



Roy and nursery owner Stephen Mules explore the well-ordered and exuberant beds at Lower Kenneggy Nurseries near Penzance. Stephen grows a vast range of unusual temperate and maritime woody and perennial plants.



Kniphofia thomsonii var. *thomsonii*



Agave montana

Roy Lancaster visits... Lower Kenneggy Nurseries

Cornwall is nearly always a trip to remember and this nursery near the farthest tip of the county, with its vast collection of unusual and exotic plants from across the world, certainly leaves an impression

Author: **Roy Lancaster**, VMH, author, broadcaster and member of the RHS Woody Plants Committee. Photography: **Tim Sandall**

As soon as I drove through the entrance to Lower Kenneggy Nurseries in August last year, I knew I was in for a treat.

Facing me was a towering 4m (13ft) mound of *Buddleja forrestii*, its numerous winged shoots boldly clothed with drooping, taper-pointed, rugged green leaves 30–40cm (12–15in) long. Regularly hard pruned in spring, this species provides a spectacular foliage feature for larger gardens (although, as nursery owner Stephen Mules says, by treating it this way, he rarely if ever sees it in flower). I once grew this giant of a buddleia against the south face of our house where, with minimal pruning, it reached 5m (16½ft) and flowered each year in late summer or early autumn. The long, terminal,

tapered heads, shaped like whippets' tails, are closely packed with tiny mauve, orange-eyed flowers, sadly with little or no scent.

Accompanying the plant at the nursery was a spectacular, fine-leaved mound of New Zealand pampas grass (*Cortaderia richardii*), its tall-stemmed, drooping plumes of buff spikelets swaying in the breeze. Close by, a colony of ginger lily (*Hedychium densiflorum* 'Sorung') was fast advancing, its bold foliage on sturdy stems up to 1.5m (5ft) terminating in superb spikes of fragrant flowers of a distinct pinkish apricot, with darker protruding styles. As if this wasn't enough, the informal grouping in the car park included a large clump of New Zealand's *Astelia chathamica* (often given the cultivar name 'Silver

Spear') and, towards the rear, a large *Viburnum awabuki* with caramel-coloured shoots supporting a rich canopy of leathery, evergreen leaves, the upper surfaces of which look as though they had been coated with the finest Japanese lacquer.

For a plantsman with wide interests, this was as good an introduction to a nursery as I can remember. But it was merely the entrance, and on meeting Stephen I was soon introduced to the main theme of this neat, well-ordered nursery that specialises in woody and perennial plants for maritime and warm sheltered gardens further inland. Many of these are from Oceania, Australia and New Zealand in particular. The nursery comprises a potting shed, a glasshouse, cold frames, several polytunnels and ample standing-out areas with



Hedychium densiflorum 'Sorung' (left) bears its fragrant, apricot flowers against bold foliage. *Grevillea victoriae* (far left) has proved hardy in Roy's garden (see also panel, p66). *Agapetes* 'Ludgvan Cross' (above), a local cross, has clusters of tubular flowers with eye-catching pink markings.





Roy and Stephen discuss the wealth of plants that thrive not only here in coastal Cornwall but also further afield.

benches for saleable stock.

Among these I recognised *Grevillea victoriae*, a large, evergreen shrub from the mountains of southeast Australia which for several years has proved totally hardy with me in Hampshire in a west-facing border by the house. It is now 2.5m (8ft) tall and almost as much across, its ascending, grey-hairy shoots clothed with narrow, firm, willow-like leaves, silvery haired beneath. The nodding clusters of orange-scarlet, shrimp-like flowers are produced over a long period from spring onwards, but most freely in autumn. Despite occasional winter temperatures of -10°C (14°F) my plant has never been damaged. It grows in acidic, well-drained soil in sun and seems impervious to pruning, should the need to contain it arise.

Differing in its more compact habit, with shorter, broader, greener leaves and soft, orange-red flowers is its cultivar *Grevillea victoriae* 'Murray Valley Queen' which, Stephen says, is just as free-flowering. Given the winter lows experienced in Cornwall in recent years – Lower Keneggy has recorded -8°C (18°F) – Stephen has been sourcing other potentially

hardy *Grevillea* species and hybrids to trial. One such is *G. 'Bairnsdale'* (sometimes sold as 'Big Red') and a cross between *G. victoriae* and *G. juniperina*, a vigorous erect shrub with narrow leaves and terminal nodding clusters of red flowers.

Exotica abound

Australian plants apart, I spotted a number from South Africa. One of them, *Kniphofia thomsonii* var. *thomsonii*, has distinct loose, slender-stemmed racemes of narrow-tubed, downcurved orange flowers; Stephen's clone has never set seed. Small, shrubby, evergreen *Pachystegia insignis*, from New Zealand, is another exotic; its big white, single, daisy flowers bloom over bold grey, white-backed foliage and stems. I have seen it growing in several gardens, both coastal and inland, where winter temperatures are not too severe or where some protection can be given.

Stephen's interest in plants began as a school leaver in the early 1980s when he studied Commercial Horticulture at Pershore College, Worcestershire. This developed into a passion for ornamental horticulture



on his leaving college. When job-hunting proved unsuccessful, and having made the brave decision to go it alone, he was lucky enough to find the present site of 1.6ha (4 acres; the nursery occupies only half). It lies approximately half a mile from the sea, between Penzance and Helston, and needed the protection of wind-breaks (including *Griselinia*, *Escallonia* and Monterey pine) before serious production could begin. He began with 'bread and butter' fuchsias

Roy fell for *Correa reflexa* var. *angustifolia* (above right) with its red, pendulous, green-tipped flowers. The striking buff plumes of *Cortaderia richardii* (above) swaying in the breeze greet visitors arriving at the car park.



and bedding plants, before experimenting with the more interesting and challenging plants he enjoys growing so well today.

These include: magnificent, almost palm-like *Cordyline indivisa*; Canary Island echiums, tall and small; *Agapanthus*; *Olearia*; *Eucomis*; *Puya* from the Andes; *Callistemon*; *Ozothamnus*; *Ochagavia carnea*; and a host of succulents, especially *Aeonium*, *Agave* and *Aloe*, all basking in Cornwall's mild maritime conditions.

I noted a fine batch of *Schefflera taiwaniana*, which is proving to be the best member of this genus of ornamental, umbrella-leaved evergreens for British gardens. I admire it enough to have planted two in my own garden, one now 3m (10ft) tall in

Nursery information

Address Lower Keneggy Nurseries, Lower Keneggy Lane, Penzance, Cornwall TR20 9AR.
Tel: 01736 762959.
Mobile: 07584 838695.
Email: lowerkeneggynurseries@gmail.com
Open: 10am-5pm, Tues-Sat.
Closed: December-February.
Wheelchair access: yes.



Roy's choice of *Grevillea*

1 *Grevillea lanigera* 'Mount Tamboritha'. A favourite of Stephen's; he originally thought it to be tender, but it has proved hardy with him and others in warmer parts of the UK. He recommends it for wall tops and raised beds. I have a plant that I bought three years ago, forming a carpet 1m (39in) across of overlapping, hairy shoots with short, blunt, olive-green leaves. Its clusters of pink and white flowers are freely borne and charming (I protect it with garden fleece over winter just to be sure).



2 *Grevillea juniperina* 'Molonglo'. A prostrate, yellow/apricot-flowered selection with green, needle-like leaves; it flowers from May. My newly acquired plant survived a winter with fleecing (like 'Mount Tamboritha').



3 *Grevillea rhyolitica*. Red-pink flowers; one of the more tender grevilleas grown for the conservatory (*G. olivacea* 'Apricot Glow' is another) and related to *G. victoriae*. Like many members of the family *Proteaceae*, grevilleas 'are generally fond of poor, infertile, well-drained soils, although needle-leaved kinds seem less demanding in this department,' says Stephen.



Nursery beds and the glasshouse at Lower Keneggy Nurseries are filled with remarkable plants from a range of temperate and maritime climates across the world.

a sheltered border, the other smaller and grown in a large container that I can move around to fill temporary gaps, or to provide an instant eye-catcher or talking point.

Along with prostrate, yellow-flowered *Grevillea juniperina* 'Molonglo', I came away clutching a beautiful plant labelled *Correa reflexa* var. *angustifolia*, a small, upright shrub of borderline hardiness with pendulous, tubular, cinnabar-red flowers each with a clover-green mouth. I also picked up a plant of evergreen *Agapetes* 'Ludgvan Cross': its drooping clusters of angular, tubular, pink flowers with a pale mouth are exquisitely marked with darker chevrons. Raised, apparently, around 1946 by a Miss G Talbot at Ludgvan in Cornwall, this cross between *Agapetes incurvata* and *A. serpens* enjoys most a moist, shady, frost-free situation.

A year on, I now have the pleasure of admiring its arching, leafy shoots that fill a wire basket suspended from the roof of my cool glasshouse. It is a vivid reminder of a lovely county, and its continuing rich garden heritage. ●