



RCMG SW Branch News

Autumn 2021

Editor's welcome – Notes from a Devon Garden

Welcome to the latest edition of the regional newsletter. As I write in mid-November, it feels as though some semblance of normality is returning to the garden. Whilst we are further behind in seasonal tasks than would be expected at this time of year due to the hangover of pandemic restrictions, it definitely feels as though we are moving forwards.

At Greenway, meadows are still being cut and raked (*right*) and many hedges are yet to be cut; made all the harder as some areas weren't cut at all last year. We've also had to respond to some unexpected challenges. Clearing around the base of a *Magnolia grandiflora* that was growing next to the dining room wall revealed an unexpected and fast decline in health. Honey fungus had advanced to a level that meant we had no choice but to remove the tree (*below*). A sad end to a wonderful old tree, but as we all know, no garden remains static.



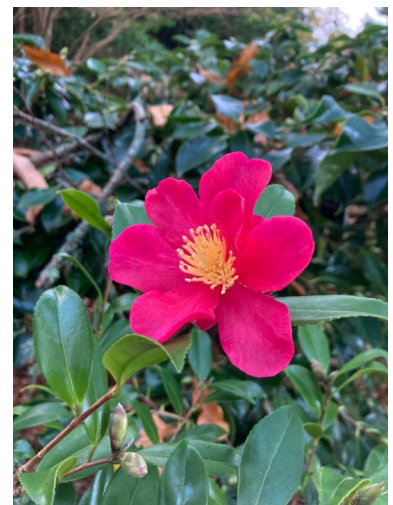
Whilst some plants have come to the end of their lives, others continue to thrive. Although outside of our genera, one plant that has been particularly wonderful this autumn had been *Colletia paradoxa* (*below left*). Smothered in white flowers and giving off the most delicate of perfumes on the breeze, I find the off-



white of these dainty flowers simply beautiful. It draws me back to an article written by Pam Hayward on white flowers and the perfection of a pure white bloom.

Within our three genera, of course it is the camellias that are starting off the display. Our *Camellia sasanqua* and its cultivars (*right*) are now coming into full flower and brightening up the dull mornings.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter. Please do continue to feedback comments and suggestions. They are all gratefully received as are any contributions you may have. If you wish to discuss an idea for an article before committing to writing, please feel free to get in touch with me (ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk), John Marston or Pam Hayward who will be happy to talk over any ideas.



Ashley Brent

Branch Chairman's Foreword

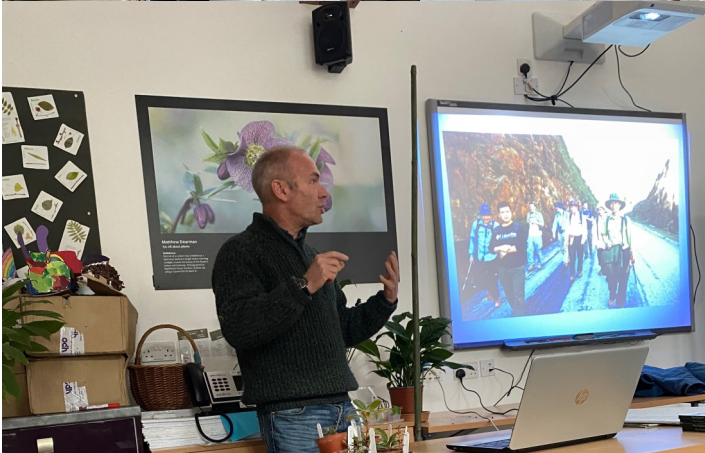
Autumn seems to be settling in although the temperatures here are still mostly in double figures during the day and the sun seems to have some strength when it shines. Here at Gorwell Garden we have not had a frost yet so there is still much colour in the garden. The autumn flowering camellias are beginning and seem a bit later than last year. There is a very reliable white *Camellia oleifera* hybrid called *C. 'Snow Flurry'* (*below left*) which flowers well every year. It was developed in the US National Arboretum as a hardy autumn-to-winter flowering plant. The single flowered *C. oleifera* parent gives it its hardiness and scent, and the other parent, *C. 'Frost Princess'* gives it its semi-double/paeony form. It drops its petals as the flowers go over resulting in a neat habit; a thoroughly good 'doer'. Similarly reliable here with scented paeony form white flowers of somewhat looser habit, is the slightly later flowering *C. 'Gay Sue'*.



It was good to see so many of you at Rosemoor on 30 October for our Autumn Meeting and AGM and to have the opportunity to catch up with each other. Richard Baines came all the way from Logan Botanic Garden to talk to us in person – a rare treat away from virtual Zoom. He talked about his fascinating trips to North Vietnam, about which he has written in his recently published book, and I'm sure we have not heard the last of unusual and as yet unknown shrubs and trees to be discovered from the mountains there. His team found two hitherto unknown rhododendron species and several others only known from China before. Wonderful magnolias, I am sure, are also awaiting discovery. In the last newsletter I illustrated my foreword with a flower from my *Magnolia cathcartii* introduced from Fan Si Pan mountain.

I have written a report of our South West Branch meeting and AGM in the *Bulletin*, so I will confine myself to photos from the day (*below and overleaf*). Richard Baines wrote that he thought the Saturday meeting was excellent, highlighting the Bring & Tell session and plant quiz. Like Roy Lancaster two years ago, he was very impressed with the knowledge and engagement of our Branch members, and I thoroughly concurred. Many thanks to all who contributed to making the day a success.





John Marston

Notes from a Cornish Garden

As I write, in the first week of November, Glendurgan has once again closed its gates for the winter. The plan for us is always the same, to spend a gentle week putting away signs and benches whilst easing into our winter programme of work. Every year though, the temptation to get stuck in is too strong and the garden team quickly launches into enjoyable but noisy and destructive jobs. As with all gardens, the intention is to build on previous year's successes and to gradually adapt and improve in order to provide a better display for the next season. In our case, this often manifests as felling and clearing dark and overgrown areas of Cherry Laurel to enable the planting of more desirable ornamentals. The upshot of this is of course that the cultivated area of the garden gradually increases and we end up creating yet more work for ourselves. Gardeners like a challenge though, so despite this, we continue to bite off more than we can chew each winter and this year is no exception!

As well as our usual clearing and replanting, this winter the team will be tackling two important projects. Those of you who know Glendurgan will no doubt be familiar with its fantastic 190 year-old maze. Planted in 1833 by Alfred and Sarah Fox, it was intended to entertain their family and friends, including their twelve children. To this day, it continues to delight visitors to the garden and remains one of the most significant historical garden features in the south west. Whilst it's fantastic that it continues to fulfil its purpose after all these years, it still needs to be conserved in much the same way that a tapestry might be conserved in a National Trust mansion. The wear and tear created by 90,000 people exploring its paths each year was really starting to take its toll, not only on the steps and path surfaces, but also on the heavily compacted roots of the hedges themselves. In 2018 therefore, we began a renovation project to upgrade the paths within the maze and to regenerate the struggling plants. Work has been carried out in phases, with funds raised through generous donations from members of the public, so that at last we're able to begin work on the final section. Over the next couple of months, paths will be dug out and levelled, stone steps will replace crumbling wooden risers, and sturdy metal edging will be installed in order to hold in place new, robust surfaces. Finally, a bonded gravel will be applied, creating smart, safe and resilient paths, protecting the hedges and allowing our visitors to enjoy the puzzle once again.

More than enough for one winter? Not so! Fans of Glendurgan will also be familiar with the Giant's Stride, a maypole of sorts, with six ropes and handles hanging from a rotating bearing at the top of the pole. Once one has selected a handle, the idea is to collectively run around the pole until the centrifugal force is sufficient to cause one's feet to lift off the ground and swing around. In mid-season, the garden is filled with hooting and hollering as children and 'big children' alike enjoy its unique charms. Unfortunately, at the start of this year, we decided it was time to replace the central wooden pole with a new one, to ensure safety and many more years of fun for our visitors, and so it has been out of action for the 2021 season. Replacing the pole is no mean feat however, starting with the problem of sourcing a substantial Douglas fir stem to be milled and shaped for purpose. This done, we have to remove the old pole, breaking an enormous amount of concrete in the process, before digging a two metre deep hole, transporting the new, seven metre long, pole through the garden, and somehow up-ending and securing this near two tonne lump of wood in its final position. Certainly a lot of logistics to consider but we can hopefully look forward to reinstating another important garden feature. Believe it or not, the original Giant's Stride was installed in 1912!

Alongside these bigger jobs of course will continue our more sensitive gardening tasks. Although we mark the passing of the seasons by the type of jobs we undertake, the garden continues to flourish in its natural never-ending cycle. The season may have finished as far as our visitors are concerned, but within the garden the blooming of the first *Sasanqua* camellias is underway and we can look forward to a riot of magnolias in just a few months. Plenty to look forward to over the winter and next spring.

Ned Lomax

1001 Summer Nights

That the Chelsea Flower Show was held in the autumn this year would not ordinarily have made much difference to the International Camellia Society; too early or too late, it's much the same. However, this year was different because the Camellia world had just discovered, or created, a summer flowering variety. It had been introduced by Thompson and Morgan in 2020 but an autumn Chelsea was the perfect platform to bring it to a much wider audience. Its name is *Camellia* '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine'.

Back in 1985 a new species of camellia was found growing beside a river in Guangdong province, China. It was named *Camellia changii*, then shortly afterwards (and amidst some controversy) renamed *Camellia azalea*. By the early 2000s the significance of it flowering all-year-round was making waves but it wasn't proving very amenable to cultivation, at least outside China. Genetic investigations suggested it would be compatible with a number of other camellia species and a breeding programme was started, led by Gao Jiyin in China. An article in the 2008 *International Camellia Journal* reported that since 2006 many crosses had been made with a range of species and cultivars.

There are two further articles in the 2011 journal, one of which describes 13 hybrids with their parentage. They are said to bloom from June until December and to be able to bloom in sun at over 38°C. Four of the 13 are *C. azalea* x *C. 'Dr Clifford Parks'*, four are *C. 'Tama Beauty'* x *C. azalea*, the rest all have different parents. All have been given names starting with 'Summer's', an echo of Dr Ackerman's 'Winter's' hybrids. There is *C. 'Summer's Pink Dress'*, *C. 'Summer's Red Velvet'*, *C. 'Summer's Square'* and so on. I am not totally sure but *C. 'Summer's Red Handkerchief'* (*C. 'Xiari Hongpa'*) looks very like *C. '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine'* and has the correct parentage (*C. azalea* x *C. 'Dr Clifford Parks'*).

The current online version of the Camellia Register lists 204 hybrids with *C. azalea* as one parent, all but one raised in China by Gao and his team. *C. '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine'* and *C. 'Xiari Hongpa'* are listed separately, so perhaps they are different; but it seems odd that there would have been an un-named variety with the qualities to spearhead a sales drive abroad.

I arrived at Chelsea around noon on Friday, to find a stand fronted by metre high bushes of camellias carrying a good display of single red flowers. It was immediately apparent though that there were other plants in the display with no open flowers. On closer examination I concluded that there were at least four different forms present. In addition to the free flowering single red, there was one bush sporting a clear-red semi-double bloom and a lot of unopened buds, another with a partly open, apparently fully double red bloom with a lot of unopened buds and a fourth with markedly different foliage and an abundance of large but tightly shut buds.

They had all been supplied as *C. '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine'* but it seems that name applies to the single red and that the other forms are different varieties. When I arrived home I rang Thompson and Morgan, who had supplied the plants and learned that there were other varieties in the pipeline and I have since been told that there are plans to introduce the

double form soon. It appears that some of the pipeline varieties have been inadvertently introduced already. What is not clear is how far back down the supply chain the error occurred. T&M have been supplying plants with multiple cuttings in a pot. They are young plants and it is likely that many have not flowered yet but I know of one that has produced a fully double flower.

Separate your small plants carefully and you may be looking at three different camellias for your money, which will likely seem like better value.

There are two issues here though. Firstly there is the apparent confusion, unless it turns out that most of what has been sent out is actually *C. '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine'*. Secondly, if the plants supplied to Chelsea at the end of September are any guide, are they, with the exception of *C. '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine'*, actually going to flower in summer?

I brought one of the big *C. '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine'* plants back with me, by bus, train and car, to Cornwall. It is now planted in the National Collection of Camellias at Mount Edgcombe and though it lost many of its flowers *en route*, by mid-October it had opened more and was very striking. Only time will tell but this looks like an interesting and worthwhile new variety. It would be reasonable to expect that future introductions of *C. azalea* hybrids would be better still and with 204 varieties already named and registered the odds look good. They will need to be trialled and prove themselves in local conditions around the

world if their promise is to be fulfilled, which perhaps means that a more even balance between commercial and horticultural considerations is adopted.



Two of the plants on the ICS stand at Chelsea. The foliage is quite different, the plant on the right is just starting to bloom at the end of September, the plant on the left isn't even showing colour



Left: C. '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine' on the Plant of the Year stand at Chelsea, 26/9/2021.

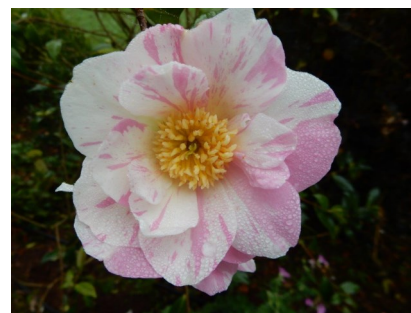
Right: The same plant at the National Collection, Mount Edgcombe, 13/10/2021.

Jim Stephens

Autumn Camellias

Autumn is a good time for camellias if you grow the *Sasanqua* species and the related *Hiemalis* group. As a National Collection holder of *Camellia sasanqua* with *C. hiemalis* and *C. vernalis* cultivars, I obviously have to commit to grow them all, but I confess I am drawn to the bolder, stronger colours to shine forth on a dank, dull autumn day. If it is mild and moist and not windy, I might also catch sweet notes from their scent and the late foraging wasps actually bed down for the day and night inside flowers; so I find I have some *Sasanquas* that will set seed and some seed does germinate.

The stripey *Sasanquas* intrigue me and one of them is *C. 'Souvenir de Claude Brivet'* (*right*) bred in France. It only has stripey flowers on one side of the plant: the other side has plain, pink flowers out at the same time and it has always flowered like this in the nine years I have grown it. Its sweet scent is one of the best and that is another reason for its popularity.



Also today, two which are much less well-known came into flower. First, *C. sasanqua* 'Daishuhai (*Sasanqua*)' (syn. *C. 'Taishushai'* in Japan) (*left*) which was bred in Japan before 1972, has flowered with a true red and pink edge to its white centre and a proper semi-double flower. Second, *C. sasanqua* 'F.L.M. Marta Piffaretti' (*right*) was bred by Floricoltura Lago Maggiore of Italy sadly no longer existing as a nursery, but in the 1980s they were



breeding *Sasanquas*. The flower form is variable and last year it was more semi-double, but this flower seems more typical and it has some scent as it is very mild at the moment.



I lent a small plant of *C. sasanqua* 'Agnes O. Solomon' (*left*) for the ICS stand at Chelsea and so it was first out on September 24th! It is having a second flower on the small plant now – over 6 weeks later which just shows how long a period even a small *Sasanqua* can be in flower over a season when many plants are shutting up shop. The photo is of my larger specimen taken mid-November and it is a good performer.



My favourite *Sasanqua* for scent is the Portuguese-bred *C. 'Baronesa de Soutelinho'* (*right*) which is unfailingly sweet and also a good garden performer.

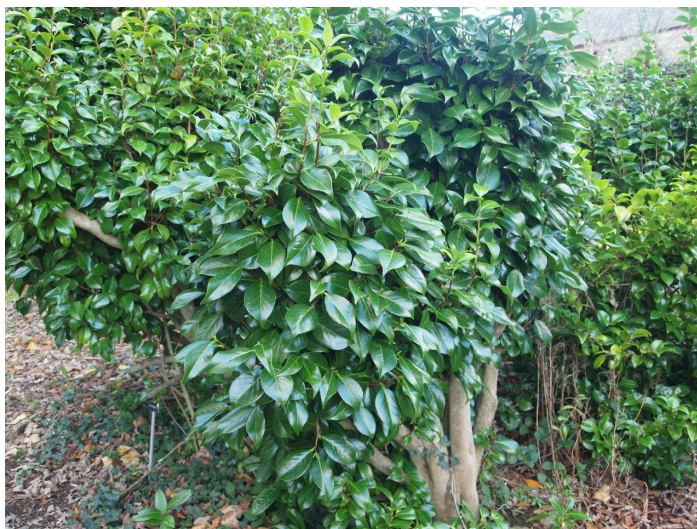
Caroline Bell

Hard Pruning Camellias

Like Ashley at Greenway, we have been hard pruning some of our camellias at Marwood Hill Gardens. An area that is near the nursery but out of the gardens was planted up 40 years ago with camellias which were transplanted from a greenhouse. They include many unusual cultivars which Dr. Smart had got as cuttings from Australia and America from camellia friends when he visited those countries. They have grown well; too well, as now some are 20 feet high and unfortunately when they flower many are never seen (*right*). In the past two years we have been hard pruning them. The only time when we can do the pruning is in the winter as the proper time, after they have flowered in late April, is a very busy time at the gardens. The result is we lose all the flowers to the pruning.



It is amazing how they respond and by the end of the year new growth is everywhere (*below*). Latent buds on the trunk and branches sprout very quickly. By year 3 they start producing flowers again. Of course you can be modest in the pruning and do it over a 2-year period with some branches being pruned each year and still getting flowers on the un-pruned branches.



I was reading an article by Philip McMillan Browse in an old edition (March 2011) of *The Plantsman*. It was entitled 'Plant ageing and its effect'. Most people will know that cuttings root more readily if they are taken from young juvenile stock plants and in his article he was showing how a plant progresses through three phases during its life cycle, juvenility, maturity and senility. Wholesale nurseries plant young stock plants which they cut back hard and vigorous growth is produced which is ideal for taking cuttings. These stock plants are usually replaced after 5 to 10 years and new young plants put in their place.

What he did say that surprised me was that '*The physiological condition of the material is not represented by the immediate age of the individual parent stock, but is a function of the chronological age of the original selection. This is the case however many generations it is removed from the current material. For example, a 10-year-old stock plant of Ribes sanguineum 'Pulborough Scarlet' should be regarded as 80 years old because the cultivar originated in the 1930s.*' He continues with '*When this phenomenon was first noted in the 1960s R. sanguineum 'Pulborough Scarlet' was regarded as 'easy' to root and R. sanguineum 'King Edward VII' (c1890s) less so. Nowadays the former is regarded as relatively 'difficult' and the latter as 'more difficult'. More recent cultivars such as R. 'White Icicle' (1970s) however, are seen as easy.*'

He provides another example of '*the original cultivars of the Ghent azaleas (Rhododendron) which are now 150-200 years old. They have, over the years been progressively difficult to regenerate from stem cuttings. Subsequent deciduous azalea hybrid groups such as Mollis (1870-80) Knap Hill (mid-20th Century) and Ilam (1960-70) are progressively easier to root.*' He later advises that '*The propagator therefore needs to determine whether any regenerative capacity can be recovered in the mature phase by manipulation of the parent plant. This can be done by heavy pruning which causes the production of stems that do not flower, and it is these stems that recover a considerable degree of regenerative capacity.*' He further explains that when hard pruned the new shoots produce a basal swelling which if removed from the parent plant and used as the base of the cutting it will root much more easily and produce a more vigorous plant.

I have been taking cuttings with this basal swelling from the new growth on our hard pruned camellias and it certainly works. I'm not advocating everyone to go out and hard prune their camellias, but if you have an old wayward tree it can be controlled.

Malcolm Pharoah

Random thoughts on . . . autumn colour

Oh what a wonderful autumn it has been this year, for me at least. For once, we've had the requisite cold (just cold enough) snap coupled with the dying day length and then been blessed with an uncharacteristic lack of windy weather and freaky mildness for weeks. Banking on a colourful autumn up here on west Dartmoor is a risky affair – the temperatures usually never low enough to trigger especially good colour and non-stop rain and plentiful gales to whisk the leaves away before they've really got going. So we tend to experience a short, mellow show rather than the full-throttle colour-fest we have enjoyed here this autumn. The only thing lacking has been sunshine – goodness me it's been gloomy, and hopeless for photography. When the sun has come out though . . . bliss!

At its best the autumn display is as miraculous as the spring's and it's so good for the spirit as we head off into winter, don't you agree?

So what has impressed me most in this cavalcade of colour? What would I choose more of and what would I recommend to someone starting out? Which choices tick the spring and autumn boxes?

Well, with space no object, the obvious must-haves would include three acers: *Acer griseum* for its ravishing bark, its graceful form and its delicious blend of peach and persimmon autumn hues; *A. 'Sango-kaku'* (I much prefer its old name *A. 'Senkaki'*) for its elegant shape, striking crimson stems which light up the entire winter, and its glorious all-over golden autumn foliage; and *A. 'Osakazuki'* for the sheer reliability of its performance – its screaming red display is quite a landscape feature here, visible right across the fields. All old favourites of course but never bettered in my opinion. And if I had to choose just one? Well, for a garden setting it would have to be *A. griseum* but in the landscape, *A. 'Senkaki'*, it's such a valuable year-round contributor to the scene.

The various stewartias kicked off the display and especially good among them this year was *Stewartia monadelpha*, its glowing burgundy leaves set off perfectly by three glaucous blue cypresses. All had flowered well this year and seed to be gathered too, I hope! With their gorgeous bark and gentle presence, all are welcome and more would be desirable.

The liquidambar never fail here and my young collection is becoming more impressive as the trees mature in my wet meadows. *Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Worplesdon' is always first and watching the 'fire' within it rage from bottom to top each year is one of those unforgettable experiences . . . provided the gales don't stop the show. This year, though, I think it's been *L. 'Lane Roberts'* which has topped the display and even now, weeks on from commencement, the colours are fantastic – currently scarlet at the bottom deepening to almost black plum-purple at the top without a leaf dropped, just fabulous. Each form seems to display individual characteristics in this regard and one – '*L. Cherokee*' – is, as usual, still completely green, quietly waiting its turn to amaze . . . provided the gales don't stop the show! By the looks of it *L. 'Thea'* is going to be a stunner in the years to come, I'm watching that develop with great interest.

Among our three genera, deciduous azaleas can add greatly to the autumn scene. This year I've been especially impressed with *Rhododendron* 'Sunte Nectarine' – grab one if you see it. In flower it is sensational, the blooms a mix of the deepest tangerine and vivid scarlet with flashes of very strong yellow. It needs careful placing of course but it's a stunner. In autumn it's in a different league again, the leaves become a clear and consistent beetroot purple and, untroubled by wind this year, every leaf joined in the display.

I'm also enjoying the heavily indumented rhododendrons like *R. bureavii* and *R. longesquamatum* looking wonderful against a carpet of equally tawny leaves.

The magnolias are just getting going, great pillars of yellow, green and brown right now, so impressive, and I can't wait to spot their ghostly leaf skeletons around Christmas time as I walk in the woodland. If I had to choose just one it would be one of the *Magnolia x loebneri* varieties, maybe *M. 'Merrill'* but probably *M. 'Leonard Messel'* which is a star performer here in both spring and autumn, definitely amenable to pruning and biddable into whatever shape you choose.

Camellias have their own autumn moment and need no additional extolling here – no garden should be without autumn-flowering varieties, lots and lots if possible, but I'll leave others to choose the best!



I love all enkianthus and grow as many as I can get hold of. Never bullies, they fill a space gently and don't impose, their tier-like growth habit so very pretty. In flower they are equally understated, both refined and delicate, but generous and always eye-catching. In summer the freshness of the foliage seems to hold for weeks, another bonus. In autumn, this genus has another fling and without exception my collection has coloured beautifully this year. Airy clouds in all shades, the most colourful of which is a (very) dwarf form of *Enkianthus campanulatus* (left) entrusted to my care by Barry Starling, a few years back. It has excelled this year – an unbelievable kaleidoscope of colour. If you aren't growing an enkianthus, put it on your list!

What has taken me by surprise in the last few days are the styraxes, small trees I would have previously grouped with the stewartias for their gentility and welcome early summer floral display alone. Maybe it's just because my collection is maturing

and making more of an impact but this is the first autumn I have been blessed with a fantastic autumn show of colour, an amazing grapefruit-yellow which signals right across the landscape. *Styrax japonicus* and its forms are great additions to a collection and now I have another reason to keep on adding.

Enough of my ramblings I think – I haven't even begun on the *Nyssa*, *Prunus* or *Cercidiphyllum* but you get the message, I hope. Buy for both spring and autumn displays from the same plant if you can and double the reward! For now, I'm watching for autumn colour to erupt from below as I have just spotted the scarlet waxcaps (*Hygrocybe coccinea*) (right) thrusting up through the short grass in my dry meadows. They appear in their hundreds each year - extraordinary!

Pam Hayward



Dates for your Diary

- ◆ 12/13 March 2022 – Rosemoor Spring Show including RHS Early Camellia Competition and SW Branch Magnolia, Ornamental Plant and Rhododendron competitions
- ◆ 23/24 April 2022 – Rosemoor National Rhododendron Show including RHS Main Rhododendron Competition and SW Branch Camellia, Floral Display and Magnolia competitions

Plant Swap Shop

Please do send in lists of plants that you wish to make available to other branch members to ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk and I will add them here at the first available opportunity. Many gardens have already benefited from the generosity of members' surplus plants. Thank you!

Your personal details will not be shared on the newsletter.

Submit a contribution

Feeling inspired to contribute? Or have something that you're keen to share with the group?

Please send any contributions, no matter how short or long, including photographs to ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk.

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