



HARDINGTON GARDEN CLUB

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2023

CLUB NEWS

Wow what an amazing turn out to last month's meeting with over half our membership being there.

Micky Little was a wonderfully enthusiastic speaker and who knew there was so much to learn about what many may considered as the humble snowdrop.

We might think that all snowdrops are the same with white petals and green foliage but Micky showed us that there are many differences between habit, size, markings and time of flowering.

We learnt the most expensive snowdrop is called the Golden Chalice and can sell for £1800 a bulb; that there are varieties that glow, one being called "Matt Bishop" and there is even one called Grumpy, can you see why?



The committee would also like to say a big thank you Clare Middleton and Sue Hubbard for the fantastic cakes they provided as part of our refreshments at the meeting but please remember if you have put your name down on the refreshments rota you don't have to be as extravagant, it was a real treat which we all really enjoyed.

Kate and Andy

Our meeting this week: Wednesday 22nd March.
Hardington Village Hall 7.30pm

A talk on 'Alternative Plants, Alternative Places' by a Gold Club speaker

At short notice the talk on 'Roses' is replaced by a talk on 'Alternative Plants, Alternative Places'.

Gold club speakers usually bring along some plants for sale so please do bring along some extra monies, just in case, and don't forget we always have at least two £10 garden gift vouchers as prizes in the raffle each month.

Refreshments: Helen Parrot and Anne Lunt

Raffle: Jo Szamj

Plug Plants

At this month's meeting we have limited numbers of our Gold Club plug plants available to collect. This year you will be able to choose one of two plants, a **Fuchsia "Koralle"** an unusual "tube" flower with bronzed foliage or **Geranium (pelargonium) "New Century Apple Blossom"** which has flowers of a delicate shade of soft pink.

These can be grown on and entered into the correct category at the flower and craft show in August. Section B, class 35 Fuchsia; class 36 Pelargonium.



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

We will also have a Garden club competition to choose the best plant with a gift voucher presented as a prize for the winner of each category.

Next month's meeting: Wednesday 26th April.

'Kingston Lacy through the seasons' a talk to be given by Andrew Hunt.

Refreshments: Sue Phillips Jo Szamj

Raffle: Irene Tizard

TREASURER

Due to unforeseen circumstances, we are looking for a new Treasurer. Our financial affairs are quite simple to look after and we invite any member with some numeracy skills to join the committee and manage our accounts. Please don't be shy - let Andy & Kate know if you are interested or have any questions about the role.

PLANT SALE CHARITY

Currently the top three charities are:

- MIND (Somerset)
- DEC Ukraine
- Green Fingers

The voting board will be available at the next meeting, this will be the final opportunity to place your votes. You can also let us know via email if you cannot attend the meeting.

Kate and Andy

FREE COFFEE GROUNDS

If any members of the club would like coffee grounds for their garden or to add to their compost bin there is a plastic box situated near the back door of The Village Café in East Coker. You can help yourselves or Kate will bring the box to club meetings so you can help yourselves then.

Kate

BEST BUY COMPOSTS

For 'Sowing Seeds' and 'Raising Young Plants'

Peat composts will be banned from sale to gardeners from 2024 so this year Gardening Which? tested only peat-free composts, comparing them with a professional peat-based compost as a control.

Peat-free products are continually being reformulated to find a mixture of ingredients that works well, hence those from Westlands and others are not included in the results.

Best Buy for 'Sowing Seeds' - 'Best Buys' need to score more than 76%

Tested for tomatoes and petunias.

- ✿ 'Fertile Fibre Original Seed Compost' - score 87%
£22 for 60L including delivery = 37p per litre.
(This matched the results of the peat compost used as a control.)
Ingredients: coir, vermiculite, loam
- ✿ 'Fertile Fibre Original Multipurpose Compost' - score 83%
£22 for 60L including delivery = 37p per litre
Ingredients: mainly coir with a little vermiculite and loam plus a plant feed.
- ✿ 'Moorland Gold Seed & Cutting Compost' – score 77%
£12.99 for 40L = 32p per litre
Ingredients: peat 33% - naturally filtered particles from lakes and dams*, coir, green waste * not extracted from peat bogs, hence no carbon loss!

Results for other generally available peat-free composts

- ✿ 'Moorland Gold Multi Purpose Compost' – score 69%
£12.99 for 40L = 32p per litre
- ✿ 'Melcourt Sylvagrow John Innes Seed Compost' - score 67%
£5.99 for 15L = 40p per litre.
- ✿ 'Thompson & Morgan Incredipeatfree' - score 64%
£17.99 for 70L = 26p per litre.
- ✿ 'Melcourt Sylvagrow Multipurpose Compost' - score 63%
£8.99 for 40L = 22p per litre.
- ✿ 'Melcourt Sylvagrow with added John Innes' - score 61%
£9.99 for 40L = 25p per litre.
- ✿ 'B&Q Verve Seed and Cutting Compost' - score 57%
£6 for 35 litres = 17p per litre
Excellent for tomato generation and health, poor for petunias
- ✿ 'B&Q Verve Peat-Free Multi-purpose Compost' - score 57%
£7 for 50 litres = 14p per litre
Excellent for tomato generation and health, poor for petunias
- ✿ 'Homebase Peat Free Multipurpose Compost' - score 51%
£6.75 for 50L = 14p per litre.
- ✿ 'Miracle-Gro Premium Peat Free All Purpose Compost with Organic Plant Food'
Score - 50%,
£8.99 for 40 litres = 22p per litre
Excellent for tomato generation and health, very poor for petunias

Don't Buy for 'Sowing Seeds'

- ✿ Dalefoot Wool Compost for Seeds - score 30%
12 litre £7.99 = 67p per litre

Best Buy for 'Raising Young Plants' - 'Best Buys' need to score more than 81%

Tested to grow-on tomatoes and French marigolds.

The professional peat compost, used as a control, scored 62%.

- ✿ 'Homebase Peat Free Multipurpose Compost' - score 97%
£6.75 for 50L = 14p per litre.
- ✿ 'Melcourt Sylvagrow Multipurpose Compost' - score 92%
£8.99 for 40L = 22p per litre.
- ✿ 'Thompson & Morgan Incredipeatfree' - score 92%
£17.99 for 70L = 26p per litre.
- ✿ 'YouGarden Peat Free Multipurpose Compost' - score 90%
£12.49 for 40L = 31p per litre.

Recommended

- ✿ 'Melcourt Sylvagrow John Innes Seed Compost' - score 77%
£5.99 for 15L = 40p per litre.
- ✿ 'Fertile Fibre Original Multipurpose Compost' - score 77%
£22 for 60L including delivery = 37p per litre
- ✿ 'Moorland Gold Multi Purpose Compost' – score 77%
£12.99 for 40L = 32p per litre

Results for other generally available peat-free composts

- ✿ 'B&Q Verve Peat-Free Multi-purpose Compost' - score 60%
£7 for 50 litres = 14p per litre

Want to buy just one compost for sowing and growing on young plants?

If you want just one compost, here is a summary of the composts worth considering for both purposes*:

The two Fertile Fibre composts' (Best Buys for seeds 87%/83%, 77%/75% for growing on). Only available from fertilefibre.com, price (see above) includes delivery.

Moorland Gold Multi Purpose (seeds 69%, young plants 77%) £12.99 for 40L = 32p per litre. Available from allgrowsupplies.co.uk .

Melcourt Sylvagrow Multi Purpose Compost (seeds 63%, young plants 92%)

YouGarden Peat Free Multipurpose Compost - (seeds 65%, Best Buy for young plants 90%). Available from yougarden.com .

(STOP PRESS – all the multi-purpose composts above are *also Best Buys for Containers – see next month's newsletter).

Feeding young plants

You may need to feed your plants more frequently with peat-free composts. Most don't contain any fertiliser at all and others have fertiliser that runs out quickly. As soon as the growth of your seedlings and small young plants slow down, start to give them a liquid feed. Even better, trials showed that mixing controlled-release feed into the compost produced the best plants.

BEST BUY GROWING BAGS

In 2022 Which? found that many bags were still peat based. They tested the limited number of available peat-free bags to grow cucumbers which are quick to crop. (Long trials of slow-cropping vegetables rely heavily on liquid feeding which skews results.)

These were also Best Buys the previous year, have improved results and are more expensive!

- ✿ 'Dalefoot Wool Compost for Tomatoes' - score 91%
30 litre £11.75 = 39p per litre from garden centres.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 10.6kg
- ✿ 'Dalefoot Wool Compost for Vegetables and Salads' - score 88%
30 litre £11.75 = 39p per litre from garden centres.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 10.1kg

The above bags do not need you to add fertilizer.

Those below will require liquid feeding or controlled-release feed mixed into the bag before you plant.

Other Bags

- ✿ 'Melcourt SylvaGrow Peat-free Planter for Organic Growing' - score 80%
45 litre £7.99 = 18p per litre.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 9kg
- ✿ 'Miracle-Gro Performance Organics Peat Free Fruit & Vegetable Planter'
Score - 73%
30 litre £7.99 = 27p per litre.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 8.1kg
- ✿ 'Humax Peat Free Multi-Planter' - score 64%
40 litre £6.30 = 16p per litre.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 7kg

This did not perform very well

- ✿ 'Levington Tomorite Peat-Free Organic Deep Planter' - score 46%
42 litre £7.99 = 19p per litre.
Average weight of cucumbers per bag – 4.6kg

Comments

There are no results for other grow-bags.

Of course, you can use normal compost for growing bags. I always cut a grow-bag in two producing two upright receptacles which can be re-filled with fresh compost in subsequent years if you are short of large pots!

Look out for my report on the best Container composts in April.

Rosie

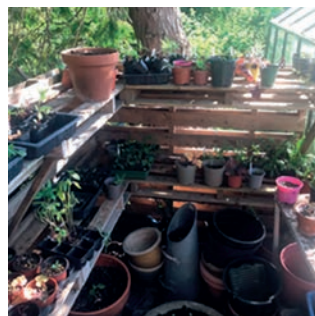
RECYCLE, REUSE

As spring is just around the corner you are probably thinking more and more about your garden and your plans for this year.

Apart from the actual plants you are going to grow, you may be considering some garden organisation. Whilst these ideas are not new to many gardeners these ideas may be of use to newer gardeners and certainly we have found to be very useful.

Many products we buy these days are delivered on pallets and these can be very useful in many situations around the garden, and apart from anything else the pallet is being recycled which is always a good thing.

The most obvious one that we did was to construct a compost bin to contain all the materials we cut down during the gardening season. It also is a great place for our kitchen scraps which rot down and can be returned to the ground. You don't need any skill to construct one. You just need 4 pallets, a few screws and a screwdriver. We put the 4 pallets on edge and screwed them together at each corner. Last year we took out 18 bags of compost which is great material for mulching around our existing plants or adding to the ground as a soil improver full of great nutrients.



We also use them to hold our greenhouse guttering when they are no longer needed but more of that later. (article to follow next month) We also screwed one to the back of our shed as they make a great storage rack for all our garden canes we need to support a variety of our perennial plants and vegetables.

If you are feeling a bit more ambitious and have the space you can cut them down to make outside storage racking for your plants to harden off or use it just as additional storage for trays and pots. This will then look like your own mini garden centre; it has proven to be a great addition in our garden and sits nicely between our potting shed and greenhouse.

We use a surplus recycling tub that came with us when we moved to the village to keep our compost mix in to make filling pots easier. Two bits of wooden batten are screwed to the bench and the shed end to make runners to slide the tub in and out for cleaning. Any surplus compost is brushed back into the tub for use at a later date. It's also a great place to mix vermiculate in with your compost prior to potting on your plants.



We both like recycling and reusing things when we can and using items from the garden can often work out to be a money saver as well as hopefully being quite attractive. This was also important when we had some of the trees cut down to keep the garden from being too shaded, when we started to create our new garden here 3 years ago.

Jim used the wood to make a trellis and gateway into the garden. This has provided for a nice rustic entrance, a trellis to grow our plants on and to keep our dog Rosie in the garden.

I have future plans to make a travellers seat and a bug hotel from some of the same logs and branches we still have in the garden

All the stones that we found in the ground when we first dug the flower beds we have made into a very low wall to contain



the soil on one of the new flower beds This stops the soil from spilling onto the path or patio.

We have a lot more stones which this year we hope to build a pond and a rockery but more of that in a future article. If anyone wants more details, help or wants to see what we have done please get in touch with us and come round for a visit.

Happy gardening!

Jim and Lucy



RECIPE CORNER

I subscribe to a weekly newsletter created by Robin Hardford called "Eatweeds". Robin established Eatweeds and a wild food foraging school in 2008 and is the author of the Edible and Medicinal Wild Plants of Britain and Ireland. He is a member of the Society of Economic Botany and the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland and is based in Devon.

The recipe below was sent through in his newsletter on the 2nd March and although Andy and I only have a very small magnolia tree I will be raiding my mum's very mature magnolia tree to create this recipe.

The recipe was created in 2009 after Robin was rummaging through a book by Facciola called Cornucopia. Facciola goes on to reference U.P. Hedrick's edition of Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World, where he says: 'The flowers are pickled in some parts of Devonshire, England, and are considered exquisite in flavour'.

Robin describes this recipe as divine, so just be warned you may be offered this as an accompaniment if invited to Winyards for a meal!



Pickled magnolia flower

- 500g fresh young magnolia buds and flowers (you can separate the petals if you want, but it's not necessary)
- 350ml rice vinegar
- 200g sugar
- 1 tsp salt

Wash and dry the Magnolia flowers with paper towels and put them in a sterilised jar. Mix the rice vinegar, salt and sugar in a pan, bring to a boil, and then simmer for a couple of minutes. Cool enough you can dip your finger in, then pour the mixture over the Magnolia flowers, and cap. Allow to marinate for a minimum of a week. Longer is better. Eat pickled magnolia flowers as an accompaniment to cheese, in salads or with anything that takes your fancy.

There is no known toxicity to magnolia flowers (unless you have an allergy).

Kate

EVENTS

Forde Abbey's Plant and Gardening Fair

Forde Abbey House and Gardens, Chard, TA20 4LU

Saturday 1st April 10:30am-3pm

This year's event has moved from March to April in the hope that the weather will be a little more clement for the organisers. There will be plenty of specialist nurseries selling plants and gardening sundries. The growers are happy to chat about their plants and are happy to offer their expertise and share their enthusiasm.

The Plant Fair takes place at the beginning of Forde Abbey's popular Tulip display so will be a lovely time to see the garden waking up from its winter hibernation.

The Coffee Shop will be open throughout the day serving hot drinks, light bites and homemade cakes. The Coffee Shop and Gift Shop will be open from 10.30am until 4.30pm,; Eeles Pottery from Mosterton will also be open from 10.30am – 4.30pm.

The in-house Plant Nursery is also open from 10.30am – 5.00pm and it is fully stocked with spring bulbs and a diverse range of herbaceous perennials, many rare and unusual. All the plants in their nursery are grown at the Abbey.

Admission: £5 to the Plant & Gardening Fair includes entry to Forde Abbey's award-winning 30 acre gardens. (The admission fee applies to all visitors including children over 15yrs)

Free Entry to Membership Holders.

Parking is free.

Forde Abbey's Tulip Extravaganza

Forde Abbey House and Gardens, Chard, TA20 4LU

5th April - 5th May 10:30am-5pm

The Forde Abbey, garden team spend a few weeks last autumn planting 50,000 tulips and expect an explosion of colour this spring.

They chose 35 different cultivars which include T. 'Salmon Impression'; T. 'Cairo'; T. 'Fire Wings' and 'Ballerina' for a splash of colour with masses of T.'Carnival de Rio', which are a tulip described as "not for the faint hearted". Carefully selected mixtures of wild species have been planted in other parts of the garden to blend in harmoniously with the wild flower meadows.

Mapperton House Plant Fair

Nr Beaminster, Dorset

16th April 10am-4pm

This large and popular Plant Fair is held in the grounds of Mapperton House, near Beaminster. 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 selling hot and cold drinks and snacks.
Well behaved dogs are allowed into the plant fair, but not in the gardens.

Admission: £5.00 – FREE entry for under 5's with tickets available on the day.
Ticket includes FREE entry to the award-winning gardens.

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

*Please send to Alice Manning - hgcnewsletter21@gmail.com by **Friday 21st April.***

