Gunnera manicata: the huge leaves collect detritus that is shed from above.

Vegetable research trust

The governing body of the National Vegetable Research Station at Wellesbourne and the committee of the NVRS Association have created a charitable trust to be known as the Vegetable Research Trust.

The objects of the new trust are to promote research and other scientific work connected with all aspects of vegetable production and utilisation.

The trustees, Professor J. L. Jinks (ex officio chairman of the governing body); Mr T. W. Clucas (ex officio chairman of the NVRS Association); Mr R. A. Gibson, Professor E. H. Roberts, Professor W. W. Schwabe, Professor M. J. Way (appointed by the executive committee of the NVRS governing body); Mr D. Bowerman, Mr A. C. Green (appointed by the committee of the NVRS Association).

The director of the NVRS, Professor J. K. A. Bleasdale, has welcomed the event as providing the opportunity for tangible support to be channelled into those areas where public funds were not likely to be available or were limited, and cited as possible examples the rapid response to some new research need and the dissemination of research findings by publications and promotional activities.

He also expressed the hope that the trustees would be able to provide funds which would assist younger scientists from overseas to work at Wellesbourne for periods of up to a year.

The trustees will initially be concerned with attracting financial support for their activities.

Answers to gardening questions

Some big plants for big places

Herbaceous plant have suffered in popularity during the last quarter of a century in favour of trees and shrubs. This is, to some extent, due to the lower labour requirement of shrubs when compared with some herbaceous plants. There are, however, some fields in which shrubs cannot compete. Where bold effects are required, the herbaceous plant wins every time. Is there a tree or shrub with leaves four feet across such as we have in *Gunnera manicata?* Such plants obviously want using with care. They must be sufficiently isolated to be able to display their full grandeur.

I have long had a dislike for the conventional herbaceous border popular in the early years of this century. In nature, shrubs and herbaceous plants are found together. Whilst we may not wish to copy nature too closely, many herbaceous plants are far more effective in irregular areas between shrubs than in the rectangular blocks to which we have become accustomed, and the larger bolder plants are particularly good used in this way. I apologise to those with small gardens. It is obvious that this article is intended for those with plenty of space to fill. I will do a special article soon for those with very small gardens just to balance things up.

One of the objections to herbaceous plants in the past has been the need for staking. Various devices have been used. Square, green-painted dahlia stakes were once the rule. Pea sticks, wire and, in this modern age, bits of plastic gadgetry have all added to the profits of the suppliers if not to the appearance of the garden. I one made a rule that if a plant required staking a large rubbish heap awaited it at the end of the garden. The rule has been broken from time to time but in the main I have little use for plants that cannot stand on their own feet. It is so difficult to make a plant look natural if it has to wear corsets, — an argument that might find application elsewhere.

Gunnera I have mentioned already. It likes moisture and a rich soil but is permanent if given some protection from frost in very severe winters. This is best done by folding the dead leaves over the crowns and piling a few stems of other herbaceous plants on top. The rhubarbs are fully hardy and quite impressive. *Rheum palmatum* will reach six feet high under good conditions and stands as stiff as a ramrod. *R. nobile* is shorter and has large concave, almost transparent bracts of pinky white colour, almost hiding the greenish flowers. A third species is the medicinal rhubarb, *R. officinale,* a giant even among rhubarbs. The dried roots of this plant were imported for medicinal use long before rhubarb became accepted as a food plant in this country.

Yellow daisies abound in the garden. The elecampane, *Inula helenium,* is another old medicinal plant. Gerard tells us that it is good for shortness of breath and for those who "cannot breathe unless they hold their neck upright." Pliny says it is good for "all kinds of worms of the belly" and "being chewed doth fasten teeth." TEETH". Today we are satisfied to admire its large elliptic leaves on rigid stems five feet high surmounted by narrow-petalled yellow daisies.

A slightly grander plant is the related *I. magnifica* from Eastern Europe and Western Asia. The form I grow comes from Afghanistan. Somewhat resembling the inulas, but having heart-shaped leaves, is *Buphthalmum speciosum.* It is just as stiffly erect and creates a fine background for smaller things.

The ligularias are yet another group of yellow daisies, usually with very broad heart-shaped leaves and exceptionally showy heads of orange-yellow flowers. This is another plant with a liking for moisture and it is not suitable for lighter soils that dry out quickly. Well-grown and well-fed, they are among the most effective of plants. *Ligularia clivorum* is the best known and is available in forms with green and purplish foliage. *L. hodgsonii* has rich orange-yellow flowers which are borne in early summer, a little before the other species. Gregynog Gold is a variety which is probably of hybrid origin and is the tallest I know, reaching six feet under good conditions with leaves a foot or more across.

Sometimes included in ligularia but more usually under senecio is *S. przewalskii,* a choice plant with black stems and leaf-stalks, fine palmately-lokbed leaves and narrow spikes of yellow flowers on stems up to five feet high. The plant in flower or foliage is a delight for the flower arrangers. Another senecio that I like, although it does fall about rather, is *S. tangutica.* The large panicles of flowers are borne in the early autumn and are followed by heads of feathery pappus if you are not so tidy-minded to cut them off as soon as flowering is finished. I repeat, however, that it is not good at staying upright.

If you would like something to put in soups, what better than lovage? Six feet high, attractive foliage and heads of greenish yellow flowers. A flavour somewhat akin to celery but more spicy. It was given to me many years ago as a "Maggi plant," invented specially by that firm for soup-making! Alas, not such a recent invention. The plant was well-known in Shakespeare's time.

The globe thistles must rank high among our bolder plants. The most popular one with the bluest flowers is *Echinops ritro,* growing about four feet high. *E. sphaerocephalus* is taller, with larger heads of paler flowers. Why this specific name should be applied to this species I do not know: all the species have spherical heads. The stems are solidy upright and almost stout enough to support a clothes line.