

NEWSLETTER

2011

September

NEXT MEETING: **Wednesday 28th September at 7.30pm**

COOKHAM DEAN VILLAGE HALL

A Year at Kew

Dr Peter Branham, retired Senior Scientist at the Royal Botanic Gardens will talk us through the seasons

Chairman's Letter

The last 2 months have passed so quickly and the summer weather has been rather disappointing this year. I think we had our summer in April as we have had very few really hot days recently, although



plenty of rain. At least watering the gardening has not been the chore it often is, but quite a few plants would have benefited from more warmth and sun. However, I hope you have all had a good holiday and maybe we shall enjoy an Indian summer.

It was really good to see so many members at 'Old Waterfield', the garden we visited in Ascot in July. I think everyone would agree that we had a very enjoyable evening and the Stevensons were such generous hosts. Hugh Stevenson's vegetables were amazing, I don't think I have ever seen such a big cauliflower as the one he gave

for the raffle. It had been agreed that the money raised from the £3 entry fee and the raffle would be donated to 'Thrive', the charity for young disabled people who learn gardening, but to this we were able to add the £35 cost of the wine, at the Stevensons' request. The result of this is that we sent Thrive a cheque for £230, which is excellent.

Now that we are into September, I do hope you will all support the Horticultural Show at Cookham Dean Village Fete on Saturday 17 September. We not only want you to come on the day but also to enter some of the classes in the schedule, which has already been circulated. There is also the exhibition of photographs of Wild Flowers which is a new idea, and we are hoping for some really good pictures. The Committee will be preparing the Village Hall on the Friday evening, 16 September, from 6 p.m., when entry forms can be available and submitted. The entry fee is 50p. per class, entries can be staged in the hall between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. on the Saturday morning 17th, after which judging will take place in private and the show will be open in the afternoon. Prize money will be paid on Saturday afternoon between 3 and 5 p.m. This will be the first time the Society has organised this event, so please support us and bring along something for at least one class. If you want any more information, please contact Janet Shanks (tel. 01628 525576) or myself. We look forward to seeing you there.

Just a reminder also that we would like you to bring along your competition fuchsia plants to the September meeting, I hope you have all been nurturing them well during the summer. Susie Tremlett

Visit to Old Waterfield

It was with a sense of relief and anticipation that we drove to Old Waterfield on the evening of 13th July. This was to be my first **dry** Society garden visit for some time (remember Remenham, Fawley and Waltham Place?) We were immediately made to feel very welcome with wine and platters of smoked salmon appearing and a useful introduction to the history of the garden given by Lady Catherine Stevenson and her husband Hugh. Set in 4 acres adjacent to Ascot Racecourse there was an atmosphere of calm but enthusiastic gardening. Many of us were inspired by Lady Catherine's dedication to growing plants from seed,



including many of the trees in the grass paddock. The Chiltern Seeds catalogue was clearly an inspiration for the Stevenson's and a new lean to greenhouse was an essential part of propagation. New to me was *Calycanthus occidentalis*, the 'Spice bush' from California flowering April to August and hardy to -15C (see left) Hugh's responsibility is the vegetable garden which replaced the old tennis court. With a central gazebo supporting clematis *viticella*, the brick paths led to beds with vegetables and seedlings of next year's wallflowers. We all marvelled at the lack of weeds and the healthy looking produce, especially the amazing cauliflowers. The herbaceous borders were well planted and colourful without being pretentious and although the open sunny aspect and well drained soil were an advantage, I think we all came away full of admiration for this couple who have worked so hard on developing the garden since 1966. Towards the end of our visit a bumper raffle of garden produce in aid of Thrive raised £230 and we polished off the remains of the food and wine. Thank you Susie, Pam and Mary for organising such an enjoyable evening. GT

Will they die young?

Many of you will read **The Garden**, the magazine of the RHS. For those who didn't see the piece on plant longevity, read on..... The strict definition of a perennial plant is one 'that lives longer than two years' This surprised me as we tend to regard perennials as lasting indefinitely, especially if they are regularly split and looked after. In my own garden at The Farm I had plants which had been in the ground for over 30 years. Noel Kingsbury therefore argues for a subdivision of the category of perennials

Short lived perennials have two extremes; at one end are plants such as hollyhocks which are unlikely to last into a fourth year without looking very sad. *Knautia macedonia*, *Achillia*, *Aquilegia* and *Echinacea purpurea* have a similar prognosis and are genetically programmed to die young but have good ability to produce copious amounts of seed.

Some **longer lived perennials** do not spread but form a compact clump.....Astrantia, Salvia x superba, Sedum spectabile and some Heuchera are examples of this. These plants can live for many years but resent root disturbance , especially if the central growth point is damaged.

The truly **long lived herbaceous plants** are quite different. This category spread, are easy to divide and in the garden their clumps will expand, albeit at different rates (hellebores slowly; geraniums, rapidly) Some form steadily spreading clumps such as Hosta, Monarda, Anemone x hybrida ; others have underground runners such as Macleaya or Euphorbia cyparissias. Charmingly these are known as **guerrilla** spreaders.

This is all very interesting but to identify the difference what do you look for? First, look at the base of the plant where the shoots connect to the root system. If there is one point of connection and it difficult to see how you could divide the stock then the plant will almost certainly be in the short lived category. (particularly if you have dug it up to look at it, a point not mentioned by the author!!) At the opposite end of the spectrum are plants with masses of branching roots, each with a shoot at the tip and tiny buds at the side. These plants can rapidly regrow from dormant buds on their roots, even after severe damage. .For more details go to www.noelkingsbury.com **On the subject of death and destruction** the plant gurus at Wisley are close to introducing a new set of plant hardiness ratings. Following heavy plant losses due to hard winters and climate change the RHS set up a working group to update hardiness ratings and these are listed below. You can now be among the first gardeners to impress your friends with the question" Is it an H2 or H3 plant?"

HARDINESS RATINGS

- H1a** 15C (59F) or warmer. Tropical, heated glasshouse
- H1b** 10C to 15C (50-59F) Subtropical, heated glasshouse
- H1c** 5C to 10C (41-50F) Warm temperate, heated glasshouse
- H2** 0 to 5C (32F-41F) Half hardy, cool or frost free glasshouse
- H3** -5C to 0 (23F-32F) Half hardy, unheated glasshouse.
- H4** -10C to -5C (14F to 13 F) Hardy, in average winter (South and West UK)
- H5** -15C to -10C (5F- 14F) Hardy, in cold winter (South and West UK)
- H6** -20 to -15C (-4F-5F) Hardy, in very cold winter (Central and North UK)
- H7** -20C (-4F) and colder. Very hardy.

The Garden Centre Group....or Wyevale as we knew it

News came in July that Wyevale, rebranded The Garden Centre Group two years ago, has been put up for sale. With 119 branches the company is majority owned by Lloyds Banking Group, so any sale would benefit taxpayers. NM Rosthchild has been appointed to handle the sale and analysts have indicated that a price of more than £300 million should be achieved. Bidding will take place in October. Business has been healthy in the first six months of this year and this has been due to gardening being seen as a cheap pastime in hard times and the fact that gardeners are likely to be older and wealthier than the average retail consumer, according to the chief executive Nicholas Marshall. Another reason for the successful start to the year has been increased margins as a result of sourcing more plants from Britain, thereby increasing margins. 90% of the Group's plants are now sourced from this country, compared with 70% in 2008.

Over the past two years the company has dismantled the national Wyevale brand, except in a handful of centres that historically traded under the banner. All centres reverted to their original family or regional names. The largest garden centre is Bridgemere in Shropshire Recently Bridgemere won the coveted Garden Retail award for the best planteria. The smallest garden centre is at Carmarthen. This centre was established in 1987, and is proud of its plant sales, having one of the highest sales per customer in the Group due to the enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff.

According to Mr Marshall, the business has been taken back to it's roots and staff are now proud to be selling a wide range of good quality plants with good customer service to match. My own observations at the Marlow centre do support this claim as it is now possible to find good stocks of healthy plants, and helpful, knowledgeable staff. There was a period about 10 years ago when I would not dream of buying anything from a Wyevale centre with half dead plants, decrepid weedy stands and lacklustre service. Let us all hope that new owners continue the improvements. GT

Programme from September 2011 to Summer 2012.

Sept. 28th A Year at Kew

Dr. Peter Brandham, retired senior scientist at the Royal Botanic Gardens, will take us through the seasons at Kew.

Oct. 26th The Ancient Garden

Russell Bowes, garden historian and lecturer, will take us back to the gardens of three important civilisations – Ancient Egypt, classical Greece and the Roman Empire.

Nov. 30th AGM and pre-Christmas meeting.

Sherry Smith, a trained local florist will demonstrate a seasonal floral arrangement and judge our own table compositions! Details will be in your newsletter.

December no meeting

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Jan. 25th The Potager Garden

Brian Fisher returns to tell us everything we need to know about incorporating food crops into our ornamental gardens.

Feb. 29th Willow Weaving for the Garden.

Christine Brewster of "Stripey Baskets," near Reading, will show us how we can create attractive willow plant supports and other items.

Mar. 28th Spring Show

Les Waldren will return to judge our best efforts at Spring flowers.

Apr. 25th Scent in the Garden

Stephen Lacey, well-known writer and garden journalist, explores the role of scent in plants and how we can best make use of fragrance in our gardens.

May 30th Garden Photography

David Manners, experienced photographer and knowledgeable general naturalist, will give an illustrated talk on taking better pictures of plants and gardens.

June and July We hope to arrange at least one visit to a local garden this summer. Details will follow later.

Copy for next month's newsletter to Gill Townend (01628 483092 or gilltownend@aol.com). By 6th October. Please also remember to let Janet Shanks or Gill know if you have changed your email address.