



Newsletter - March 2024

Letter from the Chair

Hello members and gardening friends

Spring is here at last, though we are still waiting for a good run of dry sunny days to really get going in the garden; and our local clay soil is so sticky and waterlogged that even basic weeding is a difficult and unpleasant task.

I know that some gardeners like to get everything trimmed back and tidy at the end of the autumn, and I agree that it does look good; but, personally, I prefer to leave it until the spring to provide a home for all the little creatures that overwinter in the dead stalks and leaves. Of course this means that my garden now looks a total mess; and there is a lot of cutting down to do to make way for the new growth. I just need it to stop raining so that I can get out there.



One of the joys of my garden at this time of year is a wonderful daphne odora - the winter flowering daphne - for the last couple of weeks I've been cutting sprigs from it and putting them in a vase, and it scents the whole room. Fabulous!

My other delight at the moment is my small wild garden. It nearly kills me not to overtend to it and weed it. (I just take out nettles, brambles and other really pernicious weeds) and this year I have been rewarded with lots of self sown primroses. It really is at its best right now, though later there will be lots of foxgloves and cow parsley.



Anyway - happy spring gardening to you all!

Alison

Notes for your diary



Our next meeting will be on **Tuesday 5th March** at 7.30pm in Grosmont Town Hall.

Our speakers will be Alun and Jill Whitehead from Aulden Farm talking about The Hidden Gardens of Herefordshire. You can find more details about them later in the newsletter.



Speakers for the rest of 2024 will be:

2nd April - Nick Morgan on
A Productive Year in a Small Greenhouse

3rd September - Marion Stainton on
Vegetable Legends

4th October - Michael Marriott
David Austin English Roses
We are particularly excited to be welcoming Michael to speak to us, as he was a key figure in David Austin Roses for 35 years, and was directly involved in developing the gorgeous English Roses we enjoy in our gardens today.



Our Annual Plant Sale will be on the morning of **Saturday 1st June** at Ewyas Harold Memorial Village Hall.

It may seem like a long way ahead, but we absolutely rely on our lovely members to provide us with plants to sell; and it is our main fund raising event. So as you come to the time of year when you are sowing seeds and dividing up perennials; please put a little extra aside for the Plant Fair.



Our Summer Social will be held on the evening of **Tuesday 18th June** at Blackbrook Estate, Skenfrith.

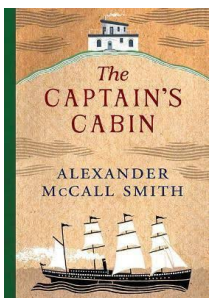
We are delighted to have been invited by the owner, Boo Vaughan, to this beautiful garden on our doorstep. It isn't open to the public, so this will be a lovely opportunity to stroll around with a glass of wine - or two!



Keep an eye on the newsletter for more Summer events - including our evening garden visit and fabulous Grand Day Out - which is planned to be to the Cotswolds this year.



The Captain's Cabin - by Alexander McCall Smith



This short story has been published in support of the charity our Gardening Club takes a close interest in - **Jamie's Farm**.

Through residential farm experience and a rigorous follow-up programme combining farming, family and therapy, Jamie's Farm acts as a catalyst for change for young people at risk of social and academic exclusion. So far, schools throughout the UK have sent over 7000 children to stay on their farms. Our local Jamie's Farm is in Rowlestone and we donate surplus plants to them each year after our Plant Sale.

The book is published by Out of the Blue Ltd with ALL profits going to Jamie's Farm to help with the construction of two cabins, for short-term rental, on each farm, which will help to raise much needed funds.

Available from alexandermccallsmith.co.uk

RENOVATION OF GROSMONT TOWN HALL

Our wonderful friends from Grosmont Futures have succeeded in securing a whopping £300,000 for the renovation of the Grosmont Town Hall. This will mean relocating our Autumn meetings (but well worth it) - we'll keep you posted.

Brilliant News



Grosmont Community Council and Grosmont Futures have succeeded in securing



£300,000



from the National Lottery
Community Fund

to refurbish the Town Hall into a
fantastic Community Hub.

Celebrate this amazing achievement
with us on

Saturday
13th April 2024

More details to follow



MEET THE COMMITTEE

In a new series for the newsletter, we will be featuring short profiles of our Committee members - so that you can get to know us a bit better.

We'd love to do some interviews with Gardening Club members too - so if you'd like to volunteer to be an interviewee please let us know. We promise that all the questions will be fun and lighthearted; and it would be great to know more about you.



Christine Williams

Christine joined our garden club over 20 years ago. She wandered in intending to stay for just one session before being impressed with the friendliness and welcome on offer. Some of the best things in life happen by accident!

After several stints as Chair she remains on the Committee enjoying the enthusiasm and encouragement of her fellow gardeners.

A former civil (not very) servant and businesswoman, Christine still retains some commercial interests, but largely spends her free time walking her 2 dogs, socialising with friends and dining out. She lives in an old farmhouse on the brow of a hill which has glorious views, but challenging winds.

Sadly, Christine was widowed a few years ago, but she has a daughter, son-in-law and 3 young grandsons in the area so life is both busy and enjoyable.

Our Next Speakers

The speakers for our March meeting are Alun and Jill Whitehead of Aulden Farm near Leominster.

They will be speaking to us about “The Hidden Gardens of Herefordshire.”

Jill & Alun are both keen plantaholics and over the years a depth of knowledge has been built up in irises, among others. For many years they have maintained a large collection of Siberian Irises and have been Hardy Plant Society members for over 25 years.



At the end of the 19th Century, Aulden Farm was then known as Aulden House and had an acre of ground. It was own by a Mr. Griffiths who earned his living as a builder and wheelwright. The original part of the property dates to the mid-17th Century and was a Moravian meeting house in the mid-19th Century before the *modern* brick extension was added about 1890.



It was purchased in 1996 by Alun & Jill who had the dream of developing a garden on the then 3 bare acres surrounding the farmhouse. As visitors will know, this dream became reality and the garden is now home to a wide variety of plants, wild and cultivated, not forgetting the wildlife which may not be obvious, but certainly enjoys the space.

The remnants of the farm can clearly be seen from the old calving-stall, hay-barn, pig-sty and the, not too steady, hen house. These add to the relaxed atmosphere and lend themselves to an informal style. However, both informal and formal have been mixed to add a touch of quirkiness.



Auntie Rosemary and Uncle Basil's Problem Corner



Your Garden Conundrums: Rosemary and Basil to the Rescue !

Rosemary and Basil between them have decades of gardening experience and we are delighted they have agreed to help our Gardening Club by looking at our readers' gardening queries



*I'd like to start growing potatoes, but I'm a total novice.
Where do I start?*



There is nothing nicer than a plate of the first new potatoes freshly dug from your own garden; so I'm sure that you will enjoy growing them.

Firstly, get to know the different types:

- First-earlies are quick to crop, usually planted in late March and harvested in June to July. These small potatoes are often referred to as new potatoes. With a thin skin and sweeter taste, they are best eaten fresh and are not suitable for storing.
- Second earlies are usually planted in the first half of April and harvested July to August. These will be larger than first-earlies, but smaller than maincrop.
- Finally, maincrop potatoes are planted in the second half of April and harvested from August to October. These are invariably larger and can be stored and eaten throughout the winter.

I recommend buying certified seed potatoes, as they will be disease-free. Seed potatoes are available from late winter to spring. If you purchase them prior to planting, you can give them a head start by allowing them to chit.

The process of chitting involves leaving seed potatoes in a cool, light, and frost-free place to sprout. Take care when handling sprouting potatoes, as the sprouts are fragile and can break off. If you don't have time to chit the potatoes before planting, they should still sprout underground but it may take a bit longer for the shoots to appear.

While in active growth, keep the plants well-watered, especially during dry spells, and continue to feed for higher yields. Flowers are a sign that potato tubers are forming in the soil.

You will also need to 'earth up' or mound the soil around the base of the plants as they continue to grow. This helps to keep the plant roots cool and protects tubers forming near the soil surface from exposure to the sun, where they run the risk of turning green and poisonous.

Potato shoots are tender, so if shoots appear during forecasted frosts, you can protect them with cloches or horticultural fleecing.

Potatoes will grow in almost any soil, however, they cultivate much better if the soil is enriched with heaps of organic matter. They grow best in an acid soil, so add well rotted manure and garden compost. It is also important that you do not lime soil at any time.

Enjoy!



I've got an empty plot at the back of a new build house, so I'm starting a garden from scratch. I love the look of a traditional cottage garden, but how do I get the atmosphere using the right design and plant choices.



What a lovely problem to have!

Design is important to get the right look; but you have to make it work for your lifestyle as well. For example, a traditional cottage garden wouldn't really have a lawn, more a series of irregular shaped beds with paths going through them; but you may have to have some grass if you need somewhere for children to play.

Avoid straight lines, squares and rectangles, instead incorporate curves and winding paths. Use traditional materials for paving; natural stone is best, but man made alternatives can work as long as they have character. Gravel is good for paths as you can have low growing plants spilling into it and seeding amongst it. The aim is to make everything look informal and artless, without being too untidy.

Old cottage gardeners would have mixed fruit, vegetables and flowers altogether; but if this sounds like too much of a challenge, maybe just plant a couple of fruit trees and have a fruit and vegetable patch at the back of the plot if you want one.

The right choice of plants is essential. Avoid anything that looks too blowsy or exotic, or anything with very large leaves; and don't use bedding plants, other than perhaps a few geraniums in pots. Profusion is the look, so plant densely and don't leave bare soil or hard edges.

Roses are a must - not hybrid teas though, go for the larger shrub roses in soft colours; then add other old fashioned shrubs such as lilac and mock orange (philadelphus), hardy fuschias - and lavender for the front of beds and edging paths. Climbing roses are perfect for softening the look of a new build house.

Perennials are the backbone of a cottage garden scheme. Delphiniums are essential, also lupins and peonies. Phlox, scabious and Michaelmas daisies will give interest later in the year; and scented pinks are very traditional amongst the lower growing plants. I'm afraid that dahlias, although gorgeous and desirable, really don't have a place in a cottage garden.

As far as annuals go, no self respecting cottage garden can be without sweet peas, preferably grown up rustic twig supports. Then choose annual varieties easily grown from seed such as love-in-a-mist (nigella), pot marigold (calendula) and cornflowers. Alyssum is also very pretty grown amongst paving and gravel.



And, of course, don't forget bulbs. For the summer, turks cap lilies such as the native liliun martagon and the tiger lily work well. Also the wonderfully fragrant trumpet lily, liliun regale; but avoid the brightly coloured large oriental hybrids. Then there are all the lovely spring bulbs; miniature daffodils, snowdrops, winter aconite and grape hyacinth. Above all, have fun with it, don't be too hidebound by the rules, and grow what you like.

Garden Jobs to do in March



Finish pruning roses early in the month.



Mulch borders generously with garden compost.



Plant lilies and other summer flowering bulbs in pots and borders.



Plant faded forced bulbs out in the garden for blooms next year.



Plant early potatoes in trenches on the veg plot or in pots if space is limited.



Sow parsnips as soon as the soil begins to warm up as they are slow to germinate and need a long growing season.



Plant onion and shallot sets spacing them 10-15 cm apart.



Check that tree ties are not too tight and that stakes are still firmly anchored in the ground.



Keep putting out feed for garden birds as the breeding season gets under way.



Cut back winter-flowering jasmine to keep it within bounds and encourage flowering for next year.

Committee Members for 2023/24



Sarah Bell

Jenny Bond

Paula Crawford

Chrissy Collingwood

Barbara Rees

Gilli Urch

Christine Williams

Charlotte Wilson

Alison Ward (Chair)

If you have any questions or ideas, if for any reason you no longer want to receive our monthly newsletter, or if there's anything you'd like included in future editions, then please email Alison Ward at:

alison.marlborough@btinternet.com

or phone Alison on 07542 800815