaves white-felted beneath, but it is the remarkable flower heads that stand out - great tennis ball sized green spheres, the flowers so deeply buried among the long jade phyllaries that they are hard to see at all. A magnificent brute, they looked particularly good against wispy grasses.

*Acantholinum acerosum* - These seemingly

uninteresting, unfriendly mounds spring to life in summer sending up dozens of spires of pink flowers that leave behind delicate papery cups once finished. Such late-flowering and showy plants are missed by most visitors along with so many other plants.



*Echinops spinosissimus*, with steely-blue globes.

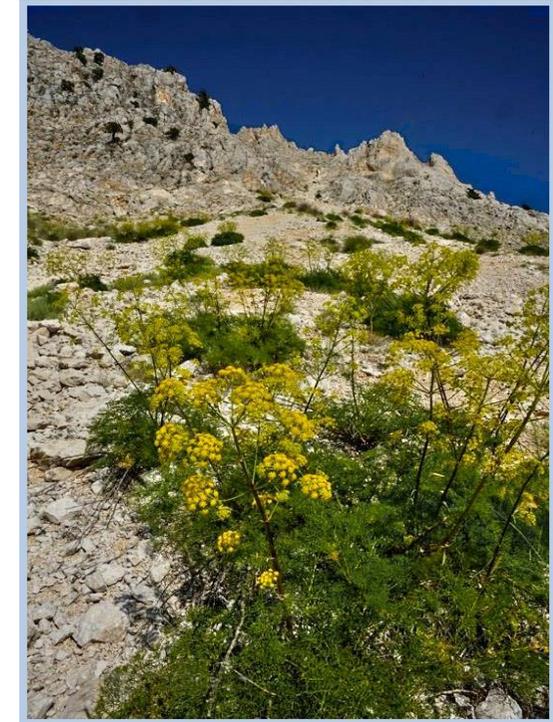
What has surprised me this year in the Taurus is just how many good plants choose to flower when the weather is at its hottest. Truly tough plants.



*Digitalis ferruginea*

I passed by rocky slopes with stands of rusty flowered *Digitalis ferruginea* in perfect condition

However, further, across was the main event, very large clumps of *Ferulago trachycarpa* that grew on the scree itself. Indeed, they were confined to it and are one of the largest herbs I've seen growing on such habitat.'



*Ferulago trachycarpa*

## Thugs in the Garden

At a recent meeting just before lockdown our President, Kay Dunlop, suggested members might send in articles on 'Thugs in the Garden' for the Newsletter. Either this struck a chord with everyone or perhaps Kay has more influence than me but I am delighted at the response. So here are some of your 'Garden Thugs' with Sandra's article giving a very good definition and Tom's being worthy as a separate article.

### Kay Dunlop – *Gladiolus papilio*

Why, I ask myself, was I so effusive in my thanks to Brian Cross as he handed me a clump of *Gladiolus papilio* Did I not notice them marching in triumph down his gravel path? Strange hooded grey flowers, sad and forlorn, but – what a thug ! An invasive plant, spreads freely at the roots, and impossible to eradicate.

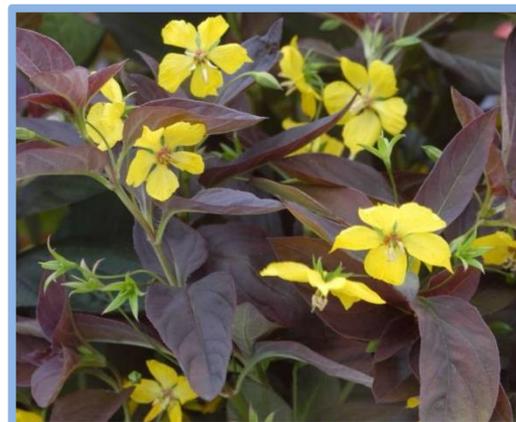


Garden journalists write that *G. papilio* is a 'must have' treasure. They recommend plants with no regard for the consequences.

Bamboos, *Anemone x hybrida* – "an essential for the autumn garden". Geraniums – manic seeder, *Crocsmias masoniorum* 'Lucifer' ----- I could go on endlessly. Warning – Beware of what you read !

### Sandra Munro - *Lysimachia ciliata* Firecracker (Loosestrife)

*Lysimachia Firecracker* is a herbaceous perennial (approx. 1m. tall) with yellow flowers in July/August. I saw it in someone's garden several years ago, commented on how pretty it was and was given a piece. Beware of gifts! At least I didn't buy it. But be warned it is widely available for sale and often highly recommended. One definition of a "thug" is a member of a group of robbers or assassins who often strangle their victims. One gardening definition of "thug" is a nickname for a plant that grows vigorously and chokes less aggressive nearby plants. They must have been thinking about *Lysimachia Firecracker*. It's not so much that it grows overly vigorous but it does spread. The thing I really dislike about it is that its root system,



although quite shallow, is so dense, spreading in a wide circle around the plant and preventing anything else from growing near it. Also, it is almost impossible to dig it out completely because of this tight compaction of the roots. It's a shame because it is very pretty!

### Gertie Baxter - Forget- me-not

Let me name the most annoying and ever-present thug in my garden, yet one that I have never really been determined enough to be totally rid of, because of its simple beauty, the myosotis or common forget-me-not. In the early days of my interest in gardening I pulled them out as weeds and they never got to bloom. Then I saw a beautiful show of these same 'weeds' under planting a sensational display of tulips and I thought I have been pulling those out but now I am going to let them grow. It didn't take long until I had a smaller version of the tulip forget-me-not loveliness. Fast forward ten or fifteen years and these little untidy straggly green plants make themselves at home anywhere and everywhere there is a space in the border. They are absolutely everywhere at this time of year, and I promise myself I will let them bloom until the end of May, enjoy them and then strip out every one. I try, I do try, but next spring up come the new ones and let's face it the weather is cold and so am I so again they take hold. Be warned. Don't be beguiled by their beauty, don't let them in.



## Agnes Peacocke – Blackberry bramble and Japanese anemone

Dealing with persistent thugs. I have ongoing war with two species which will probably outlast my time on Earth. 1) The blackberry bramble. 2) Japanese Anemone. I am surrounded on three sides by untended wasteland and Brambles predominate on the understory. | approach them as Rosacea. Prune them badly enough, often enough, and they may die. I have gone through the thickets with a digger, with a brushcutter, with my poor old mower. It is with feelings of despair that I found myself greeted with fresh new shoots within the month. Walking across the battlefield I did observe that, really, the bramble is mostly barbed air. When the top growth is torn off or pushed over, what you have is root stocks which are spaced maybe a foot or two apart. The plant spreads mostly by seedlings and by leapfrogging its long self-rooting stems. I have developed an appropriate treatment as follows. Find a very heavy object like a sleeper or a gate post. Tie a bridle of rope to it. Drag this across the patch with a long rope to create a swath to expose the roots. Do this in increments of 10 feet. Stop and deal with every exposed bunch of stems. You must use a hook or pick or mattock to snag up the growing points which are just below soil level. These are brightly coloured and represent the plant's investment for this growing season. Cut away this area and you stop the brier in its tracks. Clear away the scraw of top growth as you go with a rake or some such tool from B&Q. Getting rid of this material can be a nuisance. Remember that it is, mostly, air. I put down a length of rope and pile the rubbish across it. By tramping and folding it over it can be squashed into a smaller space, and finally strangled for transportation or the bonfire. Long handled implements and long-sleeved old clothing are obligatory.

The Japanese Anemone is a subtle and aggressive brute. It spreads invisibly by creeping underground and can travel unseen beneath paths and patios. I have a twofold policy. I keep Glyphosate handy and give any sweet young shoots a whiff as soon as they appear. This is vitally important in a herbaceous bed before the good plants grow to hide the villains. As the year progresses, I watch for the rather pretty flowers. These are on really strong stems and this is the plant's weakness. If I pull on one of these flower stems and at the same time tinker around the base with a fork, with care I can draw out nearly a foot of



thick root which has next season's growth buds at the base. This done with little damage to herbaceous plants surrounding. Digging around, I find, produces lots of chopped roots which will likely propagate further.

I won't ever be able to exterminate the things. However, there is some joy to be had when contemplating a tidy row of corpses.

I could not get by without a few basic tools;

- 1) Long handled pointy shovel
- 2) Long handled yellow plastic hay rake
- 3) Traditional Hay fork
- 4) Mattock
- 5) Plastic "snow shovel"
- 6) Long handled "Leaf grabber"
- 7) Long crowbar (choice of)
- 8) Long and short blue ropes.
- 9) - And, recently acquired, HOZELOCK WONDER WEEDER. This is a dandyish walking cane; it holds a pint of your favourite poison and can fire tiny quantities of weedkiller exactly on to the weed. No waste at all. I don't like forks very much. My ground is full of stones and rubble, and I do not like to see roots being chafed by the tools. Far better to use big force and remove the whole root ball.



## Chilean Lanterns – *Crinodendron hookerianum* 'Alf Robbins'

It was lovely to read in the February issue of 'The Garden' (RHS monthly magazine) that a *Crinodendron* has been named after Alf Robbins, a past chairman and active member of the Ulster Group who sadly passed away in the autumn of 2014. Jan Ravensberg of wholesaler Ravensberg Nurseries near Clara, Co. Offaly, was sent seed of *crinodendron* by a friend in Northern Ireland. This resulted in two exciting seedlings and here I quote. "Even more thrillingly the other – produced those long-hoped-for white flowers that look as if hewn from alabaster and hang like pearls amid the dark foliage. This plant Jan named 'Alf Robbins' in gratitude to the man who had sent him the seed." This brings back memories of a kind and generous man and I am sure, like me, many of you have plants in the garden given by him. I also have a *crinodendron* from Alf but in our cold garden it has yet to flower. You can see pictures of these beautiful plants in 'The Garden'.

## Tom Ennis - Gardening with 'Kathleen Mavoureen'

My Mother was the gardener in our house when my sister and I were growing up. It was her great interest and all of the plants had been acquired from exchanges, cuttings or grown from seeds. Into this tiny plot (we lived in a small house in a small street, in Holywood) during the winter months, came a succession of birds, attracted by the food she put out for them and it was here that she taught us how to tell a House Sparrow from a Hedge Sparrow (became a Dunnock and is now in the process of further morphing into a Hedge Accentor) and a Coal Tit from a Great Tit. She had learned these skills at her childhood home on the Langford Lodge Estate on the shores of Lough Neagh. What chance had I? The writing was on the wall! Thus, I ended up a heavy birder and a sometime gardener. My first garden began in 1972. As I was getting into it, I came across a chap who was also starting gardening and he showed me some dwarf cyclamineus hybrid *narcissi* (*Little Witch*) he had just acquired from Jack Drake's Nursery at Aviemore. It was love at first sight. Pretty soon I was fired with the idea of Alpine gardening. Rocks, troughs, soil/compost mixes, gravels, chippings" came and then I joined the Ulster Group in 1975. From there I began to broaden my horizons into things herbaceous and to acquire bigger (but not always better) plants.



At one of the AGS Plant Sales I came across this wonderful lily-like plant with the most glorious deep scarlet flowers I learned that it was a native of South Africa, that it was called the Kaffir Lily. Today this name is a No! No! and we must, instead, refer to it as *Hesperantha*. To continue with my story: I learned that that it was a very good doer and that it flourished here in Northern Ireland. It was a "must-have" and I quickly "must-had". What a splendid, showy, addition to my garden and soon, to my great delight, I discovered its smaller, more subtle relative with shell-pink flowers named "*Viscountess Byng*" - another "must have".

We moved house in 1978 to another part of Holywood. Along with much other impedimenta, came gardening paraphernalia, sinks, pots, containers of various

sorts with and without plants, one or two shrubs and yes, the *Hesperantha*. Over the course of time our new garden came into being by way of the addition of 25 tons of top-soil and the extraction of much builder's rubble, including bricks, plasterboard, fence posts, two partial wheelbarrows and much other booty. By now Evie had become a keen gardener, taking a more sensible line of growing fruit and vegetables. Our garden's growing conditions took a major set-back when a neighbour grew a 30-foot-high hedge of Lawson Cypress, along its South-west edge. This successfully deprived the garden of any sunlight for most of the day. No amount of pleading could persuade him to take it down to a reasonable height. Things began to fail. Evie's vegetable garden became a thing of the past. Eventually we settled on woodland gardening but while other plants were lost or potted along, the *Hesperantha* flourished. Bunches of the tall red *H. coccinea* and dots of pink *H. Viscountess Byng* among the *Primulae* brightened up the shade and for a number of years and we gardened thus.

Then one day nearly twenty years ago everything changed. I had just returned from holiday and while going round the garden to see what was what, I noticed a shadowy figure amongst the Lawsons. Moments later an outstretched hand, an introduction and our new neighbour Michael was asking if I would "object to the trees being removed" as he would like to replace them with a lower wooden fence. Can you guess my reply?

Many years have passed and our garden is bathed in what light Ulster produces; even in the short December days the low winter sun shines over the wooden fence. However, *Hesperantha* has found the brighter conditions much to its liking and has now become a pest. It turns up in places where I am trying to grow precious things like *Gladiolus dalenii* and *Agapanthus Yves Klein* (incidentally these were from top plantsman, Gary Dunlop) and in pots of my various hybrid marsh orchids - *Dactylorhiza* (many also came from Gary). Here it is particularly annoying as the young leaves are difficult to tell apart from the orchids. If one decides to leave things to be on the safe side (rather than risk pulling out a young orchid by mistake) in what seems like no time there is a pot full of *Hesperantha* and no sign of the orchid. *Hesperantha* is now so firmly established that I have real doubts as to whether it can ever be eliminated and we have become resigned to living with it. One has to be always on the look-out for it. It has in all truth become a true Kathleen Mavourneen 'it may be for years, and it may be forever'.



## Montalto Diary - Gordon Finch

When Gordon kindly suggested writing a Montalto Diary for the Newsletter I thought it was a great idea to keep up our link and I am sure everyone will be pleased to know that members' plants will continue to grow in the gardens. But what I really found interesting was Gordon's detailed description of the trials and tribulations on cultivating some of the more difficult alpines and I am sure both new and old to alpine gardening can learn from his successes and failures.

### September 2019

The estate has some old gardens in other houses, one of these had a rockery that was being dismantled. Peter and the guys kindly brought what they could over for me to use, this included stones and some strong growing common rockery type plants such as *saxifrage* and *Armeria maritima*. Still they provided a very useful addition to bulk up the planting; a large proportion were placed throughout the slate scree bed, with the rest destined for the upper bed.

A few unremarkable ferns arrived with the other plants. Phil wasn't sure if I'd want them, but they were healthy and he couldn't throw them away. One of the eternal problems in gardening life is when to hold on to a plant and when to fold it into the compost heap. I gratefully received and found them a home in the pipe bed. This is an area at the end of the alpine house where Kush had placed upright pipes from the old glass house heating system and inserted succulents in the top end. Around the base of these some moss was wishfully planted on a hot summer day. 2 years later they're looking lush - with some self-seeded ferns the new ferns will feel at home.



The rest of the day was taken up with the stones. While Stuart had placed a lot of the stones across the bank the pressures of grass cutting duty called, and I was left to do some rearranging at a much slower pace. As the upper bed has a flat top and

steep sloping bank, I wanted to use the stones to stabilise the bank, allow planting and also merge into a nearby existing stone wall.

I had a few plants positioned earlier and Indra kindly planted them - *Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Nana Compacta', a *Miscanthus giganteus*, along with *Olearia lacunosa*, *Salix gracilistyla* 'Melanostachys' and *Ceratostigma* 'Will Forest Blue' (from a day trip to Mount Venus), *Magnolia* 'Yellow Bird' and Myrtle from Papervale trees, a hydrangea purchased at Anne McCaughan's garden which was open for charity (sadly not one of her hydrangea). Ann has a wonderful collection of Hydrangea which if all collected into a single large bed would make a great learning opportunity from anybody wondering which one to buy. Maybe one day I'll be allowed to take some cuttings and create such a bed in the cutting garden.

### October

I didn't get to Montalto much this month, the usual season of colds were doing their rounds. Towards the end of the month I got back and had an enjoyable few days constructing a stone wall/bank. My masonry skills are not the 'toast of the town' so I would be relying in future on the plants distracting from stone work. While constructing it my first concern was making it stable, testing with walking, gingerly at first and then more brashly as I verified their stability. My second target was to create planting pockets, successfully managing it for one of Timpany nurseries fine *Clematis* 'Moonbeam', using the stones to keep the roots cool. To make the most of this area would take more time, money and energy than I had to spare at the minute, the trinity that limits all gardeners.

As this area of the garden does not have the same resources as the rest, it is therefore more of a reflection what would be possible to gardeners working full time.

### November

Another month where I don't get down as much as I want -sometimes life gets in the road of gardening. It's a wet autumn day but there is a beautiful area with the

beech leaves everywhere. At this time of the year you can admire the structure of the trees, the soft autumn light gives a quietness to nature.



I finally got the basic structure of the stones finished, and while there may be some tweaking I'm tired of the stone work game but I also managed some planting today.

Last weekend was Termonfeckin, a wonderful weekend where you come away with new ideas and a few plants. Between the plant sales, auction and the generosity of the Dublin alpine society I have about a dozen plants. Firstly *Cornus 'Pollock'* from Timpany nursery, then a *Salix nakamura yezoalpina*. I must confess my soft spot for some of the tree species such as cornus, salix and sorbus, I'm mesmerized by the variety, from ground hugging plants to stately trees. A *Veratrum viride* from a summer day trip to Dorothy Brown's garden was planted, followed by the plants from the Dublin group, an *Aster alpinus*, *Hosta 'Wogan'*, *Erigeron uniflorus*, *Hebe hookeriana*, and a few *Lewisia cotyledon*, one of which went into the alpine house. *Lewisia* are a beautiful plant in flower and look good on a show bench but I have found they get untidy and lose their appeal due to the formation of smaller rosettes. This year I decided to rejuvenate an old plant which had approximately 20 small rosettes branching from a single base, each held aloft by a thick stem. I cut these stems and treated them like succulent cuttings, letting the base callus a little before inserting them into a gritting compost.

Finally, a quick inspection of the alpine house plants before going home. This is a worrying time of year in the alpine house - all those beautiful tight cushion plants which evolved for the dry bright reaches above the tree line exposed to our dull, damp winter. You've done so well this year, please hang in there, it will start getting brighter soon.

The last day of November, a beautiful crisp day, not quite freezing but will help to slow the bugs down and get some of the moisture out of the air.

My first stop today is the alpine house, I want to inspect the cushions. While entering the house I notice the *Mukgenia 'Nova Flame'* is looking a bit off colour but at this time of year I'm not experienced enough to know if a plant is going dormant or not. I go to inspect it and the whole top comes off. I've a good idea what it is - vine weevil. I tip the plant out, root through the soil and find the brown headed grubs which I throw unto the gravel for the birds. The original planting medium was peat which I believe to be a favourite medium for vine weevil as I've seen the grubs come out of pots containing conifers potted in peat and I find it hard to believe they enjoy the woody roots of trees.

I've brought a few additions, a *Lewisia rediviva* and a *Lewisia tweedyi* both potted into a bonsai mix of equal parts lava, pumice and Akadama. Akadama is a clay; unlike most clays which are plate-like on a microscopic level, it is spherical which allows air flow to be maintained between the particles. This is an experiment which I've been intending to do for a while with some alpiners, I just didn't know which plants it would suit best. I'm hoping the succulent type root of the rediviva and its dislike of moist soils will help it live and thrive. The *tweedyi* got roped into this experiment as it was in the wrong place (or maybe right place) at the wrong time. I also potted up a *Cassiope 'Edinburgh'*, but instead of using Akadama I used Kunuma, which is very similar in nature but more suited for ericaceous plants.



The *lewisia* got planted in the back corner which is becoming the succulent corner. When planting into a plunge bed, it is important that the sand makes good contact with the pot as most of the moisture comes through the walls of the pot. I dig a hole large enough for the pot to sit in, then a small dimple of sand is placed in the base where the hole of the pot will be and finally and I used a small stick with a wedged end, to pack the sand around the pot.

The *Raoulia* with its seed heads were looking a little untidy as last year I left these on hoping they would sprout again but no joy. After a conversation with Ian Young at one of our meetings, he believes them to be monocarpic and my findings would support that. I decided this year to remove the dead seed heads and nudged some of the plant which was trying to escape into the sand, back into the pot.

## December

This isn't a busy time, more a time for biting your nails, waiting to see what plants succumb to the damp - the *Draba bryoides* is not looking good. Even in this damp weather the plants still need water and so with the rain and wind in full flow I reluctantly start watering the sand.

There are a few plants putting up a spirited attempt to get through the winter, the *Ipheion* is trying to flower as is the *Leptospermum scoparium*.

## January 2020

Happy New Year. Every year I get ahead of myself, knowing full well that it's going to be 4 or 5 months before the risk of frosts has passed. The eternal optimist, I think would be an appropriate definition of a gardener. We plant things out in the hope that this year that plant won't get killed with the frost, it won't be shredded with slugs and that I will see the flowers for more than a day before the wind denudes it.

In the alpine house my *Draba* still isn't looking happy, the *Ipheion* is still flowering (I wish I'd labelled it) the *Leptospermum* has one lone flower.

It's time to tidy up, lots of things have died back over winter and I start to remove some of the old foliage. It is a common question in gardening, when is the best time to remove old foliage. On one hand it can give a certain amount of protection, acting like a blanket, on the other it can harbour pest and diseases and restrict the new growth from coming up. The answer, like a lot of things in gardening, is it depends what the weather is going to do - when is the growth going to start and when are the bugs and beasts going to become active. For one much maligned

wasp in the alpine house my activities were clearly too early as it got awoken from wherever it was hiding. I'm not a fan of killing mini beasts while gardening. They have a role to play, remember the wasp in summer is a carnivore, eating aphids in their hundreds, - mind you I find it hard to see what role vine weevil have other than to feed to birds (sorry, I'm only human)

A common problem with plunge beds is that algae, mosses and lichens can start to grow. It is hard to know if they're much of a problem until they get into a pot and start to smother foliage. I do a few things to reduce it, one is raking the surface, letting it dry out quicker and disturbing the growth. Another technique is soaking a sponge with vinegar and dabbing the sand, this is particularly effective with lichens - I am not introducing any quantity of vinegar to the plunge but the high acidity of the vinegar kills the lichens on contact.

## February

Early February started with a quick run in look round, tidy up and out as it was stormy. A tree had fallen on the house last year and cracked the frame and although a lot more dangerous trees had been



cleared, I wasn't totally confident that the garden had reached an equilibrium after all the clearing of laurels this last few years around the estate.

Later in the month I get back and this time it's very different - a calm bright day, the alpine house is starting to wake up, so much new growth. I've had a few chest infections this year and haven't generally been feeling great, its times like these we lean on our garden and so often it supports us.

I walk in and immediately my spirits are lifted. The *Draba bryoides* is starting to green up, the *Lewisia tweedyi* in the experimental bonsai mix is starting to produce buds, the *Arenaria alfacarensis* is a beautiful green dome, there are buds on the *Tropaeolum polyphyllum*, *Helleborus lividus*, *Paeonia cambessedessi*, new shoots on the *Trillium* and flowers forming on the *Heptica pyrenaica*. Outside in the scree bed there are Iris and daffodils in flower. Not everything is perfect! A bird has visited the alpine house and decided to excavate a *sedum*, and the rosettes of a *saxifrage* have started to become detached from the plant. I lift these off and



place them in a pot in good contact with the soil as I find a significant number will start to grow, depending on how long they have been detached. Saxifrage are still something of a mystery to me, I lose a few every year, whether vine weevil or just turning brown and not greening up again.

A quick tidy up, water and that's me for another month.

## March

This month is a month of excitement and trepidation. Excitement for the upcoming shows, trepidation for a new virus that is spreading from China.

I don't try and do much in the way of forcing plants on, I'm not sure how many exhibitors do. It would be difficult, very species specific and weather dependent. You could give plants more shelter a few weeks or maybe months in advance, but you risk making them more susceptible to frost and could potentially weaken a plant, if it's a late season. If you have the time and energy to protect them before and after the show it could be done. With plants that require heat for the flowers to open, such as tulips, you're wasting your time, you can spend all the time you want getting flowers to open on the morning you're setting up, and they are closed by the time they are judged. I also believe there are some plants that are show shy, they will consistently finish flowering before a show or open up after a show,



and looking splendid and a *Primula allioni* has flowered for the first time. Primulas haven't done as well as expected in the alpine house, it's possible they are getting too much sun or heat. In the scree bed a cherry I air layered, *Prunus 'Koyo-no-mai'*, has started to flower, the daffodils look great this time of year and an *Andromeda* is flowering up the side of a rock.

## Later in March

I'd planned to get back the day before the show to collect plants, but everything was turned upside down when all shows were cancelled due to Covid-19, which I believe was the right decision.

All that's left to do now is look after things at home as best I can and plan for the future, I've been told to isolate until the middle of June and won't see the alpine house for a while, but there are a number of troughs at Montalto that we plan to plant up in the near future.

The idea is to get members to suggest planting schemes over the summer for these, some autumn planting and some spring planting. Hopefully October time we can get half planted and in spring the other half planted, fingers crossed.

*Ps Let's hope Gordon can arrange a garden visit soon to the Montalto Estate so that we can all inspect and see all these changes.*

no matter what the season, it's frustrating but also interesting to learn the personalities of the plants.

I inspect the plants, eyeing them up for the different classes. A *saxifrage marginata* is starting to flower, a flower on the *Lewisia tweedyi* has opened

## Shows Report – Pat Crossley

2020 is the year all of us will remember as 'The Year the world stopped!' For the Show committee it meant cancelling the Members' Show in March, and the 81<sup>st</sup> show due to be held in April. It was nearly more difficult cancelling the Show than making the arrangements some six months previously!! and I'm not talking about the emotional side of things, which did play a part too - we knew we were going to miss seeing our friends and competitors from Dublin, as well as the adrenaline associated with the Show Day itself. However, we are most grateful to Liam McCaughey for organising a virtual Show, and thanks to all the exhibitors who participated. At this point in time we can just look ahead and hope!! Greenmount has been booked provisionally for 10th April, 2021 - a provisional booking because Greenmount does not know if they will be able to have outside groups using their premises - so much uncertainty but the Show Committee are going ahead with plans in faith!

At the Members' Show it has been the custom if we didn't have a lunch, to present the Merit Medals and Special awards from the previous year's Show, so as that didn't happen, I would like to acknowledge and congratulate the following

Montalto Estate - Bronze Merit Medal,

Gordon Finch - Silver Merit Medal,

George and Pat Gordon - No2 Bar to Gold Merit Medal,

Gordon Toner - Farrer Medal (his 4<sup>th</sup>) for Trillium Grandiflorum. - Well Done to you all, and you will get your Medal or Certificate when we meet up again. During the past few months, I have thought of a phrase I read in an old book in AGS library at Pershore "Alpine gardening is not a passing phase; it has come to stay, not least as one of the seven blessed anodynes against the oppressions of modern life"



Overleaf are some entries to the virtual show – you can view more on the website

[http://www.alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk/Shows/Virtual Show 2020.pdf](http://www.alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk/Shows/Virtual%20Show%202020.pdf)

## Information (or even Non Information)

As I write this toward the end of July, the committee has met by 'Zoom' and are considering the replies to their questionnaire. So far, the majority of members are erring on the side of caution so let's hope we have a covid-19 vaccine soon. There are so many unknowns such as travel arrangements - if some speakers are prepared to travel while some will do an on-line presentation. Also St. Bride's will have to let us know if they are happy to have an outside group meeting in their hall with all the added work and regulations now involved.

Therefore the information below is given in the expectation of a return to normal life in the New Year if not before – it's reminiscent of the late Dame Vera Lynn song " We'll meet again, Don't know where, Don't know when, But I know we'll meet again some sunny day."

**Venue St. Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast - 2.30 p.m. Sat.**

**Dues (not due until we meet)** - Local current subscription rates have increased to £15.00 single, £20.00 family, due at the A.G.M. or before the end of the current year. Cheques should be made out to '**Alpine Garden Society Ulster Group**'.

**\*\*** Please give or send subscriptions this year to the **Membership Secretary, Mrs Sandra Munro**, who will update the records before forwarding the money to the treasurer, **Mrs. Hilary McKelvey**.

This subscription is for the local Group only and subscriptions to The Alpine Garden Society must be sent direct. A limit of one year's grace is given.

With the increasing cost of postage, it is helpful to have as many email addresses as possible and this year, to update our records and have accurate information, we ask everyone to fill in the membership forms (also see below). It is hoped in the future by either emailing or texting to be able to keep members in touch with both events and unexpected news. If you are not receiving emails, please send one to the secretary ( [secretary@alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk](mailto:secretary@alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk) ) so that she is sure of having the correct email address or let her know your preference for keeping informed.

A selection from the Virtual Show 2000



Enkianthus campanulatus - Liam Friel



Peony seedling - June Dougherty



P. grandiflora - George Gordon



Gentiana angustifolia purpurea - Paddy Smith



Erythronium 'Margaret Glynn' - Harold McBride



Hosta 'Winsome' - Pat Crossley



Fritillaria imperialis - Vickie Lapsley



Fritillaria persica - Gordon Toner



Iris reichenbachii - Mac Dunlop



Fritillaria gussichiae - Joan McCaughey



Lewisia cotyledon - Raymond Copeland



Primula 'Rufus' - Cilla Dodd



R. 'Lady Alice Fitzwilliam' - Marion Edwards

