

CRÛG FARM PLANTS

Carmel Duignan visits a remarkable nursery in North Wales.



ABOVE: Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones, owners of Crûg Farm Plants, with their dogs Lhalu and Jammu.



Situated in a beautiful part of North Wales, overlooking the Menai Straits, is a plant nursery called Crûg Farm Plants. Crûg – meaning “mound” – is probably the only

word in the Welsh language that is known to plantspeople worldwide. This is because Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones, proprietors of the said establishment, have been responsible for collecting and introducing to the world of horticulture some of the most remarkable and beautiful plants seen in recent times. Bleddyn was once, like his and Sue’s forbears, a farmer, and the cattle that populated his acres have now been replaced with plants and seedlings. He was always interested in growing things and Sue

kept a garden. They travelled extensively and back-packed throughout the world in their younger days. In the late 1980’s, they discovered that they could earn more money by renting the farm than by working it and so the plant nursery was born.

Crûg Farm Plants opened in 1991 and the Wynn-Jones’ discovered that they had a success on their hands. Word spread about an interesting new place in Wales and Bleddyn believes that publishing their first list of unusual plants in the *Plant Finder* was one of the keys to their becoming known in the plant world. At first they propagated and sold nursery-sourced plants. They then decided to use the knowledge they had gained from their back-packing days and, in 1991, went on their first plant-collecting expedition to Jordan. Since then they have travelled to many exotic places including Taiwan, India, Japan, Korea, The Philippines, Vietnam,

Malaysia, Columbia and Guatemala.

At the beginning of their enterprise they concentrated on shade loving plants, climbers and geraniums because they saw a gap in the market and filled it. They still retain their interest in these plants but now collect other plants like the exotically foliaged shrubs and trees best illustrated in the *Schefflera* genus and the salvias, fuchsias and plants of Columbia and Guatamala. Fuchsias were always an interest but Bleddyn is wary of the tendency of “the large companies to pick up on them so fast they’re not commercial for long”. He acknowledges that his introduction of the scheffleras, the tetrapanaxes, the fatsias and the pittosporums coincided with a fashion for exotically leaved plants although whether Crûg Farm Plants fed this fashion or introduced it is a matter for debate. Bleddyn is quite happy to accommodate the current fashion but not the “big companies.” “We



ABOVE: A glimpse of Bleddyn and Sue's garden.

don't want our introductions to be given daft names, sold in pink pots and promoted to death." He sees their work in collecting and distributing plants as a question of conserving these plants as much as making a living out of them. And of the hostility plant collectors such as themselves generate from some "official" horticultural institutions, he simply says that they have seed and plant collection licences; they obey the law; they work with botanical establishments in the countries in which they collect and they sell only propagated material – collected plant

material is never sold. As to the future – there are many more countries to visit and more plants to discover -in Burma, South and North America, Tasmania and the rest of the world. And, if their past experiences are anything to go by – being "done over" by bandidos in Guatemala; sitting with two others in a two-person tent on a mountainside in Vietnam while a wholesale monsoon raged outside and a river ran through the tent or a tetchy encounter with soldiers on what Bledynn describes as a "very lively" border between

Thailand and Burma – there are many adventures to come and an abundance of memorable plants to be found and introduced.

SOME SPECIAL PLANTS

Schefflera taiwaniana was undoubtedly the plant of the year in 2005. It featured in the award-winning garden that Diarmuid Gavin built at the Chelsea Flower Show and was released for sale to an eager list of plantspeople. The plant was discovered by Sue and Bleddyn in Taiwan in 1993. It is an extremely handsome, evergreen small tree with a symmetrical shape and matt green leaves that consist of seven to eleven leaflets. It was found at a high altitude and has proved to be remarkably hardy. It is a member of the currently very fashionable *Araliaceae* family of plants.

Arisaemas are also plants of the wow factor variety! Their brooding, hooded flowers and long spathes give a slightly sinister impression and their adherents are myriad. *Arisaema sikokianum* has long been one of the most desirable of a very large species – difficult to find and not easy to grow. Now Sue and Bleddyn have found a striking variant of the



ABOVE: *Schefflera taiwaniana*

OPPOSITE:	
1	1. <i>Arisaema tosaense</i>
2	2. <i>Arisaema sikokianum</i> Variegated Form
3	3. <i>Arisaema formosanum</i>
4	4. <i>Arisaema petioletii</i> 9706



*Polygonatum stenanthum**Polygonatum zanlanscianense**Polygonatum nodosum S-69*

species with beautiful variegated foliage. A native of Japan, it grows to c. 40 cm and sends up its dramatic flower in May or June.

Podophyllum pleanthum is another plant from Taiwan where it grows in dense, moist woodland conditions. The dark red flowers hide under perfectly-formed, sumptuous leaves that are bright green with scalloped edges. They require full or part shade in a leafy, moisture retentive soil and will need protection from severe cold. *Podophyllum*

delavayi has highly ornamental mottled, deeply lobed leaves and needs similar growing conditions to *P. pleanthum*.

Paris japonica is another beautiful, understated woodlander from Japan. It is a rhizomatous perennial that grows to 80 cm. It is topped by a whirl of eight to ten leaves and this in turn is topped by a small white flower. It needs acid to neutral soil and full or part shade.

Polygonatums are woodland plants commonly known as Solomon's Seal but there

is nothing common about the Crûg Farm varieties. *Polygonatum zanlanscianense* is special in that it is a climber and will scramble up to 130 cm tall. The purple, green-tinged flowers hang in pendulous clusters and are followed by blue-black berries.

Fatsia polycarpa comes from a high altitude site in Taiwan and is another very desirable plant with large, deeply lobed, palmate leaves. It can grow to 3.5 m tall and carries creamy-white flowers in long clusters. It will grow in any good soil, in sun or shade and should be protected from freezing wind. ■

ABOVE: *Fatsia polycarpa*

CRÛG FARM COME TO IRELAND

Crûg Farm Plants will be present at the **Garden Heaven Show** in Punchestown from 23rd to 25th June of this year. They will have many desirable plants with them including some new salvias from Central America, *Fatsia polycarpa*, dahlias, thalictrums and roscoeas. Plants will be limited and available on a first come, first served basis.

Web: www.crug-farm.co.uk



PREVIOUS PAGE (LEFT):

1. *Paris lancifolia*.
2. *Paris japonica*.
3. *Paris japonica*.
4. *Paris verticillata*.
5. *Paris polyphylla*.
6. *Paris polyphylla*.



PREVIOUS PAGE (RIGHT):

1. *Podophyllum pleanthum* leaf.
2. *Podophyllum versipelle* flower.
3. *Podophyllum delavayi* flower.
4. *Podophyllum delavayi* leaf.
5. *Podophyllum difforme* leaf.
6. *Podophyllum difforme* flower.