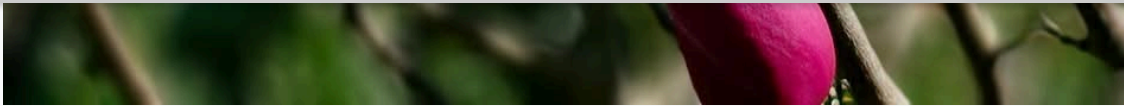


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Newsletter August 2025





Dear Member

Welcome to the RCMG newsletter. Write to us [here](#) with your news for September. We start this month by celebrating the Magnolia season for southern hemisphere members.

Plant of the month - Magnolia 'Aurora'

Magnolia 'Aurora' came into flower in the garden of Mark Boyd on the north island of New Zealand near Auckland. Mark has many fine magnolia in his garden.

Thank you Mark for this beautiful photograph of M. 'Aurora'.

Aurora flowers quickly on young trees, with beautiful deep pink cup and saucer flowers appearing early, before the leaves. It is thirty years since it first flowered for Oswald Blomhardt, who was a skilled plant breeder from New Zealand, and raised one of its parents Magnolia 'Star Wars' in the 1970's (awarded the RHS Award of Garden Merit in 2002)

It is a great cultivar for growers in a hurry to establish a medium to large flowering tree. Catherine Ballard's book 'Oswald Blumhardt - The New Zealand Plant Pioneer' says of it 'having obtained pollen from Michael Hudson, he made a cross of M. 'Star Wars' x M. *sargentiana* var *robusta*. Flowers arrived in 1993 and in 1995 he named it 'Aurora'. Three plants were propagated by Os'

It is appreciated by members that somehow M. Aurora made its way across the seas. If you wish to share your own experience of it or know of its journey please write to us [here](#)



New National Plant Collections for Horticulture - *Camellia sasanqua* and *Camellia sinensis* at Tregothnan.

In the northern hemisphere we look forward to seeing *Camellia sasanqua* in our gardens soon. Here is *C. Tago-no-tsuki* at Nymans Garden, Sussex in flower in October last year.

Tregothnan, Cornwall, is home to one of the most significant *Camellia* collections in Europe and last month it was awarded National Plant Collection status for their horticultural collections *C. sasanqua* and *C. sinensis*.

The award of a horticultural collection signifies a broad horticultural grouping and a blend of both wild and cultivated forms. We congratulate them on this milestone in the garden's history and their cultivation of camellias. Each April and over a weekend, Tregothnan has charity open days.



This is the first newsletter since the passing of our member John Hillier and our chairman has written to his family on all our behalf with our sincere condolences.

John was someone that many of our members knew personally and they will have special memories of his time supporting and engaging with the Group.

It is without doubt the case that the Group is where it is today because of the contributions made by the Hillier family.

John's father, Sir Harold Hillier joined our Yearbook committee for our 3rd yearbook in 1948. There were two editors and nine members of the yearbook committee that year. John would have been 17 years old.

Both of them contributed significantly in all aspects of the work of the Group and the work of the wider RHS with plant committee chairing, judging and awards of merit work. John was a member of the Group for many decades of his life.

He first became a member of the RHS Rhododendron and Camellia Committee in 1963, became chairman of the RCMG from 2001 to 2006 and then chaired the New Forest Branch from 2009 to 2016.

An astounding fifty three years of committee and leadership work.

He loved our genera and we appreciate his work for it and the legacy he has left for generations to come. He was a role model for what the Group is all about.

We will feature an appreciation of John's work in our Yearbook. Many thanks to Kevin Hobbs for this photo of John with Magnolias. In the meantime members may wish to read the Hillier tribute to him [here](#).



Two new gardens added to our Recommended Garden List from Germany

Our [Recommended Garden List](#) already includes the Rhododendron Park Bremen.

Two more have been added and both of these gardens are located close to each other in the area of Ammerland, Lower Saxony, Germany, near to Westerstede which holds the largest Rhododendron exhibition in Europe every four years (next one is 2027).

Above is **Rhododendronpark Hobbie** which has a tree population of over 300 years old, so, even without the rhododendrons it is calm and lush. One of the largest and most beautiful collections of rhododendrons in the world. A private garden owned by the Hobbie family with nearly 3k of walking paths. Dietrich Hobbie started hybridising in 1938. This compact *Rh 'Bohlkens Snowfire'* (bred by Heinz Bohlken) was in the garden on a wonderful visit by the Group in 2023. A link to the garden is [here](#)



Park der Garten has over ninety themed gardens and plant collections - and an extensive collection of trees. The experience for rhododendron lovers is the huge collection of deciduous azaleas and hardy hybrids all alphabetically planted in rows and rows of well kept avenues with flowers at eye level. Many old Knaphill and European cultivars and hybrids - all looking healthy.

Azalea Prinses Juliana shown below - one of our plants of the day. A visit in May allows you to see the outstanding collection of Rhododendrons, Acers, Cornus, Conifers and other ornamental specimens.

It was the location of the State Garden Show in 2002 and is a special garden cultural experience. The link to the Park der Garten is [here](#)



New RCMG Seed Shop in partnership with Plant Heritage

Members may know that sadly we cannot continue with our own seed list as no volunteer was forthcoming.

However we are pleased to announce that we have been able to secure a way for members to donate and exchange seed as we launch a new scheme in partnership with Plant Heritage.

The Plant Heritage Seed Shop has been operating now for 18 years, and is run by Plant Heritage volunteers. It has been a way to encourage more people to grow plants from rare and unusual as well as popular varieties and is a contribution to plant conservation.

We are pleased to be working in partnership to build on this success.

How do I donate seed ?

where it was collected (eg in your garden). Include your name and address when you send it and post your seed to **Plant Heritage, First Floor Offices, Stone Pine, Wisley Lane, Wisley, Woking GU23 6QD, Surrey. Please only send seed from the UK. Seed collected in 2025 will be available until Spring 2027.**

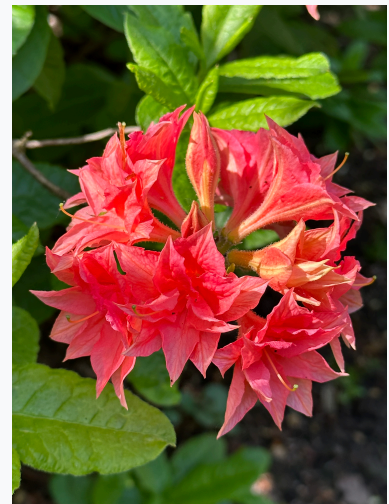
Plant Heritage Seed Shop volunteers will care for the seeds sent in and repack them early in 2026 ready for sale from that Spring. The Seed Shop cannot accept seed collected from the wild and state that the seed may have been open pollinated and so it may not be true to type. For more information on legislation and the Nagoya Protocol see [the legislation page](#)

How can I access seed from the Seed Shop?

Next year we will notify members of how they can access seeds at in person events in return for a donation to Plant Heritage. This will be at RHS Shows and we will consider extending this to branch/ regional seed events if there is enough seed, a demand and support from RCMG volunteers.

Last February RHS Wisley held a successful seed exchange event (normal garden entry requirements applied) and we will notify members of this event when it is broadcast for 2026.

Posting of seeds to members is no longer possible and the seed shop is aimed at UK members to comply with legislation.



Photographs of *Camellia* 'Inspiration', *Magnolia sargentiana* var *robusta* and *Rhododendron Norma*

The Plant Committee Members supporting the three Genera of the Group

Our Plant Committee membership has been finalised and we are pleased to share the list of members who will be leading the plant work of our Group. They can also be found [here](#)

We thank them for their support and leadership across our three genera because they bring diverse knowledge, a range of experience and geographic location.

Storrington, Jim Gardiner VMH Ashington, Rowan Griffiths Hergest Croft, Jodie Hilton Sheffield Park, David Millais Crosswater Farm, Nick Lightfoot Ness Botanic Garden, Ned Lomax Bodnant Garden, Seamus O'Brien National Botanic Garden of Ireland Kilmacurragh, Kevin Pratt Stockport, Mike Roberts Ness Botanic Garden, Rod White Worplesdon, Charles Williams VMH Caerhays, Chloe Wragg Windsor Great Park.



Plant Committee News

We are delighted that a member of our Plant Committee, Lucy Bidgood, Senior Gardener at Bodnant Garden has agreed to be our Plant Committee Co-ordinator. Lucy moved into horticulture through the Historic and Botanic Garden Training Programme following a degree in plant science and spent time at Rowallane Garden

After time at RHS Wisley on the Diploma programme she is now Senior Gardener at National Trust Bodnant Garden in North Wales. Lucy gave us this photograph of the azaleas in the garden in April this year.

Lucy will be coordinating the work of the Plant Committee in a voluntary capacity, being a point of contact for them and our members, planning and organising how the work is done.

The priority is to develop a way forward on plant propagation, review the eight Group Collections and support members.

Many members of our plant committee are also members of the RHS Woody Plant Expert Group and the International Dendrology Society which will strengthen our links and partnerships.

Lucy is a member of our management committee and Plant Propagation Working Group which is led by Mark Bobin. The first meeting will be in September to develop a way forward including on micropropagation. Please write to Lucy with any questions you have about this work [here](#)



Special issue of Sibbaldia - Rhododendron in living collections, collaboration and conservation

Sibbaldia is the International Journal of Botanic Garden Horticulture and exists to give horticulturists and managers of Botanic Gardens a voice and bring the work they do to a worldwide audience. It is published through the Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh.

First published in 2003, Sibbaldia publishes peer-reviewed articles and short notes on the cultivation, conservation, research, botany (but not taxonomic botany), history, landscaping, legislation, management and curation of plants in botanic and other gardens.

It has been announced that in 2026 [The Rhododendron Research Network](#) will guest edit a [special issue](#). Some of our members are also members of the network including Connor Ryan, our International Branch Chair.

This is a call for submissions that highlight programmes and opportunities in living collections that feature, or would benefit from, collaboration between members of the community that curates, cultivates and carries out research on the genus Rhododendron.

The deadline for papers is 10th January 2026. Please contact [Lucy Bidgood](#) our plant coordinator if you would like to support this, we would like to contribute to this important work. The current publication of *Sibbaldia* can be found [here](#).



RCMG Bursary Award and the new Tea Glade planting at Kew Wakehurst

We have awarded a bursary to PhD student Aurora Prehn, a Kew scientist. Her collaborative PhD project addresses contemporary and historical geographies of tea (*Camellia sinensis*) production in the United Kingdom and Jersey, where gardens are being seeded with seeds and plants from across tea's diaspora and botanical origins. Members will see her work described in our Yearbook. Good luck to Aurora.

The fieldwork will also inform the development of a recently planted out tea garden (*Camellia sinensis*) at Kew Wakehurst.

The area is named the Tea Glade, given its location inside the Himalayan Glade, which is one of Wakehurst's designed landscapes in the Westwood Valley. This area offers a unique microclimate, being home to many Camellias and Rhododendrons amongst other Himalayan plants.

It has been terraced and planted with rows of tea plants to transport you around the world to 'tea country'.

The Tea Glade will advance horticulture and science research and conservation of the plant. More information about it can be found [here](#)



New Stamps of Camellia for Portugal

Stamps have always been a way for nations to depict their culture. New stamps In Portugal show Camellias from the Azores.

A botanical set of Camellia stamps was issued back in 1992 in New Zealand. The artist was Pat Altman from Dunedin.



Even earlier, the USA issued a botanical painting of *Magnolia grandiflora* as a stamp in 1988. The artist was John Dawson from Hilo, Hawaii



RCMG People's Awards

Members of management committee are currently deciding on nominations for our RHS awards.

These are The AJ Whaley Medal, The David Trehane Cup, The Loder Rhododendron Cup, The Rothschild Challenge Cup and The Jim Gardiner Magnolia Cup.

The closing date is end of September. Please connect with your branch chair to suggest those you would like to recognise.

For the main RHS People's Awards, the closing date is 31st August.

Branch Activity - please contact branch chairs to book

South West - Autumn Meeting and AGM 27th September. Speaker is John Lanyon former NT Gardens Advisor

North West - Talk at Ness Gardens The Rhododendron Species at Hergest Croft by Rowan Griffiths 4th October

South East - 8th October Branch visit to Architectural Plants

around a garden 27th /28th November

Our 2025 and 2026 Yearbook and Bulletins

We hope that you have enjoyed reading this newsletter. It is a team effort. We thank Mark Boyd, Mike White, Rosemary Legrand, Steve Peters, Lucy Bidgood, Sian Thomas, Mark Bobin, David Millais, Philip Eastell and Aurora Prehn.

Our editorial team for the Yearbook and Bulletin will send the summer bulletin out soon. The 2025 Yearbook is near completion and will be sent out in the next two months.

We are now commissioning articles for our 2026 Yearbook and we are asking for contributions. Even if you have been asked before, or have previously mentioned it, please contact us [here](#)



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