

Bulletin

MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE RHODODENDRON, CAMELLIA & MAGNOLIA GROUP

SPRING 2024 | ISSUE 144



RHS
Rhododendron, Camellia
& Magnolia Group

GROWING | SHARING | LEARNING
news, views and activities
from around the Group

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▲ National Trust Bodnant: an RCMG Recommended Garden (see page 2)

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Welcome to the Spring 2024 issue of our triannual Newsletter, the first in our new design. I hope you will enjoy its refreshed look and colourful style.

We had quite a bit of damage to the garden from the storms before Christmas; mainly sycamores on the edges of the garden being flattened. Unfortunately, some of them hit cultivated plants on the way down. On the positive side, I will have plenty of fuel for the wood burning stoves this coming winter.

However, as I write this, I am looking forward to a good display of flowering by our three genera this year. As always *Magnolia campbellii* 'Sidbury' started the display here and other varieties have followed; the main display probably peaking in mid-March.

£1000 BOUNTY FOR A VOLUNTEER
We still have vacancies for Yearbook Lead Editor and Events Co-ordinator. All the evidence from other societies is that the lack of volunteers will get worse in the future and this is very concerning.

Without volunteers we will probably

© Peter Furneaux



▲ Rhododendron 'Crossbill' in the Editor's garden

have to start paying for certain functions or just cutting back on some of them. So can I make my regular plea that if you do have any time that you could offer to the Group and would like to help shape its progress, please make contact with me.

However, sorry, but I lied about the bounty in the hope you might read this section!

(continued overleaf)

EDITORIAL

With this bulletin we have changed the style and layout of the publication. The previous design began in July 2009 with Bulletin No 100 and so has been used for the past 42 issues. It was smart but had become a little dated. The new style has, we hope, a more modern and attractive appearance.

The spring issue has often been hard to fill with members' notes and news but our advertisers seem to prefer it, perhaps because of the advance notice of gardens to visit or satisfying a desire to fill gaps in the garden. I was therefore delighted to receive two pieces on Sasanqua camellias which I hope you will enjoy reading.

I need your contributions for the summer edition of the Bulletin by the end of June. It is always interesting to read of other people's experiences of plants in their gardens, or visits to others. Maybe you have seen examples of our three genera in the wild or in cultivation beyond the UK. We would love to hear from you with your stories. Tell us too what you have read or are reading about our three genera and the plants with which they are growing. I have been particularly enjoying the unusual hybrid *Rhododendron 'Crossbill'* in my garden this spring. 🌸

PETER FURNEAUX
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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES (continued)**THE PERILS OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

The RHS cut down the wisteria on the Water Lily Pavilion at the end of the Jellicoe Canal at Wisley recently. In the past this would have resulted in a complaining letter in *The Times* from Colonel Blimp. However, things have changed and it was reported on Social Media and everyone piled in complaining. It even reached the mainstream press.

The RHS explained why it had been done but they were disbelieved and instead it was felt it was the result of Health & Safety concerns. It just goes to show that you have to be very careful about what you do and say in the current 'switched on' world.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

We have had no increase in our subscriptions for over a decade. Unfortunately, we are not immune to the cost of living crisis, with substantial increases in the production, printing and postage of the Yearbook and Bulletins which are our main expenditure items.

As you will expect, we have worked hard to reduce costs but we are probably at the maximum of what we can do in this respect. The Management Committee are currently discussing the issue and I am afraid that you will probably receive notification of an increase from November this year. 

GRAHAM MILLS
chairman@rhodogroup-rhs.org

RGS Coordinator's Notes

NICK BUTLER

RCMG RECOMMENDED GARDENS TO VISIT

The RCMG website currently has a "Links" page with a list of gardens, nurseries and other miscellaneous links. This page is not regularly reviewed and many of the links are out of date, some gardens don't even seem to have collections of our genera.

We are in the process of revamping this with a new Recommended Gardens Scheme that aims to present a well curated list of gardens that have been specifically recommended by the membership of the group. The list will be prominently placed within the menus of the website. (The "Links" page will continue, with links to Nurseries, and other sources of information, which will be reviewed and updated as required.)

We aim to have a large list of gardens that are good for our genera by making the rules of the scheme very simple, and keeping any bureaucracy to an absolute minimum.

The main requirement to be put on the list is that a garden has the support of two or more of our members, in whose opinion the garden is worth visiting for one or more of our three genera.

Beyond that, gardens on the list must meet just a couple of very basic requirements:

- There must be a publicly accessible website which provides contact details, opening times, directions, and so on.
- They must be open to the public in some form: this could be regularly throughout the year or the relevant season, or irregularly (for example under the National Garden Scheme in the UK), or by appointment only.

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We are kick starting the list with a cleaned up selection from the existing links page, some of our member gardens, and a few others. This list has been circulated to branch chairs for their committees to review and add further gardens as they see fit, and the new Recommended Gardens page should appear in the near future.

At some point we would like to poll the entire membership, in a similar manner to the voting for favourite Rhododendrons in our centenary year (and currently for Magnolia and Camellia). In this way, we hope to make the list as inclusive as we possibly can, and with worldwide coverage, and in due course, we will also provide a way for new gardens to be suggested and added at any time.

In order to be of most value, the Recommended Gardens list must also be seen to be current, so entries will be reviewed regularly to ensure the garden is still open, the web address still works and so on, and an occasional test that the garden still has the support of members.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact rgs@rhodogroup-rhs.org

As a footnote: it is with regret that, for operational reasons, the Outstanding Garden Scheme has been withdrawn for the foreseeable future. 



Members' Notes

Experiences of growing rhododendrons from seed

Despite the bar to access seed exchanges in Europe and the US we can still enjoy growing seed obtained from the Scottish Rhododendron Society and from our own group. Between them they offer a wonderful range of species, a large number of which are not available as plants from specialist nurseries. Occasional opportunities arise at Branch sales or auctions, but growing from seed is now the best way to start building a wide and interesting collection.

There are obvious worries about building a collection from seed, particularly how long it will be before flowering and whether the resulting plants will show unacceptable variation from the 'true' species. Nature intends sexual reproduction to produce variation in the offspring; I hope for not too much! If you read the description of species in the *Pocket Guide* or the *Encyclopedia* or the splendid ebooks *Temperate Rhododendrons*, there is often considerable variation described within a species. You can however be reassured by the articles of Russell Beeson and Barry Starling in recent bulletins on open pollinated seed. The latter in particular reassures us how normal it is for the offspring to be just like their parents. I like to grow on a number of the seedlings in a batch in order to check for variation, for instance in colour, structure or hardiness.

I follow the advice in Peter Cox's *The Larger Rhododendron Species*, sowing in late December or early January onto a loose, free-draining compost (Bulrush ericaceous compost with plenty of added perlite). The seed lies on the surface and the black plastic seed trays are placed in a propagator with bottom heat of about 17°C and overhead lighting strips. I expect most to germinate in three to four weeks. You may need a magnifying glass to see this because some rhododendron seed is minute.



▲ A range of rhododendron seedlings individually potted-up for growing on



▲ A 4 year-old *Rhododendron ziyuanense* seedling ready for planting; a rare species now safe in cultivation

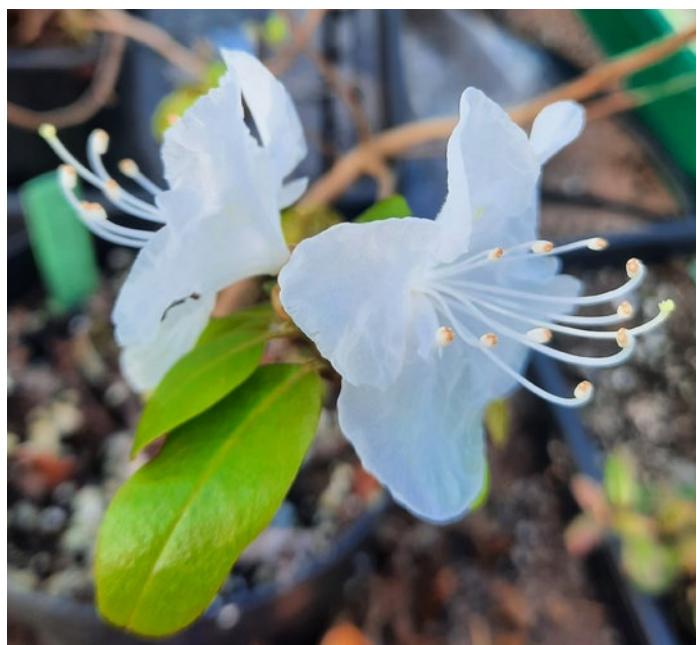
The advantage of early sowing with heat and artificial light is the long growing season in the first year. In hot weather I move the seedlings to the north side of the house to keep them cooler. In the first two winters they are protected from frost. Many seedlings can be potted up in the early autumn but small ones can be left in their seed trays until the following spring.

I pot up the seedlings into the same compost/perlite mixture, keeping them moist and watching for aphids. Each pot is labelled.

I began sowing rhododendron seed and some camellias four years ago and from then each subsequent year. I have had flowers this year on one 4 year-old (*Rhododendron ziyuanense*). Several 3 and 4 year-olds have promising flower buds now. A three year-old is now flowering (*R. dauricum Album*) and 2 year-old seedlings of *R. canadense* flowered last year. I will plant out 4 year-olds in the garden in March. Even if I don't live to see some in flower, the leaves and other vegetative features will be enjoyable and helpful for study. ♦

PETER FURNEAUX

Photos © Peter Furneaux



▲ A *Rhododendron dauricum Album* seedling flowering at just two years old

Interesting late autumn-flowering *Camellia* species found in Italy

When I travelled to Italy at the beginning of November 2023, at the kind invitation of Dr Andrea Corneo, my Italian counterpart as National Collection Holder, I was able to visit not only the National Collection of *Camellia sasanqua* at Villa Maioni, Verbania on Lake Maggiore, but also an International Camellia Garden of Excellence (ICGE) – an International Camellia Society award given to the top gardens for camellias worldwide – at Villa Anelli, near Verbania on Lake Maggiore. It had an interesting collection of Sasanquas as well as many other camellias, including a range of species, some rare. I was especially interested to find in flower two species camellias originating in Hong Kong and named by Britons.



▲ A *Camellia crapnelliana* bloom placed carefully for this reference image

Firstly, *Camellia granthamiana*, a species discovered as recently as 1955 in a wooded ravine in Hong Kong New Territories, at about 2,000ft. It was named after the then Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Alexander Grantham. To find *C. granthamiana* in flower was a first for me as my plant, which I have grown since 2015, has never flowered; indeed it loses nearly all its leaves every winter and only just hangs on to life, growing against a wall in a lot of shade. I was told it actually prefers sun in European conditions, so I will be re-siting it in early summer to another, sunny wall. Its dark green foliage is thick, veined and quilted, but what I noticed most was the large, silvery-grey, papery buds and then its white flowers up to 14cms across, drawing in the bees with its large boss of orange stamens. It made an excellent show plant. For your information, the winter low temperatures in the Verbania area are said to have dropped to -8.5°C in February 1956 and to -7.5°C in February 2012, and otherwise it would be -5°C only occasionally at night. The average in January, the coldest month, is only 4°C and in the warmest month of July it is 24°C, so this suits *C. granthamiana*. Surprisingly, Verbania can have occasional snowfall, as the Alps lie not far to the north, but the snow perhaps acts like a blanket. It is approximately 215 metres above sea level.

Secondly, *Camellia crapnelliana* impressed me as a small tree with shiny leaves; it was first collected in 1903 on Mount Parker, Hong Kong. Its extraordinary, smooth, orange-tinted bark makes it an all-season performer. It was tall after approximately 40+ years there, so its flowers were out of reach, but fortunately one

had fallen to the ground: so I can show you a blemished, large, single white flower with good stamens, which had a musky fragrance, which I placed for my photograph. The flowers are less showy and smaller than those on *C. granthamiana*, at about 10cms diameter, but the bark colour would be a very good addition and highlight to any garden, especially in winter. However, you will not be surprised to learn that *C. crapnelliana* is not at all hardy, and is found in forests at lower elevations than *C. granthamiana*, up to 600m. Out of interest, Marwood Hill Gardens grew it in an open greenhouse for about 20 years until it outgrew its position and then they lost it. They have now received a donation of a new plant and we can look forward to finding it there in the future, probably in a very sheltered spot against a wall. *Camellia crapnelliana* also feeds the bees in autumn and then sets huge, orange coloured, ornamental seed pods the size of tennis balls, and this is how it is propagated. Sadly at present, it is a very rare plant both in cultivation and in the wild, because it does not yield viable cuttings and so far does not hybridise with other species.

In contrast, *C. granthamiana* has been hybridised, although the hybrids are not readily available yet in the UK. I grow two of these crosses (both with *C. reticulata*), and both were introduced by Nuccio's Nursery of California. 'Moonrise' (2002) came out on 30/12/2023 but 'China Lady' flowers slightly later, starting on 25/01/2024 this year. They both have large reticulated leaves with impressed veins, and large, at around 14cms diameter, semi-double flowers. 'Moonrise' has a white flower, slightly flushed light pink towards the edge, taking after its *C. granthamiana* seed parent, while 'China Lady' is pink, taking after its *C. reticulata* seed parent. Frost has made getting a good photograph of an unblemished flower difficult, luckily another Devon garden was more fortunate. I grow both next to a wall and the flowers do seem a bit vulnerable to the weather in a way they might not be in a Cornish garden. Here in Devon, I garden at 500 feet (150 metres) and both plants and the species *C. granthamiana* have lived through -8°C in December 2022.



▲ The striking foliage and rich bloom of *Camellia 'China Lady'* reveals its parentage



▲ *Camellia 'Moonrise'* is another fabulous Nuccio hybrid between *C. granthamiana* and *C. reticulata*

It was interesting to come across a form of *Camellia oleifera* at Villa Maione which had been questionably labelled *Camellia sasanqua* 'Gin-no-zai'; the consensus seems to be that it is a form of *Camellia oleifera*, probably 'Plena', and indeed 'Gin-no-zai' in Japanese books looks different. Perhaps we could have an 'Oleifera Plena' or 'Semi-plena' lurking in an old UK garden somewhere? The leaves were not Sasanqua-like as they were not shiny but matt, which is a useful, distinguishing feature emphasised by Japanese botanists. The flowers were very attractive in an unusual style, and it was a good performer even when growing in quite a lot of shade at Villa Anelli.



▲ A gem of a camellia at Villa Anelli is probably *Camellia oleifera* 'Oleifera Plena'

Villa Anelli also have other, more tender species in an unheated, shady greenhouse including *Camellia chrysanthia* and *C. azalea*. It was a rare treat to see the latter which we learnt from the 2023 Yearbook is grown by Richard Baines for Logan Botanic Garden, but probably not elsewhere. The leaves were exhibiting its interesting, bronze new growth colour which is a characteristic of several of the forms sold to members of this group by Thompson & Morgan as *C. x azalea* hybrid '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine'. The species had leaves which were even more leathery and thicker than its hybrid, but the flower looked similar in its scarlet colour and 'waxy' style.

These autumn-into-winter flowering species camellias or cultivars provide excellent food for the late season bees: wild solitary bees, bumble bees and honey bees can benefit in the 'dull season', and I photographed several feeding from *C. granthamiana*. Late-season wasps in my garden also linger in *Camellia sasanqua* flowers, even into December in 2023, and of course earlier in the year we are grateful for the job the wasps do in removing aphids which otherwise attack vulnerable, young green shoots.

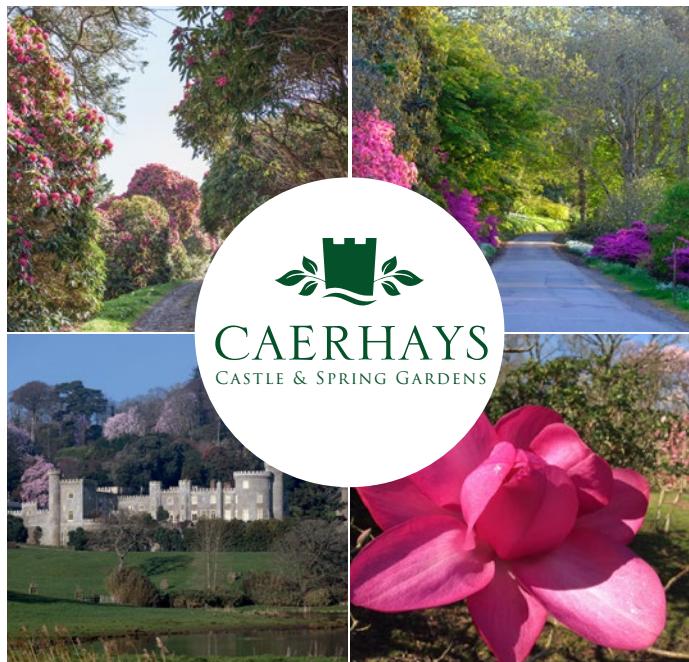
Both *C. granthamiana* and *C. crapnelliana* are classified as 'vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. In its previous assessment in 1978, *C. crapnelliana* was considered 'endangered', and I understand it no longer grows wild in Hong Kong, whereas *C. granthamiana* still does.

So growing these species in our gardens does help to conserve both them and our insect populations! ♀

CAROLINE BELL



▲ *Camellia azalea*



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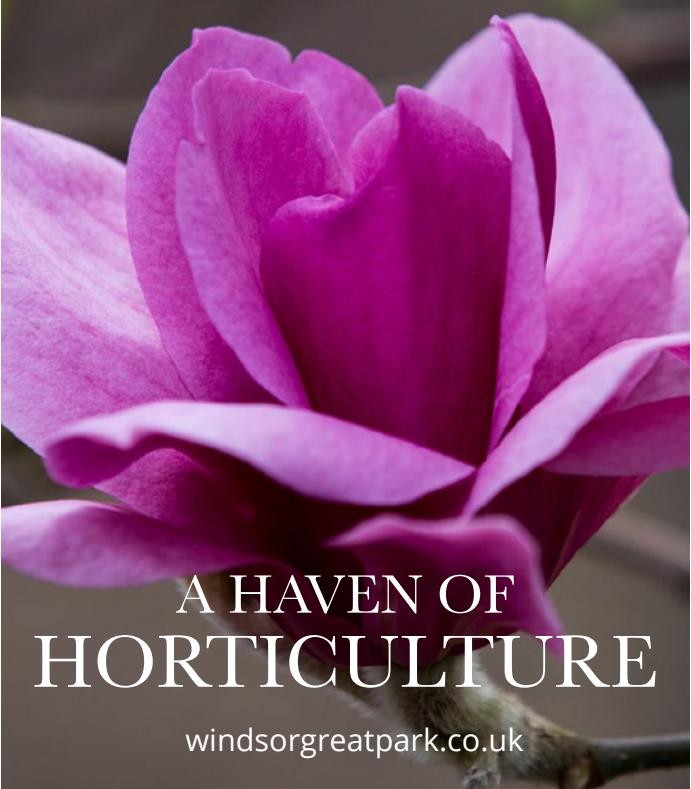
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Sasanquas on an alpine lake

The park of Villa Motta in Orta San Giulio has a history stretching back more than a century. Around 1860, the aristocratic Gallini family from Turin built the mansion and the lake walk; they also planted our marvellous *Rhododendron arboreum* hybrid known locally as 'Arborescens', now ten metres tall, and the *Camellia japonica* 'Bella Lambertii', which still exists. In 1920, my grandmother Rosa purchased the estate, and the architect Mazzucotelli designed the layout of the garden. Rosa loved annual and perennial plants, especially dahlias, and liked conifers, such as *Thuja plicata*, *Cedrus atlantica* and *Chamaecyparis* varieties. As was usual at that time, she planted rhododendrons, camellias and an almost unique border of 250 Satsuki azaleas, a feature which is still an iconic attraction of the park. My parents maintained the garden without any major change.

In 1979 I took over the garden, after a terrible whirlwind had ravaged the park and uprooted most of the conifers. Following that windstorm, I changed the aspect of the park, by replacing the dark conifers with flowering shrubs. I gradually increased camellias, which now number around 250 cultivars. Also, I replanted the border of old roses along the lake walk. At this point I decided to have an ever-blooming garden – an important point for us, who live there all year round – by planting cultivars which provide flower throughout the year. The final step was a few years ago, when I transformed the former tennis court into a secret garden, where each side blooms throughout the 12 months: winter camellias, spring camellias, bush roses, and paniculate and 'macrophylla' hydrangeas. So, after 45 years, I have probably met my objective of an ever-blooming garden.



▲ The great border of Satsuki azaleas is of one single clone and is almost 100 metres long

Let me add some details about our plants. Firstly, I mention my beloved Sasanquas, a collection of around 60 cultivars, which (together with 15 autumn-winter blooming camellia species) cover October to February. In turn, Japonicas, hybrids and Reticulatas continue the blooming season from February to April (around 190 cultivars). Third come roses, from April to June-July, where I have focused on species and old roses (around 25 cultivars and 100 plants). Species include *Rosa hugonis*, *R. roxburghii*, *R. banksiae*, *R. bracteata* and *R. chinensis*. Not only are they super healthy, but also they are not attacked by *Popillia japonica* (the 'Japanese Beetle': a chafer beetle which is now a priority invasive pest species in Europe). The borders along the lake walk consist of old rambling French roses, the same varieties that had been planted by my grandmother, with their light colours



▲ The glorious lakeside setting of Villa Motta in Orta San Giulio

(e.g. 'Albertine', 'Albéric Barbier', 'Félicité et Perpétue', etc.). After roses, from April to May we have, as you would expect, rhododendrons (around 25 cultivars) and azaleas, which make a spectacular display. A large group of hydrangeas, varieties of *H. macrophylla*, *H. quercifolia*, and *H. paniculata* blooms from June to September. From early September, varieties of *Osmanthus* (*O. aurantiacus*, *O. fragrans*, *O. armatus* and *O. delavayi*), some being over 100 years old and 12 metres tall, spread their soft scent throughout the garden.

What has been my experience with Sasanquas and winter-blooming camellias? Orta Lake is an alpine lake, slightly colder than Lake Maggiore. Summer is not hot, seldom above 28°C, while late January may drop to -5°C (the 1984 record was -15°C). Heavy snow is, fortunately, rare, but it is a disaster anyway, bending and cracking Sasanquas, which are inherently less sturdy than Japonicas. On the 'up' side though, we enjoy abundant rain, around 1200–1800mm per year. With an acidic soil, and dry winters and wet summers, Orta Lake is an almost perfect environment for camellias. My Sasanquas (and most Japonicas) are in full sun, south or west-oriented, so that they can produce the highest number of blooms. They never dry out, since the soil is dampened by numerous sources – a good chance for my garden!

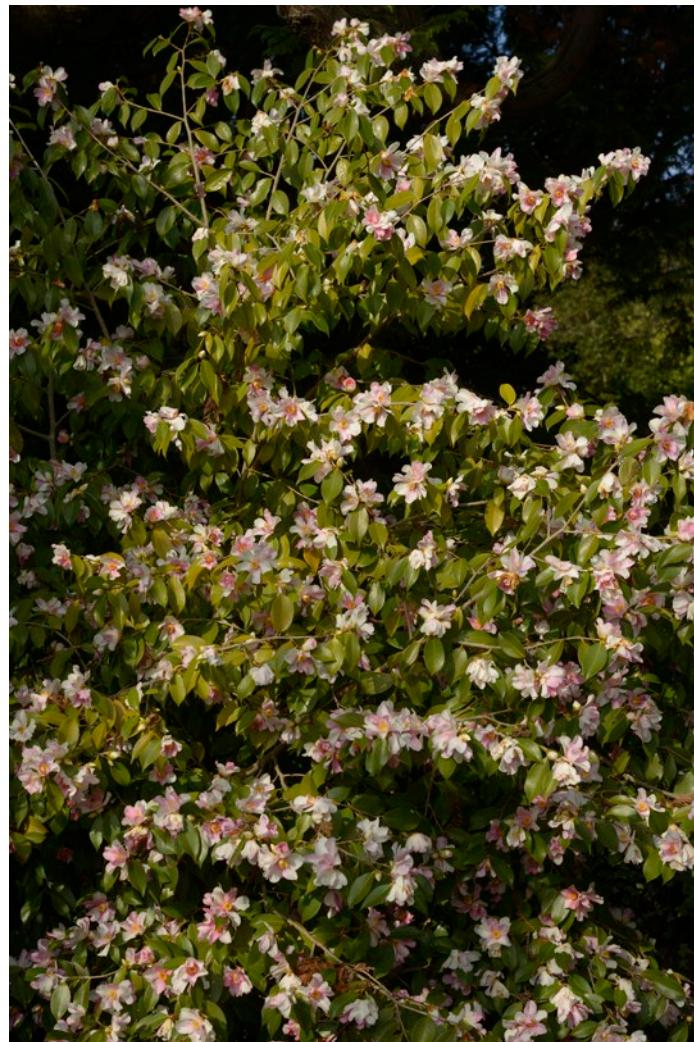


▲ Old French roses adorn the lake walk and peak in late May



▲ Heavy snowfall on the Sasanquas in 2008 left them badly bent

To maximize the landscape effect, I planted Sasanquas with white and blush flowers along the lake, to contrast with the blue of the water and the green of mountains. Blooms start in October, peak in November, continue in December (if not too cold), almost cease in January, and resume in February. Generally, Sasanqua flowers do not stand frost; however, some late flowers, such as 'Yume', 'Kamakura Shibori', 'Shibori Egao' and 'Shishigashira', withstand even January temperatures. Among the species, *Camellia granthamiana*, *Gordonia axillaris* and *Tutcheria virgata* do well until the temperature falls below zero Celsius, while 'Wabisuke' hybrids and *C. drupifera* survive the frost.



▲ *Camellia 'Yume'*, a Sasanqua hybrid (*C. yuhhsienensis* × *C. hiemalis*), in February



▲ *Camellia 'Shishigashira'*, planted in 1990

As you will certainly have guessed, I am a Sasanqua fan. My passion pushed me to ask Professor Tanaka, a world-known expert of *Camellia sasanqua*, to edit an International Camellia Society book about the species, with text and pictures contributed by international experts (*Splendid Sasanquas, an International Ornament*). And in companionship with Professor Tanaka, I visited the forests of wild Sasanquas in Kyushu (Japan).

Sasanquas, even if they are considered minor siblings of Japonicas, are a valuable landscape ornament, and, moreover, some flowers are certainly comparable to Japonicas e.g. 'Star above Star' and the Italian 'Fiocco di neve' (=snowflake).

In the following Appendix I have provided a list of our Sasanquas, an all-embracing label under which I include *Camellia sasanqua*, *C. vernalis*, *C. hiemalis* and their hybrids. Their descriptions can be found in the International Camellia Register <https://camellia.iflora.cn> or in the ICS book *Splendid Sasanquas, an International Ornament*. 

GIANMARIO MOTTA

Photos © Gianmario Motta



▲ *Camellia sasanqua 'Fiocco di neve'* is an Italian cultivar

APPENDIX

SASANQUA CULTIVARS AND WINTER CAMELLIA SPECIES AT VILLA MOTTA

(*indicates Italian cultivars)

Early Sasanqua cultivars (October /November) (57)**White and blush flowers (25):**

‘Paradise Sayaka’, ‘Paradise Pearl’, ‘Paradise Blush’,
 ‘Paradise Little Liane’, ‘Asakura’, ‘Hinode-gumo’, ‘Setsugekka’,
 ‘Yoimachi’, ‘Cleopatra White’, ‘Hinode-fuji’,
 ‘Principessa Borromeo’*, ‘Bianco Natale’*, ‘Fiocco di Neve’*,
 ‘Fuji-no-yuki’, ‘White Doves’, ‘Silver Dollar’, ‘Beatrice Emily’,
 ‘Snowfall’, ‘Little Pearl’, ‘Autumn White’, ‘Shiratori-no-mai’,
 ‘Mine-no-yuki’, ‘Jean May’, ‘Winter’s Snowman’, ‘Polar Ice’.

Pink and red blooms (32):

‘Cleopatra’, ‘Choji Guruma’,
 ‘Jennifer Susan’, ‘Weroona’, ‘Rainbow’, ‘Survivor’,
 ‘Peaches ‘n Cream’, ‘Tennyo-no-mai’, ‘Agnes O. Solomon’,
 ‘Versicolor’, ‘Navajo’, ‘Hiryu’, ‘Pink Lassie’, ‘Sakura-zukuyo’,
 ‘Marta Piffaretti’*, ‘Orsola Poggi’*, ‘Isoli’*, ‘Selvaggia’*,
 ‘Showa-no-sakae’, ‘Maiden’s Blush’, ‘Russhay’, ‘Plantation Pink’,
 ‘Bonanza’, ‘Yuletide’, ‘Sparkling Burgundy’, ‘Kanjiro’,
 ‘Kanjiro-Shibori’, ‘Hanajiman’, ‘Kifukurin-benten’ (Sasanqua),
 ‘Hanadaijin-benten’, ‘Bettie Patricia’, ‘Pink Goddess’.

Late Sasanqua cultivars (December–January, February) (6)

‘Shibori Egao’, ‘Star above Star’, ‘Ginryu’, ‘Immacolata’*,
 ‘Shishigashira’, ‘Sugar Dream’.

Autumn/winter camellias and allied species (17)

Camellia granthamiana, *C. crapnelliana*, *C. oleifera*,
C. oleifera ‘Oleifera Plena’, *C. drupifera*, *C. sinensis*, *C.*
synaptica, *C. longicarpa*, *C. tenuiflora*, *C. brevistyla*, *C.*
salicifolia,
C. hybrids ‘Buttermint’ and ‘Pink Granthamiana’,
C. wabisuke ‘Hatsukari’,
Gordonia axillaris, *Tutcheria virgata*.



▲ Other, less familiar members of the *Theaceae* flourish at Villa Motta: *Gordonia axillaris* above left and top right; *Tutcheria virgata* above right

Branch Reports

South East Branch

Visit to Borde Hill Garden November 7th 2023

After a rather fraught build up to organising an autumn visit, we were fortunate to be able to arrange a trip to Borde Hill Garden, where we were greeted by the owner, Mr Andrewjohn Stephenson Clarke, and taken around by the Head of Horticulture, Harry Baldwin. We had asked the Wessex Branch members if they wished to join us, and it was a pleasure to see those who took the opportunity.

After what was proving to be an extraordinarily wet autumn, we had glorious sunshine and a pleasantly mild temperature on the day; we were most fortunate. By the date of the visit, the gardens were closed to the public, so we had the grounds to ourselves and the maintenance team who were busy clearing leaves, etc.

At the start Andrewjohn gave us a summary of the history of the house and garden, which dates back to about 1598. The property was originally owned by the Borde family, who put together some of the estate, before it was bought by the present family in 1893 by Colonel Stephenson Clarke and then considerably enlarged – from about 8 acres to over 2,100!

The house, built with local Sussex sandstone, was extensively renovated only in 2018, so it is looking very ‘spick and span’.

Harry took us around in the ‘anticlockwise’ direction, so we ended up at the Rose Garden and the way out, having passed through the Azalea Ring.

A feature of Borde Hill is the number of unusual trees that grow there. Harry pointed out a selection of them, Champion Trees in many cases. Of special note is the *Emmenopterys henryi* in the Azalea Ring. The Trustees are conscious that sometimes there is only one example of a plant, and they have started a programme of propagation to try to secure back-up for most of the important trees and shrubs; micropropagation is being used extensively and has already started to produce small new plants.

A recently developed feature of the garden, yet to grow to a size to make a lot of impact, is the Magnolia Ring, designed by Jim Gardiner to be a feature showing a large mix of beautiful magnolias; having been planted it 2018, the new plants are beginning to make an impact, but there is a long way to go, as the



▲ Andrewjohn Stephenson Clarke introduces Borde Hill's Head of Horticulture, Harry Baldwin, to South East Branch members

intention is cut back growth at certain stages to give an unusual effect, in a ring, as the name of the project implies.

The colours of autumn seem to be getting later and later, and in early November many trees were still in the summer colour, but the landscape views, of which there are many at Borde Hill were startlingly attractive in the autumn sun.

Since the garden was closed to the public, the cafe was closed (and is being substantially altered) so we missed the usual end of walk refreshments, but the visitors were as one in thanking Harry for his expertise – a bit technical at times! – and for an excellent visit. Many members had not been to Borde Hill before, and vowed to be back in springtime to see it at its best. 🌸

BARRY HASELTINE

Photo © Philip Eastell

Irish Branch

Spring Visits 2024

For the past number of years our spring fixture has been to visit the world famous magnolia collection at Mount Congreve in Co. Waterford.

This spring we travel to County Down to two privately owned gardens with large collections of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias.

Mahee Island and Ringdufferin House April 6th

Mahee Island is the garden of Paddy Mackie MBE, a scion of the famous gardening family and Belfast industrialists, and his wife, the author, Julie Mackie. This large island garden, created by Paddy, is on the western side of Strangford Lough and looks east towards Mount Stewart and has a similar mild climate to Mount Stewart; this has allowed Paddy to bring together a remarkable collection over the past 60 years. Paddy, as you may remember, was awarded the A J Waley medal in recent years by the Royal Horticultural Society and he is one of Britain and Ireland's leading plantsmen. This visit creates an opportunity to hear directly Paddy's story of how he created a lush oasis from a wild-swept drowned drumlin in Strangford Lough. The same morning at Mahee we will also present a very prestigious RHS award to an RCMG Irish Branch member for their remarkable life achievements with the genus *Rhododendron* on behalf of the Royal Horticultural Society. Wonderful to see Irish branch members being recognised in this way and it will be a great cause for celebration in Paddy and Julie's lovely garden.

Bring your notebook, Paddy is a fount of information and good tips, and with luck his gargantuan *Rhododendron sinogrande* should be in full bloom.

In the afternoon we shall visit Ringdufferin, the garden of Tracy Hamilton MBE. Tracy is Paddy and Julie Mackie's daughter, so gardening pulses through her veins. The founder and Managing Director of Mash Direct, Tracy is Irish Vice President of the International Dendrology Society (IDS), a committee member of the Northern Ireland Heritage Garden Trust (NIHGT) and an advisor on the advisory panel for the Annesley Garden at Castlewellan, Co. Down. Ringdufferin House, the home of Tracy's grandmother (an accomplished artist), probably has the most beautiful drive anywhere in Ireland. The arboretum contains many fine specimens, in the woodland is a towering fossil tree



▲ Paddy & Julie Mackie with Peter Cox under *Rhododendron sinogrande* at Mahee

Metasequoia glyptostroboides from the original introduction, many fine magnolias including an impressive *Magnolia rostrata* and masses of big-leaved rhododendrons.

To participate members must pre-book and you can do that by emailing me seamus.obrien@opw.ie

Rhododendron Week April 8th to 14th 2024

National Botanic Gardens of Ireland,
Kilmacurragh, Co. Wicklow

Rhododendron Week is an annual event in the calendar at the National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Kilmacurragh, Co Wicklow. We showcase the highlights of the collection and explore the stories behind them. This year we have a series of events happening throughout the week.

The gardens are open from 09:00 to 17:00. There will be daily 'Rhododendron Week' guided tours at 12noon and 3pm. As always, the gardens are free to enter, as are the guided tours.

A series of video stories on 'Historic and Plant Highlights' will be uploaded to the National Botanic Gardens of Ireland social media accounts and YouTube channel during the week.

On Thursday 11th April, in collaboration with the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group, Seamus O'Brien will give an online lecture on 'The Moores of Glasnevin: the Irish Rhododendron Story' at 19:30. This is a free event and the Zoom link will be sent out to all members.

A walking tour with Seamus O'Brien, Head Gardener at the National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Kilmacurragh will take place on Friday 12th April at 14:00.

Title: 'The rejuvenation of the historic rhododendron collection at Kilmacurragh'. Bookings for this event will be on Eventbrite only and places will be limited. Link for bookings will be available in March and posted on social media. 

Enquiries to: kilmacurraghgardens@opw.ie
Tel: +353 404 48844

SEAMUS O'BRIEN

Photo © Seamus O'Brien

Japanese Garden Society



Clipped evergreen azaleas at Keisu-en garden
(Photo Graham Bowyer - japanesegardens.piwigo.com)



To find out more about the Japanese Garden Society please look at our website
www.jgs.org.uk

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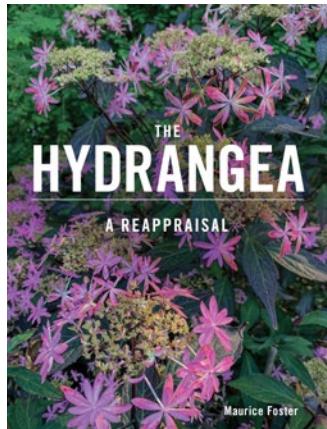
An enticing 2024 events programme:

- Camellia & Magnolia Walks Feb - March
- Specialist Plant Fairs 12 May & 15 Sept
- Roses in Bloom 10 - 21 June
- Borde Hill Garden Festival 22 & 23 June
- Open Air Opera 19, 20 & 21 July

OPEN: 10 Feb to 22 Dec, 10am-5pm. Gift Shop, Plant Sales, Café

BORDEHILL.CO.UK | West Sussex, RH16 1XP

Book Review



**THE HYDRANGEA:
A REAPPRAISAL**
MAURICE FOSTER VMH
CROWOOD PRESS 2023
ISBN-13 978-0719842832
21.5 x 1.4 x 26cm
HARDBACK
208 PAGES
RRP £25

For too long, hydrangeas were under-appreciated, being seen just as the ginormous pink blobs outside seaside guest houses in Torquay. Now with increasing popularity, they are starting to be seen as a very diverse and valuable group of plants with a long season of summer colour. They are especially valuable in woodland gardens, providing colour and interest when the spring glories of rhododendrons etc have all turned to green.

Many will know our past-chairman and great plant guru, Maurice Foster VMH. He has a particularly large and wide-ranging collection of woody plants in his Kentish garden and it is such good news that he has shared his vast knowledge and experience of hydrangeas by putting it into print. He gives us a very full review of all the different subsections of the genus and considers in detail all the species and a great number of their different clones and hybrids. It is of course impossible to include all the very latest 9-day wonders, of which there are so many released every year; most fall by the wayside. So he writes from personal experience of the best and most reliable, both in his own and other gardens he has visited, plus where they grow in the wild. The impressive number of photos are of the highest quality.

He opens with 'A Potted History', a fascinating and detailed exploration of the history of the genus in Japan and elsewhere, and the story of introductions into Europe. At first they were more popular in France and Germany, hence the names of so many varieties. He gives great credit to Michael Haworth-Booth for his popularisation of hydrangeas in the UK and also the fact he is responsible for kick-starting Maurice's interest in the genus when as a student, he worked briefly for Haworth-Booth.

Maurice then goes on to discuss the classification and distribution of the species, and follows with chapters on each subsection – Asperae, Heteromallae, Calypranthae (climbers to you and me) and of course Macrophyllae. The Americanae chapter covers *Hydrangea quercifolia* and *H. arborescens* with the explosion in popularity of *H. 'Annabelle'* and her relations and progeny. He has achieved great success with his own breeding of the Asperae; his glorious 'Hot Chocolate' and the many similar others he illustrates.



▲ The stunning *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Enziandom', one of the best dark blues

He calls the Macrophyllae 'The mainstay of the summer garden' and indeed they are to so many gardens, large and small. A very large number of the best and most reliable are discussed and illustrated, both old favourites and many of the highly regarded newer ones also. He mentions all the Award of Garden Merit varieties and the RHS Trials in which they were assessed. It is good to see his recommendations of the best of the Teller Series of lacecaps, such as the superb 'Blaumeise', regrettably so often sold inaccurately named just as 'Teller Pink' or 'Teller Blue'. It is of course impossible to show all the variations in colour in different soils, but sadly 'Kardinal' and 'Fasan' are listed as just pink, when both can be a lovely purple in acid soil.

Maurice is a great fan of the less well-known *Hydrangea serrata* varieties. He calls them delicate, sophisticated and chic, and yet they are hardy and tough. He has found them growing well in much harsher climates than *H. macrophylla* clones will survive in. He illustrates many of the named varieties plus the vast number of seedlings he has himself raised and is assessing; mouth-watering treats for future release and distribution. They are compact, making them ideal for smaller gardens, and he sees much future breeding potential. He collects the seed by placing seed heads upside-down on a sheet of white paper and allowing them to dry naturally.

Elsewhere in the book, he shows the great potential for breeding from other species, such *H. scandens* and illustrates a tropical climbing species. How great would a hardy red climber be!

The rest of the book is concerned with cultivation, soil and colours depending on pH, and tips on pruning. He also discusses propagation and considers how the genus can be used and best sited in the garden, full of ideas and inspiration.

To have such a thorough and accurate book is a delight and so useful. It is almost completely free of any error; sadly one spelling of 'Veitchii' wrongly as 'Vietchi' slipped through. Though there are other valuable reference books for this genus, notably those of Mallet and van Gelderen, this will certainly be the premier go-to *Hydrangea* reference book from now on, and one recommended most highly and without reservation. ♦



▲ Maurice Foster beside *Hydrangea aspera* 'Koki' at White House Farm

Plant News



▲ *Rhododendron 'Captain Johnstone'* displays its delightful fading characteristic from cherry red to white-flushed pink as it ages

Rhododendron 'Captain Johnstone'

Hybrids between *Rhododendron aucklandii* (now *R. griffithianum*) and *R. barbatum* were bought by William Hartland Banks for Hergest Croft Gardens in 1923 and listed in his notebook *from Captain Johnston, Tregoose, Granpon Rd*; there is a further note that 'some of the plants were small and died'.

Fortunately, at least one of these survived and was rediscovered by Willie's son, Richard 'Dick' Banks. He noted that with loose trusses of translucent cherry red bells which appear regularly it was 'one of our very best Rhododendrons'. Successful efforts were made by Dick to layer the plant and it is now represented by several other examples within Park Wood.

Lawrence Banks and I followed the trail back through Captain George Johnstone to Trewithen and started the search to see if any other remnants of this excellent hybrid were still extant. The conclusion of our investigations suggested our plants might be the only surviving examples.

The best way to protect this excellent hybrid was to bestow on it a name (deeming 100 years to be a suitable trial period). I wished to commemorate the efforts of that great Twentieth Century horticulturist and extend many thanks to the Galsworthy family for their blessing and in July 2023 we registered *Rhododendron 'Captain Johnstone'*.

Other ornamental features of this hybrid include the peeling bark from *R. barbatum* and a curious quality to the colour of the corolla which fades from red on opening to almost white flushed with pink at the lobes before they fall. The next and most important phase will be for us to focus our efforts on propagation, with my first priority to return the plant to Trewithen. 

ROWAN GRIFFITHS

Photos © Rowan Griffiths

New Camellias

Camellia japonica 'Claire Hannah'

Not exactly a new camellia, but very definitely a new discovery from our current Top Ten exercise. This hybrid is Devon-bred and available exclusively from Otter Nurseries, and it's a beauty.

Raised from *C. × williamsii* 'St. Ewe' × *C. japonica* 'Blood of China', it has the upright habit of the former with the full blooms of the latter.

On enquiry to Jim Stephens, we discovered this camellia was not present in the National Collection at Mount Edgcumbe, a situation quickly rectified with a generous donation of plants from Otter Nurseries and a formal presentation to celebrate the company's 60th anniversary as a Devon garden centre and nursery raising its own plants for sale.

The breeder of the variety, Bernard Jones of Sidmouth, recognised he had raised a very special camellia and passed the rights on to Otter to ensure its survival before his death. We are trying to locate the lady for whom it is named to complete the story.



▲ *Camellia japonica 'Claire Hannah'*

Camellia japonica 'Painter's Palette'

You may have come across this camellia variety whilst browsing at one of the RHS Plant Centres and been intrigued by its variegated foliage and vivid red single flower. Not as strongly marked as the famous 'Kerguelen', nevertheless it is a striking camellia in both flower and foliage.

Never one to let a mystery go unsolved, I wrote to Stervinou in France, from whence the plant had originated, to discover it is one of their own introductions and is in fact a (hopefully stable) sport of the excellent *Camellia japonica* 'San Dimas', hence the exceptional vivid colour and fabulous flower form. It's certainly a 'Marmite' variety but none the less, of interest.



▲ *Camellia × williamsii* 'Mary Pickthorn'

Camellia × williamsii 'Mary Pickthorn'

Featuring on the Caerhays Christmas card, this addition to the home-raised *Camellia × williamsii* tribe caught my eye immediately. Not one to name a second-rate plant, Charles Williams recognised this camellia as something special, being unique among the rest of the group with its bi-coloured blooms. It was found during lockdown, when time allowed for clearance of an area of the garden where this chance seedling had appeared above a group of the earlier named varieties. Named for the wife of a long-standing family friend and mother of John Pickthorn, whose name is also remembered as a *Camellia × williamsii*. ♡

PAM HAYWARD

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Membership

PHILIP EASTELL



RHS

Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members and hope they will enjoy all the benefits of the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group.

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

Andrea Corneo	Italy
Jake Fleming	Surrey
Arild Landsners	Norway
Michael Levett	Cornwall
Claire McNally	Ireland
Gianmario Motta	Italy
Fiona Parrott	Sussex
Thomas Tregurtha	Cornwall
John Woodyatt	Shropshire

GARDEN MEMBERS

Museum of Wales, Cardiff	Wales
NT Treliwick	Cornwall
NTS Branklyn Gardens	Scotland
Trewithen	Cornwall

Membership Enquiries to: membership@rhodogroup-rhs.org

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*Woodland Garden unsuitable for wheelchair access. Sorry no dogs.



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FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2024

MONTH	DATE/TIME	VENUE	WHAT'S ON?	CONTACT
APRIL	From April 12 for one month	Online	Zoom Talk 'The Moores of Glasnevin: the Irish Rhododendron Story' by Seamus O'Brien	Group Events
	Wednesday 17 April	Plantsman's Garden Knoll Gardens	Garden Visits	New Forest Branch
	Saturday 20 April & Sunday 21 April	RHS Garden Rosemoor	RHS Main Rhododendron & SW Branch Competitions	RHS & South West Branch
	Friday 24 April	Tilgate Park	Garden Visit	South East Branch
MAY	Wednesday 1 May	Riverhill Himalayan Gardens	Garden Visit	South East Branch
	Saturday 4 May	Greencome	Garden Visit	South West Branch
	Saturday 4 May & Sunday 5 May	RHS Garden Harlow Carr	RHS Harlow Carr Rhododendron Competition	RHS
		Ness Gardens	NW Branch Show	North West Branch
	Wednesday 8 May	Pinecroft	Garden Visit	South East Branch
	Friday 10 May	High Beeches	Garden Visit	Wessex Branch
JUNE	Saturday 1 June & Sunday 2 June	Trewithen Gardens	Group AGM & Centenary Cup Competition and Show	Group Secretary
	Saturday 3 August	Marwood Hill Gardens	SW Branch Away Day	South West Branch

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Wessex Branch
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RHS
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All RCM Group members will be very welcome to attend any events



Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

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Don't forget the AGM and Show at Trewithen Gardens 1 June

Help the Group by joining the Committee!

Email the Chairman to volunteer!