



In the lower garden some of the earliest planted trees are now approaching maturity. Left to right *Quercus robur*, *Q. × turneri*, *Acer palmatum* 'Osakazuki', with *Tilia tomentosa* behind and *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aspleniifolia'.

Ridleys Cheer

Creating a garden on 14 acres of permanent pasture in Wiltshire has been a daunting but exciting task for **ANTONY YOUNG** and his wife, **SUE**. Here he writes about the trees and shrubs that they have planted in the past 50 years and lessons learnt along the way.

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The spring of 2020, following on the heels of a very wet and mild winter, was quite remarkable. On the one hand the dark shadow of COVID-19 hung over us all, whilst in the plant world almost everything flowered as never before, starting in January with *Parrotia persica*, whose tiny crimson flowers were crowded on the branches. A dozen different forms of *Daphne bholua* flowered abundantly early in the year before we locked down and the pure white buds of *Magnolia denudata* were close to breaking by the end of February. April and May brought such a spectacular display on all the spring-flowering trees and shrubs that it was hard to be fully aware of the threat posed by the coronavirus. Enforced lockdown through one of the sunniest and driest springs on record was accompanied by almost empty roads, blue skies with not a single airplane to be seen. Total peace and quiet had taken over our normally bustling world and it seemed that the very shrubs and trees were celebrating. Of course, one knew that all was far from well and the pandemic was all around us and getting worse day by day. In the garden a late frost in early May caught some of the magnolias, put paid to most of the flowers on a *Davidia involucreata* and burned the soft, new growth on a number of beech and yew hedges.

When the house was bought in 1968 there was not much garden to speak



Abutilon vitifolium 'Tennant's White'

of such thin limestone soil, all the young trees were mulched generously with leaf-mould in their early years, which is a practice that has been continued in the arboretum to aid the humus content and moisture retentiveness of the soil. I had not long previously heard a talk on trees by Alan Mitchell, in which the renowned and revered dendrologist had opened his talk with the statement 'Trees do not know what pH is', and this remark has had a huge influence on the nature of the garden that exists here today. Magnolias and acers were two of the principal genera to be planted and all are faring remarkably well. The garden currently contains over two dozen magnolias and more than 50 acers in a wide range of species. One of the main aims has always been to create interest throughout the year.

of and groups of dwarf conifers on the small lawn were speedily consigned to the bonfire! Beech hedging was planted alongside an old privet hedge, which was removed as soon as the beech was well-established. A number of specimen trees were planted in the old garden including: *Acer sieboldianum*, *Acer triflorum*, *Acer griseum*, *Acer palmatum* 'Osakazuki', *Fagus sylvatica* and *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aspleniifolia', *Liriodendron tulipifera* 'Aureomarginatum', *Davidia involucrata*, *Quercus ilex* 'Fordii' and *Magnolia* × *loebneri*, *Ptelea trifoliata* 'Aurea', *Gleditsia triacanthos*, and *Abutilon vitifolium* 'Tennant's White' followed a few years later.

Considering the ground here is very thin soil over Oolitic Limestone, this was quite a bold start and against all the advice of various local cognoscenti! Nearly all the trees have prospered and are now in early stages of maturity. To overcome the problem



Quercus ilex 'Fordii'



Above, Hungarian oak, *Quercus frainetto* and *Juglans regia* with *Quercus ilex* in the paddock beyond.

At this time the structure of the existing garden and its various compartments was set with the planting of a number of beech and yew hedges. A formal potager was planted with box shapes and edging and more recently with beech and even fern-leaf miniature hedges. The fern-leaf seedlings were all home grown from mast on the original *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aspleniifolia', planted in the 1970s. Close to the potager, *Hoheria sexstylosa* 'Glory of Amlwch' has thrived, undaunted by the cold winters of 2010 and 2011. In a nearby border a narrow leaf eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus nicholii*) is flourishing; it has attractive mauve tinted young foliage. It remains to be seen how it may fare in a cold winter but it seems that as evidence of man-made climate change appears indisputable it is good to consider what more tender additions we could be making. Nearby, overhanging the top of a retaining wall there is a small *Podocarpus lawrencei* and *Luma apiculata* is flourishing in a central position in the arboretum—both southern hemisphere species.

The first opportunity to expand occurred a few years later when an adjacent small dairy farm was put on the market. This enabled us to add two small fields, widening our horizons at a stroke and we have been planning and planting ever since. As our knowledge grew, a willingness to challenge the conventional wisdom helped to influence the choice of trees and shrubs and it is amazing how much one learns along the way but it required a willingness to admit mistakes from time to time. *Hillier's Manual of Trees and Shrubs* located beside the loo for many years was an invaluable source of assistance.

In the late 1980s a further opportunity arose and was seized upon, to buy



Acer triflorum in full autumn colour.

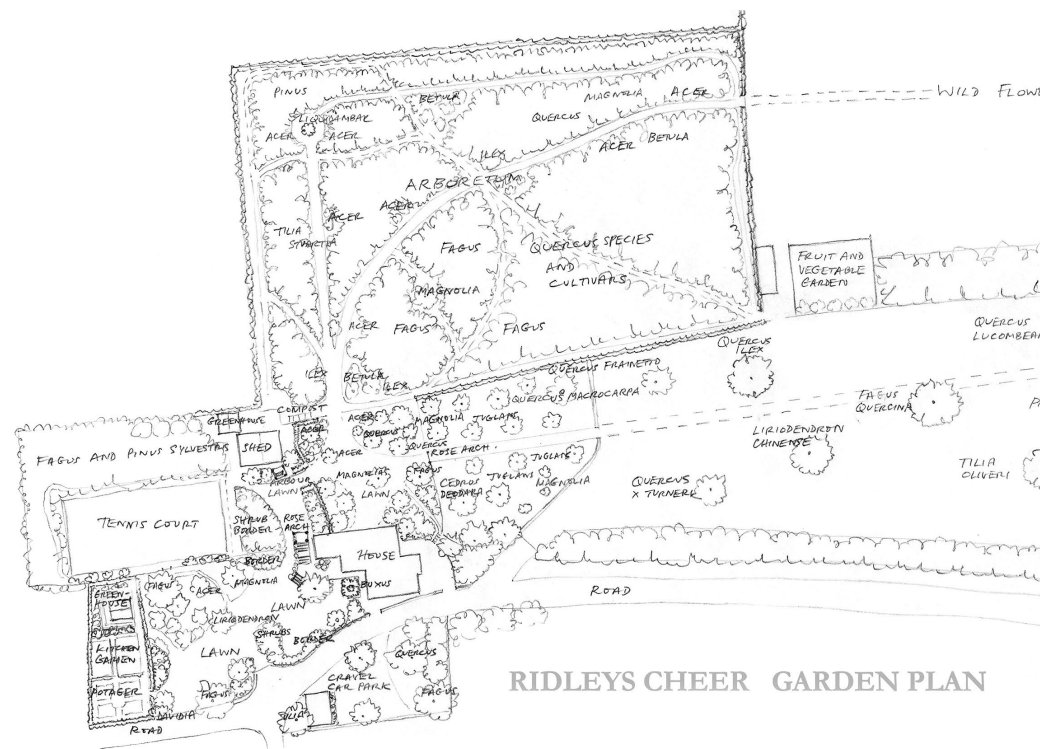
another adjacent field, taking the small original garden up to 14 acres. This gave enormous potential for new planting, including an arboretum, a separate block of mostly native woodland, a three-acre wildflower meadow and two smaller paddocks, in one of which a number of specimen trees were planted. One of these is a *Liriodendron tulipifera*, grown from seed collected in 1999 in Tuscany and planted out in about 2012. It flowered for the first time in 2020.

The arboretum

The creation of the arboretum was the real opportunity as it was a completely blank canvas. First, path structures were planned and then the planting was

based on merged drifts of the principal genera: *Quercus*, *Fagus*, *Tilia*, *Acer*, *Betula* and some *Picea omorika* on the west and east margins to provide shelter. Over the years, magnolias, maples, *Ilex* in a wide variety of forms, *Quercus*, including *Q. coccifera* (or possibly subspecies *calliprinos*) grown from seed collected in western Turkey, and *Azara microphylla* have been added. *Daphne bholua* in 12 different forms, has been planted on the margins of the main ride where the scent can be enjoyed in the winter months. Near the middle, on the left going up the ride a young example of *Quercus ithaburensis* subsp. *macrolepis* is establishing well and a *Quercus libani*, planted some years earlier and now making a strong specimen with ascending branches. Also *Nothofagus betuloides*, planted in about 2000 is growing into an elegant upright tree lower down on the east side; there is a *Juglans regia* 'Laciniata' close by.

Among the different forms of *Fagus*, there are good specimens of *Fagus sylvatica*, *F.* 'Cockleshell', *F.* 'Quercina' and a recently planted Chinese species, *F. lucida*. There is also an interesting seedling with larger more frilly leaves. Further up the main ride, on the left *Magnolia campbellii* is growing on strongly since planting in 1995. It flowered for the first time in 2019, followed by 30 flowers in 2020. At the top of the straight ride *Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Lane



RIDLEYS CHEER GARDEN PLAN



Above left, *Ilex aquifolium* 'Silver Milkmaid' and right, *Ilex* × *wandoensis*.

Roberts' has grown well, considering the unfavourable conditions. *Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Stella' is a more recent addition on the lower side of the arboretum.

Hollies are represented by a number of species and forms. Just inside the lower entrance to the arboretum there is a bushy specimen about 4 m high of *Ilex pernyi*, with characteristic small, oddly-spined leaves. Further up the ride, on the right is a magnificent, tall specimen of *Ilex* × *aquipernyi* DRAGON LADY ('Meschick'), a very free berrier and with dark, glossy leaves, significantly larger than *I. pernyi*. Near the centre there is a group of hollies including *Ilex* 'Washington', planted to mark the inauguration of President Obama, *I. colchica*, from north Turkey and the Caucasus, *I. x wandoensis*, a natural hybrid from the Korean Peninsula, with a tall *Ilex aquifolium* 'Pendula' in the background. There are a number of other cultivars including *I. aquifolium* 'Angustifolia', 'Madame Briot' and 'Silver Milkmaid' and *I. x altaclerensis* 'Camelliifolia' and 'Ripley Gold'. Hollies make a vital part of the presentation of the broadleaf trees in a collection and create significant additional winter interest, not least for their berries, which in tune with the theme of 2020, bore crops the like of which we have never seen before. The hollies also provide valuable protection and shelter from strong winds.

Among the acers there are a number of *Acer palmatum*, many of them home-grown seedlings selected for their habit or shade of autumn colour. There are a number of deep red shades and good yellows. *A. palmatum* 'Seiryu' is the last to turn and in many ways the best. It seems to hold on to its leaf for longer than most, undeterred by the worst autumn gales. *A. maximowiczianum* is growing on well and colours late but this year it was badly affected by strong winds and gave very little in the way of colour. *A. x freemanii* was planted in 2020 and there is every hope of good colour in the years to come. *A. micranthum* is a smaller reliable performer, which should be grown more widely, as it has always done well here, even on thin ground in full sun.

Lower down on the main ride is *Betula globispica*, not the best of specimens

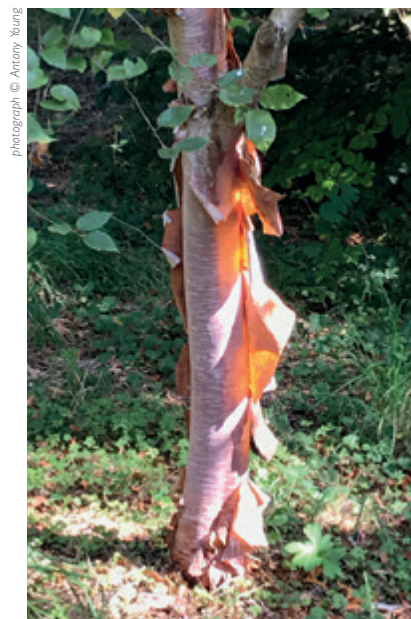
but becoming rare in its native habitat in the central mountains of Japan, with *Betula* 'Hergest' close by. At its foot is a small *Pseudotaxus*, not yet well established and opposite, below an area of *Paeonia delavayii*, is a young *Ilex aquifolium* 'Harpune' with narrow, entire, sharply-apexed leaves.

In the meadow below *Liquidambar* 'Stella', are *Tilia mongolica*, *Nyssa sylvatica*, a long shot on our thin, brashy ground, *Quercus ilex*, which is rapidly developing a superb, spreading crown, and a *Q. x hispanica* 'Lucombeana', planted to mark the Millennium. Beyond are *T. henryana* and *T. oliveri*, with a seedling of *Fagus sylvatica* 'Quercina', showing a ruffled cut leaf and *Liriodendron tulipifera*.

Near the north side of the house is a group of magnolias, including *Magnolia* × *loebneri* 'Merrill', *M. denudata*, *M. 'Wada's Memory'* and *M. kobus*. Other magnolias in this area include *M. denudata* 'Purple Eye' and three yellows, *M. 'Butterflies'*, *M. 'Gold Star'* and *M. x brooklynensis* 'Yellow Bird'. These are all doing well and, of the three, 'Yellow Bird', flowering a little later than the other two is less prone to a late frost. More recently planted is another yellow, *Magnolia* 'Yellow Sea' which is yet to flower.

Quercus x libanerris 'Rotterdam' stands next to a Turkey oak, *Quercus cerris*, with *Quercus ilex* behind. Beyond the rose arch a seedling of *Quercus macrocarpa* is making rapid growth. It is probably a *robur* hybrid but it has many of *macrocarpa* characteristics, though its bark is less furrowed. It came here as an acorn from a magnificent specimen in the garden of Château de Bagatelle in the Somme region of France. In the same area a recently planted *Parrotia subaequalis* from China is making slow growth, not destined to attain the size of its Persian relation but certainly worth growing for its superb purple autumn colours.

There is also a young *Heptacodium miconioides*, a *Parrotia persica* and *Fraxinus sieboldii* on the bank just beyond the house and a strong, young *Cedrus deodara* behind. Close to it, *Ilex x altaclerensis* 'Belgica' is making strong growth with large spineless leaves and also nearby is *Rosa cymosa*, a semi-prostrate Chinese species with very small many-flowered panicles of creamy-white flowers and striking dark red new growth. It is thought to be on the tender side. Roses are another feature of the garden with over 130 mainly old-fashioned shrub



Betula globispica



photograph © Antony Young

roses, climbers and ramblers, the latter ascending through the canopy of some of the major trees.

Beyond the arboretum and the vegetable garden is the wildflower meadow, some three acres in size. In spring it is a carpet of cowslips, followed by ox eye daisies, various vetches, scabious, lady's bedstraw, centaurea, yellow rattle and many others which flower progressively through the summer. Orchids are making a welcome comeback through June and July.

Through a gate on the north side of the meadow, there is another piece of young woodland, mainly native to blend more easily than the arboretum into



photographs © Antony Young

Opposite, top, near the north side of the house is a group of magnolias, including *Magnolia* × *loebneri* 'Merrill', *Magnolia denudata*, *Magnolia* 'Wada's Memory' and *Magnolia kobus*.

Opposite bottom left, *Magnolia* 'Mark Jury' hybrid in flower in the arboretum and **right**, *Magnolia* 'Genie', a hybrid from New Zealand in flower in mid-April.

Right, Autumn colours of *Parrotia subaequalis* planted in 2017.



photograph © Antony Young

the adjacent landscape. This wood contained a swathe of *Fraxinus excelsior*, nearly all of which have been hit by Chalara ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). About 300 have already been felled and, on the experience of how the fungus fared in Denmark, we should not expect more than about 5% to survive here. There is, however one ray of hope in this small wood. A number of seed-raised *Fraxinus ornus* (Manna ash) planted out amongst the *F. excelsior* appear largely unscathed at present. *Fraxinus ornus* may not be a native but it would make a good substitute for one of our most important landscape trees and its superb spring flowers would be more than welcome. There is also a block of some 150 beech in this wood which have been very badly damaged by squirrels. Trapping has failed to stop the little devils, which arrive in droves from the nearby wooded valley. At worst it may be necessary to accept defeat and plant another species which they are not so attracted to, such as *Tilia cordata* or a mixture of *Tilia* and *Quercus*.

At the top corner of this wood a dewpond has been made, with marginal plantings and a native water lily. There is also water hawthorn, which is South African and has attractive small white flowers held a few inches above the surface over a long season. Beside the pond is a group of *Alnus cordata* (Italian alder) and a single *Alnus glutinosa* 'Imperialis'.

The reward of this effort over the years has been not only to see the fruits of our labour as trees start approaching maturity, but also the benefit to the bird population. Whilst so many bird species are in decline in the UK many here are increasing and, after not hearing owls, either tawny or barn owls, for far too long we now hear them again and hope they will find the young woodland a suitable habitat. Early in the year from an open patch in the top wood where ash trees had been felled, a charm of some 30 goldfinches was seen to fly up into the branches of young oaks and hazel; a real sight for sore eyes.

Some new planting continues every year, even if it means sacrificing the odd tree planted at the outset. Where a group of diseased ash have been removed from the top of the arboretum, a *Carya ovata* has been planted in their place. It has to be admitted that one of the satisfactions of what has been a life's work is the hope that at least some of it may remain for future generations.