

Walk of the Week

There is a profusion of exciting plants waiting to burst onto the scene, but now it's the turn of late magnolias and early rhododendrons. Notable is the many shades of 'Augustinii'. Lord Lansdowne has successfully propagated the deep blue of this plant and established an outstanding line known as 'Bowood Blue'.

If you would like to follow the Walk of the Week, can we suggest you take a photograph of the numbers and descriptions on this board and refer to your photo at each of the marked plants. They are marked with a post and numbered blue disc. Please remember that most woodland plants are poisonous to animals and humans if ingested.

1. Rhododendron 'Currieianum'

This superb shrub is an old Waterer Nursery hybrid pre-1851. It was re-discovered in 2005 by the then Chairman of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Society. He thought it no longer existed. A vigorous evergreen shrub, that can reach up to 3.5m high at maturity, with an upright, branching habit and narrowly elliptic, leathery green leaves up to 15cm long. It produces rounded clusters of purple-pink flowers, with wavy edges and dense, very dark red speckles on the upper petals, from now until early summer. We are fortunate to have five of these plants in the collection.

2. Pieris japonica / lily-of-the-valley shrub

This is a stunning example of a slow-growing evergreen shrub 4m high, with a bushy habit and narrowly ovate, slightly toothed, glossy green leaves that are sometimes tinted copper when young. Pendant clusters of small, scented, urn-shaped white flowers are borne at the tips of the stems in spring. The flower panicles are formed in autumn, and those with red-tinged buds are attractive throughout winter.

3. Bluebell – Hyacinthoides non-scripta

Enchanting and iconic, bluebells are a favourite with the fairies and a sure sign spring is in full swing. Native bluebells are unmistakable bell-shaped perennial herbs. They spend much of their time underground as bulbs, emerging, often in droves, to flower. Pointed tip leaves are narrow, around 7mm to 25mm wide and 45cm in length. Bell-shaped with six petals the flowers are violet blue in colour. These sweet-smelling flowers droop to one side of the flowering stem (known as an inflorescence). Up to 20 flowers can grow on one inflorescence. This year the bluebells are early and prolific. They thrive with an overhead canopy of beech or oak in mildly acidic soil.

4. Rhododendron augustinii

There are a few augustinii in the garden including this shrub in Pauline's Ride, a 'Bowood Blue' variety in the Jubilee Garden and another in the Quarry. This beautiful quick growing Chinese species is arguably one of the finest of all rhododendrons. The name commemorates Augustine Henry who found it in China. A large evergreen shrub, growing to 2m tall and wide, with narrow, tapered leaves, up to 11cm long, with upper surfaces covered with a fine down whilst the undersides are scaly with pale hairs along the midrib. Open, funnel-shaped flowers, up to 7cm across, in trusses of two to five and range in colour from white to a deep violet-blue with greenish-brown spots on the throats.

5. Rhododendron oreodoxa var. fargesii

This hardy upright evergreen shrub with pink bell-shaped flowers thrives in acidic soil with partial shade. A recipient of the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM). The species name oreodoxa translates to 'Glory of the mountains' and the variety fargesii is after Pere Farges (1844-1912), a French missionary in China.

6. Magnolia 'Yellow Lantern'

This stunning shrub produces delicate tulip-shaped flowers with beautiful tones of light yellow-lemon in spring. This contrasts with its mid-green, ovate leaves. This tree was given to Lord and Lady Lansdowne by the Bowood team in 2004 on the 250th anniversary of the Lansdowne family inhabiting Bowood.

7. Magnolia 'Spectrum'

'Spectrum' is a small to medium-sized, upright, deciduous tree producing large, goblet-shaped flowers in mid-to-late spring. These open from rich, purple-pink buds; the open petals are pale pink inside, flushed and veined darker outside. The tree was raised by William Kosar at the U.S National Arboretum in 1963. It received the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit in 2012.

8. Rhododendron 'Cunningham's White'

This shrub has stunning full trusses of white, funnel-shaped flowers with yellow or greenish-brown markings and dark green leaves. A reliable and hardy old hybrid rhododendron, Cunningham's White is understandably popular in woodland gardens due to its tolerance of poor or near-neutral soil. Compact and robust, it is ideal for growing on a boundary, for use as a windbreak or screen.

9. Rhododendron 'Geoffroy Millais'

Named by rhododendron expert John Guille Millais, who wrote 2 large volume books on Rhododendrons (1917 and 1924). He named this for his son, Major Geoffroy "George" Millais who was killed in action in France in August 1918. A gift from David Millais, this like other first-crosses from R. griffithianum thrives in woodland conditions. Bred originally by Otto Schulz in Germany this plant is recommended for vigorous growth and highly scented flowers.

10. Rhododendron 'Russellianum'

This shrub grows from 2-10 metres in height, with leathery leaves. The leaves are elliptic-lanceolate, 15cm long, medium green above, and brown indumentum below. It is a very early hybrid (1831), a cross between R. catawbiense and R. arboreum.

11. Rhododendron 'Yellow Hammer'

Raised at Caerhays and uniting George Forrest's R. sul fureum with Ernest Wilson's R. flavidum this hardy evergreen shrub grows to 2 metres, with small, dark green leaves and trusses of soft yellow tubular flowers. It can also flower in late summer.

12. Magnolia 'Butterflies'

This compact, upright hybrid magnolia is renowned for its fragrant, lemon-yellow, tulip shaped flowers, red stamens and elliptical bright green leaves. Growing to 4-6 metres it is an ideal low maintenance tree for small to medium gardens.

13. Acer palmatum 'Katsura' (P)

An upright, deciduous shrub with 5 to 7 lobed yellow-orange foliage with pink margins in spring, becoming green in summer and turning bright orange in autumn. Small red flowers may appear in spring. This shrub has a vivid colour. It was one of the first shrubs planted by Lord Lansdowne in 2007 in the Jubilee Garden. It was a present from a remarkable nurseryman and friend, Doug Harris of Penwood Nurseries. It originated in Japan.

14. Magnolia 'Susan'

This group of trees were planted shortly after Lord Lansdowne established the Jubilee Garden in 2006. The trees are compact, deciduous and about 4m tall, with oval mid-green leaves up to 15cm long. Deep reddish-purple buds open with fragrant, cupped flowers with usually 6 tepals, deep red-purple outside, pink within.

15. Rhododendron 'Lady Easthope'

This shrub thrives in partial shade to full sun. Like so many rhododendrons in the garden, it needs protection from harsh winds and extreme temperatures to ensure healthy growth. A magnificent, large, dome-shaped shrub with very distinctive, handsome foliage. Flowers are in a rounded truss, widely funnel shaped, dark pink with mauve filaments. Pre-1888. It is notable for its strong resemblance to many other shrubs in the garden and the difficulty that arises of correctly distinguishing rhododendrons. It is only by examining all the parts of a flower including petals, pistil and stamen, along with leaf detail, that it is possible to identify with any certainty these remarkable shrubs.