

A different corner...



This month our Gardening Writer GILL HEAVENS visits a special spot for cultivation and cake!



Evocative sculptures are dotted around the garden



The glowing fragrant flowers of *Rhododendron lutueum*



The village of Belstone, a few miles from Okehampton, sits on the northern edge of Dartmoor. In fact, from Robin and Edwina Hill's home at Andrew's Corner you can almost touch the moor.

The curiously named house was built in the mid 1930s by a Paignton butcher who wanted somewhere for his family to escape the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. It was originally called Chilluns, which is Devonian for Children's. Just after the Second World War the name was changed to Andrew's Corner which The Hills believe refers to a plot marked as Andrew's Field on old tithe maps. Descendants of original family have photos of the children playing tennis in an area still known as the Tennis Court Lawn.



Evocative sculptures are dotted around the garden

Robin's parents bought the property in 1967, relocating from Hertfordshire where his mother ran a small market garden. When they moved to Andrew's Corner the garden was largely uncultivated - it was, after all, primarily a place to play. All that was to about to change and they set about creating island beds and planting heathers and conifers. The conifers were an essential windbreak as the garden is at a gusty 1,000ft above sea level.

In 1979 Robin and Edwina "temporarily" moved back and they gradually took over responsibility for the garden from Robin's father. The garden is about $\frac{3}{4}$ acre in size but they have "borrowed" a further $\frac{1}{2}$ acre from next door. As this arrangement has been in place for the past 30 years the join between the two parts is seamless. The garden has been ingeniously designed,

with trees, shrubs and ancient moss-covered walls concealing the treasures that lie around each corner. Once established, plants grow tremendously well in this shallow, acid soil which has had lots

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of organic matter incorporated over the years. Adjacent to the house the elegant *Acer palmatum atropurpureum* and fragrant yellow *Rhododendron lutueum*, both planted in 1968, are thriving.

There are many showstoppers in this

garden. These include a floriferous handkerchief tree, *Davidia involucrata*, which Robin says many people miss as no-one ever looks up, and the golden *Metasequoia* "Goldrush" which brightens a shady corner. There is a statuesque *Rauli Beech*, *Nothofagus alpina*, which was planted to replace elms lost to Dutch Elm Disease, and a fine specimen of *Cornus* "Eddie's White Wonder".

The woodland areas are under planted with carpets of wood anemones and a glorious tree peony *Paeonia lutea* var. *ludlowii* shines out with saucer size golden blooms. Robin's particular favourites are the stunning *meconopsis*, the Himalayan poppies, which he pampers in raised beds. These beds are filled with a secret recipe of well-rotted manure, leaf mould and compost to create the allusive "moist but



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well drained” conditions they require.

There is no dispute, Robin is the gardener in the partnership. Edwina is allowed to pull out large and unmistakable weeds but contributes to the open days in other ways. She makes splendid cakes. In an act of selflessness I tested the curiously named lumberjack cake, it was delicious! My lunch included some tasty mizuma leaves (I was very well looked after) grown in Robin’s potager garden. They also have a large vegetable plot which must have one of the most dramatic aspects of any in the country.

Although he has had no formal training, Robin’s knowledge is wide and deep. In

these sometimes challenging conditions he manages to grow plants from every continent except Antarctica. Robin says that he “learns something new every day”, which to my mind is a good way to live, and what is learnt is shared.

Andrew’s Corner will be having special evening opening on Saturday, 30 May for the charity Hospiscare. The garden will be festooned with over 250 lanterns which will light your way. Once this magical tour is concluded there will be wine and cheese. Sounds like my kind of evening! ■

Andrews Corner will be open for the NGS on various dates throughout May, for more details go to ngs.org.uk For the lantern evening details

Meconopsis

This genus contains between 40 and 50 species and is in the family Papaveraceae.

They are often known as Himalayan Poppies although they are not all from the Himalayas. Although best known for blue flowers, they also can come in red, mauve, pale yellow and white.

Some of this genera are monocarpic meaning that once they flower they will die. This has caused a lot of unnecessary guilt

to those who aren’t aware of this fact. These species often produce many seed which, for optimum germination, are best sown fresh.

The only species endemic to the UK is the Welsh Poppy *Meconopsis cambrica* which can be invasive due to its efficient self propagation. This yellow to orange flower is, however, a very pretty nuisance.

The national flower of Bhutan is *Meconopsis grandis*, the iconic Blue Poppy.

Meconopsis paniculata



produces a mound of golden velvet leaves (I challenge you to resist stroking them!) from which a dramatic panicle of creamy yellow flowers emerges.

Pacific Coastal Plants

The conditions at Andrew’s Corner are very similar to the Pacific Coast of the America. Six plants native to this area are:

***Erythronium revolutum*:** The mahogany fawn lily is one of the dog’s tooth violets, so named because of the shape of their bulbs. It has delicate pink nodding pixie-hat flowers in spring and is happiest in moist soil in woodland conditions.

***Asarum caudatum*:** The common name of tailed snakeroot, referring to its long rhizomes. It is a curious plant which produces hairy cup shaped purple/green flowers with three long lobes. The leaves when crushed omit the smell of ginger, hence its other name of Western Wild Ginger.



***Metasequoia glyptostroboides*:** The Dawn Redwood is a big and beautiful deciduous conifer with a corky bark. It can reach 25m tall so be careful where you plant it!

***Camassia quamash*:** This relative of the asparagus has beautiful spires of flowers in blue, from sky to deep sea. An important food to Native Americans, the root can be roasted and eaten or ground down to make flour.

***Mahonia aquifolium*:** This spiky leaved shrub can reach 2m tall and 1m wide. It is also known as the Oregon Grape, referring to its edible but tart black berries, used to make wine or jellies. The golden winter flowers are fragrant and irresistible to pollinators.

***Ribes sanguineum*:** The flowering currant brightens the garden with racemes of red, pink or white flowers. Some people are put off by the scent, the bees however have no complaints.