

Newsletter

February 2011

Cookham and Cookham Dean Horticultural Society

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday February 23th at 7.30pm

COOKHAM DEAN VILLAGE HALL

Plant Zoos --National Plant collections and Plant Heritage

Chairman's Letter

I'm sure everyone who was at our January meeting will have enjoyed Richard Poad's talk on the 'Gardens of Guelderland', another place to go on the holiday list! He himself said he was not a plant expert, so it would be interesting to see them through the eyes of a trained horticulturalist.

At last the bulbs are pushing through the soil and snowdrops are appearing and some of the early crocuses, lovely to think Spring is on the way though we may well have some more very cold weather before then. Carolyn Foster has written a piece for this newsletter on how you should now care for the 'society' bulbs so that they will give a good display at the Spring Show in March. We have had a really good number of entries for our last few shows, so I hope we shall be able to match them this year. You will know by now that we as a society will be organising this year's Horticultural Show at the Cookham Dean Fair in September, and the committee will be meeting later this month to go through the schedule and make any amendments or additions we feel are appropriate. We would greatly welcome any offers of help with this new venture for us, and we also hope that some of you will feel inclined to enter some of the classes. We hope to have the final schedule printed by the end of March so that people can plan ahead with their planting! Cookham Dean has got such an active and lively community spirit and it seems to us that by taking this on we are helping to keep that alive and encouraging all our members to participate in this enjoyable event.



Our summer visit is now definitely fixed for **Wednesday 13 July, at 6.30 p.m.** We shall be going to **Old Waterfield**, just opposite Ascot Racecourse, the garden is owned by Sir Hugh and Lady Stevenson. They do nearly all the work themselves, and grow everything from seed, so it should be really interesting. At the moment, until the end of March, Catherine Stevenson is High Sherriff of Berkshire, head of the county judiciary, and her husband was knighted in the New Year's Honours List. They are delightful people and have already sent us a most welcoming letter, so I hope as many of you as possible will be able to come.

One more thing – I have today had a telephone call from Brian Thompson, my predecessor as Chairman, whom many of you will know and remember, and he has offered to let us have some sweet-pea plants for sale in both March and April. He is a sweet-pea “king”, a member of the National Sweet Pea Society Council and I believe he now does some judging. Those of us who’ve had his plants in the past will know what beautiful flowers they produce, so I’m sure there will be a ready market for anything he can give us. I hope to see you at our next meeting on 23 February.

Susie Tremlett, Chairman.

Memo from Carolyn.....

‘How are your society bulbs? They should be at least 2-3 inches above the pot now --- Over the next few weeks you may need to move them either to a sunnier position in the garden to speed them up or to a north facing site to slow them down. They do not need to be brought into the warm until mid March. Between now and then one or two feeds of a high potash feed, eg tomato fertilizer, would be helpful.’

GOING DUTCH

At our January meeting Richard Poad gave us a delightful pictorial tour of some of the gardens of Gelderland , a province in the central eastern part of the Netherlands.

The tour began with a visit to **Hortus Botanicus in Leiden**, this is the oldest botanical garden in the Netherlands, dating from 1590. In 1593 Carolus Clusius, a very reputable botanist became its director and with his worldwide contacts he gathered a very extensive plant collection, now displayed in the Clusius garden. He will be remembered most of all for introducing the first tulips bulbs to Holland , from which tulipmania resulted in the 1630s. There is also a systematic garden with 33 beds laid out in families as dictated by the Swedish botanist Linnaeus.

The **Royal Palace of Het Loo** in Apeldoorn was our next destination, this was built for William of Orange, later to become our King William III, in the grounds of a castle-like hunting lodge– the castle of Het Loo- which he purchased to pursue his favourite sport . The new Palace of Het Loo was a beautiful building in symmetrical William and Mary style and it became their favourite country palace. An extensive and elaborate garden complemented the palace, laid out with a central axis and perfect symmetry either side. There were parterres with intricate designs, radiating gravel paths, fountains, canals and level changes. Either side of the house were the more intimate and enclosed king and queen’s gardens. Tragically in the 18th century the garden gradually deteriorated and in the early 19th Century, when Louis Napoleon was king, the whole garden, including the moat was filled in to create a landscape park with groups of trees planted as a focal point. Fortunately in 1970 it was decided that Het Loo should be a national museum and extensive restoration took place. In their hey day the gardens were pictured in many prints and described in letters and journals, also much of the construction was found intact once all the earth was removed. The restoration was completed in 1984 and Richard compared an old print with the present day garden shown on a google -earth photo and it was remarkably similar.

We then saw the **gardens of Warmelo Castle** , a 17th century house surrounded by a moat. The garden has developed through the centuries and has retained various period features in different parts of the garden, from a formal French parterre garden near the house to an English garden with rhododendrons and azaleas in a woodland setting. There was also a Victorian garden with a pinetum and the ‘Well Garden’ which was designed as an outdoor room

as typical of an early 20th century garden. Beautifully manicured hedges which divided up the garden were a very striking feature of many views.

The final garden Richard showed us was **De Weirsse in Vorden**, south east Gelderland. This too is a moated manor, surrounded by a 34 acres garden, and it has been in the same family since 1678. The garden had a lovely relaxed feel about it, though near the house was a formal garden with symmetrical box edged beds which were filled with a mass of David Austin roses, a wonderful sight in the summer. There were some amazing vistas throughout the garden and in some cases these crossed a canal which was hidden from view until you walked down towards it. The paths also led to other hidden features such a sunken garden . Other striking features were a long serpentine beech tunnel , again giving a sense of mystery, and a beautiful wild garden with a lake which gave wonderful reflections of the surrounding trees and shrubs. Richard stayed at De Weirsse in the spring and there were masses of bulbs in the grass and Rhododendrons and Azaleas, but he showed photos taken later in the year and there was a wealth of colour and interest throughout the garden.

The garden at De Weirsse is only open to the public on a few days a year, but there are 2 apartments which you can stay in and then you have free access to the garden every morning. The website giving details of this is www.deweirsse.nl

Carolyn Foster

RANDOM JOTTINGS

These jottings are one of the results of attending the evening course in Cookham Dean Village Hall run by the W.E.A. and given by Carolyn Foster on the styles of garden associated with various periods of history

DAFFODILS

These notes are particularly relevant at this time as we are close to our Spring Show. I thought it would be interesting to know something more about the main stay of the show. The daffodil seems to be one of our oldest known plants. The earliest reference seems to be by the Greek botanist and philosopher Theophrastus in his "Enquiry into Plants". This was in about 300 B.C. when the daffodil was introduced into gardens. He described and listed the earliest known kinds of narcissus. The next mention of the narcissus is by Mohammed (c.570-632 A.D.) when he wrote "He that has two cakes of bread, let him sell one of them for some flowers of the Narcissus, for bread is food of the body, but Narcissus is food of the soul." There is then no record until Parkinson in 1629.



The name daffodil is the English name and narcissus the latin or botanical name. The word Narcissus however seems to be derived from the Greek. The original English name was affodyle from afo dyle that means "the one that comes early". In 1629 the D was added by a scientist named Parkinson to signify that the daffodil was a bastard narcissus. In Elizabethan times the names Daffodilly, Daffowdowndil and Primrose Peereless were common. The name Jonquil is another name often used and this is used for one part of the family.

In ancient Greek mythology Narcissus was a beautiful youth who was immortal until he saw his own reflection in a pool of water. A hunting woman named Echo fell in love with him but he

spurned her and she died of a broken heart. The goddess Nemesis heard the story and lured Narcissus to look into the pool. He then disappeared and a beautiful yellow flower took his place. There are many versions and much longer versions of this story.

It is thought that the Narcissus initially grew in Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East long before the beginning of the bulb fields of Holland. Now one can find them throughout Europe and the U.S.A. There is evidence that daffodils have been used in the treatment of baldness, on burns and for joint pains and muscle strains.

The profusion of daffodils is probably because they are easy to grow and tolerate most growing conditions except extreme heat and soggy ground. They will survive deep snow and cold weather. Also they contain lykorine that is poisonous to humans, deer, rodents and most insects. Several incidences of accidental poisoning have been recorded.

Botanists differ in the number of kind of daffodils there are in existence-some say forty species but if sub-species are included it may be nearer two hundred. Over 27,000 hybrids have been registered.

The Daffodil Society issues 12 points for success when growing daffodils.

1. Never cut foliage from the bulbs. Pull off yellowing foliage at AROUND about 6-8 weeks after the flowers have faded.
2. Remove all dead flowers by nipping off at the neck, behind the seedpod.
3. Keep the soil surface around the foliage well hoed to prevent the entry of the Narcissus Fly.
4. Remove and burn any bulbs whose foliage shows sign of disease.
5. After flowering keep bulbs watered and feed once a week with a high potash fertilizer until the leaves die back.
6. Lift and divide overcrowded clumps in late June or July.
7. Keep lifted bulbs stored in a cool, dark, well ventilated place until ready for planting.
8. Before storing and planting remove and burn any bulbs that are soft or spongy to touch.
9. Don't plant bulbs in ground that is likely to become waterlogged.
10. Try to have bulbs planted by October.
11. Bulbs grown in pots should be "plunged" (covered with soil and/ or peat) to a minimum depth of 2" to 4" depending on weather conditions in your area, for 16 to 18 weeks.
12. Spray daffodil foliage at least twice during the growing season with a recommended systemic fungicide."

The most recent efforts at classification began in 1884 when the R.H.S. held its first daffodil conference. In 1908 the R.H.S. introduced its first division classification "list" for garden and show purposes – 7 divisions were adopted. In 1910 the list had expanded to 11 divisions. Then nothing much happened until 1969 when another division was added. In 1975 the colour code system developed by the American Dr. Tom Throckmorton was adopted. The R.H.S. has now classified all daffodils into 13 divisions. Information on the divisions and colour system is available on the internet at www.thedaffodilsociety.com

References:

- Classification System – The Daffodil Society
- Fun Historical Daffodil Facts by Clay Higgins
- Daffodil from Creation Wicki, the Encyclopaedia of Creative Science
- Looking after your Daffodils – The Daffodil Society

Janet Shanks

SNOWDROPS

Snowdrops always take centre stage in the gardening press at this time of year. They are everyone's favourite and for some at the RHS shows this is an all-consuming passion. Apparently a bulb has recently changed hands on eBay for £357! Previous issues of this newsletter have listed snowdrop gardens to visit so this year there is advice from the RHS experts on how to establish snowdrops in your garden. The best way to introduce snowdrops into your garden is to ask friends to split their clumps 'in the green' as the leaves begin to yellow after flowering. Experts will argue that even later is better but it then difficult to find the dormant bulbs unless they have been marked.

When splitting established clumps pull apart carefully (with two forks back to back) and take as much soil from around the roots as possible. Plant each small clump about 4 inches deep and keep well watered., even through the summer dormancy. A moist rich soil under deciduous trees or shrubs is ideal for the common snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, in sun or partial shade. Although snowdrops are woodland plants if you become hooked on named selections then these will require good garden conditions in a sunny spot with good drainage. Most choice named selections are less vigorous than *G nivalis* and need better conditions.

Avoid buying bulbs which may have dried out in the display stands of supermarkets and garden centres as these do not establish well. Several garden centres are now offering snowdrops in pots, in which case settle them into their permanent positions as soon as possible as bulbs in containers can be killed by hard frosts.

For snowdrop gardens check out www.greatbritishgardens.co.uk and visit the RHS Plant and Design Show 15-16th February (see www.rhs.org.uk/flowershows) The dates for all the RHS shows are now fixed and tickets are on sale for Malvern, Chelsea and Hampton Court. GT

Pruning winter flowering clematis

Clematis such as *C cirrhosa* and *C armandii* flower on wood ripened the previous year, so if untidy or overgrown cut back after flowering (and after the risk of frost) in spring. Shorten individual stems back to a pair of strong buds. In the case of *C armandii* this can become rampant so to restrict growth cut out older, weaker stems to a pair of prominent buds. The plant may not regenerate if you cut back into old woody stems. Feed and mulch plants after pruning.

Finally.....

RHS Wisley *Butterflies in the Glasshouse* (until 27th February; normal admission price) and early bulbs in the Alpine House will banish winter blues.

Deadline for next month's newsletter is 6th March. The schedule for the Spring Show will be included in the newsletter. Please send contributions to Gill Townend (gilltownend@aol.com or phone 01628 483092.)