

Fifty shades of green

Sylvia Marden spills the beans on husband Tony's shady secrets

We live in a lovely valley not far from the town of Painswick in the Cotswolds. Tony has run his small nursery in the garden of their house for about 10 years now, selling mainly from plant fairs.

Tony has a passion for plants suitable for shade. Two of the more unusual plant families he grows are Arisaema and Podophyllum. Arisaemas are his favourites and he has many varieties and he grows them in a separate tunnel house continually expanding the collection.

He propagates by division and seeds which is a 3 to 4 year process from seed to flower.

The flowers are well worth waiting for as they are extremely unusual and look magnificent in the shady areas of a garden, if you are fortunate enough to have a free draining soil.

In the wild, they mostly live in mountainous areas for example the Himalayas, Japan and Taiwan. Therefore they are hardy plants and suitable for the shade garden.

Podophyllums are another unusual herbaceous perennial plant for shade. They are not difficult plants to grow, but are very slow to propagate, as seed is rarely produced and difficult to germinate.

The most well known are Podophyllum "Spotty Dotty" and p. Kaleidoscope with spectacular large marked leaves. These are produced by tissue culture and are subject to Plant Breeders Rights as they are sterile hybrids.

Tony has collected plants of P. Versipelle and P. Pleianthum from different sources to try to obtain a number of different clones. This year he has hand pollinated the flowers and has been rewarded with a good seed set, so can now experiment with germination.

Podophyllum Hexandrum roots are used as a resin for an anti cancer drug and they are being removed from the wild in China in large quantities. Nurseries have been set up in India to try to produce commercial quantities.

For a woodland area the American Podophyllum Peltatum with its creamy white flowers and creeping rootstock can look magnificent Podophyllum Delavayi has stunning mottled green/brown leaves and red flowers.

All Podophyllums need shade and moisture retentive humus rich soil. They will in time reward you with a magnificent display.



Part of the Arisaema tunnel



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