



Roy and nursery co-owner Louisa Arbuthnott

# STONE HOUSE COTTAGE NURSERY

## Nursery profile

In a walled garden surrounded by romantic follies, Roy Lancaster finds plenty of the choicest climbers, wall shrubs and perennials. Photography by Tim Sandall

**LIKE MANY OTHER** plantmen I have long dreamed of having a walled garden to make the most of my passion for climbers in all their variety. Not any old walls, but tall ones, 3m (10ft) at least, of natural stone or red brick, big enough to accommodate high flyers (as well as the more fragile, together with selected shrubs pruned and trained to give of their very best in flower and foliage).

There are countless fine walled gardens, including many small, private gems tucked away in unexpected places – and then there is Stone House Cottage Garden and Nursery. The nursery itself lies outside the walled garden and is rather quaint, long a draw for those gardeners who prefer plant hunting of

the domestic kind. Here can be found a selection of hardy, and not-so-hardy, woody plants and perennials including many of those flourishing in the garden that have been propagated by co-owner Louisa Arbuthnott from cuttings, seed or by division. Some are only available in small numbers, but customers can take heart from the fact that Louisa seems to have a remarkable way with plants, especially more desirable ones, and is not one to be intimidated by a plant's recalcitrant reputation.

### The garden and its plants

Many specialist nurseries have, or aim to have, an area where plants for sale can be seen in a garden context. This

often doubles as a stock area, as it does at Stone House Cottage. Louisa and her husband James bought the property, then a neglected Victorian red-bricked walled garden and its gardener's cottage, in 1974. The special charm of the present site, however, is a result of James' remarkable building skills and industry over many years, embellishing the walled garden with a series of follies including two towers that give the site a slightly medieval feel. James eventually retired from his building spree, but not before Louisa had filled the garden and clothed the walls with a riotous assemblage of plants, to which she continues to add.

I first visited the garden and nursery many years ago, returning on a sunny

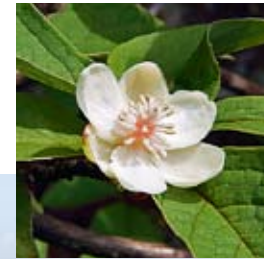
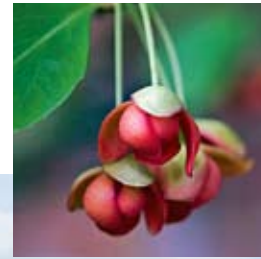
day in May last year to find Louisa waiting to guide me along the garden's many paths, each turn revealing plants in flower or with interesting foliage demanding closer inspection.

Just inside the entrance on opposite walls grow two splendid examples of hardy, twining, deciduous climbers: *Schisandra grandiflora*, a male plant with clusters of creamy-white, cup-shaped flowers 2.5cm (1in) across, and a female plant of *S. sphenanthera* with rounded, orange-red flowers. This has been allowed to cover the roof of a sheltered, seated refuge. Nearby, in a corner in raised, flanking beds, grows a selection of shade-loving perennials including a large clump of *Beesia calthifolia*. This

choice member of the buttercup family is noted for its long-stalked, heart-shaped, shining dark green leaves, their paler venation giving a marbled appearance. I once found it colonising a streamside in a woodland in China's Yunnan province and for the past five years have enjoyed its quiet presence in a ferny corner of my own garden.

Also ideal for a shady border is *Corydalis* 'Spinners', a 60cm (24in) mound of ferny foliage topped with racemes of smoky-blue, tubular flowers. Further along the path my eye was caught by two flowering shrubs, one of which, *Deutzia x elegantissima* 'Rosealind', looked superb, well deserving its Award of Garden Merit with its arching ▶

The nursery (above) at Stone House Cottage in Worcestershire adjoins an RHS Recommended Garden of the same name. Its folly towers and turrets may look ancient, but actually date from 1974



Dioecious *Schisandra* produce male and female flowers on separate plants. Female *S. sphenanthera* flowers (far left) are red, male *S. grandiflora* (left) white



## ROY'S TOP THREE PLANTS

Three lesser-known plants from better-known genera



*Lathyrus rotundifolius* is an elegant pea with herbaceous scrambling stems, ideal for a sunny position and good for growing through and over large shrubs. The distinctive brick-red flowers appear in late spring.



*Buddleja colvilei* 'Kewensis' is a selection of a large shrub/small tree from the eastern Himalaya. Its rich, ruby-red, pendent flowers are among the largest in the genus. It likes a well-drained soil and full sun.



*Actinidia pilosula*, a strong-growing and twining kiwi-fruit relative, produces long, slender-pointed, dark leaves, some of which are half to almost wholly white. Clusters of rose-red flowers appear in the leaf axils.





The view across the garden to the house

## 'LATHYRUS ROTUNDIFOLIUS WAS FLOURISHING AGAINST A SUNNY WALL WHERE ITS LONG-STALKED RACEMES OF BRICK-RED FLOWERS LOOKED IRRESISTIBLE'

branches smothered in rich, deep pink flowers. The other was *Jamesia americana*, a rarely seen member of the hydrangea family from western North America, looking nothing like a hydrangea, its slightly fragrant white flowers borne in conical panicles on grey-leaved shoots.

### Roses and climbers

From a lawn I admired the beautiful, loosely double, apricot-yellow blooms of *Rosa x odorata* 'Pseudindica', its long stems climbing through the branches of *Eriobotrya japonica* against one of the towers. This rose (syn. 'Fortune's Double Yellow') was famously introduced by Scottish plant hunter Robert Fortune in 1845 from a 'rich Mandarin's garden' at Ningbo in eastern China and was a favourite of the late Graham Stuart Thomas, who said it was 'the most brilliant rose of its time, and will make people blink even

today.' It is principally spring flowering and performs best in a warm climate.

Behind a tower, below a shaded wall, grow *Luzuriaga radicans* and *Philesia magellanica*, two evergreen shrublets from the temperate rainforest of the southern Andes. The *Luzuriaga*, with loose clusters of white flowers, climbs the wall with a small-leaved ivy, while the *Philesia* has formed a low mound of neat, dark green, white-backed leaves from whose branches in spring hang tubular crimson flowers. Both require a sheltered site in cool shade and moist, acidic soil to flourish.

By contrast, *Rhaphiolepis x delacourii* 'Coates' Crimson', a shrub of 1.5m (5ft) with leathery evergreen leaves and terminal panicles of rose-crimson flowers, relishes a warm, sheltered, sunny site and rich fertile soil.

The area around the house was awash



*Deutzia x elegantissima* 'Rosealind'

with plants in flower, including several *Indigofera*, most available in the nursery, including *I. heterantha* (sometimes sold as its synonym, *I. gerardiana*), and equally attractive *I. subverticillata*. All are shrubby, pea-flowered sun-lovers for average garden soil, ideally well drained, lending themselves to training against a warm wall. Late frosts can be a problem in cold areas, but hardier species will re-shoot from the base, or they can be hard pruned in March as they flower on the current year's wood.

Another pea-family favourite of mine,



*Rosa x odorata* 'Pseudindica' (syn. 'Fortune's Double Yellow')

herbaceous *Lathyrus rotundifolius*, was flourishing against a sunny wall where its long-stalked racemes of brick-red flowers looked irresistible. A vigorous, scrambling plant, it needs support to climb and space to spread.

Of the many perennials I admired, *Libertia procera* was particularly notable for its large, bold clump of narrow, evergreen leaves topped by the long-stalked spikes of comparatively large white flowers. It looks to be a plant worth having as did a charming monkshood, *Aconitum austroyunnanense*, twining its

shoots through a nearby *Philadelphus* 'Innocence'. This is one of a number of species introduced from China in recent years, in this instance by Bledodyn and Sue Wynn-Jones (collection number BSWJ 7902), a favourite of Louisa's for its striking blue-helmeted flowers in autumn on 3–4m (10–12ft) stems.

The few plants I have described here hardly does justice to Stone House Cottage Garden and Nursery's 'Who's Who' range of the best shrubs and perennials, which on the day of my visit included clematis, roses, honeysuckles, wisterias, epimediums, geraniums and iris in flower among others. Equally impressive is the advice freely imparted by Louisa on her plants and their needs. It was as if she was talking about her family – which, in a way, she was. ■

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



Wisteria has scrambled up to the crenellated roof of one of the red-brick towers (left) built by James Arbuthnott



## STONE HOUSE COTTAGE GARDEN AND NURSERY

Address Stone, nr Kidderminster, Worcestershire DY10 4BG

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Web [www.shcn.co.uk](http://www.shcn.co.uk)

**RHS Recommended Garden:** open free to members (Member 1 only) mid-Mar–mid-Sept, Wed–Sat, 10am–5pm (non-members £3). From mid-Sept to mid-Mar, by appointment only. See *RHS Members' Handbook 2010*, p96

**Plant list** available, see website or send SAE for 30p.

**Mail order:** no

