

Cookham and Cookham Dean Horticultural Society

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, 27th September 7.30pm
Cookham Dean Village Hall
Spring Flowers of Crete
An illustrated talk by Victor Scott

Chairman's letter

Welcome back to all of you from what I hope has been an enjoyable summer in spite of the hosepipe ban and the rather changeable weather in August, at least it brought some welcome rain for the gardens.

The Society was much involved with the Cookham FM broadcasts, both with members of the committee and the Society doing their bit to help the balance of programmes. Also during the summer break we have had two visits, one to the Windsor Farm Shop, our last meeting of the summer, which was interesting, fun and possibly expensive for some! The other visit was on the 23rd August to a beautiful private garden at Medmenham. All those members who visited this garden on a somewhat damp evening were treated to an absolute gem. To quote from a popular phrase of our times, "just awesome" and it really was, we will possibly have some photos to show those who can't make it at a later date.

Let's hope that this season's talks go rather more smoothly than the last half of the year, as Susie, our programme secretary has had some unfortunate 'let downs' at the last minute with several of our speakers.

The next meeting is on the 27th September and I hope to see you all again then. Brian

VISIT TO THE MILL AT MEDMENHAM

My enthusiasm for gardening, which has waned in this year of drought, was definitely reignited by our visit to The Mill at Medmenham on a very wet evening on 23rd August. Yes, it was a VERY WET visit which was rather a novelty, but what was more of a novelty, was the very lush and bright green lawns and the borders filled to the brim with hardy and tender perennials, many of which were actually moisture loving plants such as Lobelias, Lythrum, Ligularias, and Hostas.

The clue to how this green oasis exists so close to the 'desert' that exists in our area at the moment, is in the name of the house, as it is an old mill house, complete with water wheel. It has the mill pond at one side of the garden, and the mill stream running right through the garden with another huge pond in the sunken area in the centre of the garden. Throughout the year the water table is high, but in the winter and early spring the garden is usually flooded. For this reason much of the planting focuses on late summer colour and use of tender perennials and annuals which can be planted out when the soil has dried out a bit.

Suzanne Phillips, the owner of the garden, led about 25 of us on a tour of the delights of the garden, which began with a vegetable garden in which there were the largest tomatoes I have ever seen.

We then moved on through a rose tunnel over a bridge across the millstream to a huge, walled herbaceous border with stands of late flowering perennials such as *Aster frikartii*, *Anemone japonica*, *Sedum matrona* and *Heleniums*.

At the end of this was a bank planted with a wonderful colour combination of deep blue *Salvia patens*, lime green *Eucomis*, a little cream *Scabious* (*S.columbaria* var *ochroleuca*) and a bright orange annual called *Emilia coccinea*.

We then passed the water wheel next to a very shady courtyard and moved round to the back of the house, looking down on the lush planting on the banks of the stream.

The terrace around the house was adorned with pots of tender perennials of every hue and then we reached a newly planted border where *Verbenas* and deep red ivy leafed *Pelargoniums* had been used as bedding. They had spread widely and made a great impact, and a welcome change to the usual bizzie lizzies and begonias.

The next path we took led us to the Mill pond and a totally different feel to the garden. It was a calm, peaceful, natural and mainly green area with ducks and the resident pair of swans enjoying the pond, the path continued up and down the bank with gentle rustic steps through woodland ground cover.

We then arrived at three very large green houses in which the tender perennials are propagated and housed in the winter. They also acted as a nursery for housing a family of mallards with 10 ducklings to keep them safe from the herons and foxes. Many of us got out our notebooks here as there were so many unusual plants, including a creamy yellow flowering plant that even Mrs Phillips did not know the name of. All the plants were huge and SO healthy, and the secret seems to be very regular feeding.

Opposite the greenhouses was a wonderful barn like building which looked very old. and it had some beautiful church windows. Apparently the windows were bought for £80 secondhand, then the building was built to accommodate them, so not old at all! It is used for a potting shed and a pottery studio, and outside it, another magnificent display of potted tender perennials adorned a courtyard, and an amazing red passion flower sprawled over the studio wall.

Heavy rain started yet again as we walked on to the central pond, this was surrounded by marginal borders of moisture loving plants and grass paths next to which were island beds of shrubs and perennials, with a superb display of dahlias and also some cannas which must have been 6 feet tall! Tucked away behind these borders was a double border of *Phlox paniculata* of every shade, - another gem.

Our last delight was the former rose garden which is enclosed by a yew hedge, this is now planted with annuals, dahlias and grasses. Many of the annuals, some of which are grass species, have self sown and the display they had made was very impressive with large drifts of different colours and textures. Even in the rain this part of the garden was very vibrant and tactile and Mrs Phillips also told us how it changes so many times during the seasons as the various annuals come and go with different colours as they flower and seed - a real garden of movement and surprises. I am sure we all felt uplifted by being shown around such a beautiful garden by a real plant enthusiast, so thank you Susie for arranging this for us. Next time I drive past the thatched wicker fence on the Medmenham Road I will feast on the memories of what lays behind.

Carolyn Foster

*Thank you, Carolyn, for this detailed account of the visit; as I was one of the visitors lazily wandering at the back of the line I missed out on many of the details from Mrs Phillips which you have recorded...it was a bit like Chinese Whispers trying to hear under our waterproofs!
GT*

A visit to a garden at Beech Hill, Reading

The Priory (opened 25th June)

The origins of this interesting place go back to the 12 Century, originally a hermitage it shortly afterwards became a priory. The present owners have been in residence since 1994, and have set about restoring much of the extensive gardens. In the immediate vicinity of the house are lawns, yew hedges and herbaceous borders. Alongside an ancient wall are the neatly laid out vegetable plots, old brick cold frames, sweet peas and herbaceous beds surrounded by small box hedges. Further on there are similar beds planted up with 200 roses.

A small bridge over the Loddon River takes you to the less formal part of the garden which is 14 acres in all. Here there is a very large pond. Plenty of seats enable you to sit and watch the wild life around the water, and in the long grass. It is a very tranquil, peaceful place, thanks to the influence of the monks perhaps? Many and varied trees have been planted in the 14 acres including Pyrus Beech Hill, Prunus and Holm Oaks, Walnut, Maple and Chestnut trees. There is also an orchard area which is in the process of being restocked.

As we wandered round this interesting garden we kept coming across ancient and interesting small buildings. My favourite was a small summer 'house' built by adding side walls to an old wall, and a roof. The front was mostly open, and some lovely painted glass windows let in filtered light through one of the side walls. Visiting gardens does give you ideas for your own....I wonder if we've got any spare wall to build a summer house....?

Becky Pinnegar

Salad Leaves All The Year Round

Jane Taylor

I have enjoyed growing salad leaves in the summer for some years now. Having tried a variety of different types of lettuces, recently I have grown just one hearting variety (Little Gem) and two 'cut and come again' (Red and Green Salad Bowl) I have tried to extend the season as much as possible by sowing Little Gem seeds early inside (February) and then sowing a small tray of about a dozen Little Gem seeds every 2 or 3 weeks throughout the summer to give me a constant supply. Last year I was harvesting lettuces from the middle of May until the beginning of November. Salad Bowl often bolts by mid summer if it is hot but a second sowing would probably go into the autumn (*NB when sowing lettuce seeds in hot weather, wait until it cools in the afternoon/evening before sowing as heat can prevent germination*)

Two or three years ago when we had a speaker from Halcyon Seeds at one of our meetings, I was inspired to be a little more adventurous and try growing some new varieties of salad leaves. I was particularly keen to be able to pick some leaves through the winter as well. The last two winters I have tried the following varieties;

Chinese Mustard (Red Giant), Mizuna, Lambs Lettuce and Claytonia (Winter Pulsane)

The Red Giant Mustard and Mizuna have been a real success. I sow them at the end of August. They are cut and come again and the plants have lasted through the winter in my cold greenhouse, but I think they would also survive outside too in a sheltered part of the garden. I saw Red Chinese Mustard growing outside in February in Sarah Raven's Cutting Garden in Sussex and on Gardeners' World last year they were planting out Mizuna plants in the vegetable garden at the end of summer. I think it is important that the plants are well established before the cold weather arrives. I am not going to grow Lambs lettuce and Claytonia again. Both years they have suffered from mildew and the Claytonia did not survive. They are also both rather small, so you need a lot of plants to be able to harvest a reasonable amount regularly. I also grow flat leaved parsley in the winter as, unlike the curly leaved variety, it is hardy and it is good added to salads and as a garnish too.

Next winter in addition to Mizuna and Chinese Mustard Red Giant, I am going to try Mibuna (similar to Mizuna), Namenia and Kale Red Russian (the young kale leaves can be used as a cut and come again salad plant) In January of this year Sarah Raven published her trials of 14 different winter salad leaves in the gardening section of the Saturday Telegraph giving them a score out of 10:-

Namenia and flat leaved parsley 10/10
Mibuna, Mizuna and Red Giant Mustard 9/10

I start my salad seeds off in small trays, then transplant them into short (8cm deep) Rootainers before the first true leaf appears planting them as deep as possible with seed leaves just clearing the compost-this produces strong stemmed plants with a good root system which are very easy to transplant with little root disturbance. In the summer they then go into my vegetable bed wherever there is space or sometimes into pots or plastic window boxes if space is short. (This is quite helpful in hot weather as they can then be moved out of the sun and they are less likely to bolt)

In the winter I transplant the small plants into plastic window boxes or pots in my unheated greenhouse. This system of transplanting seems to work well for me as I have limited growing space and it makes it easier to protect the seeds and young seedlings from slugs, cats etc in the early stages.

Recommended book: **The Great Vegetable Plot** by Sarah Raven (BBC books £20, but you may be able to get it at a reduced price through Waterstones or The Book People

Also look up '**Winter Wonderland**' by Charles Dowding in the RHS magazine **The Garden**, July 2006 page 492

List of suppliers (also Mr Fothergills and Thompson and Morgan)

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| <i>Halcyon Seeds</i> | 01865 890180 | |
| <i>Sarah Raven</i> | 0845 050 4848 | www.thecuttinggarden.com |
| <i>Demeter Seeds</i> | 01287 661368 | |
| <i>Edwin Tucker</i> | 01364 652233 | www.edwintucker.com |

Don't forget....Waltham Place Gardens are still open on Wednesdays until the 27th September 10-4pm

(Church Hill, White Waltham SL6 3JH see www.walthamplace.com)

Copy deadline for October's Newsletter is 6th October. Call Gill Townend on 483092 or gilltownend@aol.com

Reminder to visit the website of the South Chilterns Gardening Which group web site at www.gogardening.org.uk which is kept up to date by our own member, Liz Kwantes (Liz@kwantes.com).

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