

THE PLANT FINDERS

There is always something new at Crûg Farm Plants, where Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones trial exciting species they have collected across the world to add a wealth of colour and interest to our gardens

WORDS BY CAMILLA SWIFT ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD BLOOM



Schefflera taiwaniana,
Crûg's signature plant (see
page 129 for more details) ➔

People come from all over the world to see Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones's latest finds. Those who can't make the journey to the hills of north Wales to rootle through their exotically crammed polytunnels can pore over their equally intriguing online catalogue. When they are not running Crûg Farm Plants, Bleddyn and Sue are plant-hunters extraordinaire. Wasps, landslides, earthquakes and monsoons are second nature to them on their expeditions. Outside of Kew, they hold the only full, ongoing wild-collected plant-import licence in England and Wales. On their assiduously researched annual trips – usually conducted for three months at a time in the autumn – their aim has been not only to seek out new plants, but ones that really work in temperate climates.

Over 25 years of plant hunting, they have introduced more than 4,000 new cultivars through the UK, including a graceful Taiwanese schefflera that can shrug off all the weather that a Welsh winter can throw at it and an invaluable ground-cover pachysandra with ornamental leaves and remarkable fruit that even flourish under yew. Their walled garden, open to nursery visitors, is a glorious horticultural wonderland – a jungle of green, filled with mysterious plants most of us have never heard of. "People come here thinking they know a lot about gardening," Sue says, "and then discover things they've never seen before."

They started Crûg Farm Plants in 1991, when they decided to rent out in stages their 200-acre traditional beef farm to open a nursery instead. Initially, Sue looked after their garden while Bleddyn grew vegetables, but with a long-harboured passion for ornamentals, he started taking cuttings and growing plants to sell.

By 1994 they had expanded out of their original walled garden, planted 30,000 trees to create a substantial 20-acre windbreak (Crûg means hilltop or lookout) and set up a website. Both avid travellers, they organised the nursery so they could get away for plant-hunting trips. "Each one tells a story," says Bleddyn, "It's very exciting and we are passionate about conservation."

Their first serious expedition, following family holidays in Jordan and Indonesia, was to Taiwan. Since then, they have travelled through Asia to Korea, Vietnam and the Himalayas, returning with hydrangeas, podophyllums, tricyrtis, actaeas... the list goes on. These days, their trips are shorter and they combine travel with lecturing, showing and handing out plant advice to fascinating people and extraordinary gardens the world over. After 42 years of marriage they remain a great double act, bouncing half-finished sentences off each other with peals of accompanying laughter. "We still work very hard," Sue says. "Just like farming, it's 24/7."

Bleddyn's taste in plants inclines towards the subtle – predominantly green with interesting form and foliage, such as Solomon's seal – but getting them to flag up their favourites is impossible. "Always different, depending on the light or season," Sue says, while Bleddyn admits, "I have at least 365 favourites a year."

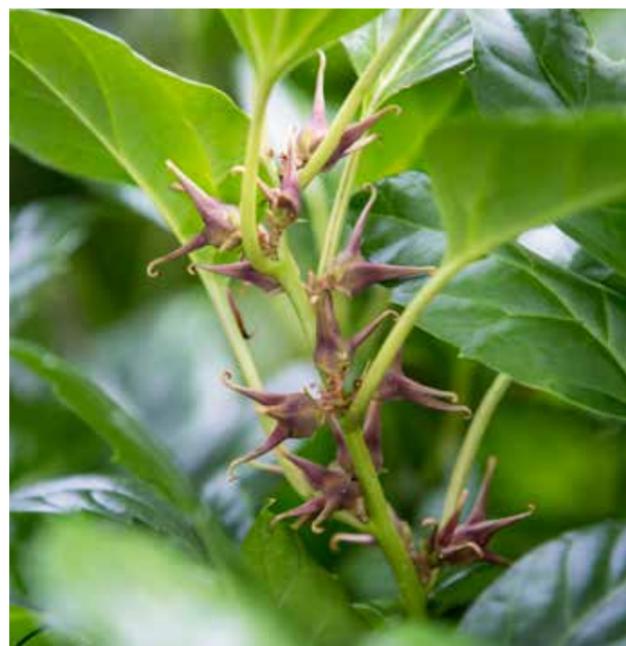
Crûg Farm Plants, Griffith's Crossing, Caernarfon, Gwynedd (01248 670232; crug-farm.co.uk).

8 OF CRÛG'S RECOMMENDED PLANTS TO TRY



WONDERFUL STRUCTURE

Sculptural and distinctive in any border, *Eryngium guatemalense* has a sturdy upright-branching stem bearing umbels of large spiny near-black flowers, backed by silvery bracts. Found at high altitude in parts of eastern Guatemala, it is best grown in full sun to part shade in fertile well-drained soil that does not dry out. Height 1.75m.



INVALUABLE GROUND COVER

A member of the box family, *Pachysandra axillaris* 'Crûg's Cover' is one of the nursery's best – and bestselling – plants. Unlike other varieties of the genus, it has scented flowers followed by red-pink fruit peeping from polished leaves. Discovered in Sechuan, it is easily grown in moisture-retentive, fertile soil in light to dark shade. Height 30cm-50cm.



GREAT FOR SHADE

Unusually brightly coloured for a shade lover, *Lychnis cognata* is a clump-forming hardy perennial originating from forests in Korea and north-eastern China that experience extremely cold winters. It is easily grown in any fertile well-drained soil with some moisture retention, in a cool, sunny site in full to part shade. Needs caning support. Height 40cm-100cm.

VIGOROUS AND LONG-FLOWERING

Roscoea cangshanensis is a robust little plant that quickly forms healthy clumps of slender stems with violet-pink and white striped flowers through summer right up until November. Found high on the Cangshan in Yunnan, China, close to a river, it is easily grown in any humus-enriched, fertile well-drained soil in sun or part shade. Height 30cm.



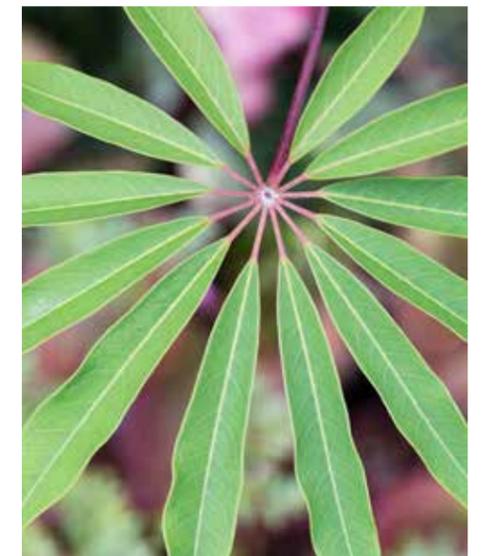
TALL AND STRIKING

Flamboyant *Thalictrum delavayi* aff. var. *decorum* bears huge panicles of long-lasting lilac-pink flowers. Crûg's original plant, from seed collected in Yunnan, China, is still in the garden after 20 years. It comes up late, so take care to mark its position in the garden. Easily grown in full sun to part shade in any fertile drained soil. Height 1.5m.



DENSE EVERGREEN CARPET

An evergreen hardy perennial, *Saxifraga stolonifera* 'Kinki Purple' quickly forms carpets of rounded, softly bristled, purple-stained leaves and throws out pleasing, pyramidal spikes of white flowers from June to October. Found in the high mountain forests of the Kinki Peninsula, Japan, it is easily grown in part to full shade and is best in moist but well-drained soil. In too much sun, its colour bleaches. Height 40cm in flower.



YEAR-ROUND ELEGANCE

Schefflera taiwaniana is one of the most elegant of all evergreen shrubs. Naturally a single-stemmed small tree, it can easily be grown as a bushy, well-branched plant with minimal pinching out required at critical intervals. Collected from the high mountain forests of central Taiwan, this tough, easily grown variety grows best in humus-rich, well-drained soil in good light, sheltered from freezing winds. Height 2-3m. 🌱



**A LONG-LASTING
ANGELICA**

Unlike other varieties, *Angelica anomala* is perennial. Tall, slender and ornamental with delicate white umbel flowers and large lustrous leaves, it is found in the cool mountain forests of Nagano in north-west Japan. It is easily grown in any type of drained fertile soil in sun or part shade.

Height 2m. 