

Perennial Notes

July 31, 1994

These are the times of the summer doldrums of gardening. By now we've all but given up the battles against slugs and mildew, and muster our remaining forces to keep the armies of weeds at bay. Have you ever noticed during these dog days that the weeds are at their peak, appearing as if by magic overnight, yet are disdained by slugs? They much prefer the three spindly leaves of that *Hosta kikutii* "Kifukurin" you been agonizing over for the last three summers. In desperation, I've started to browse the fall bulb catalogues, but not yet with much enthusiasm.. It must be time for the "occasional notes" of the Perennial Society.

Meetings

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday at 6:30 PM, August 17, at the garden of Marlyn Sachtjen, "Wind and View", 5181 West River Road in Waunakee. To get there, head east on County M around the North Side of Lake Mendota to where it ends on Northport Drive (Hwy 113). Turn left on Hwy 113 and go to the first right--River Road. (To get there from the East side of Madison just drive out Northport Drive) Proceed east on River Road for less than 1/4 of a mile. House and garden will be on your right--you can't miss them. Caution!! Do not drive off the road gawking!! The prairie flowers should be smashing!! Marlyn will lead us on a tour of her garden.

The PS September meeting will be held jointly with the Hosta Society on Thursday, September 8 at 7 PM at Olbrich Gardens in the downstairs meeting room. The speaker will be Mark Zillis of Wheaton, IL. Well known to the hosta crowd, Mark is an excellent speaker and Hostas are his business. He runs a large commercial tissue culture operation. He promises a top notch Hosta slide show.

The Wisconsin Woody Plants Society will hold its next meeting on Saturday, September 24th, from 10 AM to 3 PM and will include lunch (\$8). The meeting will be held at the Wisconsin River home and private arboretum of Larry Collins between Sauk City and Mazomanie. A tour of a stand of American chestnut trees and the state champion *Magnolia acuminata* near Spring Green is also planned for the afternoon's activities. If you are interested in attending please call Larry Collins at (608) 795-4433 for further details.

A retirement dinner honoring Ed Hasselkus will be held at 4 PM on August 13 at the McKay Center. The cost is \$25. For more information call Cathy Brunner (256-7144) or Ken Wood (255-2473).

Past Activities

Our Memorial Day weekend plant sale was quite successful. Many thanks to members as well as CR Stephenson and The Flower Factory who donated plants. A gold medal goes to Tom Cottington who not only hosted the sale but also potted up about 140 plants from his garden. We made about \$330 which helped to replete our treasury. It was a good beginning for our first annual members sale. Hopefully, next year more members will

participate in both contributions and purchases. There were some special plants at the sale including the Door County Lake Iris (*Iris lacustris*) and *Hosta* Pee Dee Gold Flash, which are rarely commercially available. Hopefully, next year there will be more such plants.

Thanks to the Meichers of McFarland who opened their garden to us for the June garden tour. The garden was truly a gem. I will always remember the expression on member's faces as they rounded the corner of the house and passed through the garden gate. It was a real mouth opening, show stopper!!

Members in the News

"On Stage" is of course the name of a hosta with spectacular variegation. But one of our members was also "On Stage" this spring. If you attended the Madison Opera's spring production of "Aida", you couldn't help but notice John Tallman in the grand procession of the first act, and as the Nile boatman in Act II. The palm trees in the act with the boatman were pretty sorry looking, but John redeemed himself with the gorgeous bouquet of roses he presented the lead soprano during the curtain calls.

"Wilson Green" is a new downtown Madison green space across from the Cardinal Bar. It is the pet project of none other than our own Gary Tipler whose photo appeared in this new urban park in the July 15 issue of the Isthmus. As an aside, the Hosta Society will tour his private garden on East Main Street the evening of August 18th.

I'm sure that most of you saw Jean Rideout in the June production of WHA-TV's Wisconsin Gardener's series. Jean talked about her lovely shade garden and but what else, hostas!

Our members do get around. Tom Cottingham, Peggy Lubby and Walter & Jean Rideout were in England in June on the UW Arboretum's garden tour. And as I write this, Ed Hasselkus is touring gardens in southern England with his wife Betty in celebration of his upcoming retirement. This gives me a great idea about a program for next winter. Stay tuned. Joan Sevrera was in Montreal recently and reports that the Montreal Botanical Garden is in the not to be missed category. As for me, I visited some friends in the Olympic Peninsula's rain forest in May. The vegetation was fascinating. I was particularly taken with the understory carpet of *Oxalis oregonia* which was everywhere as well as *Maianthemum dilatatum* (formerly *M. Kamchatka*) which is much more striking than the native form of lily of the valley found along the shores of Lake Michigan. Other unusual plants included *Disporum smithii* (the form with the orange berries), deer fern (*Blechnum spicant*), and some giant forms of equisetum. Needless to say the urge was irresistible, and I now have a small corner of my garden devoted to the flora of the Olympic rain forest. Any bets on how they do?

Ode to Roterio

It is very sad to report that the Madison area lost one of its finest gardens and gardeners in late May. Begun in 1972 on 1.5 acres of land in Verona, Roterio Gardens, the work of Terry and Roger Roby, was truly a master piece. It had everything--a Mediterranean garden centered around a swimming pool, a white garden, a yellow garden, a woodland garden, streams, pools, and waterfalls. Certainly its hallmark was the collection and displays of hostas in a woodland setting. These included enormous single plantings of *Hosta* Royal Standard, *Ventricosa*, *Kabitans*, and *Hyacinthiana*. There were giant specimens of *Hosta* August Moon, *H. Montana* *Aureo marginata*, *Sum & Substance*, and

Sun Power. Indeed, it was a garden of many moods and vistas. I visited it for the first time during the Olbrich Garden Tour of 1991, and enjoyed it on several occasions thereafter. In the final few weeks, Terry sold many plants from the garden as well as large quantities of gardening supplies and equipment. I personally now have my own piece of Roter and hope that many of you were able to do the same. I will never forget standing in the driveway with Terry on a sunny evening just before the closing on the property, looking out at the enormous clumps of *Hosta fortunei* alba marginata appearing as islands in pools of blue (*Phlox divaricata*) and white (sweet woodruff), a simple arrangement with common plants, but oh so lovely, even in the garden's final days. Terry and Roter Gardens will be missed from the Madison garden scene. It is said that the garden dies with the gardener, but I am happy to report in this case that Terry has simply relocated to a new home in Palm Springs, where of course, she intends to begin a new but very different garden (no slugs and certainly no mildew).

Plants That Merit Attention The Genus *Tricyrtis*

Toad stools, toad flax, and toad lilies have always sounded pretty unappealing to me, but though I had heard of toad lilies, my personal experience with them had always been nonexistent. Then, about five years ago at the Felly's 50% off perennial sale, perennially held in mid August, I came across a miserable pot of foliage sporting a single one inch, almost orchid like flower. It was white with many spots of lilac. Of course, such an interesting flower appearing in mid August under such adverse conditions, begged to be purchased. Particularly intriguing was the label, "*Tricyrtis hosta*". Now of one thing I was certain at the time, it was no *hosta*, and eventually I identified the plant as *Tricyrtis hirta* (after a \$2 investment). This plant is now found for sale fairly commonly in the Madison area. However, this chance encounter led me to seek more information and to acquire many more examples (at last count 20) of this genus, the most appealing aspects of which is that all members bloom in the late summer to early fall, and in woodland, shady conditions. It is also fair to say, that *Tricyrtis hirta* itself is now perhaps among my least favorite member of this genus.

All of the species originate from the Far East, ranging from Nepal eastwards through China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippine Islands, with the greatest diversity being from Japan. They like moist woodland conditions for the most part and humusy soil. They may scorch in too much sun and most species range up to at least 25" in height. Presumably the common name "toad lily" refers to the spotted flowers and leaves (in early spring) but in at least one species in the Philippines (eaten by the natives), the juice from flowers or leaves is rubbed on the hands prior to hunting frogs (it makes them less slippery?). The nomenclature is very confusing and is becoming even more so with new hybrids appearing on the market regularly. In fact several unique ones in my collection were simply labeled "*Tricyrtis* x ?" at the time of acquisition.

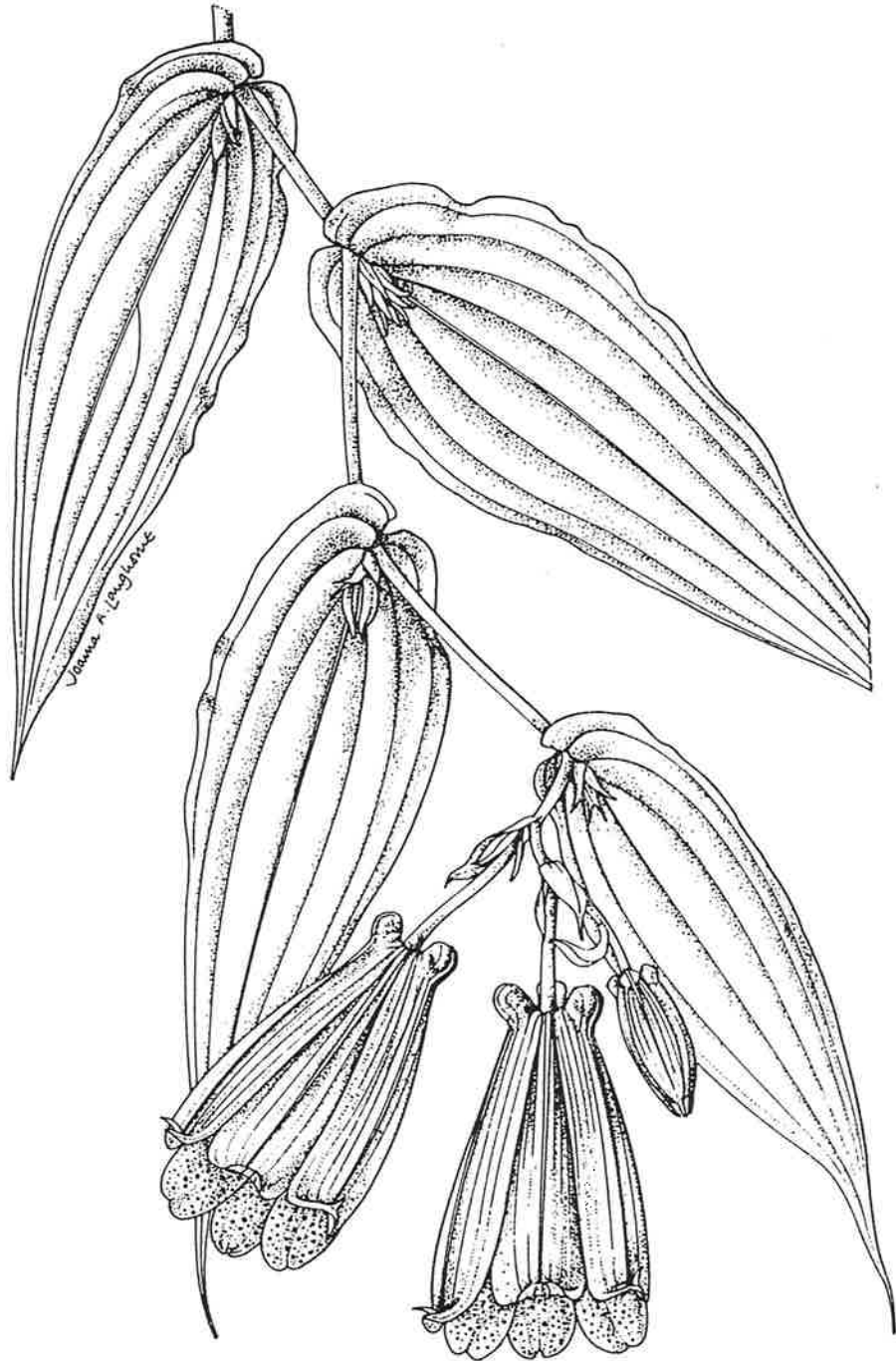
Without a doubt my favorite plants in this genus are in the group referred to as *Tricyrtis macrantha* (subgenus *Brachycyrtis*), as they are the most interesting in habitus and have the largest and most striking flowers. The most spectacular plant in this group is *T. macranthopsis*, a color photo of which was featured on the back cover of the Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery's catalogue a few years ago. By the way, to my knowledge, this is the only commercial source. It has an arching habitus which is accentuated in the fall by the two inch yellow bells, the insides of which are spotted with dark chocolate brown. These blossoms are produced at every leaf axil. As the plant approaches full bloom, the leaves turn a complimentary color of gold streaked with green. In nature the plant occurs in the walls of waterfalls of the mountainous Kii Peninsula on the island of Honshu (Japan). It is

said to be rare and in its native site it grows up to five feet in length with 60 or more flowers on each non branching stem! I purchased this plant in the fall of 1990 and as with most Siskiyou selections, it arrived on the puny side (about 4 leaves) especially considering its \$15 price. It has thrived, however, and this year sports six primary, up to 30" stems (slightly branched for me) each of which will contain up to 24 flowers this fall. Its lance shaped, glossy, green leaves are very attractive all season. I have one more member of this group, purchased as *T. tamagawa* four or five years ago. I know of no current commercial source. In general, it resembles *T. macranthopsis* but as a plant is somewhat smaller and the flowers are less showy. Both of these plants burn in direct sun light and have one other major drawback--they must have just the right garden location. In my garden this is at the top of a shady stone terrace wall which allows the arching stems to display their beautiful flowers. If planted on a level site, the plant flattens to the ground from the weight of the flowers.. In this situation the flowers tend to become muddled and the plant looks dreadful.

Another striking group of this genus originates from Taiwan. The most commonly available plant in this group is sold as both *T. formosana* and *T. stolonifera*.. It grows up to three feet high and its somewhat arching stems are capped with many flowers in branched terminal inflorescences opening over a period of 4 to 6 weeks in the late summer. Each flower has a spread of 1-1.5 inches and when fully open is funnel shaped. The background color is white or pinkish and the whole interior is spotted heavily with a rich purplish-red. There is usually a small area of yellow towards the base of each segment. I brought this plant back from Coastal Gardens Nursery (Myrtle Beach, SC..) a couple of years ago and it has been hardy here in Madison with a mulch of marsh hay during the winter. It has formed a striking clump in this short period of time. On page 12 of Ken Druse's The Natural Shade Garden, there is a magnificent color photograph of this plant in full bloom, even though it is misidentified as *T. hirta*. A spectacular variant of this plant is *T. formosana* var. *amethystina* Masamune. The outer segments of the flowers are a gorgeous violet (only equaled by the violet color of the fall blooming *Crocus speciosus* in my experience), with a white, orange spotted throat. Alas, this has not proven as hardy for me in Madison, and I have lost it a couple of times. However, I am sticking to Alan Lacy's dictum: "Kill a plant at least three times before you give up on it." The earliest blooming of any species, it has a two month bloom time in my garden beginning in late July. It is available at the Flower Factory locally. (You have to ask for it.)

Finally, there is the *T. hirta* group of which my original plant is the most commonly available of any tricyrtis. This species again has a slightly arching habitus and tends to flop somewhat if it does not fall over a wall or grow up between companion plants for support. In fact, it is best used in a closely packed arrangement of plants which will accentuate its many flowers of white spotted with lilac. One of my favorite arrangements is to plant it with *Hosta plantaginea* (white flowers) and *Begonia grandis* (pink flowers), the bloom periods of which overlap. There are a number of pure white cultivars including *T. hirta* White Towers and *T. hirta* alba which are very striking when planted with deep green colored foliage plants. My favorite of this group are those with variegated leaves--*T. hirta* variegata (yellowish leaf margins) and *T. hirta* alba marginata (white leaf margins). These variegated selections add considerable interest to the shady garden throughout the growing season.

The drawings appearing on the next page are by Joanna Langhorne and are plagiarized from "A Review of the Genus Tricyrtis" by Brian Matthew appearing in vol. 6 of The Plantsman (March 4, 1985) Pictured along with *T. hirta* is *T. ishiiiana* (in the *T. macrantha* group) which does not differ in the drawing from the *T. macranthopsis* in my garden. It is interesting to note that in 1985 Mr. Matthews states that *T. macranthopsis* is the most satisfactory garden plant of this genus.



Tricyrtis ischana
(looks like *T. macranthopsis*)



Tricyrtis hirta