

HERBACEOUS AT SAMPFORD

Choice herbaceous plants are also sold at the nursery



Martin considers *Eryngium giganteum* 'Silver Ghost' to be a good strain of the typically biennial plant due to its shorter, more widely branched habit and, later as the heads mature, blue-anthered flowers.



Campanula 'Sarastro' blooms in early summer, its indigo buds opening to rich smoky blue bells, held on 30cm (12in) tall stems. Grow in fertile, moist soil in sun or part shade. It spreads slowly at the root.



Achillea grandifolia is a noble yet seldom-seen perennial producing creamy flowerheads in summer, held on 1.5m (5ft) stems clothed with handsome, divided foliage. Best in sun and well-drained soil.

SAMPFORD SHRUBS Nursery profile

Roy Lancaster visits Sampford Shrubs in Devon, which stocks a wide range of unusual woody and perennial plants, some selected and named by the owners themselves. Photography by Tim Sandall

ON A DAMP MORNING at the end of June last year I pulled off the M5 towards Tiverton and followed a country road in search of Holbrook Garden, home of Martin Hughes-Jones and his partner Sue Proud. I was soon driving into a parking space at their nursery, Sampford Shrubs, with its polytunnels and cold frames.

Stepping out of my car I was confronted with the spectacular sight of two deciduous climbers growing in tandem on the face of the nursery's small office. One of these, *Vitis coignetiae*, provided a bold display of foliage and must be superb in autumn when showing its rich fiery tints. The other half of the partnership and in full flower was *Rosa* 'Francis E. Lester' said to be a Hybrid

Musk of rambling habit, introduced by the Lester Rose Gardens in the USA in 1946. I was struck by its rich fragrance and bold display of blush-pink fading to white, single blooms.

At this point Martin and Sue emerged from the nursery and Martin, having noted my interest in the rose, commented that it had been planted 15 years earlier and was a favourite of theirs due to its scent, its free flowering in June and the fact that it does not become too large. He said that on average it grows to around 4m (12ft), making it suitable for a domestic wall or scrambling into a large bush or small tree. He also recommended its ornamental hips, which appear in autumn.

An eclectic collection

Martin trained in animal production and worked for some years in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic before returning to Britain where Sue and he started the nursery, built their house and planted a garden (see *The Garden*, September 2007, pp584–589). That was 27 years ago, since when they have collected and added to their stock, mostly through generous friends and home propagation. They hold a National Plant Collection of *Helenium* but their interests are eclectic and cover a wide,

ROSES BY NAME *Cistus x aguilarii* 'Maculatus' (far left) is one of the most desirable sun (or rock) roses while *Rosa* 'Francis E. Lester' (left) is a scented climbing rose, whose flowers turn white as they age



GARDEN SETTING A building built of straw bales at Sampford Shrubs is clothed with *Vitis coignetiae* and *Rosa* 'Francis E. Lester' (above). The nursery and sales area (left) is adjacent to Holbrook Garden



expanding range of woody plants and perennials, including many treasures rarely offered elsewhere. One such is *Cistus x aguilarii* 'Maculatus', for which I have been searching for several years, having come to admire it at the Hillier Arboretum in the 1970s.

I purchased a strong young plant and this year, in June, it produced a succession of big, bold flowers to 10cm (4in) across. Each of the five white petals with a deep crimson basal stain provides a dramatic contrast with the central boss of yellow stamens. Normally it forms a

dense evergreen dome to 2m (6ft) with lance-shaped, wavy-edged leaves to 10cm (4in) long. I cannot praise this sun rose enough, but would not recommend it for cold locations or heavy, wet soils. In warm areas on well-drained acidic soils in full sun it should be quite content though, like many of its ilk, it would be wise to keep spare plants from cuttings in case frost or old age take their toll.

Another plant to catch my eye, this time in full flower, was *Abelia floribunda*. One that I planted in 1984 has ▶



PROUD ASSOCIATION

The pendent magenta flowers of *Abelia floribunda* (above) are an arresting sight. Sue Proud (right), co-owner of Sampford Shrubs, with *Achillea millefolium* 'Sue's Pink', a seedling discovered on the nursery and later named after her



MARTIN HUGHES-JONES

'ANOTHER PLANT TO CATCH MY EYE, THIS TIME IN I PLANTED IN 1984 HAS FLOURISHED ON A SUNNY

flourished on a sunny wall; in summer, visitors to our garden are struck dumb by its pendulous, long-tubed blooms that flood the tiny, glistening, evergreen foliage, creating a waterfall of rose-red to magenta. These are said to be visited by hummingbirds in its native Mexico.

Home-grown selections

Over the years Sue and Martin have raised several new cultivars that originally appeared by chance in the garden or nursery. These include *Achillea millefolium* 'Sue's Pink', selected as a seedling four years ago for its pink flowers paling pleasingly with age. *Hoheria* 'Holbrook', meanwhile, was raised from seed collected in a Devon garden some 20 years ago from a plant apparently wrongly labelled *H. 'Glory of Amlwch'*. Being fond of these New Zealand evergreens, Martin was pleased with its late-flowering habit in August and good fragrance. Considering it distinct, he propagated and distributed

it. In leaf it has a look of *Hoheria populnea* though it could be a hybrid with *H. sexstylosa*. His original plant is a small, much-branched tree and is crowded in August with slender-stalked, bee-friendly white flowers.

Walking around Holbrook Garden, I was amazed to see a huge colony of *Lobelia tupa* apparently comprising two variations, differing in leaf colour (one greyer than the other) and in the red shades of their flowers. I have noticed this, too, in wild populations in Chile. To my surprise, growing with the tall-spiked lobelia were the spangled heads of *Allium christophii*, presenting an exciting but successful association; both clearly enjoyed the well-drained, sunny site and 5cm (2in) gravel mulch.

Woodland grass

In a wooded area nearby I was thrilled to find the shade-loving, little-grown *Phaenospisma globosa*, a graceful, loosely clump-forming grass from the Far East,

FULL FLOWER, WAS ABELIA FLORIBUNDA. ONE THAT WALL; VISITORS ARE STRUCK DUMB BY ITS BLOOMS'

with bamboo-like, slender-pointed leaves. Its shining green and compressed stems up to 1.5m (5ft) long produce at their extremities arching panicles consisting of scattered whorls of pendulous, thread-like branches lined with tiny, bead-like, shining-green seeds. Their effect, especially if planted in early morning or evening sun, is exquisite. It is hardy for me on clay soil.

Sue and Martin's garden doubles as a trials ground where new plants are grown and assessed, providing a source of propagation material should they be given the thumbs up. Martin pointed out teasel *Dipsacus inermis*, native from Afghanistan to Burma and southwest China. It was a handsome plant, reaching 2m (6ft) with smooth or minutely prickly, branching stems, entire to deeply lobed leaves and long-stalked, globular heads of tiny, cream-coloured flowers with black anthers. Martin commends it for its attraction to insects as well as for the structural value of its winter stems.

Perennial in nature (common teasel, *Dipsacus fullonum* which is monocarpic, dies after flowering and setting seed), it slowly forms colonies and is best suited to naturalistic planting in cultivation.

Working my way through the sales areas I was impressed with the many unusual plants as well as by collections of genera such as *Crocsmia*, *Solidago*, *Aster*, *Geum* and *Kniphofia*. I noticed startling *Eryngium giganteum* 'Silver Ghost', which Martin considers a better strain than the typical plant because of its shorter, widely branched habit and blue-anthered flowers. Much of what Sampford Shrubs offers is also available as mail order via a useful website (see box, right).

As I took to the road after a most enjoyable day my head was filled with images of plants new and familiar, while in my car boot were a few treasures I had been unable to resist. ■

Roy Lancaster VMH is a member of the RHS Woody Plant Committee



SAMPFORD SHRUBS

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Tel 01884 821164

Web www.samshrub.co.uk

Open Mar-Oct: Tues-Sat, 9am-5pm.

Catalogue download from website.

● **Holbrook Garden** (adjacent to Sampford Shrubs) is an RHS Recommended Garden open free to members throughout its open period (Apr-Oct, Tues-Sat, 9am-5pm). See *RHS Members' Handbook 2009*, p144. www.holbrookgarden.com

GARDEN-WORTHY CHOICES

Martin Hughes-Jones with Roy Lancaster (above) admire gravel planting in Holbrook Garden, including *Lobelia tupa* and *Allium christophii* (for a later-season photograph of this border, see *The Garden*, Sep 2007, pp588-589). Many plants in the garden can be bought from the nursery and by mail order

