



The HPS Hertfordshire Group Newsletter - Autumn 2015



<http://www.hertshps.com>

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Editorial

Hello again, and welcome to the start of a new season of HPS talks. After a busy summer, which included an evening visit to the spectacular Alexander McQueen exhibition at the V&A, a reflective afternoon admiring the watercolours of Eric Ravilious at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, and a riotous Chas 'n' Dave knees-up in Chelmsford (Gertcha!), it makes a change to sit down and compile the Newsletter. I hope your gardens have thrived this year; despite a rather drawn-out spring, we seem to have had the right combination of sun and rain to keep foliage looking good long after midsummer, and what a fantastic year for roses.

The indefatigable Annie Godfrey has scooped three more Silver-Gilt Medals at Chelsea, Hampton Court and Gardeners' World Live for Daisy Roots Nursery this year. As she says herself, she's nothing if not consistent!

I'm happy to say that we expect to elect Alison Tracy as Membership Secretary at the AGM in November. We are still in need of volunteers to take on three vacancies within the Group, however, so please do consider putting yourself forward. More information on the roles can be found on page 4.

If you have any cuttings left over from enthusiastic summer propagating, or if you've been dividing those spreading herbaceous perennials, perhaps you'd like to bring your spare plants along to the Plant Sale Table at the next meeting.

We're covering a wide range of subject matter in our choice of speakers this season, from Stefan White's story of the Tradescants to a masterclass in tulips from John Amand. I'm looking forward to hearing Colin Moat's talk on shade-lovers and perusing what he brings for sale, having recently browsed the tantalising plant list on his Pineview Nursery website. Bring your pocket money!

Marion Jay

Chairman's Report

Our society has had another successful year of lectures and activities which is shown in the high attendance numbers and in the number of new members and visitors we seem to have attracted throughout the year. For this I have to thank my very able Committee for all the work they put in.

The first of our outdoor activities of the year was the very successful Seedling Swap hosted by David and Jane Singleton in their lovely garden on an unusually warm and pleasant morning in April. This is always a very pleasant and relaxed event where members can chat over a cup of tea and pick up a treasure or two. If you feel you could host such a morning we would love to hear from you.

Our Grand Plant Sale held at the end of May was another huge success. Many thanks must go to all the members who contributed plants, time and effort to make this a success. It's very pleasing to see so many of you pitching in to help with all the setting up and especially the advertising that goes on beforehand, all carefully prepared by Ed and Alison King. Many thanks go to Beryl Davis for organising the event in such a calm and able fashion. The Sale seemed to have gone very smoothly and it was great to see a large number of repeat customers.

Many thanks to Sue and Peter Tomson for holding the Members' Open Garden event in May, which was reasonably well attended. Their garden was looking wonderful, and we had the added excitement of one of their hives of bees swarming...but far enough away from where we were enjoying our tea and cake for it not to be a problem!

This brings us back to our indoor meetings and our need for new Committee members. Linda Williams, our Refreshments Organiser, is standing down. I would like to thank Linda for doing a sterling job on the teas. In the meantime, we need someone to take over the role. If the thought of organising cakes is too much, tea and biscuits is perfectly acceptable, and certainly better than no refreshments at all. Hardy Planters do enjoy the chance to get together and chat after our meetings, and it would be such a shame if this had to be discontinued.

Due to the lack of a volunteer there was no Summer Coach Trip this year, which is such a pity as they have always been a great day out. Members have plenty of ideas for places they'd like to visit, we just need someone to coordinate it.

I would like to thank the individual members of the Committee, many of whom have served for a long time; Alison King is even serving again after a previous stint. All your efforts are hugely appreciated. My gratitude also goes to the many members who are willing to help behind the scenes and make the group the success it is. Finally, I would like to give special thanks to Janet Horton, who is finally standing down after twelve years on the committee as Treasurer and Membership Secretary, all of which she has done with great skill, efficiency and good humour. We are very grateful for the time and effort she has put in.

Irene Cowan

Your HPS Group Needs You!

Our stalwart **Refreshments Organiser**, Linda Williams, is stepping down this autumn, and we are now scouting for two volunteers to take her place. I don't need to tell any of you how the group would feel about going without tea and cake!

This essential role involves maintaining supplies in the kitchen and co-ordinating refreshments at the monthly meetings. The Committee feels the position would best be filled on a job-share basis, so that no one person feels responsible for every meeting. If you and a friend would like to help, please do let us know. There is a lot of help already on hand in the kitchen and a well-subscribed members' rota for supplying cakes.

Sorry to keep banging on about this, but the Committee is still on the look-out for a volunteer to take the post of **Coach Trip Organiser**. This involves arranging the Summer Coach Trip and coordinating a Member's Open Garden event. The annual outing this summer has been sorely missed, and we would very much like to enrol someone to instigate next year's day out.

As organiser, you have free rein in choosing which gardens to visit; if you're short of ideas, the committee have plenty of suggestions. We will provide information and help to get you started. An enquiry doesn't mean you are obliged to commit by any means, so do please get in touch.

Marion Jay

I would like to step aside as Herts HPS **Conservation Scheme Co-ordinator** and let someone else enjoy the role. It has been a great opportunity to meet members of both the Herts Group and other co-ordinators round the country, and I have had the opportunity to handle some very rare plants.

I am willing to help any prospective volunteer as much as I can, so please get in touch. I had no knowledge of conservation when I started in the role, so I am proof that no experience is required!

Diana Garner

For more information on these roles, call **Heather Osborne** on **01727 856354**, or click '**Contact Us**' on the website: www.hertshps.com.

New Membership Secretary

I am very pleased to be able to announce that Alison Tracy has offered to take the reins from Janet Horton as Membership Secretary. All being well, Alison will be elected at the forthcoming Herts Group AGM in November. I would like to thank Janet for all her hard work in the role, and as Treasurer beforehand, and warmly welcome Alison to the Committee.

Marion Jay

Grand Plant Sale

This year's Annual Plant Sale was very successful, and you will be pleased to hear we made a grand total of **£1,507.50**.

On the Friday evening lots of members' cars turned up outside the Homewood Church Hall, most of them loaded with trays of plants. Once inside the hall, we laid out the tables and the plants were priced and put on display. Not only did we have perennials, there were tables for annuals, half hardies, shrubs, vegetables, fruit and ornamental grasses.

Saturday morning, and again lots of volunteer members arrived. Once any extra plants were priced, we were then ready to open the doors to the public; because of the good publicity, we had a queue right along the side of the hall. The first hour was very busy and the tables started to look quite depleted. In fact, figures taken on the gate suggest that, of a total of 125 customers, 92 arrived before 10.30am! A number of customers were regulars and some were obviously quite knowledgeable, but many needed help and advice about what they were buying. A few were carrying lists of plants they had seen and liked, and it was gratifying to try to help them. At the end of the morning, after we had retrieved some of the more interesting plants to grow on for HHPS sales tables, or to donate to members' own plant sales, the charity Earthworks arrived to collect the remainder.

This event could not have taken place without those members who grow the plants and everyone who volunteers to help, both on the Friday and on the Saturday, all of whom made the sale a very enjoyable and profitable success. The money gained from this sale is the primary source of income for the Hertfordshire HPS Group and it enables us to have really excellent speakers at the meetings. A huge thank you, therefore, to everyone who contributed.

Beryl Davis

Seedling Swap

David and Jane Singleton generously offered to host the Herts Group Seedling Swap this year. The event was very well attended, and members wandered around the spring garden, admiring the snakeshead fritillaries and early-flowering geums. Lots of little plants changed hands, accompanied by much chat and cups of tea. I took along a few plants of a capsicum (chilli) variety known as the Penis Pepper, which curiously vanished within minutes. In return, I managed to snaffle a small clutch of *Cerintho major* 'Purpurascens' which have performed beautifully on my sun-drenched terraces this summer.

Many thanks to David and Jane for the delicious refreshments and warm hospitality; we all had a very jolly time (see photos, back page).

If you'd be willing to host this members-only event next year, please get in touch: **Heather Osborne 01727 856354**, or via the website: **www.hertshps.com**

Marion Jay

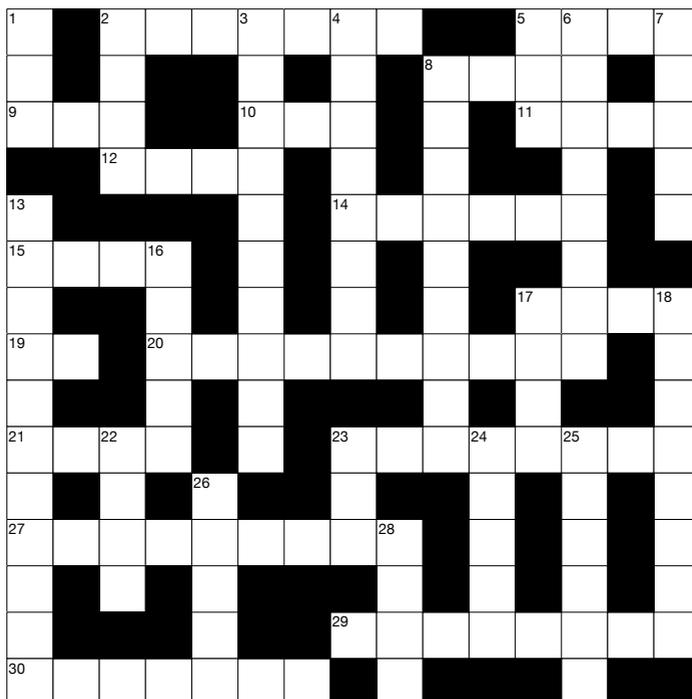
Prize Cryptic Crossword

In the absence of a Coach Trip report, I thought I would occupy the space with something to exercise your summer-slackened brain cells. Yes, it's a nerdy gardening-themed cryptic crossword. Apologies to any purists for the freeform grid; it is my first attempt at this sort of thing and combining symmetry with theming proved a step too far, but I hope it will be an enjoyable challenge.

Entries must arrive by **December 1st 2015**, and only Herts HPS members may take part. There will be a prize of a **£10 Garden Centre voucher** for the first correct solution pulled out of a hat at the Christmas Party on December 5th. Either cut out the completed crossword, or photocopy the page, or scan it and send to:

Marion Jay, 84 Valley Road, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7DP

Email: marion@garden84.net



Name:

Email:

Phone:

Clues

Across

- 2 Squaw stirs up no drama (7)
 5 Went crazy, living in pond (4)
 8 Chivvies old horses (4)
 9 Arranged little onion (3)
 10 National floral society initially prune fabulously and rearrange (1,1,1)
 11 Slice carnivorous pitcher plant to a spade's depth (4)
 12 Mrs Winder, the Greek goddess of youth? (4)
 14 Retrieves rent covering terrace excavator (6)
 15 Lad goes to Georgia to find individual aquatic organism (4)
 17 Disorientated footballer has orange skin (4)
 19 Both eyes find nominal Latin suffix (2)
 20 River flowing to North Dakota coast leads to king water skimmer (4,6)
 21 The way one walks, perhaps, or the way one walks in? (4)
 23 Main Christmas evergreen from dune dweller (3,5)
 27 Frantically retracing elevated landscape (9)
 29 Widen bed to accommodate morning glory! (8)
 30 Storks bill two-thirds worn away by ageless aeonium (7)

Down

- 1 Sam bewildered Latin male (3)
 2 Bergamot has a nocturnal pollinator (4)
 3 Rubs a genie up the wrong way and receives vegetables (10)
 4 Almost a princess, so pink (8)
 5 Yellow Book charity selects tops of new green shoots (1,1,1)
 6 Sixth sense a slander, right, when formally trained (8)
 7 Common arum from giant Greek family (5)
 8 Tobacco tonic spilt on first class return to eastern China (9)
 13 Hard surface given to snap awkwardly (6,5)
 16 Spartan very soft, immersed in beer (5)
 17 Poet becomes designer of Iford Manor gardens (4)
 18 Aristocratic chick whose house is on fire (8)
 22 Accountant takes bet on green (4)
 23 Student union removed light source (3)
 24 Smell identification: damp (5)
 25 Hardy companion plant? (6)
 26 Play, in cabaret item at first, various prickly characters (5)
 28 Sharp stones set teeth (4)
-

Subscription Renewal Letters

Subscription forms are being sent out as enclosures within the Autumn Newsletter this year, to save on postage. Please complete the form and return with payment. If you have not received your form with this Newsletter, contact Janet Horton (details on p.23) as soon as possible, and she will send one out to you.

Conservation Scheme Update

The updated HPS Conservation Scheme list of plants was issued in April, following the publication of the RHS Plant Finder 2015. The HPS Conservation List only includes plants that are listed in three or less nurseries country-wide. Several of the plants that we have been growing in Herts have now been taken off the list as they are now more widely available.

If you are growing *Athamanta turbith*, *Chrysanthemum* 'Early Yellow', *Heuchera* 'Brown Finch' or *Rudbeckia laciniata* 'Starcadia Razzle Dazzle', these plants have all been taken out of the scheme so you can regard them as your own. They are still rare plants so I am sure Beryl will welcome any babies you may have to sell on the Herts Group plant stall.

New additions to the Conservation List include *Ballota pseudodictamnus* compact form B&M 8119, *Geranium* 'Pink Delight', and *Erysimum* 'Bowles' Yellow'. The full list of Conservation Scheme plants, many with photos, are on the National HPS website, with growing instructions.

If you are interested in becoming more involved with the Herts Conservation Scheme please do not hesitate to contact me on: montana@cholesbury.net.

Diana Garner

Members' Open Garden

On a sunny afternoon in early May, a small group of Herts HPS members gathered to visit Sue and Peter Tomson's garden at The Abbot's House in Abbot's Langley. It was a real treat to explore the large garden, with myriad paths leading to many different areas, each with their own distinct character and atmosphere. Many of the plants were unusual, and the Tomsons were kept busy advising visitors of plant names and cultivation tips.

Tea, cake and biscuits were served near the house, where the conservatory boasted a beautiful *Mandevilla boliviensis*, its velvety red trumpets strongly contrasted against glossy green foliage. It was a lovely afternoon for all who attended, and our thanks go to Sue and Peter for their warm hospitality and remarkable memory for plant names!



The Tomsons' beehive meadow

Succeeding With Monardas

When Clare and I open our garden to NGS visitors at the end of July each year there is one thing that I can guarantee, and that is that there will be more complimentary remarks and queries about one particular plant than about the over 200 other perennial plant and grass species in the garden. That plant is the Monarda. The nice words are richly deserved – it is a fabulous plant suitable for most herbaceous borders, but particularly for a mid to late summer-flowering planting scheme.



Monarda 'Gewitterwolke',
syn. *M.* 'Thundercloud'

Everything about these aromatic plants is appealing. Of course, the flowers, ranging from almost white through to various pinks, reds and purples, are wonderful, attracting hoards of insects looking for the abundant nectar. Not for nothing are monardas sometimes called bee balm. The plants themselves are of medium height, robust and self-supporting with good foliage throughout the season – and furthermore no slug damage! As a bonus during autumn and winter, the seed heads create an

interesting silhouette, especially against a background of grasses, and are particularly spectacular when covered with a hoar frost or a pom-pom of snow. After all this praise, I might say what's not to like? Well, I must be honest and admit that growing monardas does sometimes lead to a few problems, which I will go into later.

Monardas are native to the eastern side of North America, where they grow typically alongside river banks. This gives a clue to the conditions in which they will thrive. They like a moisture-retentive soil, one which contains plenty of organic matter, that will allow their shallow, fleshy roots a reasonably free run and the opportunity to meander at will. They are happy in sun or in part shade. They most certainly will not like a very heavy soil that may become waterlogged in winter or, at the other extreme, a soil which bakes hard under a hot sun in summer. In my garden I grow them in part shade, in a workable clay soil liberally enriched with garden compost.



Monarda
'Beauty of Cobham'

When grown in conditions they do not like,

monardas will often become more susceptible to diseases. If the soil is too wet in winter then the plant will simply rot away. The most notorious problem often mentioned by gardeners, however, is mildew. This will affect the plant mostly when the conditions are too dry – but then again it could also be too wet! My advice generally on this is to avoid the older varieties such as *M.* 'Cambridge Scarlet', and choose instead the more modern hybrids. These have been bred with a much greater degree of mildew resistance.



Monarda 'Balance',
syn. *M.* 'Libra'

Another of the problems mentioned by people I have spoken to is that the plant simply does not reappear in spring. My feeling on this is that it is more to do with understanding what the description 'perennial' actually means. Perennial as far as horticulture is concerned does not always mean that a plant will perform reliably year after year without some degree of 'management'. Monardas fall in the category of perhaps needing a little more management than most perennials. They will spread naturally, but at the same time tend to die out in the centre. Therefore every two or three years it makes sense to pot up some healthy,

vigorous pieces from the outside of the patch, dig over the complete area, adding in some organic matter, and replant once the potted plants have established. Just to emphasise, good soil preparation is vital. Without this necessary maintenance there is a risk that the plant may simply fade away.

What about companion plants? This is a tricky area, as I am sure that every gardener will have a different view on this depending on what happens to be his or her preferred planting style. But I will nail my colours to the mast! Those of you who have seen our garden will not be surprised that my view is monardas look their best in a more natural setting, reflecting their North American origins. This means combining them with the taller growing grasses such as miscanthus, calamagrostis, molinia, etc., together



Monarda 'Gardenview Scarlet'

with the later flowering perennial plants such as echinaceas, asters, persicarias, rudbeckias, eupatorium, helenium, etc. Wonderful - but I am prepared to be persuaded that other combinations will also work!

Finally, a word about varieties. There are so many hybrids available, many of which can seem remarkably similar. I have the following growing in my garden and are all doing well, with minimal mildew problems:

- *M.* 'Beauty of Cobham'; pale pink with dark purple calyxes
- *M.* 'Gardenview Scarlet'; vigorous and more reliable than *M.* 'Cambridge Scarlet' but can be difficult to place, as its flowers shine out conspicuously
- *M.* 'Gewitterwolke' (syn. *M.* 'Thundercloud'); lovely dusky purple-red
- *M.* 'On Parade'; purple red
- *M.* 'Balance' (syn. *M.* 'Libra'); bright pink
- *M.* 'Praerienacht'; lighter purple, seems to tolerate drier conditions
- *M.* 'Raspberry Wine'; a rich red, as the name implies
- *M.* 'Vintage Wine'; similar to *M.* 'Raspberry Wine'.

I have also read that *Monarda* 'Marshall's Delight' (clear pink, rounded, ball-shaped flowers) is another superior variety.

So, in summary, monardas are probably my favourite perennial plants and I do encourage you to give them a try, as they are beautiful and rewarding to grow, despite their minor foibles. But if you don't believe me then listen to Piet Oudolf, who says - and I quote - '*Monardas are without doubt one of the most important plant genera for the natural garden*'. There you have it!

Photographs: Bill Hodgson

Adrian de Baat

Front Cover Plant Profile

Front cover: *Vitis vinifera* 'Brandt'

Vitis 'Brandt' is a vigorous grape vine grown largely for its spectacular autumn tints, which are characterised by rich crimson leaves, veined in yellow or green. It bears pendulous bunches of small, sweet, dark purple grapes in abundance but being thick skinned with large pips, they are usually left on the vine and (birds permitting) last well into the autumn, contributing to the colourful display.

V. 'Brandt' produces long, trainable, woody stems, and can be propagated by layering or taking hardwood cuttings. Heavy pruning beyond November should be avoided, as the rising sap bleeds excessively, which dramatically reduces the plant's vigour and may even cause it to die.

Marion Jay

Opening Your Garden for the NGS

Have you ever considered opening your garden for the National Garden Scheme? The Herts County Organiser is currently scouting for new gardens of all sizes and styles. A team of assistants provide lots of support to get you started, and all the proceeds go to worthwhile charitable concerns, such as Macmillan Nurses and Hospice UK. You can find out more about the scheme on the NGS website: ngs.org.uk or get in touch with County Organiser **Julie Wise** directly, by phone: **01438 821509**, or email: juliewise@f2s.com, for more information.

AGM Agenda, 7th November 2015

THE HARDY PLANT SOCIETY – HERTFORDSHIRE GROUP TWENTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**To be held on Saturday 7th November 2015 at 2.00pm
at the Memorial Hall, Wheathampstead.**

AGENDA

Apologies for absence

1. To approve the minutes of the 26th AGM held on 1st November 2014
2. Matters arising
3. Chairman's report
4. Treasurer's report and approval of accounts for the 12 months ending 30th September 2015 (to be laid round)
5. Election of Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and Newsletter Editor for the ensuing 12 months (en bloc)
6. Election of Membership Secretary, for which there is a vacancy and a nomination has been received
7. Election of Committee for the ensuing 12 months
Five committee members are standing for re-election and there are two vacancies. Nominations would be welcome
8. Election of Examiner of the accounts
9. Any other business

*Please submit NOMINATIONS for members of the Committee in writing,
to the Secretary by Saturday 17th October 2015
(20, St Stephens Avenue, St Albans, AL3 4AD)
Prior permission of any person nominated must be obtained.*

Heather Osborne, Secretary

The AGM will be followed by a talk by Judy Barker, entitled 'Hardy Border Chrysanthemums' (See Events Programme, p.21)

AGM Minutes, Autumn 2014

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE GROUP OF THE HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

**Held at the Memorial Hall, Wheathampstead
on Saturday, 1st November 2014**

Present:	Officers
Irene Cowan	Chair
Elizabeth Egré	Vice Chair
Heather Osborne	Secretary
Mary Robey	Treasurer
Janet Horton	Membership Secretary
Marion Jay	Newsletter Editor

Committee Members: Anne Godfrey, Bill Hodgson,
Edwina Robarts, David Singleton, Linda Williams

54 Herts Group Members and 2 visitors

Apologies for absence were received from: Margaret Easter, Dee Folkard, Diana Garner, Eileen Heylin, Mary Ridlar, John Rolfe, and Sue Stockman

1 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on Saturday, 2nd November 2013, which had been circulated, were agreed and signed as a correct record.

Proposed by Diana Barry; seconded by Pauline Foers

2 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

3 **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

The Chairman referred to her report, which had been set out in the last newsletter. She added that it is good to see that we are still such a successful group.

Proposed by Mary Martin; seconded by Jacqueline Turner

4 **TREASURER'S REPORT**

The Treasurer referred to her report, which had been circulated. The books had balanced and she thanked Mike Foers for examining them. A small profit had been made on the Coach Trip. The Plant Sale had produced much better results, and this continues to be our main source of income. However, as Speaker and Hall hire costs are rising, our reserves are reducing.

Proposed by Margaret Bardell; seconded by Dennis Sandor

5 ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Irene Cowan, Elizabeth Egré, Heather Osborne, Mary Robey, Janet Horton and Marion Jay were re-elected en bloc.

Proposed by John McCormack; seconded by Dennis Sandor

6 ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Beryl Davis, Bill Hodgson, David Singleton and Linda Williams were re-elected (to serve respectively as Plant Sales Coordinator, Web Person, Hall Manager and Refreshments Coordinator).

Anne Godfrey (Speaker Booking and previously Chair) and Edwina Roberts (Coach Trips and Summer Programme) were stepping down and were thanked for all their hard work on the Committee and presented with Garden Gift Vouchers.

Diana Garner was also thanked in her absence for her hard work as Conservation Scheme Coordinator.

Alison and Ed King were voted onto the Committee to take on the roles of Speaker Bookings and Publicity respectively.

Proposed by Sandra Hartley; seconded by Madeleine McCormack

7 ELECTION OF EXAMINER

Michael Foers was re-elected as examiner.

Proposed by Sue Tomson; seconded by Yvonne Mansergh

8 PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE ANNUAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The Chair outlined the necessity of raising the annual subscription to £7 single and £12 joint membership, and that this worked out at only £1 per meeting.

Proposed by Michael Foers; seconded by Sue Jaye

The motion was carried unanimously.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair asked that members should indicate immediately if they can't hear at meetings so that we can do something about it straightaway.

The Secretary explained that the The Hardy Plant Journal has a new format which is 30% bigger in both size and content, and contains more photographs. HPS is the second largest plant society in the UK after the RHS, and benefits include being able to attend events in different parts of the country.

Ed King proposed a vote of thanks to the Committee for their hard work, which was seconded by Maggie Lacey.

The meeting closed at 2.20pm

Butterworts: Little Lettuces with a Deadly Secret

Butterworts (*Pinguicula* spp.) are perhaps the best-ever windowsill plants. They are compact, look beautifully delicate but are extremely forgiving. They never need fertiliser and it's practically impossible to get watering wrong. You don't have to move them inside when you close the curtains. They produce violet-like flowers in purples, blues, reds, whites and shocking pinks, so freely that you could only stop them with a hammer. But their best party trick is easily missed at first glance: they are meat-eaters. And their preferred food is fungus gnats, properly known as sciarid flies. If, like me, you find these little pests sneak in with a new houseplant and insist on flying in your face, butterworts are the answer. Even Kew uses them in its glasshouses to detect these nuisances.

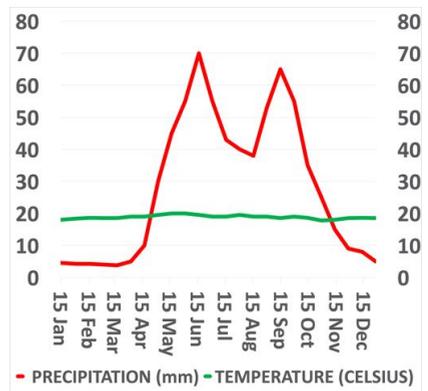


*Pinguicula
laeua x emarginata*

There are many species of *Pinguicula* in a variety of habitats across the world. Some grow on trees in Cuba, and some are native to the UK. One of these, *Pinguicula grandiflora*, grows wild in boggy places in Britain and its 'Rio Ara' cultivar has lived happily in my garden for many years. Each

spring, I am cheered by its display of conspicuous, glowing purple flowers over glistening rosettes of red-tinted leaves. But for houseplants, the best are the tropical Mexican butterworts, notably the *P. moranensis*, *P. ehlersiae* and *P. esseriana* species and hybrids. The butterworts seen in the novelty section of garden centres, next to the doomed pots of Venus Fly Traps, are almost always the *Pinguicula moranensis* hybrids *P.* 'Weser' and *P.* 'Tina'. If only children (young and old) chose the butterworts instead of the VFTs, carnivorous plants would not have gained their undeserved reputation of being difficult.

There are very few rules for growing Mexican *Pinguicula* successfully, and these are easily explained by where they come from. On the right is the annual rainfall and temperature graph for Comitan, in the Chiapas province in Mexico, which is typical butterwort habitat. The temperature is constant at around room temperature (18°C - 22°C) all year, with consistently heavy rainfall from April to November. The region is very wet, mountainous (1600m above sea level) and exposed to the sun. Therefore they like rainwater, household temperatures



and plenty of sun. Their mountain environment suggests they are adapted to a temperature drop at night, so being behind closed curtains is fine. Some authorities insist that they prefer shade, but my plants don't seem to have read their work.

The dry season from November to March suggests that Mexican butterworts prefer a dry rest in winter, watering as for other houseplants to keep them moist. However, tests show that these tough little plants are happy to have their feet permanently wet, probably as they have surprisingly few and short roots. This makes watering a doddle: you keep them standing in rainwater all year round.



Pinguicula 'Tina'

Some say that they can be prone to brown crown rot, but I think this is due to water left in the rosettes after watering from above, especially in winter. I have always watered from below, standing the pots in dishes of rainwater which I keep topped up, and I've never seen brown crown rot in over ten years of growing them. My latest set-up is an aquarium on a south-facing window, without net curtains. An automatic watering system keeps a constant 1-2cm of rainwater in the aquarium all the time,

with plants in 8cm-high pots. Hertfordshire tap-water is full of dissolved salts (3 mmol/litre!). Butterworts come from very nutrient-poor soils - it's why they evolved carnivory, to access fixed nitrogen - so they need rainwater, distilled/reverse osmosis water, or water from rinsed and thawed ice cubes in this hard-water county. Water boiled to remove temporary hardness will do for emergencies, but salts will build up in the compost if this is used routinely.

The few, very short roots of these plants give an indication of their compost requirements: it's almost unnecessary. I have escapee plants growing directly in the water trays, flowering away without a care in the world. A free-draining compost that conveys water to the roots is all they need. In deference to their boggy origins, it's best if it's neutral or acidic. I use 2 parts perlite, 2 parts vermiculite, 2 parts grit sand and 1 part moss peat, with 10% John Innes No.1 thrown in for trace nutrients, but I'm probably overdoing it. They catch their own nitrogenous fertiliser as it flies past their pots. In fact, adding fertiliser will kill them by nitrogen overload.

You can propagate butterworts from pulled leaves or seed, but why bother? Plants will produce 'pups' around the main rosette; when they have visible roots, pull off the pup rosettes and literally drop them onto their own pot of compost. Job done. The books say that Mexican butterworts flower in the spring, but once again my illiterate plants flower from February through to October. I often have a few flowers open for Christmas.

I hope I have interested you enough to try these fascinating and surprisingly easy

plants. There is much that I have omitted due to lack of space, such as their potential use as biological stain removers for your laundry problems, but I have opened the door to a truly wonderful genus and trust that you will enter to find out for yourselves. I shall grow them till I push up daisies, I'm sure of that!

Vic Inzani

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Pinguicula laeana x emarginata: photographer unknown

Graph data taken from www.pinguicula.org P. 'Tina' photo: infojardin.com

Desirable Interlopers

Introducing self-seeding plants can bring a new dimension to the garden. Many of these plants are short-lived and are therefore geared towards producing sufficient seed for successive generations, so they flower abundantly and colourfully, producing lots of insect-friendly nectar to encourage pollination. They are useful for filling gaps as they happily exploit any opportunity in the border, and some even thrive between cracks in walls and paving. Often, their seeds germinate best where it suits them to grow, resulting in beautiful, healthy plants growing in the most appropriate conditions. Self-seeders are also robust and easy on the whole, which makes them good for beginners.

Growing self-seeders introduces the idea of design by editing, i.e. deciding which seedlings should be kept and which taken out. This is an approach favoured by Dan Pearson, whose expertise in creating 'wild' gardens was so gracefully illustrated in his Chatsworth garden at Chelsea this year. Allowing self-seeding may appear to be a fundamentally informal way of gardening, but in fact these plants are versatile enough to be used to great effect in formal designs, too. Stricter editing is the key in an ordered layout, confining the massed plants to geometric block forms, or using them to emphasise linear structure. Having used self-seeding plants myself for many years now, both formally and informally, I can't say it is a particularly low maintenance method of gardening. The editing process takes time and effort, but on the plus side it can help the gardener to develop a flexible, open-minded approach; colonisation by self-seeders has occasionally caused me to completely reassess existing plantings and allow a different, looser configuration to develop.

Costing only the price of an initial packet of seeds or a single plant, self-seeders are a remarkably inexpensive method of augmenting existing borders and building sweeps of colour. Or they can even be free! I unwittingly distributed white foxgloves seeds over my front garden a couple of years ago when I mulched the area with my own home-made compost. This June, a multitude of soaring, pure white spires, some up to 8ft tall, sprang up across the entire plot, stopping passers-by in their tracks. They looked particularly effective at night, a small army of phantom sentinels in the moonlight.

Verbascum phoenicum 'Violetta' is another self-seeder which is ideal as an 'en

masse' gap filler, with its tall, slender, rich purple spikes providing height and colour over a good six-week period in spring/early summer. As an edge-of-woodlander, this verbascum prefers dappled shade; I have noticed its flowers tend to shrivel in strong sunlight. It slots in easily alongside existing shrubs and emergent perennials, as its super-slim, upright habit doesn't crowd other plants, and it seeds true.



Nigella papillosa 'Midnight'

Self-seeding plants include annuals, biennials, short-lived perennials and monocarpic plants (which may take some years to reach flowering, then die after setting seed). Annuals provide glorious washes of colour, the flowering period of which can be extended by succession sowing in spring. The best of these include *Nigella papillosa* (syn. *N. hispanica*) 'Midnight', which produces intricate, rich black-purple flowers followed by extraordinary horned seedheads. Drought-tolerant *Eschscholzia californica*, the California Poppy, whose satiny, fluted-petal flowers are now available in a much wider variety of colours thanks to recent breeding

programmes, also self-seeds well, but with a mixed heritage the progeny is unlikely to come true. *Cerinth major* 'Purpurascens' is also useful for drier situations, and as its moody, purple-blue-green hues are produced on bracts, it lasts well in the border.

Many of the most desirable self-seeders are biennials, including divinely scented Sweet Williams (*Dianthus barbatus*), Stocks (*Matthiola incana*) and Sweet Rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*). Hollyhocks are best grown as biennials, as older plants tend to succumb to rust more readily. T&M have developed a seed strain they claim is particularly rust-resistant - *Alcea* 'Antwerp Mixed', which comes in a wide range of colours - so perhaps these old cottage garden favourites could be back on the menu very soon. According to trouble-shooter Helen Yemm, the cream-flowered Russian Hollyhock, *Alcea rugosa*, is also a reliably healthy choice. Some biennials can be rather tuggish; one of the most insistent is the beautiful silver-bracted *Eryngium giganteum*, whose errant seedlings must be removed when very small, before the tap-root runs too deep.

Short-lived perennials which seed freely may only live a few years but provide an excellent foil to other plants. The tiny rockets of *Verbena hastata* add height and movement to the border, rarely appearing visually intrusive. They contrast well with *Euphorbia oblongata*, which is a robust and bushy plant, growing to almost a metre tall and providing fresh, lime-green flowerheads for many weeks in summer. It self-seeds gently without becoming a pest. Fennel is also a wonderful companion plant; I recently saw how effective this could be when I attended HGPS member Sue Wood's NGS open garden in Knebworth. Bronze fennel had



Peucedanum verticillare

umbels of greenish-yellow flowers. What a plant! I first saw it at Great Dixter and it blew me away. I planted three last year, which are still at the herbaceous stage...fingers crossed for next year.

Certain long-lived perennials are prone to self-seeding, and some can be very useful indeed. Evergreen, bright red-pink *Dianthus deltooides* 'Flashing Lights' is superb groundcover on dry soil, seeding true, and of course we are all familiar with the promiscuous tendencies of primroses, oriental hellebores and *Alchemilla mollis*. There is a short flight of stone steps in Kate Stuart-Smith's garden at Serge Hill where only *Alchemilla mollis* has been allowed to self-seed amongst the cracks in the paving and it's simply stunning in flower, frothing and tumbling lime-green flowers over the stonework. It is such a simple idea, such a ubiquitous plant and yet the effect is so striking. The tiny pink and white daisies of *Erigeron karvinskianus* (Mexican fleabane) are perfect for softening walls and steps, as they seed readily into cracks. To start a colony, instead of attempting to insert an actual plant into the wall, I have found it much more effective to mix the seeds into a handful of wet, ordinary garden soil,

been allowed to thread its way through a wide border, the repetition of its soft, feathery foliage linking the purple shades of the early summer-flowering perennials and bringing continuity to the whole scheme.

Monocarpic plants include some of the most architectural self-seeders. *Angelica archangelica* may take a couple of years to build up enough oomph to flower, and it's certainly a talking point when it reaches its full height, but beware the ensuing seedling proliferation! *Ferula communis*, the Giant Fennel, can pootle along for several years, complementing neighbouring perennials with its plumes of rich green filigree foliage, but it's another that will draw crowds when it finally sends up majestic umbels of yellow flowers to a height of 3-4 metres. However, my favourite of the monocarpic plants is *Peucedanum verticillare* (Giant Hog Fennel), with its tall, ruby red stems and elegant



Dianthus deltooides
'Flashing Lights'



Hystrix patula,
syn. *Elymus hystrix*

ball it up and push it firmly into the crack in the wall. That way, the plant germinates in situ and its roots find their own way as they grow, resulting in a well-adapted plant.

As you might expect, I couldn't end this article without mentioning the self-seeding properties of ornamental grasses. *Milium effusum* 'Aureum', a short-lived perennial grass, is invaluable in the spring border with its soft, lime-green foliage and dainty, open panicles of flowers which light up shady areas. The leaves bleach horribly in full sun. Visitors to my garden have often asked about *Hystrix patula* (syn. *Elymus hystrix*), a tall (to 5ft) grass which also prefers a bit of shade. Grown for its bottle-brush shaped

flowerheads, up to 20cm long, which catch the light and sway in the wind, it is a quixotic plant, sometimes seeding prolifically and in other years hardly seen at all. I grow it in dappled shade alongside the much more diminutive Rice Grass, *Melica uniflora* f. *albida* which flowers throughout the spring; its little white grain-like heads seem to float amidst the dark blooms of *Geranium phaeum* 'Raven' and powder-blue *Phlox divaricata* 'Clouds of Perfume'. Although the Rice Grass self-seeds, I've rarely sold or given any away - I can always find a place in a semi-shaded area of the garden for that endearing little plant.

Marion Jay

Photographs: Bill Hodgson. (P. verticillare: photographer unknown)

Further reading: 'Cultivating Chaos', by Reif, Kress and Becker, published by Timber Press (ISBN: 978-1604696523)

'The Dixter Handbook on Self-sowing Plants', by Frank Ronan - £3.50, available from the Great Dixter shop - www.greatdixtershop.co.uk

New Members

Welcome to two new members who have joined the group this summer: Kate Whitfeld and Mike Willis (husband of Roz, our ex-Refreshments Organiser). We hope you both enjoy your memberships.

In Memoriam

I am sorry to announce that long-standing member John Wimpenny passed away earlier this year after a short illness. John had a long and distinguished career in the aeronautical industry, which included the production of a man-powered plane. He will be greatly missed by all those who knew him.

Events Programme 2015-16

All talks start at 2pm.

3rd October

Neil Lucas - *'Go Large: Gardening the American Way'*

With fabulous natural landscapes for their inspiration, often on a massive scale, American gardeners have created a mix of gardens that rival those of any other gardening nation. Having travelled across the USA, Neil takes a look at some of the wonderful landscapes and gardens he encountered along the way.

Neil Lucas is the owner of Knoll Gardens & Nursery, specialising in ornamental grasses, and holder of ten Chelsea Gold Medals. www.knollgardens.co.uk

7th November - AGM, followed by Member's Talk:

Judy Barker - *'Hardy Border Chrysanthemums'*

As a member of the Trials Committee at Wisley and holder of the Plant Heritage National Collection of Hardy Chrysanthemums, Herts Group member Judy Barker is an acknowledged expert. After a short talk explaining why these plants are hardy when other chrysanthemums aren't, and giving tips on cultivation, Judy will take questions from the floor. www.gardenchrysanthemums.org.uk

5th December

Stefan White - *'Skulduggery in the Shrubbery'*

Stefan White will relate the intriguing story of the Tradescants, father and son, who were master plantsmen and gardeners to the aristocracy during the reigns of James I and his successor Charles I. The talk describes the fascinating ups and downs in the life of these 17th Century pioneers who were widely-travelled plant hunters, collectors of curiosities and founders of the world's first museum.

2nd January

Richard Ayres - *'Snowdrops and Winter Interest'*

For forty-one years, Richard was a gardener at Anglesey Abbey, twenty-seven of which he spent as Head Gardener. He was responsible for the introduction of the snowdrop collection and assisted in the creation of the famous Winter Walk. Since retiring from that position he has designed gardens at Kirtling Tower and Sawston Hall. Richard is an Associate of Honour of the RHS.

6th February

Julie Toll - *'Garden Design'*

Since 1982, Julie has been running her own garden design practice. Her commissions have included private gardens, a garden for the blind, a playground for children with disabilities, and show house gardens. Julie has achieved seven Gold, one Silver-Gilt and two Silver Medals at Chelsea and, in 1993, the Fiskar's

Events Programme 2016

Sword of Excellence for the best garden at Chelsea. She has presented television programmes, published books, and is a Fellow and former Chairman of the Society of Garden Designers. www.julietoll.co.uk

5th March

Colin Moat - *'Fifty Greys of Shade'*

Colin has been a member of the HPS for over twenty years, and twice a trustee. Now a retired Independent Financial Adviser, he says he is able to fulfill his ambition of running Pineview Nursery properly, which he had been attempting to do for the previous fifteen years. This year he co-ordinated the HPS Kent Group Chelsea display. Plants for sale. www.pineviewplants.co.uk

2nd April

John Amand - *'Tulips, Old and New'*

John is Managing Director of Jacques Amand International Ltd, based at Stanmore in Middlesex. They exhibit at many shows around the country, including Chelsea, where they have won twenty-nine Gold Medals for their displays of unusual bulbs and plants. Plants for sale. www.jacquesintl.com

1st October

Geoff Hodge - *'Pruning - Making it Simple'*

Geoff is a freelance garden writer, writing for various national gardening magazines. He was Web Editor for the RHS, Gardening Editor of "Garden News" and technical writer for "Garden Answers" magazine. He is an author and broadcaster, appearing on Q&A panels at flower shows across the country. He may make gardening butchers of us all! www.gardenforumhorticulture.co.uk

5th November - AGM, followed by Member's Talk:

Margaret Easter - *'Grasses for the Small Garden'*

HHPS member Margaret holds a National Collection of Thymus in her Harpenden garden, which she opens for charity. She has worked on nomenclature and taxonomy and has published several books, including 'The Thyme Handbook'. In this talk, she will be talking about another of her interests: ornamental grasses. www.thymus.co.uk

3rd December

Chris Chadwell - *'Wild Flowers of Britain'*

Chris is a modern day plant hunter and freelance lecturer, travel photographer and documentary maker. Since 1984, he has been proprietor of Chadwell Seeds and has been Leader and Botanist on twenty-nine expeditions to the Himalaya. We hope he will bring seeds for sale. www.chadwellseeds.co.uk

Committee

Please see latest newsletter for committee contact details

Meetings

Indoor meetings start at 2pm, and are held at the Wheathampstead Memorial Hall on Marford Road, Wheathampstead, AL4 8AY.

Visitors are very welcome and are asked to contribute £5 per visit.

Tea and a cake costs £1 (tea only 50p). If you are able to offer help by serving tea or baking a cake please contact Linda Williams on 01582 832361.

The opinions expressed by contributors to the Newsletter are not necessarily endorsed by the HPS.

The Seedling Swap and Grand Plant Sale, 2015



Jane and David Singleton serve refreshments and help members with their plants amidst the glorious April sunshine at this year's Seedling Swap



Yvonne Mansergh, Chairman Irene Cowan and Treasurer Mary Robey with helpers and customers at the highly successful Annual Plant Sale in May

Photographs: Bill Hodgson and Heather Osborne