

Balsall &  
District



Horticultural  
Society

April 2021

# Newsletter

PRESIDENT: Jackie Tomnie  
CHAIRMAN: Ivor Stansfield  
SECRETARY: Angela Shaw 01676 534562  
TREASURER: Helen Jones 01564 772645  
NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Marion Keeley 07973911313 Web site: www.bdhs.club

Dear Members,

It was a relief when our March speaker delivered his talk, although there was still a slight 'wobble' with his technology as he began. David Ashcroft must have nerves of steel when he sets up our meetings! I must admit I found it a bit challenging to take notes with Mick's broad Black Country accent, and it has taken me a while to make sense of them for the report below.

My BDHS competition Narcissus 'Sailboat' bulbs finally flowered 2 weeks after the judging date, but they were worth waiting for because their scent is gorgeous. They now sit on the kitchen table and on entering that room in the mornings, their scent fills the air.

I've treated myself to a pruning saw and discovered its joys! Like many others I've spent more time than usual in the garden over the many months of lockdown. I'd always been a bit of a wimp when it came to cutting woody plants back, but I'm now much braver and have progressed from only secateurs to a lopper and now a saw. Anyone in need of a serious haircut?

The garden is certainly my favourite place to be and I can be out there for hours, including in the recent snow. My husband thinks I'm mad ..... no comment!

Enjoy your gardening,

Marion

## SPEAKER REPORT

### 'Keep calm and Make Compost' – Mick Poultney

On 25<sup>th</sup> March, we were entertained by "The Compost King" from the Black Country who explained his tried and tested way of making compost. Mick is a member of the National Vegetable Society, gives composting talks nationwide, does weekly blogs on YouTube & Facebook, and has recently published a book 'Compost Ready within a Month'. Of the 2 composting methods - heat and worms - Mick prefers the latter. The heat method requires the compost heap to be turned **very** regularly, otherwise only the material in the centre would get hot enough to decompose into compost.

Composting worms are **not** earthworms who are soil dwellers, but species of worms adapted to life in decaying organic material and have distinctive striped red bands down their length. They are known by various names including Brandling Worm, Manure Worm, Redworm, Tiger Worm, Trout Worm. They may be obtained from various sources including fishing tackle shops and online. These worms do the turning for you, but if you possess a Tumble Composter then **only** turn it a maximum of once a week to avoid disrupting worm and fungal activity. One should regularly check that worms are not being predated, eg by moles from below, (chicken wire across the bottom of your DIY bin with a foot of straw on top will deter them). One should also do a regular moisture check as worms dislike dry habitats. Worms also dislike acid matter, so do not add citrus fruits or onions to the bin.

If you have the space, Mick recommends DIY compost bins comprising of 3 bays; 1) for making compost, 2) for making leaf mould and 3) for manure. These can be made from 4ft slatted pallets and must be lined with black garden plastic to prevent moisture loss. All must have lids from old carpet for the same reason. If using readymade compost bins, Mick suggests ringing Blackwall Compost Bin

Company on 08445 714444, as they can supply one and relate it to your local council via your postcode. Mick recommends lagging these bins with carpet & black plastic, as well as painting in summer to keep the sun off.

Mick makes compost by layering his ingredients, rather like a lasagne. At the base of the compost bin is a 2ins layer of manure, followed by a 2ins layer of green (both kitchen & garden) waste, then a 2ins layer of leaf mould, and finally a 2ins layer of carbon, compressed down and watered, before replacing the lid. Repeat the process until the bin is full. Each bin should have its moisture level checked weekly; they should be 'just' moist. Mick says that "peeing in your bin" is the quickest way for gents to add moisture! Urine is rich in nitrogen & potassium and acts as an activator. He also collects "oss pee" from his local stables for the same purpose. Other liquid Mick uses are wine slops and out of date ales from his local. Date the top of your bin so that you can estimate when it will be ready.

He then talked at length about the 4 ingredients for compost, which he prepares individually into old compost bags before layering them into the bin to decompose into compost.

Manure can be sourced from horses ("oss muck" is Mick's favourite), sheep, cows, llama, or alpaca, all of which are deemed 'mild'. However, horse stud manure should be avoided as it is likely to be laced with hormones. Do not forget to water the manure before putting the lid on. When the carpet lid is removed, worms are often found just underneath as they proliferate in manure. On emptying the manure bin, pick out the worms to re-use.

Green waste comes from both the kitchen and the garden. Ensure all is finely chopped, even peelings, as better compost is made. Kitchen waste must not include cooked foods which attracts vermin, nor anything acidic if using worms. Crushed eggshells are a good source of lime and the worms love uncooked porridge oats. Be wary of teabags (some contain up to 30% plastic), but the leaves can be emptied out and the bag discarded. Spent coffee grounds can be added which slugs & snails detest. In the garden, nettles (before they go to seed) and comfrey leaves are valuable. Mick does not put in weeds, nor grass due to spores on the latter. He will add spent mushroom compost and spent hops from the Black Country Brewery. He collects the topsoil from molehills which the moles have "pre - riddled". If making a trip to the sea, washed up seaweed can be shredded and is a good addition. Alternatively crush a couple of Sea Kelp capsules from Holland & Barrett! Collect worm castes from the lawn or purchase Green by Nature's Black Gold Worm Castings. Tip the compost bag up & down to mix the green waste.

Leaf mould is not just valuable in compost but also as a soil conditioner or top dressing. As well as the DIY compost bin, it may be made in a pierced dustbin liner stored out of sight. Mick reports that leaf bins made from 4 posts and chicken wire fail to retain moisture. Beech leaves are particularly good. Try to collect leaves that are as 'clean' as possible, avoiding those from roadsides contaminated with traffic pollutants. Ideally shred the leaves before adding to your bin or dustbin liner. Add in two - inch layers, compress down and water before adding the next layer. Check weekly to ensure that the leaves have not dried out, re - hydrating with water or urine. Mick uses the biological compost maker 'Biotal' from the Home Bargains shop, as it is very good for making leaf mould.

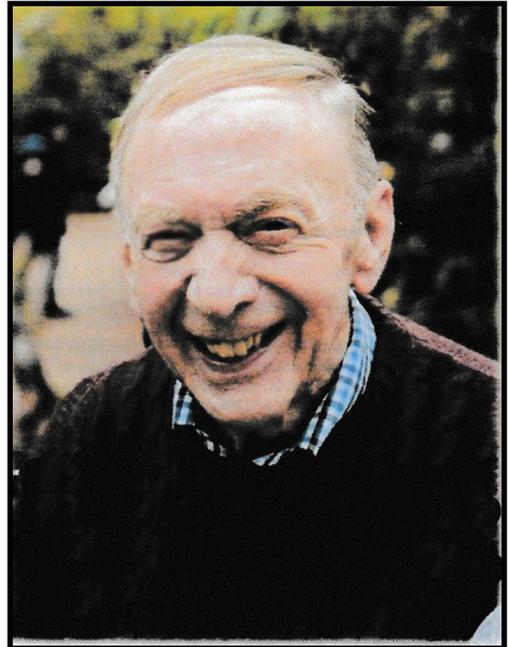
Carbon may include anything made from cardboard or paper, but no coloured or glossy paper is advised. Paperback books may be ripped up but avoid the glue on the spine. Finely shred all shrub and tree prunings, wood & bark chippings and straw. The ash from woodburning stoves may be added. Again, tip the compost bag up and down to mix the carbon.

Mick also outlined other additions including mycorrhizal fungi, Ecothrive Charge, a soil enhancer made from made organic beetle dung (ecothrive.co.uk), Biobizz Fish - Mix, an organic mix of North Sea fish emulsion and Dutch sugar beet, and minerals in Remin Volcanic Rock Dust or Scottish Basalt Rock Dust.

To conclude, Mick's resultant compost has been tested by Laverstoke Park Laboratories in Hampshire and has been recognised as an excellent alternative to peat.

## Dr Donald Riddoch

It is sad to have to report the death of one of our most loyal members who passed away on 12th March 2021. Donald was a retired Consultant Neurologist who had worked at the Coventry Hospital and his principal relaxations were salmon fishing and gardening. He was a keen gardener, who until his health made it too difficult, came to most of our meetings, joined in our social events and participated in our annual show with superb fruit and vegetables as well as jams and jellies. I have known Donald for over 50 years; he was a kind and unassuming man with a keen sense of humour and he will be missed by all who knew him. Within the last 12 months his health had deteriorated further and his passing peaceful; his death is a loss to our Society. Unfortunately the pandemic made his funeral at St Peter's Church on 25th March a family only affair so the Society was not represented, Donald's burial was at Temple Balsall.



Dr Robert Leeming

## NOTICEBOARD

- Our Chairman has received the following from the widow of Life Member, Bill Court, dated 21st March.

*Dear Ivor,*

*Thank you for your kind words and lovely card. Bill's membership of the Society brought him so much pleasure. The friendships, exchange of knowledge and ideas, and sharing that love of gardening, which throughout his adult life has been important to him. Please pass on to all the members my appreciation of their kindness.*

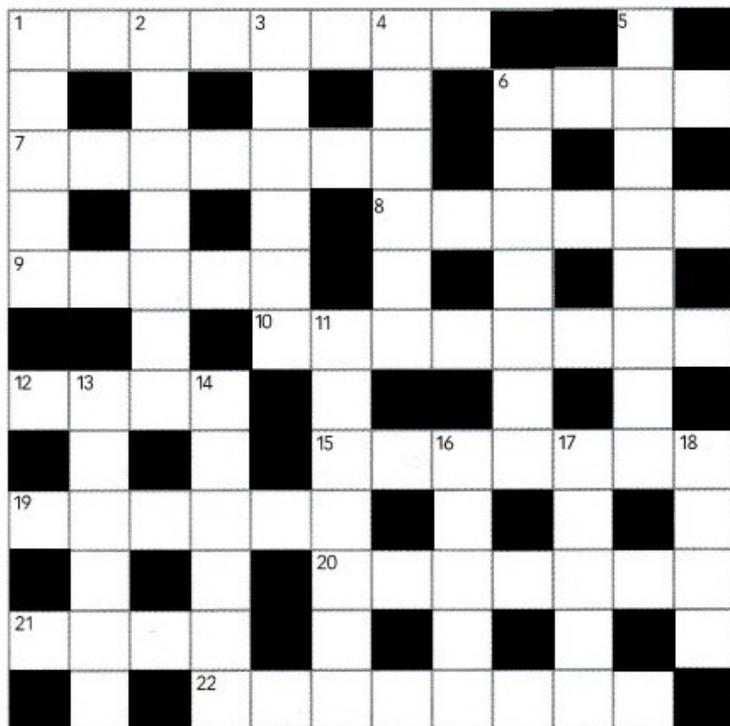
*Yours very sincerely,*

*Jo Court*

- Our **Annual Show has been re – scheduled for Saturday 4th September** at St Peter's Church Hall, Holly Lane, Balsall Common.
- **On Saturday 24th April, from 10 – 11.30am**, we will be handing out Pelargonium plugs, (ONLY), due to the scaled down nature of the show, at the rear of Balsall Village Hall. These are to be grown on by members ready for the show in September and there is a free plug for all. We will also have a plant stall and Gill Stansfield will be selling the Showa Gloves (£4), previously available from the Sundries Table when we were having normal monthly meetings. Please note that the WI Country Market will also be in progress at the same time at the front of the Village Hall.
- Our next monthly meeting is on **Thursday 29th April at 8pm** and will be a talk via Zoom on The History of Oxford Botanic Gardens to which we had a coach trip a couple of years ago. It will be given by its former Director, Dr Timothy Walker. Please sign up to attend by emailing David Ashcroft on [dja@krystalservices.plus.com](mailto:dja@krystalservices.plus.com) by **12noon on Weds 28th**. It is preferable that you log your intention to join the meeting even if you are not sure until Thursday evening. This is to avoid David being inundated with last minute requests. David will always acknowledge your request to join. Should you not receive this from David, please check your SPAM file first in case his email has gone in there, before you contact him again.
- This month's photographic competition entries must be sent to Angela by **Sunday 25th April** on [ange\\_shaw@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ange_shaw@hotmail.co.uk)
- The BDHS holiday to Cornwall has been postponed to Spring 2022.

## COMPETITIONS PAGE

A crossword for you this month. Please send your completed crossword to me **by Friday 30th April** on [marion.keeley@btinternet.com](mailto:marion.keeley@btinternet.com) or The Cottage, Fen End Farm, Oldwich Lane East, Fen End, Near Kenilworth, CV8 1NR.



### ACROSS

- 1** Maple more formally known as *Acer pseudoplatanus* (8)  
**6** *Dionaea muscipula*, or Venus fly \_ (4)  
**7** Plants that grow on mountains above the tree line (7)  
**8** Evergreen shrubs that are good for ground cover and have bell-shaped blooms (6)  
**9** 'Granny \_', a variety of hard, green-skinned apple (5)  
**10** Genus of plants native to the Mediterranean, with large spiny leaves and bold flower spikes (8)  
**12** A plant that forms dense mats on both trees and rocks (4)  
**15** Scale \_, tiny pests that often prey on greenhouse and pot plants (7)  
**19** A genus of invasive plants that includes the dead nettle (6)  
**20** Platycodon is better known as \_ flower (7)  
**21** Common name for *Tilia europaea* (4)  
**22** Machine for chopping twigs and branches (8)

### DOWN

- 1** \_ horn sumach is the common name for *Rhus typhina* (5)  
**2** Bugs that suck sap from ornamental plants and fruit trees (7)  
**3** The mint genus (6)  
**4** \_ *odorata*, a cottage garden annual whose scent attracts bees, also known as common mignonette (6)  
**5** Poisonous weedkiller (8)  
**6** Plant with prickly leaves and feathery plumed seeds (7)  
**11** Describes a plant that grows upwards either by twining or clinging (7)  
**13** Large plant genus, including wood sorrel and Bermuda buttercup (6)  
**14** Racemes of flowers, as on a gladiolus (6)  
**16** Term for vegetables that are grown to be eaten raw (5)  
**17** Tropical evergreen whose dried buds are used as a spice (5)  
**18** A type of soil that is light, dry and easy to cultivate (4)

### Answers to March's Easter Quiz

- |                  |               |                   |
|------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1. F (Passion)   | 5. B (Egg)    | 9. L (Bunny's)    |
| 2. D (Chick)     | 6. I (Nest)   | 10. G (Chocolate) |
| 3. J (Jerusalem) | 7. K (Judas)  | 11. E (Cross)     |
| 4. H (Donkey's)  | 8. C (Lamb's) | 12. A (Easter)    |

All entries received were correct and were sent in by Wendy Boulton, Mary & Edward Cotterrell, Laura Eden, Sylvia Farley, David Felthouse and Gill Whitehead. The entrant whose name was pulled from the hat and will receive a copy of the RHS magazine 'The Garden' is Sylvia Farley.

### Results of the monthly BDHS website Photographic Competition (29 entries)

1. Ken Shaw (Narcissi)
2. Angela Shaw (Hellebore)
3. Doug & Sue Timmis (Narcissi)

### Results of the Annual Daffodil Growing Competition (20 entries)

1. Val Cotterrell
2. David Hickson
3. Alison Watson