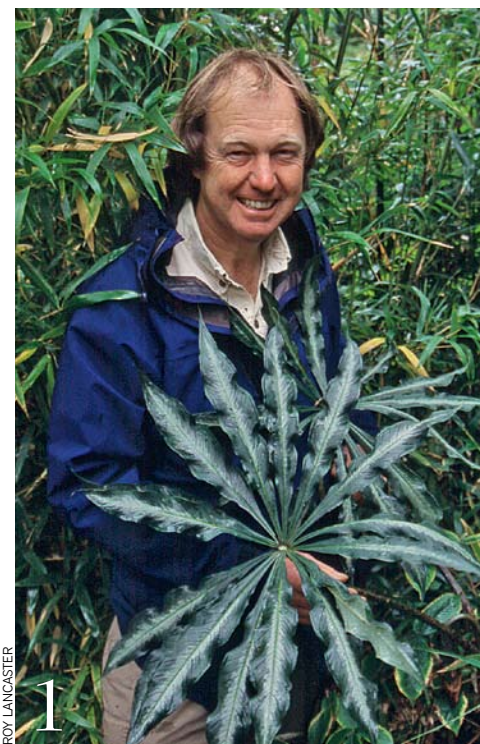


'KNOWLEDGEABLE GARDENERS CAN BE FOUND WANDERING IN A DAZED OR AGITATED STATE'

THERE CAN BE FEW if any garden enthusiasts or plantsmen who have not heard of Crûg Farm Plants. Some may have seen their award-winning exhibits at various flower shows, such as at the RHS London Plant and Design Show in February. The more adventurous will have visited the nursery itself, on a hill overlooking Anglesey on the North Wales coast. Those who have made that journey have doubtlessly marvelled at the extraordinary wealth of plants grown and sold. They range from aspidistras, toad lilies (*Tricyrtis*), Solomon's seals (*Polygonatum*) and *Paris* to viburnums, mahonias, maples, holboellias and hydrangeas.

Crûg Farm Plants' annual catalogue reveals an unrivalled list of names without descriptions and void of illustration, most of which are accompanied by a collection number. These identify plants that have been introduced as seed by nursery owners Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones and other collectors, sometimes on joint expeditions. They have visited some of the most remote and botanically exciting locations around the world, often mountains and woods. Evergreens, ground cover, shrubs, shade lovers, climbers, trees and perennials from as far

PLANT COLLECTOR
Bleddyn Wynn-Jones with a leaf of *Arisaema formosanum* var. *bicolorifolium* 1. Many *Tricyrtis* are grown at the nursery; this *T. formosana* 2 is one of several that were collected in Taiwan by the Wynn-Joneses



ROY LANCASTER



RHS / SIMON GARBUTT



CRUG FARM PLANTS



PHOTOLIBRARY / ANDREA JONES

asfield as Taiwan, Japan, Korea, northern India, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Colombia and Guatemala fill the Wynn-Jones' garden and stock beds, while those of uncertain hardiness are kept for future assessment either in plastic tunnels or are given winter protection. If ever there was a plantsman's Aladdin's cave this is it. Even knowledgeable visitors can be found wandering around in a dazed or agitated state, especially when it comes to deciding which plants to buy now and which to leave for the next time they visit.

Crûg specials

Particularly popular among Crûg Farm Plants are perennials and shrubs with exotic, especially evergreen foliage – of which there are a great many. These include *Aucuba omeiensis*, the largest in leaf of any aucuba species, up to 30cm (12in) on strong young growth, an impressive shrub for sheltered, woodland sites in the milder areas of Britain and Ireland. Also striking is *Curculigo crassifolia*, a drought-tolerant perennial herb with bold clumps of large (up to 1m/3ft long), conspicuously pleated, evergreen leaves like those of a giant aspidistra. This is one for the shady conservatory or else a warm, sheltered or woodland site outdoors. Different again is *Arisaema formosanum* var. *bicolorifolium* 1, a tall-stemmed (to 1m/3ft or more), tuberous, herbaceous aroid from Taiwan, the handsome long-stalked leaf of which is crowned by a ring of slender, tapered green leaflets, each with a pale to silvery central band.

Among the most impressive and desirable of Crûg Farm Plants are those members of the ivy family (*Araliaceae*) with larger-than-life leaves, and it is these that most capture the imagination of many visitors, in particular those with an eye for drama or design. In addition to several species of the woody deciduous

and herbaceous *Aralia*, Bleddyn and Sue have a special liking for *Fatsia polycarpa*, which differs from the leathery-leaved, glossy-topped and ubiquitous *Fjaponica* in its longer-stalked, more deeply and attractively lobed leaves. This newcomer is proving hardy in UK gardens; in mine I have two plants that have survived -9°C (16°F) without injury and may be more reliable than *Fjaponica* in this department – though both shrubs, which can reach 2–3m (6½–10ft) in height, thrive best with shelter and shade.

Schefflera specialists

Equal to these in evergreen foliage effect are the many species of *Schefflera*, several of which have been growing for some years in more-sheltered gardens of Britain and Ireland. Such is their allure that some plant lovers seem as determined as Robert the Bruce's legendary spider to try and try again for success. The first species I ever saw was *Schefflera impressa* (now *S. rhododendrifolia*) from the eastern Himalaya, a plant of which grew in a border by Jermyn's House, the late Sir Harold Hillier's home in Hampshire in the early 1960s. It reached 2m (6½ft) but succumbed to a serious frost shortly after. Subsequent introductions have fared better; in June 2006 I saw a superb mounded tree of 5m (16ft)

or more growing in a woodland garden on the Argyll coast, while a similar, possibly older example grows in the Cornish garden of the late plantsman Edward Needham. I have two younger, smaller plants in my garden and I particularly love the pale, downy nature of the young growths in May. The leaves have five to seven (sometimes nine) slender, pointed and stalked leaflets of a matt green on their upper surface.

Better known and perhaps the best one to start with is *Schefflera taiwaniana* from the coniferous woods of Taiwan, which is proving quite hardy. It has a most elegant appearance with its more numerous (9–15) smoother, narrower, slender-tapered and brighter green leaflets. Its young growths arise fountain-like in tiers from the shoot apex in May and June. *Schefflera delavayi*, a Chinese species, is well established in Cornish gardens and elsewhere in sheltered sites where it has reached small-tree size of 4m (13ft) or more. Its large leaves with five to seven long-stalked leaflets, which are boldly lobed on juveniles, are dark green above and covered beneath (as are the young growths) with a dense pelt of creamy-grey or yellowish-brown hairs. A plant of five years in my garden is proving as hardy as the other species. Beyond these three, adventurous

SCHEFFLERA SENSATIONS

The emerging cinnamon-coloured foliage of *Schefflera macrophylla* 3; they later turn green. Hardy *S. taiwaniana* is one of the best scheffleras to grow outdoors. Collected by Sue and Bleddyn in Vietnam, this unidentified *Schefflera* 4 is close to *S. chapana*, or could be *S. alpina*

gardeners, especially those with warm sheltered gardens, have an increasing selection of species to tempt them. At least two of the above scheffleras plus magnificent *S. macrophylla* 3 (hardy to about -10°C/14°F) and hardier *S. alpina* (to about -15°C/5°F) are to be included in an exhibit, the Wynn-Jones' first, at this month's RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

For Sue and Bleddyn this will be a celebration of their many years of plant exploration. 'Every plant,' Bleddyn tells me, 'will be one of our own collections.' For plant enthusiasts, it will be a treat not to be missed. ■

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

Plant explorers extraordinaire

At Crûg Farm Plants in North Wales, an exciting range of plants from as far afield as Taiwan, Japan, India, Colombia and Guatemala fill stock beds. Roy Lancaster looks at some of the nursery's introductions as the owners prepare for their first RHS Chelsea Flower Show exhibit

WHERE TO SEE CRÛG

i Crûg Farm Plants, Griffith's Crossing, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 1TU; 01248 670232; www.crug-farm.co.uk.

• Events at the nursery include 'Pushing the boundaries', on 18 June, exploring the importance of microclimate, and on 17 Sept, 'Our 2010 collecting trip'.
• See Ken Cox's Viewpoint (pp340–341) on the role of plant hunting and its future

RHS Chelsea Flower Show, 24–28 May, Royal Hospital Chelsea, London SW3 4SL
Tickets: 0844 338 7539 www.rhs.org.uk/chelsea