



# The HPS Hertfordshire Group Newsletter – Spring 2019



## Contents

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<i>Editor's Introduction</i>	<b>2</b>	<i>A Garden I Love</i>	<b>11</b>
<i>Seedling Swap</i>	<b>3</b>	<i>My Hardy Planting Journey</i>	<b>14</b>
<i>Grand Plant Sale</i>	<b>4</b>	<i>The Big 'BB'</i>	<b>17</b>
<i>Annual Coach Trip</i>	<b>5</b>	<i>An Adventure with Plants</i>	<b>20</b>
<i>Members Open Gardens</i>	<b>6</b>	<i>Looking Ahead</i>	<b>23</b>
<i>Gardening on Clay</i>	<b>8</b>	<i>Committee Members listing</i>	<b>24</b>

### Editor's Introduction

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Welcome to the HHPS Spring 2019 Newsletter.

I am writing this intro in the first week of January and the mild Winter has passed, so far, in a fairly unremarkable way – the only notable thing being all the early plant growth in our gardens. I visited a friend on New Year's Eve and she had a magnificent vase of 'Mrs McNamara' snowdrops on display – a wonderful but surprising way to end the calendar year. However, as we know, Jan and Feb can dish out the worst of the winter weather so, by the time you receive this Newsletter, the story could be a very different one.

For the HHPS, this last year has been marked by the challenge of long-standing Committee members retiring and the frustration at the absence of new volunteers to take their places. It really is a worry because those that remain will surely become disenchanted with the increased responsibility that will inevitably ensue. Our knowledge of other HPS groups who have suffered similarly is that the groups can, and do, fold and that would be truly be a tragedy for a group that has had such a robust and illustrious past. There have already been lots of exhortations to you all to volunteer but this is another heartfelt one, I am afraid, because we are without a Secretary as we go to press and that role is pretty crucial to the full functioning of the group.

On a more positive note, we have an exciting year of talks, visits and events ahead that will surely convince you all of the value of keeping our Group going.

Susanna Geoghegan

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## Seedling Swap

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Margaret Bardell has kindly offered to host this year's

### **Herts Group Annual Seedling Swap**

on Saturday 13th April 10 - 12 noon

at 1, Nathans Close, Welwyn, AL6 9QB

Tel 01438 714879

One of the annual treats for HHPS members is our so-called 'seedling swap' although, as those of us without greenhouses know, it's often more of a guilty freebie 'grabsie'. The timing of the event is planned several months in advance and so we never quite know how 'ahead' or 'behind' everyone's seedlings will be but we attend knowing that it will be pot luck. That's the fun of gardening of course - contending with unpredictable weather but, rest assured, there are always interesting 'babies' to be had. Please don't be deterred from coming if you are not able to bring any seedlings - those that do are always delighted that their excess seedlings will be nurtured elsewhere. Do bring some plant labels to enable you to record what you take away and, ideally, some small pots to put them in.



Margaret's garden has a lot of spring interest and, hopefully, if we have a nice morning we will have the pleasure of enjoying her garden alongside the seedling swapping.

Directions: From the south, leave A1M at J6, cross 2 roundabouts and at the next, turn left onto B656 towards Codicote. Take first right (Carlton Rise) then 3rd right (Blake's Way). Park in Blake's Way, then take the short walk to Nathan's Close.

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## Grand Plant Sale

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**The Annual HHPS Plant Sale will be held on  
Saturday 25th May at the Homewood Road United Reformed  
Church Hall, St Albans AL1 4BH from 10am - 12noon**

The exercise of preparing for our annual HHPS Plant Sale has been finely honed over the years and, with less committee members to organise this year's sale, we hope we can encourage as many of you as possible to come along and help – more hands making light work.

The receiving, sorting, pricing and arranging of the plants will take place at Homewood Road Church Hall on **Friday, May 24<sup>th</sup> from 6 - 9 pm**. Plants can be received before 9am on the morning of the sale but we much prefer receiving them the evening before.

The funds gathered through the modest subscription that we pay to belong to the HHPS would not allow us to book well known or sought after speakers and so the revenue from the plant sale is most important. It allows us to hire a warm, comfortable hall and to engage interesting speakers making our 'indoor' meetings very worthwhile events.

The amount of money we raise on the day is totally dependent on the quality and quantity of plants donated & how well they are labelled. Some of our members are fantastic donators but even if you can only bring a few spare tomato plants or something quite ordinary, we are pleased to receive it if it is healthy and properly labelled.

The plants that sell best are the unusual ones and those in flower and with informative labels because many of our customers are not plant experts and they like to be given as much information as possible so, even if it seems obvious, do write as much on your labels as possible especially the flower colour.

Planning ahead is the key to having spare plants to donate so, when you are sowing your seed or splitting and dividing in early Spring, think about the sale and what you can pot up or pot on for the sale.

If you have any gardening books/magazines that you'd like to get rid of please bring them along for us to sell - they may raise additional funds.

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## Annual Coach Trip

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### Saturday 15th June

**Depart: 8.30am from Westminster Lodge, St. Albans AL1 2DL**

This year's trip will begin with a visit to **Langthorn's Plantery**, a large nursery established in 1977. There is something for everyone as it specialises in top quality plants, ranging from trees, shrubs, shade plants, herbaceous and grasses, to alpines and tender/conservatory plants.

**Langthorn's** were even granted a Royal Warrant in 2017. There is a self-service coffee machine (sorry, no tea!) available for a small charge.

We will then proceed to **RHS Hyde Hall**, where you will be able to wander through the beautiful gardens, have lunch at the Gardener's Rest restaurant or Clover Café, and browse round the shop and Plant Centre.

Hyde Hall was purchased in 1955 by Mr and Mrs Robinson and initially had only six trees! Previously it had been a working farm and the land surrounding the 18th century house had been used as a dumping ground. Mrs Robinson cleared and developed the garden to include herbaceous borders, roses, a vegetable garden and sixty trees.

The RHS took over the gardens in 1993 from the Hyde Hall Gardens Trust, and one of the first projects undertaken was the installation of a 45 million litre reservoir to enable irrigation. The iconic Dry Garden was completed in 2001 and in 2002 the Queen Mother's garden was created, an informal area of winding paths and rambling roses. Further developments include the Australia & New Zealand garden, Robinson Garden, the Global Vegetable Garden, the beautiful Cottage Garden and recently opened Winter Garden.

Our last visit will be to **Furzelea**, a privately owned Victorian house surrounded by a stunning garden of 2/3 acre, created by the owners over almost forty years to provide year-round interest. The garden is on a gentle slope, and the colour co-ordinated borders are enhanced by topiary, grasses and climbers attracting a large variety of birds and butterflies. Further interest is provided by the thatched summerhouse, a black and white border, a pond, camomile steps, a huge variety of perennials and, most importantly, a courtyard where we will be able to relax with tea and delicious cake.

**Please complete the Booking Form carefully.**

**RHS Members plus one guest are entitled to free entry to RHS Hyde Hall. Remember your RHS Membership Card on the day.**

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## Member's Open Garden

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**Saturday June 22nd June 2 - 5pm**  
**Crunnells, Green House, Preston SG4 7UF**

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of their house and garden Meta & Hugh Reeves have very kindly offered to open their garden to HHPS members.

Meta describes their garden as fair sized with a variety of different rooms - in addition to her floral borders there is a vegetable garden, a greenhouse and potting area.



The small village of Preston is 3 miles south of Hitchin. Crunnells Green House is right opposite the main gates of Princess Helena College (PHC). Parking is on the road along School Lane.

Meta can thoroughly recommend the lunches at the Red Lion pub on the Green at Preston where there is ample parking. To book a table call Ray or Jo on 01462 459585.

Contact details for Meta Tel: 01462 456567

## Member's Open Garden

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Long term HHPS member Barbara Stalbow has kindly agreed to open her garden in Stanmore to HHPS members twice this year.

Very recently she had a 'pop-up' opening with tea and home-made apple cake so that we could enjoy her lovely snowdrop & hellebore display. It was a chilly but bright afternoon and there was a good turn out of members from around the county. She gave us a tour of her mature garden that was opened



many times in the past with the NGS.



However, what particularly impressed us all on our recent visit were Barbara's ambitious plans for a 'new' area in her garden which has involved removing a tennis court and replacing it with a pond, curving paths and new herbaceous & shrub borders.

**Sunday, Sept 8th 2 - 5pm**

**Hornbeams, Priory Drive, Stanmore, Middx HA7 3HN**

Barbara will be opening her garden again in the late summer, and on this occasion, we will get the opportunity to see how her new 'vision' is unfolding. Judging from the number of potted plants in every corner of the garden, waiting to be planted, I am sure we will see quite a transformation.

Priory Drive is a private road off the A4140 in Stanmore and there will be plenty of parking available in her drive and outside the adjacent houses.

Any queries ring Barbara 0208 954 2218



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## Gardening on Clay

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Since 2008 I have maintained a number of gardens within the Muswell Hill N10 postcode. For the purposes of this article, I will focus on one garden which faces West and naturally slopes to North. Although it was recently landscaped by the new owners to provide a flat lawn for cricket and football, but definitely not a level field for the gardener! Beyond the West border, the garden is framed by many mature Hornbeam and Oak trees on a sharp upward slope into Queen's Woods. The soil in the garden is predominantly clay and landscapers have exacerbated this by inverting the soil and neglecting drainage issues when building retaining walls into the contour of the land.

The runoff from the adjacent land and the heaviness of the clay means that beyond mid-November and up to April the soil is too heavy to work and normally by mid-June through to mid-September the clay will have baked. In the summer of 2018 there were fault lines into which I could sink my arm up to the elbow! In a neighbouring garden the run-off issue has been further compounded by a neighbour on the upward West slope who was granted planning permission to sink a basement which deflected the course of an underground stream causing the loss of *Chamaecyparis* on the border although adjacent *Thuja*, 30m Oak and Aspen thrive.

Fortunately, in view of the robust use their garden gets, my clients are realistic and pragmatic. So not too many ambitious planting schemes and expensive failures although I do have to go in goal for penalties and retrieve cricket balls from the nether regions but the cups of tea keep coming. The neighbouring mature Oaks have twice shed large limbs, both times without warning on clear hot windless July days, damaging fences and outbuildings but no loss of life or human limb so far. Of more use has been the enormous leaf drop which I clear from lawns, compost and, in due course, spread as a surface conditioner or use as a planting medium.

The pile of predominantly Oak and Hornbeam leaves reaches approx. 2.5 cubic metres bounded by builders pallets dropped over discarded scaffold poles and can be partly dismantled and raided each autumn prior to being topped up. Another significant contribution has come from the similarly constructed garden compost heap, although this has mainly comprised the green clippings from the approx. 600 sq. mtr lawn, and I have struggled to

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## **Gardening on Clay**

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find matching quantities of brown or carbon material - the client is reluctant for me to add riding stable waste although I am trying wood shavings from a local joiner.

My focus has been to piecemeal target and improve the soil in what should eventually prove to be the better planting positions for light and warmth. Readers may remember Derry Watkins advising how she mulched her clay with industrial quantities of horticultural grit and then planted through this. I have taken a wider approach using root crops and green manures planted through an annual surface mulch of garden compost and then leaf mould.

The season starts in March/April with a potato crop, Charlotte and Red Desiree, as they are normally stored in the allotment hut. I plant deeply as earthing up is not an option once the clay bakes. The potatoes are dug up from mid August although this is heavy going as by now the soil has baked and yields haven't been spectacular. However excitement runs high and wagers are laid on tubers per plant. A few weeks on, and ideally after some rain, I attack the area with a sharp shovel to break up the clods and decide if I need to repeat the cycle or am now ready to plant.

The cycle has then been a Sept/Oct raid on the garden compost pile to use all available suitably rotted material, ie not reconcilable to what was put on the heap, followed by a coat of leaf mould sown with Rye Grass. The grass generally gets away by the end of Oct and then in late March I strim and work in the clippings at this time I apply a light mulch of Horticultural grit approx. 25 kg to 2 square metres. So definitely 'no dig' here ! Anyway it's probably beyond my capacity to resurrect any of the viable top soil buried when the lawn was scraped and levelled.

The proposed planting areas face south and slope down to the lawn and there has been some scope to build small terraces using treated timber to retain raised beds which will also allow me to keep up appearances with a nylon strimmer to manage the otherwise coarse grass bank. There's always plenty of clues available when first planting and ,if possible, best to defer to see what gems may already be en situ. So in the unmown areas in the first season there were cameos from Ragged Robin, a drift of Autumn Crocus

## Gardening on Clay

and what the Collins Wildflower Guide suggests may be 'Fox and Cubs' vibrant orange daisy flowers I'll struggle to better this spontaneity.

With client expectations set I've taken a cautious line to planting at this stage and David Austin roses apart have mainly used plants I've propagated myself: *Acanthus spinosus*, *Osteopermum*, *Geranium psilostemon*, *Geranium Johnsons Blue*, *Hypericum*, *Oenothera*, *Lythrum salicaria*, *Hypotelephium 'Matronalis'*, *Astrantia Majus* (below) all have come through this summer well and several seasons before.



*David Austin rose Generous Gardener*



*Astrantia Majus*

### *Gaura*

*lindheimeri* has also been a successful more recent low budget addition.

*Persicaria affinis*, despite being a slow starter, is now on the march. Box and *Pittosporum* 'Tom Thumb' have got away to provide structure along with Hornbeam clipped into form. An eclectic mix, but sometimes the best pictures come from a limited palette. As a separate exercise, along the heavily shaded rear border with the Queens Wood, several 25cm bare root *Rosa Arvensis*

have, within 3 years, scrambled over a 2m trellis to deter intruders (there was no soil preparation here).

In anticipation that the leaf mould pile and garden compost will be ongoing, I'm confident of extending the repertoire and am already seeing expansion in the *Hederifolium* introduced as seasonal under-planting into the autumn leaf mould mulch.

And the failures? We haven't got time!

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## Gardening on Clay

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As an aside, I would add that there has been a rat problem here, probably emanating from the faulty conduits that at one time took away the run off from the slopes above the garden. This was why the clients have been reluctant composters, although all the material used is from the garden. Possibly tiring from the lack of diversity in the flora, a neighbour decided to boost the fauna by introducing a Bengal Cat which, I now read, are purportedly domestic animals but was probably just eye candy. It quickly became obvious that this was no cute puss, more of a killing machine, as it terrorised the neighbourhood often carrying it's most recent victim, furry or feathered. The rat population plummeted, I didn't hear so much of the wren, and the cat had several skirmishes with pet dogs. I was asked to deal with it in one garden but the Bengal ran straight up a conifer; no scrambling here but a vertical ascent. However, those who live by the sword generally come to a sticky end and, no exception here as the feline became yet another road traffic statistic outside the house.



Several families here own large people carriers for the school run but, as yet, nobody has come forward. Last week I saw a rat. Nature's balance restored.

Paul Stiles

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## A Garden I Love

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As some of you will know from my recent Newsletter articles, I recently moved to Wendover – a smidge over the border from Herts to Bucks. I visited Wendover many times before I actually moved home and, on one of those visits, I noticed a Church fete with a big 'Plant Stall' sign. Unable to pass without a look-see, I quickly parked up and made a beeline for the plant stall, fearing that whatever gems may possibly be for sale would disappear before I got a look-in. Unusually, rather than the random collection of ragged plants that tend to characterize fund-raising affairs, this stall was notable for the wonderful selection of robust, unusual plants with beautifully scripted labels, mostly written in the same hand. I scooped up

## A Garden I Love

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as many plants as I could possibly carry and made my way to the money taker. I suggested that the Church had a very able and generous donor who was clearly a wonderful plantswoman. Luckily for me, it turned out that the person taking the money for the Church funds WAS 'the donor'.

I obviously made enquiries about her garden etc and it transpired that her house was a mere stone's throw away and that she had, until the previous year, opened her garden annually through the NGS. The loss of a parking facility in an adjacent field was preventing her having a public opening day in the future – it was now to be 'by appointment' only. Well, rather than risk our paths not crossing again, I boldly invited myself for a one-to-one garden viewing and, fortunately, no offence was taken at my effrontery. The time chosen for my visit turned out to be a sublime early June morning and my arrival at the front of the house could not have prepared me of the pleasure to come because, when I passed through the side garden gate I entered, what was to me, a truly heavenly place. A feast for all the senses.

The structure of the garden, the borrowed landscape, the planting, the combinations, the variety, the health of the plants, the soil condition, the attention to detail was breath-taking. Having started the garden from scratch, the owner, Sarah, knows each and every plant in her 1 acre chalky garden intimately. How/where/when each plant was acquired and its horticultural history and its habit – when it flowered in previous years etc.

Sarah considers her garden to be one full of memories because so many of her plants were gifted by gardening friends and associates. She has a great memory for plant names but any that temporarily escape her are revealed in moments as she ferrets under the plant to retrieve the stylish embossed steel labels that are located alongside every plant. As you can imagine, with a responsive audience, a detailed tour of the garden can take hours – but what pleasurable hours!



## A Garden I Love

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Sarah comes from a family of gardeners and had previously developed a garden in the grounds of a beautiful Regency house in the centre of Wendover. Hankering after a more rural context with an extensive borrowed landscape she and her husband moved to a hill just outside the town that afforded wonderful views. With significant vision she designed a garden that has matured into the sight that I beheld on that lovely summer morning.

The sloping garden is surrounded by large, mature elegant trees shielding her from views of the neighbouring gardens. At the end of the descending slope there is a concealed natural swimming pond and an opening in the trees that offers a beautiful view of the rolling Chilterns. The perimeter of the garden is bordered with carefully planted, coloured, themed perennial and shrub beds that offer all year round structure and interest and various habitats. Just in advance of the wild pond are two glorious beds – called Sun and Moon beds - which provide a central focus above which the gap in the trees provides views of her beautiful borrowed landscape.



Sarah has become a gardening friend and I have therefore been able to visit the garden on multiple occasions seeing it change season by season. Every visit yields a cutting or some seedlings or a plant that has had to be thinned because, on top of being a fantastic gardener, she is a great propagator - hence all the lovely plants that occasioned our first introduction.

Her garden features annually in the NGS listing for Wendover and she welcomes parties of more than 10, ideally in 4 cars or less due to the parking limitations. I do recommend that you pal up with some other plants people and pay her and her garden a visit – obviously by arrangement.

Sarah Nicolson, Cedar House, Wendover HP22 6EQ Tel 01296 622131

Have you a favourite garden - **do please write** about it for a future Newsletter.

## My Hardy Planting Journey

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Twenty odd years ago I was looking after my third large London garden. Juggling the domestic and work commitments of a busy wife and mother and raising three boys were the priorities. Gardening, though it had always been a primary interest and solace, necessarily took a back seat. Keeping on top of mowing, weeding, mulching, watering, pruning and planting had to be squashed into a full timetable. If the garden looked tidy it would do. I had always loved and nurtured my everyday plants, kept a gardening diary, loved botanical Latin and tried to give my plants the conditions they needed to thrive. However I stuck to the old favourites, the good doers. A snowdrop was a snowdrop; a peony was a peony. One day my mother gave me her back copies of HPS periodicals. Quickly hooked, I eagerly joined the National Society but there was never time to attend a local group. Still, from reading the journals, I began to learn about unusual hardy perennials. A rich world of new varieties appeared. A new phase of my gardening life had begun.

Some years later I took over and gradually resurrected the tiny garden I now look after bordering three sides of my cottage in Bedfordshire. Totally neglected and with a thin layer of forest bark covering builder's rubble and rubbish, my heart sank as I explored my bleak new garden. At the back was a 20' by 40' strip bordered by a row of 15 Leylandii planted along our border by my neighbour. The lawn was a tatty piece of rough grass containing a shallow polystyrene moulded "pond". At the front of the house was a space 8' by 30', south west facing and containing five plants that might be worth keeping. A small tree, *Magnolia x loebneri* 'Leonard Messel', an ancient and tangled *Clematis montana* 'Elizabeth' by the front door, a *Crocsmia* 'Lucifer' and a *Paeonia officinalis* tucked into the corners beside a border of thorny *Rosa rugosa*. The third patch alongside the house measuring 10' by 30' contained a small shed surrounded by a sea of bark. In the depths of that first hard winter I wondered if I had met my nemesis.



Spring, however, was round the corner and the first warmer days cheered me. Armed with energy, enthusiasm, a small budget and a little knowledge I set to and planned my new garden. By May 2007, with new paths and a lawn laid,

## My Hardy Planting Journey

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gates and fences repaired, log store built, shed moved and borders cleared, defined and enriched I felt I was on my way to transform this ramshackle space. Planting could begin! Little did I know what fate had in store.

During Bank Holiday Sunday night disaster struck. Following 36 hours of torrential rain I woke to find my house and garden inundated with flood water ankle deep. The family rallied round to help bail out along with a dozen or so wonderful neighbours, some suffering the same plight. We spent the holiday Monday moving furniture, lifting ruined rugs and carpets all thrown out onto my new lawn and assessing the damage. The planting plan went on hold. That summer a few outdoor pots were the sum total of my garden. Indoors refurbishment continued for a year before I could move back downstairs. But, I discovered, gardens recover quickly. The building of a French drain was a priority to hopefully avoid any further flooding. Once that was in place, I could look forward to the Autumn planting of my restored garden.

During the summer I had visited Frogmore near Windsor. Though on a far grander scale than mine, I was inspired by the beauty of shade loving plants and the contrast of leaf shapes and textures. I decided to make a green garden with the accent on soft colours and whites and creams which would show in dark corners, reflect moonlight and often have evening fragrance. Like many gardeners I longed to grow and try many varieties of plants. Space however was severely limited and I wanted to avoid the spotty effect. Now each area more or less mirrors the others.



I had room for one small tree and chose an *Acer micranthum*, the snake bark maple. This is under planted with brunnera, heuchera, epimediums, bergenia and hellebores interspersed with snowdrops and primulas in the Spring. *Galium odoratum*, the sweet woodruff, was a late addition, a lovely ground cover plant but, I have discovered, determined to take over and must be kept within bounds.

## My Hardy Planting Journey



*Clematis Arabella*

On the boundary fences I planted two of my favourite climbers, *Actinidia kolomikta* and *Parthenocissus henryana*. Where there is enough sun there are climbing roses and clematis. Clematis seem to love it here, in particular 'Arabella', 'Black Prince', the lovely viticella 'Etoile Violette' as well as *C. rehderiana*. This grows over an arch and, I must confess, an impulse buy, it is rather too rampant for my small space. But it gets tamed annually and how I love its' masses of pale creamy yellow tiny bell flowers and scent of cowslips.

In the summer of 2016 I enjoyed the company of more than 100 visitors when I signed up for our village Open Gardens day. One visitor, Diana Barry, lingered a long time and seemed most interested in my planting lists. Diana mentioned the next meeting of HHPS and suggested I come along. I did...and received the warmest of welcomes. At last I was a fully-fledged member of our Hertfordshire group. May I thank Diana for leading me to HHPS and all you fellow gardeners for friendly, knowledgeable advice, excellent speakers and many enjoyable Saturday afternoons.

I continue to learn and discover new plants. Somehow they must be squeezed into what is now a full garden. Many pots come to the rescue with the added advantage of being able to move them to just the right spot. My favourites are plants with aromatic foliage. Two especially, *Aloysia citrodora* (lemon verbena) and *Pelargonium tomentosum* loved last summer's heat. Then of course there is the salvia family. Who can resist the intoxicating scent of *Salvia greggii* as you brush against the leaves on a summer's evening walk around the garden? Even writing this in the depths of winter makes my heart sing.



Here's to the next gardening year, many good meetings and new discoveries with the HHPS in 2019.

Su Detre

## The Big 'BB'



Whether you have a small courtyard garden or an 'estate', the chances are that you will have some box bushes or hedges. It has always, since Roman times, been the evergreen of choice for low manicured hedges and topiarised bushes adding all-year-round architectural interest to gardens large and small. The slow growing nature of *Buxus sempervirens*

means that mature plants do not come cheap and many of us will have bought small plants for both cost reasons and to make the topiarising of them easier. But, due to their slow growth, growing box requires some patience so the threat of the 'Big BB' – box blight – to our patiently nurtured topiarised box balls and hedges is doubly upsetting. And if one serious affliction were not enough, box has also been afflicted by box tree caterpillar – the number one garden pest in 2017, according to the RHS.

The origins of box blight (*Cylindrocladium buxicola*) are not known, but it occurs around the world, from New Zealand to the UK. Confusingly, the term often covers another box disease too, Volutella blight. The two diseases often appear together but *Cylindrocladium* is more serious because it can enter the plant through the leaf cuticle while *Volutella* needs a cut leaf edge to penetrate the plant. As I am sure many of you already know to your cost, the symptoms of the blight are:

- Brown patches on top of the leaves
- White undersides on the leaves
- Leaves dropping off, especially in humid conditions
- Black streaks on the stems

For *Volutella* blight, the leaves yellow and darken to a shade of tan.



## The Big 'BB'

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The main way that box blight can get into your garden is on newly bought plants. Another way is being carried on tools that have been used elsewhere on infected plants. If you have a helper in your garden, it may be that they come from a garden suffering infection and their clothes and footwear could harbour the spores of the blight. There is treatment for the blight and its worth trying this first because to grub up and destroy mature hedging or topiarised bushes is extremely distressing. The experts recommend a combination of cultural and chemical treatments. Affected areas should be hard pruned and these branches burnt. Treat the cut areas with a proprietary fungicide. Clear up all leaf debris from infected plants and destroy this too. Remove the top layer of soil around the box and replace it with fresh soil because spores can stay active on the ground for up to six years. Clean pruning tools with disinfectant after using them on infected plants.

Going forward, propagate new plants from your own healthy box plants and, if you buy in plants, 'quarantine them first for at least 6 weeks to make sure they are free of disease. Avoid clipping box in wet weather or when rain is forecast in the next few days. Try not to position taller plants over box, because they could drip on them. Water plants around the plant base and not over the foliage. Allow adequate ventilation around the plants, preferably 30cm apart.

As if the Big 'BB' was not a big enough worry, the other problem is Box tree caterpillar (*Cydalima perspectalis*) that can turn a box plant completely leafless. The moths, native to East Asia, were apparently first noticed in the UK in 2008 and caterpillars in private gardens here in 2011. Box tree caterpillars are greenish-yellow with black heads when newly hatched. When they are older they have thick black and thin white stripes along their bodies, and can be up to 4cm long.



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## The Big 'BB'

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They are busiest spring to autumn but can overwinter as small caterpillars buried in webs amongst the leaves. There are only limited ways to control the caterpillar. You can pick them off by hand or use an insecticide but try to avoid spraying insecticide near plants that are in flower to avoid harming beneficial pollinators. Most importantly of all, check carefully any new plants being brought into your garden.

If replacement of your box proves unavoidable it may be wise to consider alternatives. For clipped hedging one needs slow-growing evergreens with dense, tightly knit foliage - yew & holly being obvious examples both of which are far less prone to pests and diseases than box and, of course, bay has always been a traditional shrub to topiarise.

Susanna Geoghegan

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## A Romance with Roses

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With sadness we have read of the death in December of England's greatest rose grower. As The Guardian so aptly wrote "David Austin who has died aged 92, put romance back into roses. A quintessential Englishman, he was a farmer's son from Shropshire who created what we now think of as the quintessential English rose. "

Awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society in 2003 and appointed OBE in 2007 his legacy will go undimmed in many of our gardens.

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## **An Adventure with Plants**

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Plants are long time survivors and have been around for far longer than we have. Nearly twenty years ago I bought a few garden chrysanthemums, unlike most perennials these did not come through the winter. In the UK plant breeders from the 1950's were breeding for larger flowers on shorter plants for autumn use. Having two allotments trying to find winter hardy, as opposed to autumn hardy proved to be difficult. So I started trialling plants and, at its peak had over two hundred cultivars. Slowly I was able to separate which was which.

A lot of these plants appeared in the RHS Wisley Garden Trials and I spent a wonderful day going through all the records from the 1950's onwards tracking names and who had submitted them. All were dug up at the end of the year, housed in a cold greenhouse and fresh cuttings taken in Spring. According to the National Chrysanthemum Society, there is no other way to treat chrysanthemums.

I was awarded full National Collection status by Plant Heritage (then NCCPG) and was immediately invited onto the RHS Wisley Chrysanthemum Trials Committee. This started seven years of M25 J22 to J10 journeys every two weeks. Now I was really in at the deep end as all of the committee were the top National Chrysanthemum Society men and women. They all talked in a code which I soon discovered was the Chrysanthemum Register, a bit like reading a knitting pattern. So I mastered the code and was allowed to walk the trials field marking the plants every two weeks from August to November. To control disease, two toxic sprays twice a week, plus large amounts of feeds, were applied. Lovely flowers but certainly not the sort of plants beloved by hardy plant enthusiasts.

Then I was allowed to submit a few of my plants five the first year, but they insisted in digging everything up at the end of the year. My persistence paid off as I kept on about my trials on open allotments leaving all in for the winter, and slowly they began to listen. In 2009, if I could provide 500 plants at no cost to the RHS, a winter trial could take place, something the RHS has never attempted before. A lovely friend who was a retired Parks Superintendent did all this for me and the trial went ahead. Planting in May 2010, the first winter was mild 'Ah a fluke' they said when the second winter went down to -17C they all turned up at the May meeting expecting to see an

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## An Adventure with Plants

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empty field but there they were, they grew and flowered well. By now, the chrysanthemum breeder Dr Barrie Machin (on the committee) was very interested as he had never seen these plants before. So every two weeks I took to Wisley print outs of my research and we had many wonderful discussions over coffee. Why were these plants so different? He teased the answer out, as in the 1920's- 30's breeders of hardy border plants were crossing back to wild plants from around 45N latitude across Eurasia, the edge



*RHS Wisley Garden Winter Hardy Trials*

of the last Ice Age. These scruffy wild plants enhanced the ability to survive cold but in the UK we also have winter wet so what survives well in Minnesota winters may not in the UK, so further refinement was needed for our UK borders.

These plants will never make the show bench but for a real splash of colour at the end of the year I feel they cannot be overlooked.

Thanks to the HPS for funding the printing of the book and to John McCormack for sliding around muddy allotments to take pictures.

Judy Barker

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## A Big Thank You

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...to all the HHPS women - and a sprinkling of men - who have helped by cake-making or kitchen-helping this last year! Our monthly meetings would not end so happily and with such a friendly atmosphere without your efforts. As one helper said recently:

"I do this once a year. That's my contribution."

Another thank you is due to Max Walker who organises the dishwasher with the minimum of fuss.

Penny Bennetts

Our monthly talks are held at the **Memorial Hall, Marford Rd, Wheathampstead AL4 8AY at 2.00 pm followed by tea & cakes.**

**Saturday, 2nd March**

**Ingrid Millington - Primulas & Auriculas**

The Millington family runs Hillview Hardy Plants in Shropshire and has a particular interest in Primulas and Auriculas as well as other hardy plants and bulbs. [www.hillviewhardyplants.com](http://www.hillviewhardyplants.com)

**Saturday, 6th April**

**Dr Brenda Harold - Wild Flowers of the Canadian Rockies**

This is a return visit for Dr Harold; you may remember the entertaining and informative talk she gave last time about plant defence mechanisms. This time she will talk about Wild Flowers of the Canadian Rockies which no doubt many members will have seen for themselves. [www.identiplant.co.uk](http://www.identiplant.co.uk)

**Saturday 13th April 10 -12 noon**

**HHPS Seedling Swap**

1, Nathans Close, Welwyn, AL6 9QB

**Friday, 24th May 6 - 9pm**

**Plant Sale sorting, United Reformed Church, St Albans AL1 4BH**

**Saturday, 25th May 10 - 12 noon**

**Annual Plant Sale United Reformed Church, St Albans AL1 4BH**

**Saturday, 22nd June 2 - 5pm**

**HHPS Open Garden**

Crunnells, Green House, Preston Herts SG4 7UF

**Saturday, 15th June**

**Coach Trip to Langthorn's Plantery, RHS Hyde Hall & Furzelea**

**Sunday, September 8th, Sept 2-5pm**

**HHPS Open Garden**

Hornbeams, Priory Drive, Stanmore Middx HA7 3HN

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## Looking Ahead

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### **Saturday 5th October**

#### **Tony Goode - A Crocus for All Seasons**

A keen Alpine gardener, Tony will in his talk today cover the genus Crocus, his specialist subject, and will look at the botany of both wild and cultivated plants.

### **Saturday 2nd November**

**HHPS AGM** followed by a short talk about honey bees by **Jonathan Matthews** of the Mid-Bucks Beekeepers.

### **Saturday 7th December**

#### **Helen Yemm - Down-sizing**

Another returning visitor, this popular speaker is well known for her column "Thorny Problems" in The Telegraph and other writing. She describes herself as a "passionate muddy-gloves-and-wellies gardener blessed with the gift of the gab". Just over 10 years Helen moved from a property with a 2.5 acre garden to a new, much smaller one hence the subject of her talk. We can certainly look forward to an entertaining afternoon to round off the year.

The December meeting will also be the occasion for our Christmas Party.

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## HHPS Membership

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We are delighted to welcome a number of members who have joined over the last year: Peter Johnson, Julia Spring, Julianne Arden-Rose, Peter Kidman, Sue Watson, Margaret Cooper, Penny Leech and Kay Petty.

And to welcome back three members who we thought we'd scared away but we are glad have returned - Anastasia and Keith Robertson and Elizabeth Hunter.

The HPS regularly discuss recruitment of new, and, in particular younger members. If you know anyone you can 'recruit' do try and bring them along to one of the meetings as a trial run. As you will all see from the demographic of our stalwart members, some young blood would be particularly welcome!

Role	Name	Contact
Chairman	Liz Egré	01727 857727 / malandlizegre@sky.com
Vice Chairman	Annie Godfrey	07958563355 / anne@daisyroots.com
Treasurer	Mary Robey	01727 858360 / maryrobey6@gmail.com
Secretary	VACANT	Please apply!
Newsletter	Susanna Geoghegan	07799 038833 / susanna.geoghegan@btinternet.com
Membership Sec.	Alison Tracy	020 8440 8671 / alison.tracy@btinternet.com
Refreshments	Penny Bennetts/ Leo Vaughan	01442 391432 / pbpenben@gmail.com 01923 854650
Plant Sales	Beryl Davis	01279 898413 / berylpdavis@talktalk.net
Coach Trip	Maggie Lacey	01727 569286 / maggielacey99@gmail.com
Programme	Susanna Geoghegan	07799 038833 / susanna.geoghegan@btinternet.com
Technical Manager	David Singleton	01582 832348 / david.singleton@theiet.org
Conservation	Malcolm Stodell	01582 840059 / m.stodell@btinternet.com
Website	Mike Crabb	020 8440 8671 / mec.hhps@gmail.com
Publicity	VACANT	Please apply?

Please Note: Committee members' email addresses are private and must only be used on a one-to-one basis, not in open multiple address lists.

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## With Sadness

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It is with sadness that we announce the passing of David Way, a long time member and friend of the HPS & HHPS. Born in 1928, too young to serve in WWII, he was sent to work on a fruit farm where his life-long love of the land and growing things was established. After the war he studied horticulture at Cambridge University Botanic Gardens and RHS Wisley which gave him a firm academic grounding, and after a research assignment in the Netherlands, he took up his first teaching post at the newly established Pershore College. His career in horticulture and involvement in the HPS, having helped found the Kent Group, gave him the opportunity to organise garden tours to Northern Europe. Following his retirement he developed a second career in garden writing following an invitation from the HPS to write a book on Penstemons. David and Anke opened their lovely garden on many occasions and were always very generous with their plants and their time. He will be sadly missed.