

Balsall &  
District



Horticultural  
Society

October 2021

# Newsletter

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Dear Members,

It was lovely to see some 50 of you at September's meeting in the Village Hall. Those present seemed so pleased to be back. There was a good through-put of air as the kitchen door and the main door onto Station Road were left open. Traffic noise did not appear to detract from the meeting as both our chair and the speaker used microphones. If members got a little chilly, they just put their coats back on. Those who preferred to wear masks did so, and there were hand sanitising stations in the hall. We even attracted a new member that evening, so welcome to David Leighton.

October's meeting at 8pm on the 28<sup>th</sup> will be Craig House Cacti run by 'the cactus couple', Stan Griffin & Vicki Newman, from West Bromwich. They are easily recognised by their bespoke jackets & waistcoats at the shows! The title of their presentation is 'So you think you've got problems'. Note this is a change to what is listed on your membership card. No doubt they will have plants to sell too. Don't forget our own plant stall and gardening sundries table, as well as our raffle.

Bags of 6 Narcissus 'Jack Snipe' are still available at £1.50 for potting up for the competition at our Annual Dinner in March next year. Alternatively, you may just want to plant them to enjoy them in your garden. These are available from Alison Watson & Sue Edwards, or at our next meeting. Helen Jones continues to sell tickets (£6) for our AGM & Buffet Supper on November 25<sup>th</sup>. We always aim to keep the AGM as brief as possible so that we can enjoy Sue Edward's splendid buffet & each other's company. Your committee would be pleased to receive nominations for new committee members. We normally meet in the Westlake Room at the rear of the Village Hall on the Monday evening following a speaker meeting. Be assured, we are a happy, friendly bunch!

Whilst the pot plant and flower spike competitions have resumed at our meetings, our Secretary Angela Shaw would still like you to send in photographs of your gardening successes to go on our website. Of note, whilst there was a good display of flower spikes at the September meeting, only one pot plant appeared. Now we can't let Edward Cotterrell have all the glory! In respect of the rules for these monthly competitions, members can bring more than one entry, but points will only be awarded to one entry from an individual member. First place is awarded 5 points, second place 3 points and third place 1 point. At the Annual Dinner, the members with the highest points tally in each competition from the previous year receives a prize.

Last Sunday, I visited the Harvest Flower Festival at Haseley Church, just this side of Warwick. Their theme was 'Around the World' and the ingenuity and skills of those concerned depicted 16 countries or continents in flowers, foliage, fruit, and vegetables. Antarctica appeared in front of the altar in whites and creams. Myriad colours depicted the Caribbean in a box pew at the back. A Chinese produce market was sited on the tomb of some ancient member of local nobility. Hot colours depicted Arabia, Australia, Africa, India, and Spain. The Seychelles had tones of the ocean, and Peru of its mountains and Inca tribes. Pastel shades picked up the cooler climes of Switzerland, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. Behind the organ, Scotland was a mix of purples, tartan and whiskey, and Wales sported plenty of red, leeks and music. Finally, England was a mass of flowers, edibles from the garden, foliage from the hedgerow, corn, and bread. This tiny rural church has no electric lighting, and all down the aisle corn dollies hung under the candlesticks. Some brave soul even scaled the height of the bell tower inside to suspend a basket and balloon arrangement. Tea and cake in a gazebo in the churchyard rounded off the visit nicely!

With best wishes, Marion

## SPEAKER REPORT

### **Grasses and Friends for Autumn Interest – Paul & Helen Green, Green's Leaves Nursery, Gloucs.**

This nurseryman and his wife travelled from Newent with a van full of plants, to demonstrate grasses, other perennials and shrubs that look their best at this time of year. This couple regularly attend Plant Heritage Group events and Rare Plant fairs around the country. Paul took plants from his display and described them – not a slide in sight through which to nod off!!

#### **Grasses**

These go in and out of fashion. They look particularly good with contemporary landscaping, gravel, and paved areas. This group of plants includes rushes & sedges as well as grasses. Paul recommended the book by American landscaper, Rick Darke, 'The Encyclopaedia of Grasses for Liveable Landscapes'.

They may be deciduous or evergreen, short or tall, and come in a great range of colours & shapes. Some are very tactile but beware of those which can cut your hands such as Pampas Grass. The sound and movement of grasses, especially during the winter months, is another bonus. Grasses left uncut over winter also provide homes for insects & their larval stages, and seed heads for birds such as Goldfinches. Grasses can colour very differently in sunlight, and some look stunning when covered by a hoar frost. Many grasses prefer moist shade but can cope with drought once established, apart from those very dependent on moisture.

Deciduous grasses are cut back hard annually, early to mid-Spring (Paul suggests the end of March), depending on the species. Evergreens only require a tidy up to remove any dead material. However, if they appear brown at the tips, they can be rejuvenated by bunching the leaves and cutting them back, at fist height from the ground, from mid – March onwards. They will soon grow back.

Propagation of grasses depends on whether they are cool season growers (Group 1) or warm season growers (Group 2). Cutting back and splitting is the usual approach. Group 1 are propagated in either March or September / October, and Group 2 in June.

Short grasses can be used for underplanting and as border fillers, helping to suppress weeds. New Zealand sedges (*Carex comans* & *C. testacea*) are petite, fine – leaved evergreens and especially useful in containers. Those that are bronze or 'brown' are not dead! Japanese Hakone Grass (*Hakonechloa*) can soften the hard edge of a path or hide the edge of a pond liner. So long as this grass is in moist conditions, it will tolerate both sun and shade. Some are all green but *H. macra* 'areola' has a gold stripe.

Taller are the stripey Zebra grasses (*Miscanthus sinensis*). They are ideal for small gardens and containers. If kept moist they will be happy in sun or shade. The deciduous North American Switch Grasses (*Panicum virgatum*) are very hardy and provide lovely foliage and flower heads. *P. 'Oxford Autumn'* can reach 2-3ft, whilst *P. 'Squaw'* is 4-5ft.

Very tall grasses are found in the Molinieae family, and these do need moisture, with colours changing through the season. Purple Moor Grass, such as *Molinia caerulea* 'Edith Dudsus' has dark green foliage, deep purple flowers stems & flower spikes, which change to an orangey yellow by late autumn. Paul suggests delaying pruning until the foliage falls over around Christmas time, then cut back, feed and leave. Some tall grasses are grown purely for their flowers such as Golden Oats (*Stipa gigantea*) and Feather Reed Grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster').

#### **Non – Grass Friends**

Japanese Anemones may become rampant. The Swan series of these anemones has been popular. Paul was keen to show us a new variety called *A. 'Frisly Knickers'* – compact & smaller at around 2ft, with semi – double flowers. The anemone Fantasy series has 'Red Riding Hood' which is even smaller, and useful for the front of borders & containers. Paul gave these tips for container planting. Buy the biggest plants you can afford as plants dry out much quicker in pots and can blow over. Don't pack the compost down as it is vital that there is air in it.

Hesperantha, (syn.schizostylis), can often flower as late as November but moisture is essential. Nerines and colchicums also provide colour now. In the plumbago family, the hardy Blue Flowered Leadwort (Ceratostigma plumbaginoides) sprawls to form a mat, with its leaves reddening in sunlight. It will tolerate dry conditions once established.

Hypericum have plentiful yellow flowers for insects, followed by berries. In the old varieties, the latter are always black, but newer varieties have red or pink berries. They can seed but the offspring won't be true to type, so dispose of their seeds carefully.

Gunnera needs space as it can reach 10 – 11ft and must be kept consistently moist. It is essential to protect their crowns over the winter. Form a protective 'tepee' using its old leaves, hay, straw, or coarse bark.

Shrubs such as Weigela 'Monet' has lovely, variegated foliage and is only about 2ft high. The Heavenly or Sacred Bamboo (Nandina domestica) can take ages to reach 2ft but can withstand temperatures to -15C, if it is out of the wind. The Nandina variety 'Obsessed' is evergreen, with red leaves, white flowers and is good for a container. Buddleia can be tidied up in autumn by reducing it by a third to prevent wind rock, leaving its hard pruning until Spring.

Succulents have become trendy, especially as houseplants with teenagers! Most varieties can live outside for the summer but should be brought in for the winter. Many will cope with cold alone but will succumb to the combination of wet and cold. The bigger their leaf, the less hardy they are. Beschorneria yuccoides 'Flamingo Glow' from Mexico is a statement succulent with a dark pink spike and is hardy to -6C. The small Agave 'Cream Spike' has spiny variegated rosettes of blue green leaves, with buttery margins and brown spines. The bromeliad Dyckia has rosettes of purple leaves with orange flowers.

Having wetted our appetite with his demonstration of plants on display, his van was emptier to make the journey home to Newent!

## TOPICAL TIPS

Now that weather is cooler and damper take care not to over water pot plants. Reduce watering of houseplants as the days shorten.

Where possible bring tender plants into greenhouse or conservatory before weather turns cold. Other vulnerable plants which cannot be moved can be protected by wrapping with bubble wrap or fleece.

Finish harvesting apples and pears.

Dig open ground so that it gets fully weathered over the winter.

Apply compost/manure if available.

Cut herbs and dry for use over winter. Also lift and pot up herbs for use over winter.

Clear out summer bedding and plant out winter bedding plants.

Lift and divide herbaceous perennials.

Prune climbing roses and tie in stems.

Cut out green shoots in variegated evergreen shrubs.

Reduce height of roses, and shrubs such as Buddleia and Lavatera to stop wind damage. Prune more in spring.

Plant out hardy trees, shrubs, and new fruit trees and bushes.

Plant out Spring cabbages.

Complete planting of spring flowering bulbs.

Sow sweet peas under glass.

Sow winter salads in unheated greenhouses.

Lay turf any time between now and April when conditions allow.

Raise cutter level and reduce mowing of lawns as growth slows.

Remove fallen leaves from lawns and ponds.

Remove toadstools from lawns before their spores spread.

Lift dahlias, cannas and other tender perennials to store over winter.

## COMPETITIONS PAGE

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| 1) Look out for the prickles and stained fingers!<br>2) Some are edible but beware, some will make you ill.<br>3) Several new unpronounceable names for these now!<br>4) Becky had a ruddy complexion. | 5) Cinderella's coach after mid-night!<br>6) Helen's flower?<br>7) Naked ladies?!<br>8) Can be turned into a berry nice gin!<br>9) Originated in Mexico & have | recently come back into fashion.<br>10) Who remembers Delrosa Syrup for children?<br>11) Roast them or dangle them on a string for a fight?<br>12) Nothing to do with crustaceans but make a very nice jelly. |
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Answers to me by the October meeting in person, by email ([marion.keeley@btinternet.com](mailto:marion.keeley@btinternet.com)), or in the post (The Cottage, Fen End Farm, Oldwich Lane East, Fen End, Near Kenilworth, CV8 1NR) please

### September Puzzle

An easy wordsearch, particularly as I'd given you the list of the varieties of Narcissi for you to find. Entries were received from Wendy Boulton, Mary & Edward Cotterrell, Sylvia Farley, David Felthouse, Jean Gledhill & Gill Whitehead.

The winning entry pulled from the hat is Jean Gledhill who will receive a copy of the RHS magazine, The Garden.

### Monthly Flower Spike & Pot Plant Competitions

#### Flower Spike

1. Felicity Hill (Alstromeria)
2. Alison Watson (Dahlia)
3. Edward Cotterrell (Chrysanthemum)

#### Pot Plant

1. Edward Cotterrell (Begonia)
- There were no other entries!