

# Newsletter

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Dear Members,

Well, more firsts in these unprecedented times. We held our initial speaker meeting via Zoom, topped off at the end with the guest appearance of 9 week old Helena Plumptre when she landed on Dad Henry's lap! Hopefully we will see her again and watch her grow.

The other lovely thing for me was to renew my acquaintance with my former college lecturer, some 2 years after finishing the course. However, I ought to have been more prepared for the quiz he dropped on us halfway through his BDHS talk! At college, the 2nd item on the weekly agenda was to be 'marched' around the campus to look at 6 plants/shrubs/trees growing in situ. Duncan would reel off the Latin and common names, with some facts about each one. The following week, the 1<sup>st</sup> item on the agenda would always be a test of what he had shown us from the previous week. He would expect correct spelling, with any sp., var., syn., AGM, PBR, etc all in their proper places, as well as the facts! Nonetheless, Duncan was always popular with students because his encouraging and relaxed style made both the theoretical & practical learning easier to digest, particularly when peppered with anecdotes from his horticultural travels at home and abroad!

January's Zoom meeting would not have happened without a lot of work by David Ashcroft, in both preparing for and running it. Over 50 members logged in to Duncan's talk. Of course, in any new venture there are teething problems and your Committee has discussed these. Some **"ground rules"** have therefore been drawn up to assist David in logging on the many members wishing to 'Zoom'. **Please see the box on page 3.**

Similarly, Committee members have had final discussions regarding the monthly photographs for the BDHS website, in lieu of the plant pot / flower spike competition. This starts properly from February, so **again please turn to page 3 for these "ground rules"**.

Finally, we welcome new member Diana Jagger and send our congratulations to Mary & Edward Cotterrell who celebrated their Silver Wedding Anniversary on February 10<sup>th</sup>.

With best wishes to all members,

Marion

## SPEAKER REPORT

### BARKS, STEMS & EVERGREENS IN THE WINTER GARDEN

On Jan 28<sup>th</sup> 2021 Duncan Coombs, an RHS regional advisor & Pershore College lecturer, delivered this talk, beautifully illustrated with his photographs and divided into helpful sections.

#### Evergreens with Colour & Scent

Duncan's favourite mahonia is *M. japonica* (AGM), which he feels has the best scent and is later flowering, as well as being very floriferous in a sunny position. The other two he mentioned are its offspring, *M. x media* 'Charity' (scented from autumn to early winter) and *M. x media* 'Winter Sun' (AGM). *Daphne bholua* 'Jaqueline Postill' can be tricky to grow but has a fantastic scent and is smothered in flowers once established. *Sarcococca confusa* or Christmas Box has fabulous scent in milder weather. It can be propagated by covering its black shiny berries with 1cm of compost in a tray or

pot and placing outside. These will come up the *following* spring. *Eleagnus x submacrophylla* (syn. *E. x ebbingei*) has dull green leaves but as it matures, from November onwards its silver white flowers smell like Lily of the Valley. *E. x submacrophylla* 'Gilt Edge' combines scent and good leaf colour due to its variegation.

### **Evergreens to give Structure**

The Japanese have been cloud - pruning evergreens for centuries and John Massey's garden at Ashwood Nurseries has some excellent examples using *Ilex aquifolium* 'Alaska'. At Hidcote, Lawrence Johnston used the 'come hither' approach by cutting gaps in hedges to entice the visitor onward. Evergreens can be put to good use by acting as dark backgrounds to highlight coloured stems / trunks, such as *Betula utilis* subsp. *albosinensis* & the dogwoods.

### **Evergreens to Furnish the Bare Winter Garden**

Gardens can look barren and drab in winter. Evergreen shrubs will provide structure to otherwise bare ground, and if topiarised can be quite eye-catching. Evergreen ferns and sedges can also add to a bare border.

### **Evergreens to Give Foliage Colour**

Variegated leaves provide splashes of alternative colours to plain green, including yellow, cream, white and silvery grey. Some shrubs such as *Euonymus fortunei* cultivars take on a pinky red hue in cold weather due to the action of anthocyanins. Different cultivars of *Heucheras* can provide a colour mix because of their various leaf colours. A textural contrast can be achieved with grasses. A covering of frosty rime on grasses, shrubs and trees also adds value.

### **Barks and Stems to add Colour & Interest**

The absence of leaves in winter enables bark to become prominent and more clearly visible. Duncan included *Betula utilis* subsp. *albosinensis* with creamy white bark flushed with grey & pink, *Betula utilis* 'jacquemontii' with ghostly white trunks, *Betula nigra* or River / Black Birch with peeling brown, pink & white bark, *Acer griseum* or Paper Bark Maple which peels to reveal its orange- red bark underneath, *Acer davidii* or Snake Bark Maple with stripy green & white bark, and *Prunus serrula* or Tibetan Cherry with burnished coppery brown bark.

Winter stems look best when planted against the light and don't work in positions where there is no sun. When planting ensure that the sun will illuminate them at some point during the day.

There are several *Cornus* or dogwoods to choose from. The best red one in Duncan's opinion is *Cornus alba* 'Baton Rouge' (PBR) which is not too vigorous for a small garden. Another red is *C. alba* 'Sibirica', with *C. sanguinea* 'Cardinal' being a pinky red. Reds show up well against a green backdrop or with low-growing bergenias & hellebores. Moving on to orangey yellows, Duncan listed *C. sanguinea* 'Winter Beauty' which also has good autumn leaf colour, and the petite *C. sanguinea* 'Anny's Winter Orange' (AGM). A greeny yellow dogwood is *C. sericea* 'Flaviramea'.

Brambles have some interesting stems but beware of the thuggish *Rubus cockburnianus* or Whitewash Bramble which needs chopping down to the ground in March to stop it spreading. A better one is *R. cockburnianus* 'Goldenvale' (AGM), which is less vigorous, has golden foliage on arching stems in summer and looks good with spring bulbs. *R. biflorus* is white – stemmed, whilst *R. nivalis* is red – stemmed. *R. phoenicolasius* has a hairy red stem and yellow berry fruits. At 2 – 2.5 ft, *R. tibetanus* is the smallest, doesn't spread, and has silvery, fernlike foliage in the summer.

Willows are another group with coloured stems but don't plant them near any building foundations! They MUST be pruned as they annually grow 8 – 12 ft. *Salix alba* var. *vitellina* or Golden Willow has egg yolk coloured stems. *Salix alba* var. *vitellina* 'Britzensis' or Coral Bark Willow, with its scarlet stems, likes wet ground. *Salix acutifolia* 'Blue Streak' is an unusual bluey grey one.

Finally, winged stems provide unusual interest. Duncan included *Euonymus alatus* 'Compactus' which also has good autumn leaf colour. Two that can be bought as hedging are *Ulmus procera* or English Elm and *Acer campestre* or Field Maple.

### **Ground Rules for joining Thursday Speaker Meetings via Zoom**

- Please contact David on [dja@krystalservices.plus.com](mailto:dja@krystalservices.plus.com) **by lunchtime on the previous day (WEDS)**. It is preferable that you log your intention to join the meeting even if you are not absolutely sure until the evening. This is to avoid David being inundated with last minute requests.
- David will then acknowledge your request to join. Should you not receive this from David, please contact him again.

### **Ground Rules for the monthly BDHS Website Photographic Competition**

- The closing date for receipt of photographs is the **Sunday before the Thursday meeting**.
- Photographs to be sent to Angela Shaw on [ange\\_shaw@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ange_shaw@hotmail.co.uk), who will then forward them to the judge for that month.
- The photographs can be of your garden, flowers, or a plant and **MUST** be taken during that month.
- Multiple entries are allowed, but only one prize place is available per member.
- Points awarded are 5 for 1<sup>st</sup> place, 3 for 2<sup>nd</sup> place and 2 for 3<sup>rd</sup> place.
- This will continue until meetings resume in the Village Hall again.

## **TOPICAL TIPS**

- Prepare beds for spring sowing & planting, warming the soil by covering it, e.g. cloches, polythene.
- Check & adjust tree ties as necessary, rejuvenate / prune overgrown deciduous hedges.
- Finish pruning apples, pears & autumn raspberries, adding general fertilizer to fruit trees/bushes
- Apply 'winter wash' to fruit trees to rid of overwintering pests, top-dress & feed fruits in pots.
- Prune winter-flowering shrubs & prune out old stems of Mahonia after flowering ceases.
- Hard prune Buddlejia davidii, Leycesteria, Lavatera, hardy fuchsias & other summer-flowering shrubs that flower on current year's growth.
- Prune Wisteria & complete rose pruning
- Deadhead & trim winter-flowering heathers after flowering ends.
- Prune to near ground level large-flowering, Viticella & other clematis types, which flower on new growth.
- Cut back old growth on herbaceous perennials before new growth appears & scatter organic feed at their base.
- Cut back deciduous ornamental grasses, but 'comb' by hand (wearing gloves as stems may cut skin) or rake through evergreen types, then mulch.
- Spruce up outdoor pots, dead-heading winter pansies / violas to keep them flowering.
- If ground is not frozen or water-logged, plant roses, shrubs, fruit bushes & canes, trees and climbers.
- Plant lilies and alliums.
- Plant and divide snowdrops that are 'in the green'.
- Buy seed potatoes and 'chit' tubers.
- Sow early crop broad beans, peas, onion / shallot sets and salads under cover for early outdoor planting.
- Sow carrots, parsnips and bulb onions under cloches.
- Clean Greenhouse glass to maximize light and ventilate on warm days.
- Check over-wintering plants in greenhouse for dead / decaying leaves and remove to minimize risk of fungal infection.
- Put up nesting boxes for birds.

## Potato Wordsearch

No doubt some of you will have started buying seed potatoes and some may be chitting already. The following words are hidden across, backwards, up, down, or diagonally in the grid below. Some letters may be shared between words. **The letters left over will make another term to do with potatoes, which I also require.**

- King Edward
- Kestrel
- Charlotte
- Maincrop
- Earlies
- Arran Pilot
- Maris Bard
- Swift
- Desiree
- Jazzy
- Cara
- Tuber
- Chit
- Scab

S	E	I	L	R	A	E	D	A	D
P		O	T	U	B	E	R	R	P
	T	B	A	C	S	S	A	R	O
L	A	T	H	I	W	W	B	A	R
E	O	I	R	I	D	B	S	N	C
R	T	E	F	E	L		I	P	N
T	E	T	G	I		G	R	I	I
S	H	N	T	C	A	R	A	L	A
E	I	Y	Z	Z	A	J	M	O	M
K	C	H	A	R	L	O	T	T	E

Please send your completed search to me on [marion.keeley@btinternet.com](mailto:marion.keeley@btinternet.com) or to my address of The Cottage, Fen End Farm, Oldwich Lane East, Fen End, Near Kenilworth, CV8 1NR, by 28<sup>th</sup> February.

## Answers to January's 'Nonsense' Fruit & Veg

Thank you to Henry Plumptre, David Felthouse, Sylvia Farley, Amanda Ghent, Angela Shaw & Alison Watson for sending in your answers – **you were all correct!**

1.Apple 2.Runner Bean 3.Cabbage 4.Rhubarb 5.Potato 6.Spinach 7.Parsnip 8.Raspberry 9.Pear  
10.Artichoke 11.Carrot 12.Lettuce

## Snowdrop Visits

Obviously Covid restrictions make this annual treat nigh on impossible this year. Organisations such as the National Trust have abandoned their snowdrop openings in over 60 of their gardens. The National Garden Scheme ([www.ngs.org.uk/snowdrops](http://www.ngs.org.uk/snowdrops)) was to have held its main snowdrop festival from 1<sup>st</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> Feb, with a few extending into early March.

However staying local, Temple Balsall has said that you may visit their snowdrops and aconites privately in your own time without booking, maintaining personal Covid precautions whilst you are there. They are not holding their usual formal event. Temple Balsall is always popular with ramblers and cyclists passing through at any time of year.

The best display of aconites, as well as snowdrops, is in Temple House Garden, accessed by the small gate to the right of the house. Do **NOT** use the unsafe steps to go down to them. Instead walk along the terrace behind Temple House and over the lawn. There are also many snowdrops in the small wood alongside the Temple Balsall Cemetery, and snowdrops & hellebores in the borders around the Old Hall.