

Cookham and Cookham Dean Horticultural Society



NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, October 28th 7.30pm
Cookham Dean Village Hall

Pansies, Violas and Sweet Violets

The history and cultivation of these much loved but often misunderstood plants.

Elizabeth Farrar

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

What a very interesting evening we had for our September meeting, I have to say I knew very little about Transition Town-Maidenhead and if enthusiasm was the measure of success, then it should be warmly welcomed by everyone. The explanation about what is being done at Waltham Place was equally fascinating, although I can't see myself getting up at 7 in the morning to spray my leeks, much as I love them as a vegetable. Thanks are due to Pam Campin for organising such a stimulating session. For those who missed the talk Claire Phillpot has summarised the content below..

At our recent Committee meeting we heard about the plans for next year's speakers, and I'm sure they will all be very popular. A visit to Waltham Place is also planned so we expect that to be fully supported after last week's talk. Chris Sibbald has said she wishes to retire from the Committee in November, so she will need to be replaced, and although she has kindly said she will do the seed orders for Suttons this year, she would like to hand this over to someone else for next time. If anyone feels they would be able to help us with this, please let either myself, Chris, or anyone else on the Committee know – the number of orders placed has decreased over the years but we still think it is a worthwhile service to offer to our members.

Another matter we have been dealing with is the number of silver cups the Society still holds. These date back to the days when we had two shows a year which attracted many entries from the Cookhams and further afield, particularly for vegetable classes and flowers such as dahlias and chrysanthemums. We have kept a few of the smaller cups for our own competitions, but that still leaves quite a few larger ones. We took a decision to try and return them to the families of the donors, and were quite successful with this last year, but now we have another batch to dispose of, so if anyone knows of an individual or family who donated a cup in the past, do please let us know. Chris Sibbald has done a sterling job trying to trace people on the internet, but we could still do with some help.

Don't forget that the daffodil bulbs for the Spring Show competition will be available at our October meeting, it has always been well supported and I hope some of our new members will also participate. Thanks are due to Carolyn Foster who has agreed to select and purchase the bulbs for us.

Susie Tremlett

Growing your own Future

What is a *transition town*? At the most recent Cookham and Cookham Dean Horticultural Society meeting we learnt that Maidenhead and the surrounding villages are classified as one of just 300 worldwide.

The aim of a transition town is to develop a community that can withstand outside shocks such as reduced oil supplies, with initiatives including local food production and energy action plans. Diminishing oil supplies worldwide have led businessmen in Saudi Arabia to predict that while their grandfathers travelled by camel, they travel by jeep and their sons travel by plane, their grand children will be forced once again to travel by camel.

So the transition town is all about designing for a future that may be very different from the way of life we know today. With talk of 'energy descent action plans', 'a great unleashing' and 'facilitating the great reskilling' it all sounds rather alarming at first, but lose the jargon and the initiatives that are already underway thanks to the hard work and enthusiasm of a group of volunteers are inspiring.

Did you know that we have a *Solar Hot Water Club* for example? It is essentially a bulk buying group for solar panels, enabling us to benefit from substantial volume discounts and a local school is looking at a massive solar energy project that will enable them to replace their old and inefficient boilers, halve their energy costs and sell electricity back to the national grid during the summer months when the school is closed.

Of particular interest to gardening enthusiasts, is a co-operative currently being set up to farm 35 acres of land at Fifield with the aim of supplying local produce, not for profit. How wonderful it would be to have our much valued village shop back in action, shelves packed with fruit and vegetables, all grown locally.

To inspire us to grow our produce more effectively, Beatrice, from Waltham Place, discussed the organic gardening techniques used there. With no artificial fertilizers or pesticides, success is all about feeding the soil not the plants.

Compost and manure are one way to do this, crop rotation another and my own personal favourite – companion planting. Onions and carrots like to be near each other because their root systems are at different levels and the onions drive away carrot flies. Fennel and cabbage is another match made in heaven, beans and tomatoes, sweet corn and cucumbers, parsnips and beetroot. According to Beatrice, heaven does have a lot to do with success in your vegetable garden – well the moon anyway. As well as adhering to organic gardening practices, Waltham Place also follows *biodynamic principles*.

All plants are classified by four categories: water for leaf, earth for root, light for flower and fire for fruit. And the time you plant your crops can be crucial. For example did you know that beans should be planted when the moon is rising not waning? Having not been placed in one category in the village flower and produce show this year, biodynamics may well be the way forward for me. But then I may just try another of Beatrice's inspired suggestions - nettle soup – a tasty treat for gardeners and gardens alike.

For gardeners, simply place the nettles in a bucket of water and leave until the mixture starts to really stink. Then it is ready to pour on your plants, giving them a delicious nitrogen rich tippie.

For gardeners, take 1 lb potatoes, ½ lb young nettles, 2 oz butter, 1½ pts chicken or vegetable stock, salt & black pepper and 4 tablespoons sour cream. Cook the peeled, chopped potatoes for 10 mins in salted water. Drain. Wash & chop coarsely the nettles (*Only picking the new, young*

tops, using gloves!) Melt the butter in a saucepan, add the nettles and stew gently for a few minutes. Add the potatoes and heated stock, bring to the boil and simmer for 10 minutes or until tender. When all is soft, cool slightly & purée in a blender, adding seasoning and the sour cream.

For further information about the transition town initiative, Waltham Place or nettle soup, contact Claire Phillpot on 01628 473631.

VINE WEEVIL



What is it?

For those of you new to gardening the vine weevil is a damaging pest associated with plants in containers. As well as feeding on roots, vine weevil grubs feed on tubers, corms and the base of stems. The adult vine weevils cause cosmetic damage by feeding on leaves chewing characteristic 'U' shaped notches in the edges. It is nocturnal. The larvae chew and remove the roots of plants at ground level causing wilting and poor growth. Many outdoor ornamental plants are affected, especially those in pots

Life Cycle

In order to keep this pest under control it helps to understand the life cycle. Eggs are laid in their hundreds in July-September in the soil around the host plant. These grow into creamy white 'C' shaped larvae and hatch in late August onwards, living in the soil and feeding until the following April. These then pupate in underground cells, emerging as adults in May and June. In mild winters and frost free places adult weevils can also hibernate and overwinter.

How to control it

Vine weevil numbers soared after Aldrin, a soil insecticide used by nurseries was banned in 1989. Most of the chemicals available for control are only suitable for containers (Provado Vine Weevil Killer²) but the Gardening Which? team ran a trial using a biological control which can be used in the whole garden. *Nemasys Vine Weevil Killer* contains millions of microscopic worm like creatures called nematodes. They are harmless to other animals but kill vine weevil grubs by releasing deadly bacteria into the grubs which then die in 2-3 weeks.

When to apply.

The nematodes should be watered onto the soil in mid September to feed on the vine weevil larvae before they pupate. Alternatively, apply in spring before the larvae pupate. Apparently the good thing about this latest product is that it will work in lower temperatures, as low as 5degreesC

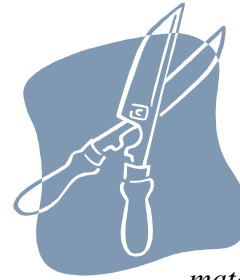
Where to buy?

Because this product has a short shelf life and needs to be stored in the fridge (mmm... not sure about that!) this is not available in garden centres. Buy at Harrod Horticultural (01502 505300 www.harrodhorticultural.com) Green Gardener (www.greengardener.co.uk) or The Organic Gardening Catalogue 0845 130 1304.

A pack costing £10.75 will treat up to 160 pots or 12m² area of garden. Could be an idea to share with other gardening friends?

GT

Best Buys from Gardening Which?



Hedging shears

Short handled

Wilkinson Sword Power Gear 220678 £35

These hi tech shears are made from light weight modern materials and have an unusual geared pivot. The gearing means that they cut with far less effort and scored highest in the Gardening Which? tests, giving a very clean cut and producing a high quality finish on the hedges. They are light (600g) and well balanced and cut well on thick and thin material. Please note that from this month Wilkinson Sword will be re-branded as Fiskars. Available at B&Q.

A close second best buy in the short handles range was;

Wolf- Garten HS-TL Comfort £35

These are traditional looking shears with shaped wooden handles. They also cut effortlessly without jamming or snagging material but check that the shaped wooden handles are comfortable for you before buying. These weigh in at 900g and are available at garden centres.

Long handled

Wolf -Garten HS64T £25

These shears with telescopic handles give an extra 20cm of length for taller hedges. The handles slide smoothly on this model and the shears cut effortlessly with no jarring action. These shears were the lightest of the long handled models tested. Also available at most garden centres.

DON'T BUY.....

Wilkinson Sword Notched 421640 £28 which for several reasons came out badly in the tests

Yeoman Light Choice Soft Grip YEO761 £18 with a difficult mechanism for closing the blades and a poor performance.

RHS Website relaunch

Have a look at the newly designed RHS website www.rhs.org.uk It is claimed to be more user friendly and easier to navigate. Important dates coming up:

WISLEY

A Taste of Autumn Festival;

16 - 19 October

Bramley Apple Dinner; 15 October - Book now on **01483 225949** to avoid disappointment

Half Term Fun; 24 - 31 October

RHS AUTUMN HARVEST SHOW (RHS HALLS, LONDON)

Tuesday 13 October: 11am - 7pm

Wednesday 14 October: 10am - 5pm

And try to listen to.....

A short interview about Buckingham Palace's allotment will be broadcast on Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time on **Friday 9th October at 3pm**. Claire Midgley, the Deputy Gardens Manager, was interviewed by BBC radio presenter Matthew Biggs in early September to talk about the experimental vegetable patch near the Gardeners' Yard. Following a brief tour of the Garden, Matthew was shown the 10 m x 4 m Yard Bed, where Claire talked about the challenges and triumphs of growing vegetables for the first time. The programme will be repeated on **Sunday 11th at 2pm..**

RECIPE FOR CHEESY PARSNIPS. (from the RHS)

Serves 4

- 4 medium parsnips
- 50g (1.75oz) Parmesan, finely grated
- 50g (1.75oz) plain flour
- 1 tsp cayenne pepper
- Salt & black pepper
- Dripping, lard or vegetable oil, for roasting

Achieving the perfect results

Preheat the oven to 190°C/375°F/gas mark 5.

Cut the parsnips in half lengthways and remove any hard or woody cores.

Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Add the parsnips and boil, lid off, for 5 minutes. Drain, but do not allow them to dry out.

In a large plastic food bag, mix together the Parmesan, flour, cayenne, salt and pepper. Add the parsnips and, keeping the bag closed with your hand, shake it well.

In a roasting tin, heat the dripping, lard or vegetable oil over a medium heat. Once it is hot, carefully add the parsnips. Transfer to the oven and roast for 30-40 minutes, turning parsnips over once half-way through cooking.



Cookham Dream Garden

In the June newsletter I asked you all to think of plants you would take to a new garden if you were moving locally. In other words, plants which have given you the most pleasure and which you would buy again. The Cookham Dream Garden will have sunny and shady areas, mainly alkaline soil with pockets of clay and chalk. **The form is now overleaf** for your selection. Please return to me over the winter months so that I can report on the results next year. Remember, this is very much about your personal experiences with plants which are reliable in the local area, not what you would like to try and experiment with or what you wish you could grow!!

I see that the RHS has pinched my idea (who is the mole?) by asking 'which shrubs you would not be without?' in the August and September editions of 'The Garden'

Gill Townend 01628 483092 or gilltownend@aol.com

All ideas for the newsletter are very welcome please feel free to suggest changes in content etc. Deadline for copy for next month's newsletter is 6th November to Gill as above.

Cookham Dream Garden

(up to five nominations in each category; you do not need to nominate in every category if you don't want to)

Small Garden Trees

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Shrubs

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Climbers

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Perennials

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Annuals

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Bulbs

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Don't worry about size or numbers as this garden is, like a dream, without dimensions!

