



RARE NATIVE
Charming
Leucojum
aestivum
subsp. *aestivum*
(left) grows wild
on the banks of
the River Avon
and is sold by
the nursery



SILVER SELECTION
Delectable
Trillium
cuneatum
'Moonshine'
(above) is a
remarkable
silver-leaved
strain selected
by Kevin. It is,
however, slow
to propagate
and few are
available for
sale. Roy and
Kevin (left)
discuss plants
in a shade
tunnel at
Kevin's nursery
in Wiltshire



KEVIN HUGHES PLANTS Nursery profile

A nursery specialising in a wide range of rare and choice plants, situated beside a glorious garden near Salisbury, proved irresistible to **Roy Lancaster**, who went for a closer look. Photography by Tim Sandall

I FIRST MET KEVIN HUGHES 15 years ago when he was working at Spinners Nursery in the New Forest. Initially he seemed a modest individual but later meetings and conversations revealed a passion for plants with a knowledge of them based on personal observation. It also transpired that his interests covered a broad sweep of the natural world, in particular birds, mammals and insects. He is a recorder of insect pollinators and once, during a meeting of the Woody Plant Trials Committee at RHS Garden Wisley, he identified a host of butterflies, bees, hoverflies and beetles visiting the buddleias we were assessing. It was inevitable he would establish his own nursery, which he did five years

ago, but it was only on moving to the present location four years ago that he fulfilled his ambition. It sits in a corner of the award-winning gardens at Heale House, in the Avon Valley just north of Salisbury, Wiltshire. These are run by Frances Rasch, whose mother-in-law, the late Lady Anne Rasch, was an expert gardener and her love of the garden and its plants has been continued by her daughter-in-law.

Natives and exotics

Kevin's nursery lies on rising ground above the River Avon, the moist, grassy margins of which provide a home for UK native *Leucojum aestivum* (summer snowflake), with its erect stems and

nodding, white, bell-shaped flowers, each tepal stained green towards the tip. This is the native plant (subsp. *aestivum*) rather than the commonly cultivated kind (var. *pulchellum*) with smaller, earlier flowers. Visiting in April last year, I was delighted to see the native plant in flower, flourishing by the river; naturally, it is available at the nursery.

From the outset, Kevin determined to grow for sale plants that he hoped would attract and tempt the plantsman and adventurous gardener as well as beginners wanting the best plants for

their conditions. Walking round the nursery, it was clear that he was more than meeting this aim. My eyes passed over frames and plastic shelters filled with desirable plants from eryngiums, crocosmias, euphorbias and other border perennials to erythroniums, hellebores, epimediums, begonias and hostas. There were climbers including golden-yellow *Lonicera tragophylla* and some splendid wisterias, while the selection of shrubs and trees contained some exciting newer introductions. These included *Buddleja* 'Morning Mist'

(syn. Silver Anniversary) and *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Phantom', as well as older favourites that are not readily available, such as *Cytisus battandieri* 'Yellow Tail' and *Cladrastis sinensis*. If he is guilty of specialising it is in magnolias and trilliums – and who can blame him?

Kevin lists two dozen trilliums, including several that are little known, all of which he has raised on the nursery. (He abhors commercial collection of plants in the wild.) One especially attracted my attention but, given the agonisingly slow process of propagation, plants ►

OTHER PLANTS OF NOTE

Kevin Hughes grows a wide range of choice plants



Trilliums are Kevin Hughes' great passion and he grows and propagates many, such as *Trillium sulcatum* x *erectum* f. *albiflorum* (above), a delightful plant for moist woodland conditions.



Magnolia 'Petit Chicon' is an excellent new hybrid: in bud the creamy-white blooms look rather like candles standing upright on the branches; when open they have a delightful 'whirllygig' appearance.



Veratrum californicum var. *caudatum* is a fine plant for moist woodland conditions, with large, gloriously pleated leaves. In summer clumps are topped by tall, slender spires of white flowers.



A near-orange-flowered selection of *Uvularia grandiflora*

'OTHER WOODLANDERS OF INTEREST I NOTED INCLUDE AN AS-YET UN-NAMED SEEDLING OF *UVULARIA GRANDIFLORA* WITH ALMOST ORANGE BLOOMS'

are in limited supply. It was a selection of *Trillium cuneatum*, a species from southeastern USA, noted for its erect stem crowned with three broad, green, variously mottled leaves and topped with an erect three-petalled flower. These vary from maroon to purple, yellow or green. It grows in woods on limestone and sandstone soils, often occurring in vast numbers, flowering from late March to mid-April. This particular seedling with its silvered leaves Kevin found 16 years ago in southern Alabama, near an illicit still. He stumbled onto this by accident and met two armed men who worked the still producing 'moonshine'. Luckily, he convinced them he was just a harmless English plant hunter, and they gave him the seedling.

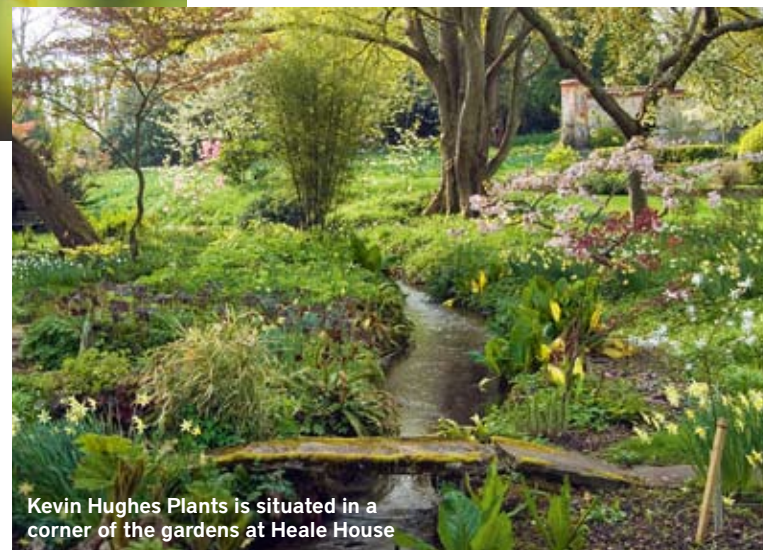
Some years later Kevin crossed this plant with a *Trillium cuneatum* selection named 'Eco Silver Tiara' to produce seedlings with leaves of variable colour.

Of these, two strains were distinct, both with red flowers. One with leaves of pewter-silver he named 'Moonshine' and the other with dark mottling on a silver background he christened 'Ghost'.

Woodland performers

Erythronium 'Diana Chappell' also has an attractively mottled leaf as well as primrose-yellow flowers with recurved segments and a red blotched centre. It is a lovely seedling of 'Pagoda' with a similar poise and stamina. Other woodlanders of interest I noted include an as-yet un-named seedling of yellow-flowered *Uvularia grandiflora* with almost orange blooms and *U. grandiflora* 'Lynda Windsor', a sport of the pale yellow-flowered var. *pallida* with leaves suffused lime-green throughout.

Kevin's other speciality, magnolias, of which he lists more than 60, comprises an exciting range, many of which are



Kevin Hughes Plants is situated in a corner of the gardens at Heale House

recent introductions to the UK, such as *M. liliiflora* 'Raven'. This has blackish-purple flowers and was brought from South Korea by magnolia authority John Gallagher. Another worth growing is *M. cylindrica*, flooded in April with erect, white blooms, pink at the base; in my garden this tree has reached 12m (40ft).

Admirers of American *M. grandiflora* may enjoy the cultivar 'Kay Paris', a fine evergreen, ideal for small gardens with its compact, columnar habit. It is free-flowering from late summer to autumn, even when young, while its glossy leaves are foxy-red beneath.



PLANTSMAN'S CHOICE

Magnolia 'Star Wars' (above) is among the superlative selections Kevin sells. *Erythronium* 'Diana Chappell' (above left) is a choice spring-flowering plant revelling in woodland conditions

Kevin also grows several *Sarcococca* including autumn-flowering *S. saligna* with polished, bright green, willow-like leaves and yellowish stamens while *S. orientalis*, despite having been introduced 30 years ago, remains rare in private gardens though its bold foliage and fragrant, white, pink-anthered winter flowers are equal to any other.

Kevin was anxious for me to see his batch of *Salix bockii*, a small, downy-stemmed willow crowded with small, narrow, grey leaves and small catkins in autumn. His plants are female and I suspect derive from a plant I introduced

from Sichuan, China in 1981. Its possibly unique autumn-flowering character apart, the catkins of Kevin's plant, at least, are notable for their nectar which, he has observed, attract moths, bees and butterflies.

The temptations here are many and not just the plants, for there is the lovely garden, wildlife galore including kingfishers and, if that still doesn't satisfy, then there is the tearoom which I can certainly recommend. ■

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



KEVIN HUGHES PLANTS

Heale Gardens, Middle Woodford, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 6NT
Tel 01722 782504
Web www.kevinsplants.co.uk
Open 10am-5pm, Wed-Sun and Bank Holidays, 1 Feb-31 Oct.
Other times by appointment.
Wheelchair access: yes
Refreshments: yes
Mail-order plant list (send three first-class stamps):
89 Ladysmith, East Gomeldon, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 6LE

