



HARDINGTON GARDEN CLUB

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2022

CLUB NEWS

We would firstly like to say a big "Thank You" to Alice for managing to edit and produce last month's newsletter in time for our February meeting despite all the disruption caused by Storm Eunice and secondly we would like to thank Sally Thompson and Cecilia Dack for producing some extra special treats that were served with our drinks at last month's meeting. It was especially nice to have some antipodean themed treats inspired by Martin Young's talk.

If you were unable to join us here is a picture of what you missed!



Our meeting this month:

Wednesday 23rd March, 7.30pm in Hardington Village Hall

Please come and support a new local business.

We look forward to welcoming **Nikki Cooper from Old Hogden Seeds**, West Coker, and with March being one of the busiest times for sowing seeds it will be a timely visit.

Nikki has a lovely website, oldhogden.com, covering what seeds need to be planted throughout the year, including flowers and vegetables, so we are sure you will find seeds available to cover your plant growing needs.



A card machine will be available but would be advisable to bring cash as it may not work at the village hall.

Raffle: Jo Szmaj

Refreshments: Rownena Murray & Jo Szmaj

Next month's meeting: Wednesday 27th April
Gold Club Speaker on Container Gardening
Raffle: Ron Ahern
Refreshments: Sue Phillips & Rachel Moulden

Plug plants

The following will be available at this month's meeting; our 'Gold Club Plug Plants'.

This year each member will have the choice of one of three plants.

Fuchsia: *Heidi Anne*, a fairly small fuchsia that works well in a mixed planting.

Geranium: *New Century Violet*, a rich violet flowers on well zoned foliage.

Petunia: *Fanfare Purple Royal*, an excellent basket habit that maintains flowers on top!

Remember we will have a Garden club competition to choose the best from each category with a gift voucher as a prize later on in the year and you can also enter your plants into the annual craft and flower show. Section B, class 35 'Fuchsia'; class 36 'Pelargonium' and class 37 'Another Flowering Plant'.

For the craft and flower show each plant will need to be in a pot with an internal diameter no more than 30cm.

Membership cards

If you have already paid for your membership and not received a membership card they will be available at the next meeting.

Garden Club Visit

Wednesday 22nd June Ryewater Nursery near Holnest.

A board will be available to sign at this month's meeting if you wish to join us on this visit.

Plant sale 7th or 14th May - 2pm to 4pm

The committee are now in the process of planning our annual plant sale and are looking for members to host a stall from their garden or driveway. The sale will be held on either the 7th or 14th of May, weather permitting. If you would like to host a stall, and the plants you may have available, please can you let Andy and Kate know as soon as possible, alternatively if you are planning on donating any plants, seedlings or garden ephemera but cannot host a stall please contact Andy and Kate so we can arrange a venue from which your donations can be sold to allow an even spread of plants throughout the village.

As we are all aware of the crisis happening in the Ukraine it has been suggested that all this year's plant sale proceeds be used for the DEC appeal for Ukraine. As members of the Garden Club we would like to know your feelings on this proposed idea.

Kate and Andy

"SUNSHINE IN A VASE"

Since Storm Eunice it has been lovely to have had a few good days of sunshine encouraging the spring bulbs into flower, which I hope like us, you have been able to pick and enjoy in the house to help brighten these sad times.

Here is a picture of some of the daffodils and anemones I picked this week.

Kate



BEST BUY COMPOSTS for sowing seeds and raising young plants

This year's Gardening Which? results. They tested mainly peat-free composts but also some with low peat content, ensuring the same products would be available in 2022.

Many composts have been reformulated including Melcourt and some Westlands so are not included in the results.

Best Buy for 'sowing seeds' (*'Best Buys' need to score more than 76%*)

Peat-free

- ✿ *'Fertile Fibre Seed Compost'*
Score 85%, £24 for 60L including delivery = 40p per litre.

Comment: Healthy seedlings - many of the pure coir products in this trial didn't excel. However, this compost appears to have some nutrients that helped seedlings to thrive. In fact, it scored higher than all other composts in this trial by a good margin. There were excellent germination rates and all the emerging seedlings achieved near-perfect scores on all measures.

Results for generally available composts

Peat-free

- ✿ *'B&Q GoodHome Multi-purpose Compost'*
Score 65%, £5.80 for 50 litres = 12p per litre
- ✿ *'B&Q GoodHome Enriched Multi-purpose Compost'*
Score 65%, £6.50 for 50 litres = 13p per litre
- ✿ *'Miracle-Gro Peat Free Premium All Purpose Compost with Organic Plant Food'*
Score - 63%, £7.49 for 40 litres = 19p per litre

With Peat

- ✿ *'Westland John Innes Seed Sowing Compost'*
Score 77%, peat content 44%, 35 litre bags £6.99 = 20p per litre

Best Buy for 'raising young plants' (*'Best Buys' need to score more than 81%*)

Peat-free

- ✿ *'B&Q GoodHome Enriched Multi-purpose Compost'*
Score 86%, £6.50 for 50 litres = 13p per litre

Comment: As good as peat compost. Most B&Q composts are now peat-free - this one is made from coir, green compost and composted bark. Be sure to buy the 'enriched' bag, not the standard multi-purpose, as the latter didn't score as well (see below).

Results for other generally available peat-free composts

- ✿ Wilko Peat Free Compost
Score 80%, 25 litre bags £3 = 12p per litre
- ✿ B&Q GoodHome Multi-purpose Compost
Score 56%, £5.80 for 50 litres = 12p per litre

Don't Buy for 'raising young plants' (score less than 45%)

- ✿ *'Thompson & Morgan Incredicoir'*
Score 20%, 30 litre bags by mail order £8.99 = 30p per litre. Note: This comes in a block to re-hydrate but with no fertiliser so you would need to liquid feed your seedlings.
- ✿ *'Coco & Coir Coco Grow'*
Score 19%, 9 litre bags £5.99 = 66p per litre!

Summary

If you want just one compost for 'seed sowing' and 'growing on' *'B&Q GoodHome Enriched Multi-purpose Compost'* is a good all rounder and generally available.

(STOP PRESS – this compost is also a Best Buy for Containers – see next month's newsletter).

BEST BUY 'GROW BAGS'

Peat-free

These growing bags grew almost twice as many cucumbers as widely available bags!

- ✿ *'Dalefoot Wool Compost for Tomatoes'*
Score 79%, 30 litre £10.99 = 37p per litre from garden centres.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 7.9kg
- ✿ *'Dalefoot Wool Compost for Vegetables'*
Score 78%, 30 litre £10.99 = 37p per litre from garden centres.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 7.9kg
- ✿ *'Melcourt SylvaGrow Peat-free Planter for Organic Growing'*
Score 77%, 45 litre £6.99 = 16p per litre from garden centres.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 7.7kg

Other Bags

These generally available bags **did not** perform very well

- ✿ *'Miracle-Gro Peat Free Premium Fruit & Vegetable Compost'*
Score - 47%, £5.99 for 42 litres = 14p per litre.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 4.4kg
- ✿ *'B&Q GoodHome Grow Bag'*
Score 45%, 27 litre £2.75 = 10p per litre.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 4.4kg

Comment: Levington Tomorite Giant Planter, New Horizon Planter and Wilko Gowbag have all been reformulated since testing.

PEAT

The impending ban on peat for home gardeners is generally supported by the public so I was interested to be alerted to the following article by Bunny Guinness for the Telegraph. She also has Youtube video on the subject. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bg0-aMK9JLM>)

— ❁ — **The TROUBLE with PEAT** ❁ —
by Bunny Guinness

I am immensely concerned that Defra is planning to ban retail peat use by 2024 and all use by 2029 - a far-reaching decision for the horticulture industry - based on muddled thinking. Social media is demonising the use of peat, but this ban will be hugely detrimental to the planet, to gardeners and to the horticultural industry.

The late Peter Seabrook gathered signatories for an open letter that was passed to MPs requesting an open debate on the issue. Signatories included many champions from all walks of horticulture. Now the Government is in the process of consulting the industry; this closes on March 18.

Few people fully understand the peat arguments. First, just a miniscule proportion, 0.053 per cent of the three million hectares of peat in the UK, is used for horticultural extraction. The biggest land use - nearly half - remains under semi-natural peatland vegetation. But this has been affected by human activities. These include drainage, burn management, the cutting of peat for fuel and livestock grazing. That leaves only 22 per cent of peat in near-natural condition. Around 300 times the area used for horticulture is drained and used for conifer plantations. A similar amount is in agricultural use, ie cropped and grazed. Surely it would be more effective to regulate these more profligate uses?

The second important argument against a peat ban is that peat substitutes are just not as good for growing plants. Peat has, as yet, unrivalled properties for holding water and also drainage. It is no longer recommended, quite rightly, as a soil improver or a mulch. But for seeds, cuttings and potting composts it is generally considered the best.

Our competitors in the horticulture industries across the channel are expected to double their use of peat by 2050. Only the UK, Germany and Switzerland are proposing a ban. Substitutes such as coir (coconut fibre) are imported from South East Asia. This has a high salt content and must be washed through with fresh water - a very scarce resource in the countries where coir originates. Other substitutes are waste materials with high plastic contamination. These may well cause more environmental damage. Additionally, these substitutes do not hold water so well, so to compensate, more fertiliser is required, which is then washed through more quickly with the extra water applications.

As for sustainability, Canadian peat companies that supply all of north America are extracting peat more slowly than the rate at which it is laid down. Furthermore, restoration of peat bogs is very much part of the British industry. Pat Walls of Bulrush Horticulture (bulrush.co.uk) has done much pioneering work with bog restoration. Following the removal of the top 2-3 metres of peat (leaving a metre or so), the water table is raised and then recolonised with moss.

Pat points out that much damage was done by previous generations who hand-dug their way around the edges of raised bogs, which then affected the water table, allowing heather, birches and other plants to come in, leading to a slow decline. Much work is needed to restore and manage these sensitive habitats. To that end, Keith Nicholson from Westland Horticulture explains that the company has spent more than £40 million since 2005 developing its complete range to be peat-free and peat-reduced.

However, the proposed ban is far too soon. There is just not enough non-peat substrate of sufficient quality to replace the 2 million cubic metres of peat we use each year. Let us hope the Government is aware of the pressures placed on horticultural producers in the UK by the ban on peat.

Food for thought. I hope to report on the best Container composts in April.
Rosie

WELKIN COTTAGE GARDEN: A STORY IN SEVERAL PARTS

This is a story about the development of Welkin Cottage garden. Neither the story nor the garden is complete yet. Over the coming months we will share our progress.

In the beginning...

In July 2003, along with our children Jessica and Dan, we came to Welkin Cottage for a viewing. We had been looking at houses for a number of months but hadn't found anything we particularly liked. We stepped into Welkin Cottage and everything changed. Immediately we liked the layout of the rooms downstairs and the amount of light in the lounge. We could see, with a bit of work, we could combine the kitchen and dining room into one large family space and replace the lean-to at the side of the house along North Lane with a sunroom.

Having looked around the house, Almut Loftus suggested we sit on the patio whilst Jess and Dan played with her dog in the garden. Almut knew what she was doing: she appeared with a bottle of wine, and we all sat and watched the sun go down on a lovely summer's evening – the house was sold! For those of you who are not familiar with where Welkin Cottage is, we are at the top of North Lane (Church end), which runs down to the playing field. We are fortunate to have a wonderful view across the valley towards West Chinnock and beyond.

So, in October 2003, we became the new residents of Welkin Cottage. At this time Jess and Dan were very young. We both had busy careers so didn't have much time for gardening. Having lived in RAF married quarters for many years, our gardening experience amounted to mowing grass, which was all we knew. Almut loved her garden and had some lovely flower beds and a large vegetable patch (which needed some attention!) We just didn't have the time to maintain the garden as Almut had, so we did what we knew best, and that was to return everything back to grass!

The years passed, the children grew and eventually left home, leaving us with more time on our hands. Then Covid struck. We found ourselves, like many others, spending more time at home. As the weather was good, we also spent more time in the garden, and this is where it all began.

The Summerhouse: Valley View

The summerhouse was always used for storage of garden furniture and other stuff. We never used it as a place to sit and enjoy the view. The Spring of 2020 began to change that. We would sit out on the top bank in front of the summerhouse and have lunch. The Walnut tree on the bank provided shade for those who wanted it (Stewart), whilst Tanya enjoyed the sun's rays. As we sat there, we discussed how we should use the area and the garden more. One suggestion was to replace the existing summerhouse with a larger version and turn it into an Air B&B. This idea never got off the ground, but the thought of how we could turn it into a little business kept us amused for a while. All this time we still hadn't ventured into the summerhouse or considered clearing it out. It wasn't until Easter last year, in the second lockdown, that Stewart was directed to tackle the spider webs and all sorts of other creatures and clear it out.

The Design

Now that we were starting to use the summerhouse, we began to wonder what else we could do in the garden, and this then led to our cousin, Sam, offering to produce a garden design. The first image is a picture of the garden just after we started doing some work. The second image is the garden design. The design includes 3 principal areas: The Potager at the bottom of the garden, which includes an area for raised beds; The Retreat at the top of the garden by the summerhouse, which includes a patio area and wildlife pond and the Grassland, which is the lawn. Borders will be planted to 'hide' the Potager area, and The Retreat will have borders

and raised beds to provide an enclosed feeling. At least, that is the plan as it stands at the moment...



And so, we begin the next stage of the journey, with structural work and plant selection, which we look forward to sharing with you in next month's instalment.

Stewart and Tanya

EVENTS

East Coker Garden Club Garden visits

East Coker Gardening club are putting together visits to gardens in May and June.

🌸 Wednesday, 18th May - Burrow Farm Garden
<https://www.burrowfarmgardens.co.uk> for £20

🌸 Wednesday, 15th June - Yeo Valley Gardens, with a talk from a gardener as part of the tour.
<https://www.yeovalley.co.uk/the-organic-garden> for £25,

There are still a number of places available, for full details if interested please contact Gillian Evans on 01935 862703 or gillian.evans737

Sherborne Specialist Plant Fair

Digby Hall, Sherborne

Saturday 26th March, 10am - 2pm

Admission- Free

Hardy Plant Society - Somerset Group Plant Fair

Yeo Valley Organic Garden, Holt Farm, Blagdon

Saturday 26th March, 10am - 3pm

Tickets from www.ticketsource.co.uk/hardy-plant-society-somerset-group

Mapperton House - Spring Charity Plant Fair

Nr Beaminster, Dorset

Sunday 10th April, 10am - 4pm

Admission: £5 per person - FREE entry for under 5's.

Ticket includes FREE entry to the award-winning gardens.

This large and popular Plant Fair is held in the grounds of Mapperton House. The specialist nursery stands will be selling a wide range of plants for your garden or conservatory from organic bulbs and vegetable plants, summer tender perennials, ferns and herbaceous perennials. With such a large selection of stands, this popular sale offers a massive choice,

great value and is great for plant lovers as well as those who want a 'Gardeners Day out' in fantastic surroundings. The Coach House café will be open serving hot drinks and snacks. Well behaved dogs are allowed into the plant fair, but not in the gardens.

Beneficial charities – The Prout Bridge Project and Disasters Emergency Committee
Afghanistan Crisis Appeal

Thank you to all this month's contributors. We kindly ask for your stories, plans or anything garden related for next month's Newsletter.

*Kate and Andy will be editing the newsletter next month and will be grateful for articles. Please send items to - gardenclub@hardington.net by **Thursday 21st April**.*

Spring is the time of year when it is summer in the sun and winter in the shade.

- Charles Dickens