



**Derbyshire Group**

# NEWSLETTER



## Spring 2020

## Contents

|                                                             |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| From the Chair                                              | 3  |
| Editor's note                                               | 4  |
| Speaker programme 2020                                      | 4  |
| Biopics of Speakers                                         | 5  |
| Plants of the year 2010 – 2019 – how fashions change        | 6  |
| Trip to Castle Ashby and Thenford gardens, 7/6/19           | 7  |
| 100 years at Taylor Bulbs of Holbeach                       | 8  |
| In defence of collecting snowdrops                          | 9  |
| Impressions of Andalusia                                    | 12 |
| Mad Garden visits 2020                                      | 13 |
| Gardening Dilemmas                                          | 15 |
| Derbyshire delights – bluebells in Bow Wood, Cromford       | 15 |
| Why Should I Pay My National HPS Subscription?              | 16 |
| Happy soil, happy plants, happy environment, happy gardener |    |

### FROM THE CHAIR

Our spring 2020 newsletter is the first to be produced by its new editor, Hildegard Wiesehofer. From my involvement thus far with Hildegard I am confident that it will have been efficiently produced and be visually appealing. The content, as ever, is down to you, our members. Please maintain a steady flow of articles: don't rely on others. Naturally, I wish to thank Hildegard for volunteering for this role and I hope that it provides her with much enjoyment and satisfaction. I must also thank the retiring editor, Graham Smith, for stepping into the breach when the vacancy previously arose (combining this with the chairmanship for a period in the absence of other volunteers) and for maintaining the high standards set by his predecessors.

One vital but often unconsidered element of our meetings is the quality of image and sound that we enjoy. Have you noted, however, that our not inexpensive existing equipment has been augmented this 'season' to produce even better results? Two sturdy collapsible stools have been purchased on which to mount our screen to ensure that those members seated on the rear rows have an unobscured view of the images. Compactness was a major consideration in choosing them as we have been told that our equipment is now taking up rather a lot of room in the Shirland Village Hall's store room. Nonetheless, I'm sure that the stools will prove to be sturdy. Given the exacting standards of our 'floor supremo' John Marshall they will probably stand the weight of a herd of elephants. Further, one of the speaker support stands has been malfunctioning with the speaker slowly sliding down as the meeting progressed. I suppose that you could say that it was lowering the tone. Cue the ever reliable Martin Brown to effect a home workshop repair. Thanks, Martin.

Since my elevation(?) to front of house I have realised just how much time, effort and expertise John and his team spend in assembling, testing and putting equipment away again at meetings. Rarely do they get a formal pat on the back, so I want to do so on behalf of all of you. Well done and thank you.

Our day trips and annual holiday (thanks to Lynn Wood and Ian Evans) provide us with an enormous amount of pleasure. We also have a number of 'bonus events' of a similar nature in 2020 thanks to Martin Brown (yet again). Martin has arranged four MAD trips, following their success at the HPS South Pennine Group, to celebrate our 21<sup>st</sup> birthday this year. MAD stands for 'meet at destination', the destinations being a member or supporter's garden. Refreshments will be provided and each event will cost £5.00 with any profits going to charity. Martin will give verbal details of the trips at our meetings. Further, details are also listed in this newsletter and on our website. On your behalf I extend my thanks to Martin and the garden owners concerned for giving us so much to look forward to. If these visits prove a success, we hope to have more in future years.

Our January speaker, Tony Russell, commenting on a picture of three vivid, contrasting groups of cornus, said how much they raised his spirits on grey winter days. As plantaholics, I'm sure that we all agreed. I hope your spirits are similarly raised by all of your gardening efforts in 2020.

Happy gardening, Nigel

## EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to my first attempt at editing the HPS spring 2020 newsletter. As mentioned in our monthly meetings, the emphasis is on **editing YOUR** contributions and compiling them. I have been quite overwhelmed by your contributions to this edition and needed to do a bit of 'pruning' here and there to make it all fit. I look forward to your articles, photos, recommendations for special places to visit and news for the Autumn newsletter.

It would be nice to share ideas of places that boast special plant collections or that simply provide an excellent day out for plant-a-holics. I am introducing Bow Wood near Cromford in this edition, which is absolutely gorgeous in late April, when it is carpeted with bluebells.

**Cover picture:** Plant of the year Stachys 'Hummelo'- Perennial of the year 2019 . A relative of lamb's ear, is a slow spreading, clump-forming perennial. You and the pollinators will enjoy the upright spikes of bright-pinkish purple flowers from early through midsummer. Hardy in zones 4 to 8, this compact **plant** grows 18 to 20 inches tall and 18 inches wide.

## 2020 Events Calendar and Speaker Programme

### February 15th, 2020

'Plants, Borders and Gardens' - Timothy Walker

### March 21st, 2020

Plantagogo 'A Passion for Heucheras' - Vicky Fox

### April 18th, 2020

'Spring Flowering Perennials' - Rosy Hardy

### May 16<sup>th</sup>, 11am to 1pm

Plant Fair

### Friday 26 June - Monday 29 June 2020 Long weekend in Kent staying at the Bridgewood Manor Hotel, nr. Chatham

This year's weekend trip will be at the end of June. Apart from Sissinghurst, we Will visit different gardens from those we visited on the trip to East Sussex in 2011. We will leave from the Alfreton Travelodge, but at 7.30 am this year because of the rather longer distance to our first garden.

### Monday July 6th 2020

Easton Walled Garden, Lincolnshire for the sweet pea festival followed by a Private garden at Sutton on Trent.

**September 19th, 2020**  
**'Dieramas' - Colin Hickman**

**October 17th 2020**  
**Alpines in the Wild and in Cultivation - Diane Clement**

### **BIO-PICS OF SPEAKERS FOR 2020**

**February 15th** - Timothy Walker - Plants, Borders and Gardens

Former director of Oxford Botanic Garden, Timothy is a freelance botanist, writer, presenter and lecturer. He returns by popular demand.

**March 21st** - Vicky Fox – Plantagogo 'A Passion for Heucheras'

Vicky and Richard Fox established Jubilee Cottage Nursery in 1990. By 2000 they were specialising in Heucheras, Heucherellas and Tiarellas and have continued collecting these species ever since.

To promote their new website, Plantagogo, they started attending flower shows. In 2007 they were showing their plants in Floral Marquees.

Their first Chelsea gold medal was won in 2009 and in the same year both of their National Collections of Heucherellas and of Heucheras were approved. This was followed by approval of their National Collection of Tiarellas two years later.

Vicky and Richard continue to show plants and gain many prestigious medals.

**April 18th** - Rosy Hardy – Spring Flowering Perennials

Rosy and Rob have run Hardy's Cottage Garden Plants in Hampshire since 1988. They have a reputation for a wide range of both usual and unusual herbaceous perennials. They also breed and propagate their own varieties.

Rosy and Rob attend many shows and events and have won hundreds of awards including 23 Chelsea Gold Medals.

**May 16th - Plant Fair 11am to 1pm**

If you would like to book a table for your own plant sale, please approach a member of the committee.

**September 19th** - Colin Hickman – Dieramas

Colin and his Dad run a family nursery situated at the foot of the Pennines in South Yorkshire called Hoyland Plant Centre. They hold National Collections of Agapanthus and of Tulbaghia.

In addition to these they cultivate Amarines, Nerines, Clivia and Dierama. Shows have been attended and many medals won including 3 Chelsea Golds.

**October 17th** - Diane Clement - Alpines in the Wild and in Cultivation

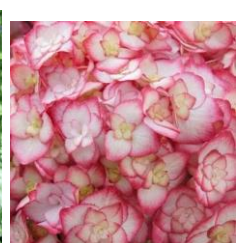
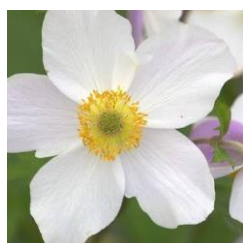
Diane is a member of several alpine and rock garden societies. She lives in Wolverhampton and is currently the Director of the Seed Exchange for the Alpine Garden Society. This is the largest seed exchange of its type in the world. She has been growing and showing alpine plants for over 20 years and is a keen exhibitor and AGS judge.

Diane specialises in Hepatica, Cyclamen and woodland plants, but also grows a wide range of other plants.

***Details of the remaining 2020 events will be published in the Autumn edition, due out at the November meeting.***

## Plants of the Year since 2010 – How fashions change!

| Year | First Place                                          |
|------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 2010 | Streptocarpus 'Harlequin Blue'                       |
| 2011 | Anemone 'Wild Swan'                                  |
| 2012 | Digitalis Illumination Pink                          |
| 2013 | Mahonia eurybracteata                                |
| 2014 | Hydrangea macrophylla, MISS SAORI                    |
| 2015 | Viburnum plicatum f. Toentosum 'Kilimanjaro Sunrise' |
| 2016 | Clematis Koreana AMBER                               |
| 2017 | Mulberry 'Charlotte Russ', 'Matsunaga'               |
| 2018 | Hydrangea, Bride Snow White                          |
| 2019 | Sedum takesimense ATLANTIS                           |



### TRIP TO CASTLE ASHBY AND THENFORD GARDENS, 7/6/19

We excelled ourselves on the trip to Castle Ashby and Thenford Gardens on 7<sup>th</sup> June. Normally we manage to find the only wet day of the summer, but this time we managed to find hurricane Miguel! Fortunately, Miguel treated Northamptonshire fairly kindly and we only had rain for about half of the time we were viewing the gardens.

Castle Ashby did not have a vast number of plant varieties, by HPS-member standards, but the lawns and gardens were very well tended with some appealing and colourful beds as exemplified by the impressive display of alliums in the photograph herewith. I have found sisyrinchium something of a nuisance in my garden, self-setting and forming a sizeable clump whilst my back is turned. However, they were displayed to great effect here in good sized blocks of plants in combination with nepetas, delphiniums and geraniums to make colourful eye-catching beds and borders. Another plant featured strongly around the garden



was a large leafed and flowered begonia.

The white flowers were suffused with pink and fooled a number of us into thinking that they were fuchsias until we looked at the leaves, which were typical of begonias. On complimenting the gardener on the quality and size of these plants, I was told that he thought that they

had been bought as a job lot to fill in for fuchsias which had been lost in a re-scheming of some parts of the garden. Well that shattered my illusion of garden artistry!

The gardens also had a “menagerie” to attract children/families presumably, but the animals proved a great attraction to our members, not least the alert and lively meerkats. We couldn’t bring any home, so we’ll have to do with mere cats.

The visit to Thenford Gardens was widely anticipated by our members, not least since it is the home of Sir Michael Heseltine. We were not disappointed: it was excellent. As at Castle Ashby, the gardens were immaculately maintained, and the arboretum had some wonderful specimens. Splendid borders lined the rear of the house, as shown by the photograph, and the fan training of the roses at the back of one of these was absolute precision, as was



the training of the espalier apples elsewhere in the garden. Another feature was the rill: see photo. How's that for size? Now that's what I call a rill.

Sizeable, tasteful (and expensive) statues and sculptures were sited in many places and



generally enhanced a vista or garden area considerably. The water feature at the foot of the rill (see photo) was so convincing that a number of us were initially deceived into thinking that it was a live plant! Despite seeing many of these objects, it transpired afterwards that I missed some or all of those in the sculpture garden since I was told that there was (unseen by me) one figure that was a super-sized impression of manhood!

I could go on and mention the greenhouse, the aviary, the lakes, the walled garden and the trough garden but newsletter space is limited. Suffice it to say that we may ultimately develop a little rust round the edges from our visit but we will recall it with fond memories.

Nigel Needham

### 100 YEARS AT TAYLOR BULBS OF HOLBEACH

This article was submitted by Colin Boulding last year following a visit to Taylor Bulbs to celebrate their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Given the time of year, this might provide inspiration for similar days out.

Taylor Bulbs of Holbeach celebrated their 100th birthday on April 10th 2019. Although we had paid £5 a head, but we didn't really know what to expect when we arrived at their headquarters at 9.30 on a bright morning with a very cold wind blowing off the North sea. We registered in a huge building and collected wrist bands and 2 tickets for the morning



lectures. Refreshments were on hand and the centre of the area was filled with tables decked out with pots of daffodils and seating.

Round the walls were displays of different daffodils arranged on their distinctive wooden packaging cases. Information via large video screen showed the process of growing & harvesting bulbs, and a display

how they would send flowers to The Chelsea show. Finally we looked at a large area for packaged bulbs & tubers.as you would see in any garden centre. Here you were given a box (of varying sizes) or even a trolley and I could buy any of their products for a pound each. What a start to the day!!!

We crossed the yard (decked with tubs of daffodils) to a second building decked out as a cinema, Brian Duncan MBE gave an illustrated talk on daffodil hybridization then Christine Scelmdale on bulbs around her garden, with slides taken only a few days before. The RHS bulb committee was on hand to answer any queries.



Back into the reception area we were each given a daffodil decorated carrier bag to fill with our lunch from the array provided then sat at the tables for lunch.

After lunch we set off for the bulb fields. We passed through sheds where employees explained the process of harvesting, grading and storing. The trial grounds contained separate beds with a single variety in each labelled and numbered. Awaiting us were 2 tractors pulling seated wagons, each taking 40 visitors on an hour-long tour round fields of daffodils in bud and flower. It was 3pm by the time we returned On the way back we passed a huge display of fat Amaryllis bulbs bunches of cut flowers and other plants for sale. More refreshments on offer and the day was over.



The event was attended by over 500 people attended. Unfortunately, this is not an annual event but was a one off just for their birthday. We were invited to comment on our day and to peg our comments onto a line. I imagine there would have been 500 requests to do it again.

### IN DEFENCE OF COLLECTING SNOWDROPS

When you read this, in my garden at least, the snowdrop season will be over except for a couple of varieties that can reasonably be expected to hang on until late April.

This year, as indeed in most years, I will have heard Hardy Plant Society and Alpine Garden Society members and speakers refer to us lovers of snowdrop varieties in a politely derogatory fashion. I've got used to phrases like 'they are all green and white' ... 'you need a big cheque book for those' ... 'I just think you can't actually beat the common ones' ... 'they all look the same from a distance don't they'. So, for the record here is why I love my snowdrops...all of them, not just the unusual ones.

The snowdrop name comes from the Greek word 'gala', meaning milk, and 'anthos', meaning flower. The family comprises 19 different species and more than 3,000 hybrid variations. The most common snowdrop is *Galanthus nivalis*, a charming, beautiful flower and free in the wild for everyone to enjoy and I love,

Collectors like myself enjoy the flowers en-masse, but also seek out rarities with a tendency to form clumps in a domestic garden rather than fill the grounds of local stately homes. Yes, they may look similar at first glance, but they have subtle variations including green and yellow colourations to the petals, unusual shapes, double petals and different stem formations. Lots of them tell interesting stories.

Snowdrops were apparently brought to Britain by the Romans, but it was not until the Crimean War in the 1850s that interest really took off. They were brought back by soldiers after this war and planted in churches and cemeteries to remember the war dead. These are the source of some of the variations we enjoy today.

At annual *Galanthus* events collectors from all over the world come to Britain to find varieties not found in their home countries, although now there are increasing numbers of European growers bringing many new varieties to the UK...'Brexit' permitting anyway. The media have dubbed collectors as *Galanthophiles* or less politely, *Galanthomaniacs*! Apparently, we are obsessive, need to get out more, show signs of mental instability and have more money than sense!! Mmmm...well I'd dispute that last one! According to psychologists, hobbyists who collect flowers that mostly look identical from a distance, stockpile old chimney pots or even amass train numbers are often really quite comfortable with themselves.

They're not seeking anyone else's approval by doing things they enjoy as sociable and acceptable fun. After all, people spend thousands of pounds on holidays, jewellery, watches or even trendy clothes and nobody thinks they're weird...although frankly I wouldn't trust any of them!



The wide variation of climate in which snowdrops naturally occur – from mountainous regions of Turkey, Ukraine and as far afield as Iran – means the blooming season of different varieties in my garden can extend from September to April. Although most are at their best in February.



It is a bit like stamp collecting. Once you get involved you can't just stop at one variety, but get a passion for more. Key to their appeal for me is that I think all snowdrops are elegant and beautiful...and they remind me of people I've met and places I've been to or things I have read about. This is a bit like the concept of 'provenance' associated with antiques and fine wines...but at a more personal and generally less expensive level.

The majority of bulbs are planted 'in the green' when growth is present. Unlike other bulbs, such as tulips, it is less easy to grow snowdrops from dormant bulbs planted at other times of the year. They are particularly vulnerable to drying out in summer.

The best time to plant bulbs is in late spring or early summer when the bloom is withered and the leaves are going over, but the bulb is still relatively large. Each year one bulb typically splits into two. However, some of the varieties in my garden have taken a couple of years to settle down and get into that annual rhythm.

The boom in demand for snowdrops echoes the 17th Century tulip mania of Holland, when bulbs were traded on the Stock Exchange for huge sums. One tulip, the Semper Augustus, which had extremely rare blood-red flames on white petals, sold for 6,000 florins in the 1630s.

The average yearly income at the time was around 200 florins. In today's money, the equivalent price would be £750,000, so snowdrops still have some way to go to match those kinds of prices! And anyway, many are really quite cheap for something that's going to last for years.

Delicate white snowdrops are a much-loved and anticipated sight in the gloomy days of Winter. And another wonderful thing? They can be potted up and shared to be grown in other people's gardens...thereby spreading the joy of this most adaptable and rewarding of plants. **I'm looking forward to next Winter already!**

Nigel P-R

## READERS GARDENING TIP

**This tip was submitted without a name, but I think it is worth sharing.....**

When planting in dry-ish weather or sandy soil, place a compostable, bio-degradable plastic bag into the bottom of the planting hole after making a few holes into the bag. Top with a thin layer of soil to enable the roots to get a grip in their new location. The bag will retain some moisture without drowning the plant and helps it to establish quickly.



## IMPRESSIONS OF ANDALUSIA –

Linda O'Neill's impressions of the Costa del Sol, October 2019



After a long, hot, dry summer the landscape in this part of the world was composed mainly of browns and greys contrasted with the intense blue of the sky.

Vivid splashes of colour came from the cultivated plantings. An iconic plant that I noticed repeatedly on our travels was a conifer, usually situated on its own, a beautiful conical outline silhouetted which I discovered was *Araucaria Pheterophylla* [Norfolk Island pine] and thus a relative of the Monkey Puzzle tree.



The gardens at MALAGA CATHEDRAL, were imaginatively planted with Cannas, Bananas, Strelitzias, giant Reeds [*Arundo* I think] plus the ubiquitous Palms, Hibiscus, Plumbago and Bouganvillea. An Orchidarium was situated in a small park in which there were beds of Zinnias, Cosmos, Marigolds and other half-hardy herbaceous planting.

All its narrow, winding streets had potted plants and balconies overflowing with colourful flowers. An unusual feature was the murals on house walls depicting plants and nature. A group of Baobab trees stood out. Up close they had nasty looking spines on their trunks, looking rather like oversized rose thorns.



**Alhambra Palace, Granada**

Water played a key role in Islamic buildings and gardens and it flows through rills and over fountains - the most spectacular of which is in the Patio de los Leones [Court of the Lions]. The gardens of the Generalife were originally market gardens and were also a summer



retreat for the Emirs who ruled here in the 13th and 14th centuries. Again, water dominates and there is also a huge Magnolia grandiflora.



The whole Alhambra complex of Palace and Gardens is stunning and awe inspiring helped undoubtedly by its location but also by the dedication of generations of archaeologists and conservationists who rescued it from centuries of neglect. I can only give a flavour of what it is like and I hope I have done this.

### Garden Trivia

**A weed is a plant that has mastered every survival skill except for learning how to grow in rows**

### **MAD GARDEN VISITS 2020 - CELEBRATING 21 YEARS DERBYSHIRE HARDY PLANTS GROUP**

To make this a “stand out” year, and to celebrate 21 years since the formation of the Derbyshire group of the Hardy Plants Society, we have arranged a series of “Meet At Destination” or MAD trips arranged in May, June, July and August 2020.

Each visit is very different, ranging from a small independent nursery, to a lovingly tended garden in the Derbyshire countryside.

All four MAD gardens have been picked to contrast and complement each other. They all display their owners' passion for plants and gardening in abundance. Most, if not all gardens, will have plants for sale.

Refreshments will be available at all four destinations and will be included in the entry price of £5 per head which is payable on the day. (Any surplus will be for charity). All you have to do, is to text 07813 697289 up to two days before the visit, to say you are coming, to ensure that there is sufficient catering on the day.

### **MAD TRIPS 2020 (Meet at Destination!)**

|                                 |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Thursday 21st<br>May<br>2pm     | <b>Don and Dot Witton</b><br>Firvale allotment<br>Winney Hill<br>Harthill<br>Sheffield S26 7YN       | Meet at the allotment at 2pm. Then onto Don and Dot's Home for the second garden and refreshments! 26 Casson Drive , Harthill S26 7WA.<br><br>Wonderful- needs no introduction!         |
| Wednesday<br>June 10th<br>2pm   | <b>Janet Boulding</b><br>Ashmore House<br>Holmgate Rd<br>Clay Cross,<br>Chesterfield<br>S45 9BA      | Turn West off the A61 in the middle of Clay Cross into Holmgate rd. Be careful to keep left at Fork. Ashmore House approx 1 mile from A61.<br>Passionate about her garden and it shows! |
| Saturday July<br>25th<br>2pm    | <b>Morton Nurseries,</b><br>Old Mansfield Rd,<br>Morton, Retford.<br>DN22 8HE                        | From A1 , Take B6420, Retford/Babworth. After railway crossing the nursery is 250yds on left. Plantaholic's Delight!                                                                    |
| Wednesday<br>August 12th<br>2pm | <b>Anne and John Marshall</b><br>10 St Anne's Lane,<br>Sutton Bonington<br>Loughborough.<br>LE12 5NJ | Park at Village Hall, next door to Anne and John's house. Pick up route map for gardens and refreshments.<br>3 mature and colourful gardens in Sutton Bonington                         |



## Gardening Dilemmas

### **Hellebores - March is an excellent time to really get stuck into tidying the herbaceous borders and allow air and light to reach the soil.**

I am always a bit dubious about removing leaves from Hellebores. They must be the only perennial that looks better when all its leaves are removed to displays the wonderful flowers to their full potential. Also, removing the leaves gets rid of blackspot, which Hellebores are so susceptible to and improves the all-round structure and beauty of the plants.

On the other hand, I am also aware that any leaves left once the blackspot is removed can add balance of leaf structure to a border. They will also provide shelter for the many seedlings, especially at the base of *Helleborus orientalis*. All potentially plants in the making.

Whether this is welcome or not is of course debateable. Since Hellebores tend to be rather promiscuous, the offspring are frequently nothing like their parents.



### **Making Leaf-mould –**

Everyone says that I should be making leaf-mould to reduce the danger of pathogens spreading in the damp autumn and winter conditions and produce a nourishing addition to my home- made compost. But what about the ‘plugged’ holes I find below the leaves in the soil? Will I take away a warm blanket for whatever creature overwinters below ? Given the threat to so much insect life, particularly bumble bees, should I be concerned that I might be harming them with my actions?

If you have any dilemmas, please email them to [wiesehofer@btinternet.com](mailto:wiesehofer@btinternet.com) or leave them with a committee member at the monthly meetings.

## **DERBYSHIRE DELIGHTS – BLUEBELLS IN BOW WOOD, Cromford,**

OS Map Reference SK 3183 5623

**Scientific name:** *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

**Origin:** native

**Family:** Asparagaceae

**Habitat:** broadleaf woodland, fields, along hedgerows

**Not to be confused with:** Spanish bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*), which is very similar in appearance to the British bluebell. However, Spanish bluebells grow upright, with the flowers all around the stem, not drooping to one side like the British bluebell.

Hybrid bluebell (*Hyacinthoides x massartiana*) is a mix of the British and Spanish bluebell. It is often similar in appearance to our native bluebell and threatens its existence by out-competing it and diluting the gene pool.



### **Mythology and symbolism:**

There are countless folklore tales surrounding bluebells, many of which involve dark fairy magic. Bluebell woods are believed to be intricately woven with fairy enchantments, used by these mischievous beings to trap humans. It is also said that if you hear a bluebell ring, you will be visited by a bad fairy, and will die not long after. If you are to pick a bluebell, many believe you will be led astray by fairies, wandering lost forevermore.

In the language of flowers, the bluebell is a symbol of humility, constancy, gratitude and everlasting love. It is said that if you turn a bluebell flower inside-out without tearing it, you will win the one you love, and if you wear a wreath of bluebells you will only be able to speak the truth.

Send your Autumn Derbyshire Delight to [wiesehofer@btinternet.com](mailto:wiesehofer@btinternet.com)

### **Why Should I Pay My National HPS Subscription?**

Why do I have to join the Hardy Plant Society? Can't I just pay my £4 and come to Shirland every month? Well, no.

Derbyshire Hardy Plant Group exists under the umbrella of the HPS and because of the HPS. To be a Derbyshire member you have to also be a member of the HPS. The HPS regularly checks the Derbyshire membership list for any members who haven't paid their national subscription and then sends details for our Committee to take action. When this happens it's mostly because that member has forgotten to renew so initially I try to have a quiet word to avoid things escalating. However, if someone persisted in not paying their national subscription the Committee would be left with no alternative but to refuse to renew their Derbyshire membership.



If none of us paid our HPS subscription there'd no longer be a Derbyshire Group, in which case you'd all have to do something else on Saturday afternoon such as join a sub-aqua club

or take up surfing. Think what you'd miss. It's not just the couple of hours you spend with other grumpy people, I'm sure, like me, you come to learn more about the things you're passionate about from some of the Country's best-known plants people. Then, how many great plants have you bought at our meetings? Perhaps you've been on one of our coach trips or three-night holidays organised for you at knock down prices, giving you the chance to visit some of the Country's outstanding gardens.

There are other garden clubs and societies you could join of course but the range of interests and activities you can take part in through the HPS is second to none. For example, you could join one of the special interest groups if you're particularly passionate about shade and woodland plants or half-hardy specimens to mention just a couple. I'm sure, like me, you want to encourage young people into gardening, so your subscription helps the HPS provide a system of bursaries to those starting out in horticulture. Its Advisory Panel is there to answer members' horticultural questions and HPS publications (including its website), both on specific genera and the regular Cornucopia, contain a wealth of information for any dedicated gardener.

**More than that the HPS does so much that directly benefits our members:**

- We get free support and advice from the HPS on the myriad issues that crop up and affect the Group. For example, last year we were confronted by the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) which affect the way every group or society manages the information it holds about its members. Fortunately, the HPS was there to advise the Committee on what the Derbyshire Group needed to do to comply and provide the appropriate documentation. This saved the Committee oceans of time and the need for specialist legal advice bearing in mind the severe penalties for getting it wrong. Paying for that advice would have seriously depleted the Group's reserves.
- Our members are covered by HPS insurance during our meetings and activities which the Group would otherwise have to arrange itself. This means we're saved the cost of the premiums which, in turn, keeps down your Derbyshire subscription.
- The HPS provides us with leaflets, stationery and other publicity material free of charge. Printing it ourselves would be another cost to the Group and would affect your Derbyshire subscription.
- Through the HPS conservation programme our members, ably supported by Nigel Parkes-Rolfe, are working to maintain biodiversity, save rarer plant varieties and preserve garden-worthy plants for future generations. How often do we read that some new drug treatment has been developed from unlikely plant material?
- What about the annual HPS seed distribution? Am I the only one who scours the seed list when it comes out, then eagerly examines those small, paper packets when the envelope arrives from HPS? What interesting things we've grown, things we'd probably never considered buying from a seed catalogue and what gems!

**HAPPY SOIL, HAPPY PLANTS, HAPPY ENVIRONMENT, HAPPY GARDENER**

## STOP DIGGING

It can't have escaped any gardener that the environment, and our impact on it, is a rather hot topic. Whilst we no doubt contribute positively by providing nectar-loving insects with food sources, treating our soil kindly is another way in which we can reduce our impact on the environment.

No-dig gardening is a non-cultivation technique that is based on the understanding that micro- and macro-biotic organisms in the soil form a food web community that help provide nutrients to plants when they are needed. This web also prevents the build-up of diseases and deficiencies and absorbs some of the carbon energy that plants produce in the soil. When we dig, we release this carbon and contributes to global warming. No digging, on the other hand, allows beneficial fungi to develop, that help retain moisture, which is important at times of little rain.

Whilst digging has its uses to remove perennial weeds, it also disturbs the soil structure and reduces its ability to retain water. Furthermore, it displaces organic matter to lower levels, where there is less oxygen available for its decomposition, so reducing the nutrients available to plants. The process of digging also tends to bring seeds to the surface, which then can germinate, and so create more work.

A no-dig method allows nature to do the hard work of cultivating the soil. It basically involves covering the soil at certain periods of the year with different material and letting the worms do the work underneath. This cover could be compost, well-rotted manure, leaf mould, spent mushroom compost, or grass clippings. Larger areas and vegetable beds might benefit from sheet mulching, that is spreading well-wetted newspaper or cardboard over an area to exclude any light before adding organic or landscape mulch. This way weeds are prevented from germinating and stubborn perennial weeds are weakened.

So, instead of getting yourself a backache and harming the environment... sit back and let nature do its bit.

Hildegard Wiesehofer

## FEBRUARY 2020 CONSERVATION FEATURE



***Epimedium* 'Milky Way ' edited from a post by [Jan Vaughan](#)**

There are not many spring -flowering plants on the Conservation List, so it was good to have this suggestion from HPS Hampshire Group.

*Epimedium* are an attractive addition to the spring garden, with brightly coloured new foliage and exquisitely dainty flowers on long stalks. The species arrived in Europe in the 19th century from Japan with only one, *E. alpinum*, mentioned by Gerard in 1597 and native to south and central Europe; *E. perralidianum* was introduced from Algeria in 1862.

More recently, China has excited large numbers of plant-hunters, including Roy Lancaster who, with Mikonori Ogisu, has introduced many new species of epimedium to cultivation. When seed is brought back from a plant hunting expedition, plants find their way into nurseries and soon new cultivars emerge thanks to hybridists. *Epimedium* 'Milky Way' is thought to be a cross selected by Robin White of Blackthorn Nursery in Hampshire from seed given to him by Roy Lancaster. Blackthorn Nursery closed in 2008 and a plant of *E.* 'Milky Way' was given to a member of HPS Hampshire Group.



It forms a mature clump approximately 30cm x 30cm; the new spring foliage is attractively speckled with deep purple and leaves mature to green with a silver overlay on the main veins. They are semi-evergreen, often persisting through the winter. Clusters of small white flowers with yellow stamens are held on long stems in April and May.

Epimediums have a reputation for tolerating dry shade, but the asiatic epimediums need a moisture-retentive soil in part shade to do well. Before the flowering stems emerge in spring remove the old foliage which may have become spoiled by the weather. Plants grow from a woody or wiry rhizome, forming low-growing, slowly spreading clumps. Established clumps can be split during early summer or autumn after flowering has finished. They are fairly trouble-free although vine weevil may damage the rhizome, especially if pot-grown. Unfortunately, there is confusion around the name 'Milky Way' as there is an *E. x youngianum* 'Milky Way' derived from two Japanese species and it is also a synonym of *E.* 'Amanogawa', another Japanese hybrid. Keith Wiley of Wildside Garden in Devon was also a recipient of Robin White's plants and the National Collection holders in Essex describe it as similar to *E. stellulatum*, another Chinese introduction most commonly seen as *E.* 'Wudang Star' introduced by Roy Lancaster and it will be interesting to grow this and *E.* 'Milky Way' together to see what differences there may be.

This highlights one of the challenges of conserving plants, trying to ensure that a plant is what it you think it is and is distinct from other similar cultivars. There is a good record of provenance here so we will grow, observe, and assess the garden worth of this cultivar over the next couple of years.