

Talk by Rosy Hardy of Hardy's Cottage Garden Perennials

This was the best attended talk I've ever been to! It was standing room only when the talk began with 85 members and guests attending. Rosy is a popular speaker, well known to garden enthusiasts, who appeals to experts and novices alike. She chose a small number of varieties that are in flower at the nursery and covered a range of well known and not-so-well known plants that need differing conditions and habitats.

She began with **Lamprocapnos**: spectabilis 'Valentine' with bright red 'bleeding hearts' and spectabilis 'Alba', with similar but white flowers. In the past this plant, originally from China, was incorrectly identified as belonging to the Dicentra genus, most of whose members come from North America. Lamprocapnos has fleshy roots and is best divided in early spring. Both varieties like moisture retentive soil and grow in shade or semi-shade although the red and pink varieties will tolerate more sunshine. 'Alba' will grow up to 18"-24" but 'Valentine' is not so tall. Give the tall main flowers a 'haircut' when they have finished and more flowers will grow. Rosy also had an example of **Dicentra** formosa, a quite different plant which produces rhizomes, tolerates dryer soil and may be divided in autumn or spring. Unfortunately both genera are called by the popular name 'Bleeding Hearts'. Some growers and even the RHS get the two confused.

Epimediums. This is a large genus, mainly from China. Hardy's stock the older more-established varieties as some of the newer more spectacular ones often need special growing conditions such as acid soil. There are deciduous and evergreen varieties. The Epimedium davidii she showed us is an evergreen perennial, to 30cm in height and 45cm spread, with bronze-tinted spotted, toothed foliage in spring turning glossy green when mature. It is clump forming and may be divided in autumn. The leaves of the deciduous types, such as grandiflorum 'Lilafee' with wide purple flowers, go red in autumn, then die down they like dry shade. The dead leaves are best removed in say February before the new shoots come.

Anemone flaccida is similar to our native Anemone nemorosa, or wood anemone, and comes from North America. It has delicate white flowers and twig like tubers, from which the plant may be propagated. It is best to soak and then plant the tubers in a container in a cold frame and only plant them out when there is a good set of leaves in the spring. Needless to say they like shade and moist soil. The plants die down after flowering and Rosy's advice is to put the label underneath the plant when planting out so that if you accidentally dig them up, you'll see the label. (If my experience with nemorosa is anything to go by, after a few years those tubers will be pretty difficult to lose!)

Corydalis flexuosa 'Elata' is a clump-forming flowering plant that enjoys moist shade. It has electric-blue flowers at this time of year and, like the anemone above, it all dies back in summer. Rosy's tip is to put it with Hosta, whose leaves will flourish as the Corydalis dies back.

The delicate yellow flowers of **Uvularia** grandiflora emerge directly from the ground on stems with bright green leaves. They may be up to 18" high and spread.

Primula 'Guinevere' is not a true polyanthus as the flowering begins with single-stemmed pale pink flowers with purple stems and leaves. As the foliage grows up it becomes green and longer multi-headed flowers are produced.

Gentiana verna – Rosy showed us a deep blue variety. They are very small and slow growing and prefer a sunny, free draining spot and may be planted in crevices. If you want to grow them from seed you need to imagine Alpine conditions and refrigerate, germinate, refrigerate again. A six inch

round takes 4 to 5 years!

Veronica kemulariae 'Mountain Breeze' is a beautiful low-growing recent variety. Flower spikes come from a low rosette of foliage and last for about 6 weeks. An easy to divide alpine or small herbaceous plant, it will take 2, or sometimes 3, 'haircuts' although the display diminishes each time.

Rosy showed us two varieties of **Geums**. The first 'Bell Bank', has coppery pink flowers that emerge from nodding bronze buds. As Geums come from water avens (*Geum rivale*), it is happy to sit in water. It needs moisture but is happy with less providing it is in shade. The other was 'Scarlet Tempest', a tough hardy plant with large double scarlet flowers which start flowering low but grow tall on sturdy stems. For repeat flowering, cut back the whole stem & new stems will emerge. Scarlet Tempest likes sun and will tolerate clay. Rosy says, "It just wants to flower!". Divide the plant *in between flowering*. These Geums don't set seed but do produce nectar and pollen so still attract insects.

Rosy has a book out - 'ROSY HARDY – 25 Years of Chelsea' – only £5.00, more details on the website along with details of other events at Hardy's Cottage Garden Plants.

<https://www.hardysplants.co.uk/shows-events>

