



Derbyshire Group

NEWSLETTER



Spring 2025

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FROM THE CHAIR

Finally, as we get to late winter we can see our first glimpse of spring in our gardens. Having spent the last few months tidying our sheds, preparing our tools and sorting our seeds out for planting, we are finally under starters orders. We can look through the hellebores and snowdrops and into the newly emerging bulbs. The next few months will be a flurry of activity but do take the time to just enjoy the sense of promise that spring brings.

During the winter months, we have had a range of excellent speakers including the wonderful Fergus Garrett and the entertaining Timothy Walker. Unfortunately, the heating in the hall has let us down a few times; but after careful consideration of the alternatives; we have decided that it's better to stay at Shirland Village Hall for now, but to keep the situation under review.

We are looking for someone to help Glyn with the setting up, managing and taking down of the AV equipment in the hall. It would be great if you could assist him on an occasional basis, with a view to learning how to set the equipment up, and stepping in if Glyn is not available for a meeting. In particular he is not available at the April meeting. If you think you can help please email me, afranks700@gmail.com or speak to myself or Glyn at our next meeting.

Our trip to Coton Manor Gardens on the 30 April is now fully booked but at the time of writing we are still encouraging members to sign for the reserve list for Newby Hall trip on the 11th June. If we get 38 people we will be able to upgrade to a larger coach. Pauline is also looking at arranging some garden visits in the summer as part of our MAD programme, information on this will be available soon.

This year, it is 25 years since our group was formed and we plan on celebrating this with a slightly extended April meeting, we will have our speaker as normal but follow this with an event to mark the occasion. There will be refreshments and a drink of fizz to celebrate. We really hope you will be able to make it. If you have any photographs, we could use for the event please send them to me at afranks700@gmail.com or pop them in the box provided at our meetings, in an envelope with your name and address so I can get them back to you.

The Plant Society National Conference /AGM will be on the 13th Sept 2025 at Eastwood Hall, Mansfield Road, Eastwood, Nottingham NG16 3SS <https://www.eastwood-hall.co.uk/>. The speakers will be Troy Scott Smith, Val Bourne and Steve Bustin (Chair of the HPS). Tickets will be on sale on the national website towards the end of March. Our group is hosting the event, and we have a wonderful group of volunteers to help at the event. If you would like to join us just let me know.

I hope you enjoy the delights of the spring bulbs and don't forget we will have our annual Plant Fair on the 17th May.

Happy Gardening

Ann Franks

EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello from your editor. Snowdrops, foreign trips and sustainable gardening loom large in this edition as well as HPS news both National and Local. Many thanks to those who contributed articles.

COVER PICTURE: GALANTHUS GODFREY OWEN

Galanthus Godfrey Owen

One of the few snowdrops that anyone can recognise from 5 yards away. It has 6 outer petals and flowers from early January until well into February. It was named by Margaret Owen for her husband Godfrey.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

15th March – Don Witton – ‘National Plant Collections of Great Britain’

12th April – David Charlton – ‘Flora and Wildlife of the High Arctic’

17th May – Plant Fair – 1100 till 1230

September — No meeting as we are holding the National AGM / Lecture Day

18th October – Paul Green – ‘Plants of the Season’

15th November – Martin Stott – ‘The Story Tellers Garden’

13th December – tba

MAD GARDEN VISITS

(For anyone new to HPS MAD means Meet At Destination, so no transport provided, just a nice trip out at a nice garden with nice people.) Ed



July 15th July – Tuesday Felley Priory

August 1st 2pm Yew Tree Cottage

September 21st Sunday 2pm Norwell Nursery

Trips will all cost around £10.00, final details will be circulated when available.

HUNTING BROOK GARDENS

I was able to visit the garden of renowned plantsman, Jimi Blake, nestled in the foothills of the Wicklow mountains on a recent visit to Ireland. I was not disappointed.

The garden is set in beautiful countryside. Jimi has not tried to impose his will on this; rather one feels there is a real connection to the land, a true sense of place which can be very hard to achieve. He has done this by having a very light touch and a deep knowledge of plants.

There is no hard landscaping, everything is free flowing, paths wind amongst plants, giving a very immersive feel.



On entering the garden from the car park, borders and paths wind up the hill and one is instantly enveloped in colour - orange, magenta, cerise pink, purple provided by *Lychnis*, *Calendula*, *Dahlia*, *Kniphofia*, to name but a few. This is calmed by plenty of green and touches of silver.

At the top of the hill the garden seamlessly merges in to dappled woodland, with *Astrantias*, *Geraniums*, *Bamboos*, and unusual shrubs like *Schefflera* and *Pseudopanax*. Weeds (native plants?) such as nettles, docks, cleavers, grasses are allowed to jostle alongside.

Jimi has created sand beds near the house which are filled with Cacti and Succulents which contrast expertly with the intense black wood of the house. Then, on the other side of the house, new woodland beds have been created with Orchids, Martagon Lilies – Claude Shriver - in particular, *Roscoeas*, some lovely grasses and many more. From here one descends into the ravine which has not been developed, apart from creating winding paths and planting pockets. Jimi has interfered as little as possible with



nature. It is a place of great serenity and, I should imagine, beautiful in early spring when his collection of Snowdrops are flowering – one of his many plant obsessions. Here, there are lots of interesting Ferns, Rhododendrons, Brambles and the like, being allowed to grow freely.

It was a wonderful visit; his approach is adventurous with exotic and naturalistic combined and, above all, experimental; as he says, no two years are ever alike.

I was only sad that time did not permit me to visit his sister - June Blake's - garden, over the hill.

I hope I have been able to give a flavour of his garden – it isn't easy with such an impressionistic space. The only way to experience it fully is to visit. As I said at the beginning, you won't be disappointed.

Linda O'Neill

SUSTAINABLE GARDENING AT GREAT DIXTER

Fergus Garrett from Great Dixter came to speak to us at our November meeting. He gave a



very thought-provoking talk about the ecological contribution of gardens. Back in 2005 following the death of Christopher Lloyd, Fergus was aware that changes might be required to keep the business viable, perhaps less labour; but still retaining the flamboyant and diverse nature of the garden.

He started by giving us a vision of the garden, as a changing picture through the seasons. The six acres gardens have strong structural elements, and a diverse range of plants of all sorts including, a small proportion of, ever changing annuals including British natives.



Early on, he put up a slide *and my wife said "get an ecological survey done"*, this was repeated, much to our amusement throughout the talk.

Fergus contacted various organisations, to see if they were interested in visiting the garden to look at the ecological diversity; always to be told, we are not interested in gardens they have very little ecological value. Roll forward 10 years, and finally, he persuaded a small group from the British Arachnological Society



to hold an AGM at Great Dixter, free of charge, with food provided. The group decided to stroll around the garden for some fresh air, and were blown away by the 55 species of spiders they found in a very short time. Opinions were beginning to change! With help from a lottery grant Great Dixter had surveys done by many different organisations.

The survey covered the gardens and the surrounding countryside. The results were astounding and showed that the greatest diversity of species was found in the “formal gardens” which gave much higher counts of species, than the surrounding areas of countryside.

So how did they do it; what changes did they make? Over the years they reduced, and finally eliminated, the use of artificial chemicals, including herbicides, insecticides, fungicides. Indeed they have stopped using any processed chemicals, even organic ones, replacing them with bulky compost feeds; some made on site and others imported from local sources. They allowed a slightly messier regime, delaying cutting back as late as possible and leaving detritus in inobtrusive areas. The results have been astounding, happy healthy plants and even slugs and snails migrating to the detritus piles, preferring dead material to live material. They also make their own potting compost something I have done for years – see separate article below.



This all seems very similar to the “healthy living” advice we are given, eat wholesome homemade food, exercise more, avoid obesity, get a good night’s sleep, keep your brain active with social interaction. We all understand it and know it will do us good but are tempted by the plate of chocolate biscuits at HPSD meeting!

Similarly it is all too easy to get a quick fix from a chemical lawn feed or insecticide spray.

Fergus acknowledged that a small garden cannot offer such a range of different environments but collectively they can contribute a great deal. The take home message would be, use a range of plants, include a small percentage of annuals, have good structural elements such as formal hedges and shrubs. Try to delay cutting back as long as possible. Replace chemicals in the garden with bulky organic matter. Try to allow some less tidy “detritus” piles in out of the way areas.

Pauline Little

HOME MADE POTTING COMPOST

Type	Garden Compost	Leaf Mould	Loam	Grit	Vermiculite
Seed	25	50	10		15
Potting On	33	33	10	25	
Container	33	25	25	20	
Cuttings or other high drainage plants	10	40		50	

Many years ago Monty Don produced the table above of the mixes he uses for different purposes.

Of course he has huge bins of the totally homogeneous ingredients, ready sifted all looking ready to use, in a perfectly dry potting shed. It is not quite the same for me. My garden compost is very good but a bit “sticky”, as in, it has many small bits of stick in it. My leaf mould often has a bit of leaf left in it. The “grit” is often gritty sand or fine gravel. I have a very good supply of loam from a large quantity of stacked turfs. I always have a “soil bank”, “bank”, as in deposit and withdraw. I find it hard to get rid of excess soil, when the beds are full, and hard to find soil unless the beds are empty, so a bank, in an out of the way place is very useful.

I generally use equal quantities of all four ingredients. An excellent way to mix the ingredients is to use a cement mixer. If you have the energy, sieving the final mixture is a good idea but it can be hard work and you can end up with quite a bit of wastage; not exactly wastage as it goes back on the compost to further degrade.

Every year for the past 27 years I have had a sizeable plant sale for NGS at my open gardens. I use this compost to pot up all my plants for sale. Originally it was a cost effective option; now I regard it as an eco-friendly, cost effective option. I find the presence of a substantial amount of soil makes watering a lot easier, particularly in hot weather.

I also use it for any pots in the garden, sometimes mixing it with a commercial general purpose compost, topping it up every year.

Finally it goes in the greenhouse border to grow my tomatoes.

Pauline Little

BEES AND WEEDKILLER

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/belpergardeningclub/permalink/2525979460919284/?sfn=scwspmo&ref=share>



[This is a honey bee. The pollen on her legs is from dandelions. Her tongue is sticking out due to what killed her that was on the dandelions. It's spring, dandelions are the bees first food. This bee is dead from weed killer spread on what we see as weeds, but what nature sees as food. Please don't spray for weeds until you see the blackberries blooming. In this area, weeds, flowers and fruit trees are bees' only source of food until middle of June. There are FAR more weeds than flowers or fruit trees, so it's their only food source. No bees, no food crops for us and we all starve.](#)

[The Self-Sufficient Backyard](#)

<https://48f29adnpjy9bo0dk9dg22w-ee.hop.clickbank.net>

[Doctor's Book of Survival Home Remedies](#)

<https://512e76bl-rb-4t63py2hibeu75.hop.clickbank.net>

[The US Army's Forgotten Food Miracle](#)

<https://8ddc43djod570m5hpmym10ar85.hop.clickbank.net>

[Self-Sufficiency on 1/4 Acre](#)

<https://amzn.to/3XgWvqg>

[The Homestead Canning Cookbook](#)

<https://amzn.to/3XBrFZe>

[The Farmer's Kitchen Handbook](#)

<https://amzn.to/3Xx8K1U>

[The Backyard Homestead](#)

<https://amzn.to/3CS556Z>

[Edible Landscaping](#)

<https://amzn.to/3X9FjD8>

GIANT WATER LILY VICTORIA

Victoria amazonica is a species of flowering plant, the second largest in the water lily family Nymphaeaceae. It is called *Vitória-Régia* or *laupê-Jaçanã* in Brazil and *Atun Sisac* in Inca. Its native region is tropical South America, specifically Guyana and the Amazon Basin. Some years ago I visited Guyana with my wife, Anne, with the specific aim of seeing this giant waterlily in the wild and also the giant otter, *Pteronura brasiliensis*. We were successful on both counts.

We stayed for a few days at Karanambu, a large cattle ranch towards the south of the country, which is mainly savanna. The ranch is owned by Diane McTurk, a fourth generation settler of Scottish descent and is on the banks of the river Rupununi, which provides a home for both water lilies and otters. Diane has a reputation for taking in orphaned giant otters and rearing them until they are ready to go back into the wild. There were two such otters in residence at the time we were there. We swam with them in the river.



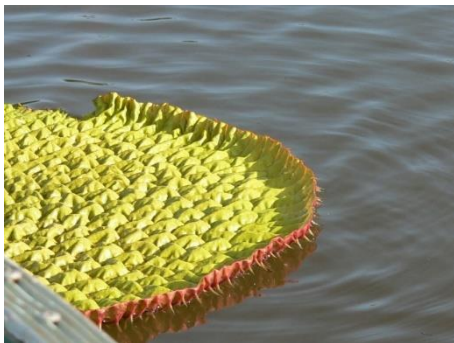
We visited a lake full of *Victoria amazonica*. Which we rowed around for an hour or two.



We also made a trip on the river to watch a flower opening, and spent a delightful evening drinking rum punches while the flowers opened. They open white, and after fertilisation by small black beetles, they turn pink and die over a two day period. The newly opened flowers have a strong pineapple smell.



Victoria amazonica is one of the largest of all water lilies, its leaves growing up to two metres across. They have red undersides with pronounced ribs to support the structure, which is rigid enough to support the weight of a child. They also have sharp spines to discourage predators.



They live in fresh water from 2 to 8 ft deep and are short-lived perennials, usually being treated as annuals, and grow to full size from seed in a single year. They are not hardy in the British climate and require greenhouse cultivation. The first one ever to flower in Britain was at Chatsworth, where they can still be seen today. Joseph Paxton was the successful gardener who persuaded it to flower after much experimentation with the conditions. He was inspired by the leaves' undersides to design



the Crystal Palace. Specimens are also cultivated at Kew and RHS Wisley. *Victoria amazonica* was originally called *Victoria regia* in 1837, in honour of Queen Victoria, the name changing to *amazonica* in 1901 after the queen's death.

An even larger species was discovered in 2022 in Bolivia, *Victoria boliviana*. It was actually first found in the herbarium at Kew, having lain there for many years mistaken for *amazonica*. The world record is held by a specimen at Rinconada Gardens in Bolivia, which is 3.2 metres across. It can be seen in the Princess of Wales conservatory at Kew.

There is a third species called *Victoria cruziana*. It is smaller than *amazonica*, with leaves up to 1 metre across. It grows in the same areas of South America as the others but is slightly more tolerant of cold.

Ian Evans

NATIONAL HPS

THE KENNETH BLACK BURSARY SCHEME

If you or someone you know works in, or is studying horticulture The Hardy Plant Society, Kenneth Black Bursary Scheme offers grants from £100-1,000 to be used in furthering knowledge and understanding of Hardy Plants.

It can be used for a wide range of things such as:

- Travel (in the UK or abroad)
- Attending conferences: symposiums or workshops
- Help towards course fees
- Equipment or books.
- A project e.g. creating a community garden

To find out more, or apply go to <https://hardy-plant.org.uk/bursary-scheme/>

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

I would encourage you to make the most of your national HPS membership for instance by joining a special interest group and by joining the seed exchange.

Also there are several booklets published by HPS such as the new Geranium booklet. As a paid up member you will be charged £5.50 + postage instead of the public price of £10.00. I have ordered mine already.

Below is an extract from the HPS website. Ed.

NEW GERANIUM HPS BOOKLET IS READY

We wanted you to be one of the first to know that a new updated version of The Hardy Plant Society's Hardy Geranium Book is now available.



Please share the news with your readers.

This is the third edition of HPS Geraniums, the last being published in May 2015. The new book includes cultivars introduced during the last ten years and has a new set of illustrations. It covers Hardy Geraniums for different sites, their propagation and cultivation. There is a directory of geraniums in cultivation which describes all those readily available and includes many rare and unusual varieties. The photos, which are truly stunning, were provided by Hardy Geranium Group members, including the late Trevor Hards. It has been written by Margaret Stone.

G. *nodosum* 'Tony's Talisman'G. *nodosum* 'Silverwood'G. *nodosum* 'Wreighburn House White'

G. 'Nora Bremner' (G. *rubifolium* x G. *wallichianum* 'Buxton's Variety') (Bremner) 25cm June-Sept.

Mounds of marbled foliage with the same rambling habit as G. 'Buxton's Variety'. The flowers are 4cm, soft violet-blue with a large white centre and finely veined, separated petals. Unfortunately it is not easy to propagate.



G. 'Nora Bremner'

G. 'Nunwood Purple' (G. *pratense* f. *albiflorum* x G. *himalayense* 'Gravetye') 30cm June-July; repeats.

Blue-purple flowers with overlapping petals; 4.5cm.



G. 'Nunwood Purple'

G. 'Old Rose' (G. x *oxonianum* 'A. T. Johnson' x G. *versicolor*) 40cm June-Oct. Light green foliage; 2.5cm flowers deep pink fading to pale pink.

G. *oreganum* W. USA 60cm June-July. Leaves similar to G. *pratense*, making substantial clumps. Prolific flowers 5cm, saucer-shaped and deep rose-purple.

G. *orientalitibeticum* SW China 20cm June-July.

Discovered by E. H. Wilson. Leaves marbled with lime-green. Flowers 2.5cm purple-pink with a white centre. Tuberous rooted and tends to be invasive.

G. *orientalitibeticum*

G. 'Orion'^{AGM} 70cm June-July. Floriferous seedling from 'Brookside' 6cm deep violet-blue flowers with red veins and a white eye.

G. 'Orkney Blue' (G. *ibericum* subsp. *jubatum* x G. *gymnocaulon*) (Bremner) 40cm June-July.

Leaves and 4cm heavily veined blue flowers intermediate between parents.

G. 'Orion'^{AGM}G. 'Orion'^{AGM}

G. 'Orkney Blue'

Hardy Geraniums continue to be one of the most popular garden plants and there are now approx. 110 species and 600 cultivars in British gardens. They range in height from a few cm. to 1m. and in colour from white through pink, mauve and pale blue to deep magenta, violet and blue. The petals may be plain or veined. There is a geranium for every site in the garden: hot and sunny or dry shade.

Margery Fish said '*when in doubt plant a geranium*'; this book gives you so many varieties of geranium it is hard to choose just one.

Please let your readers know it is available, along with our other books, from <https://hardy-plant.org.uk/booklets/>

If you would like a free press copy of the book to help promotion, please contact admin@hardy-plant.org.uk

About the Author

Margaret Stone, the author of the book, is a Plant Heritage National Collection® Holder for *Geranium sanguineum*, *macrorrhizum* and *x cantabrigiense* and a former Chairman of the Hardy Geranium Group.

THE HPS HARDY GERANIUM GROUP

Hardy geraniums are popular plants but there is no other organisation devoted solely to geraniums. The Group is open to all members of the HPS and welcomes those who are not specialists but would like to know more. The Current Chair is Martin Walker.

The group's annual Geranium Day includes a plant sale of some less readily available Hardy Geraniums. They visit gardens and nurseries specialising in geraniums, as well as producing two newsletters a year. Members also benefit from a free seed exchange with a good number of species, which come true from seed.

For more information on the Hardy Geranium Group please visit <https://hardy-plant.org.uk/group/hardy-geranium-group/>

To see our full range of HPS booklets <https://hardy-plant.org.uk/booklets/>

A BIT OF AN ASIDE

Linda O'Neill and I went to a Snowdrop weekend in Ross on Wye organised by the HPS Galanthus Special Interest Group. It was very informative, great fun and a terrific source of well priced snowdrops. On our way, we called at Brockamin, Margaret Stone's garden to see the snowdrops. I did ask what she grew once the snowdrops were over, and she replied modestly – "I grow lots of geraniums" – of course I had no idea that she was the author of the new HPS Geranium booklet! Ed.

AN UNEXPECTED INHERITANCE

Prior to our retirement in March 2013, we visited Felley Priory gardens and plant centre situated close to M1 junction 27. On that particular day, we noticed that there was a display of snowdrops and some snowdrops in flower were available to buy. We were shocked to see that the price of a particularly pretty drop was £25! We resisted the expensive snowdrop and bought 3 at less than £5 per bulb which we thought was more realistic given that we were going to be pensioners on limited means and knew nothing about snowdrops or their care. Little did we know that collecting snowdrops would soon become an addiction and that the price of much rarer additions to our collection would go far beyond £25! Since then, our collection has grown and grown until last year we had over 700 varieties registered on our large snowdrop database and the annual repotting of all our pots has now become a huge task!



Despite all the hard work, the snowdrops bring joy over the winter months from October to April. Our interest in snowdrops, and gardening in general, prompted us to join the Nottingham Alpine Garden Society group where we met Ray Cobb, one of the founders of the Nottingham group. He invited us to view his snowdrop collection in his garden at Bramcote, close to where we live at Nuthall near Nottingham. He

also came to see our snowdrops and kindly gave us bulbs of galanthus X-Ray named by his friend Ann Borrill, and galanthus Mill View, a late flowering variety.

Ray belonged to the “Immortals”, a group of well known galanthophiles each member having had snowdrops named after them. In 2020, we heard that Ray had lost his galanthus



Ray Cobb, a lovely yellow sandersii variety which John Foster, a fellow galanthophile, had named for him. We had purchased our Ray Cobb snowdrop from the late John Foster at one of Joe Sharman's Spring Fling sales near Cambridge some years before 2020. It had multiplied well and we felt it was important that Ray should have a replacement from the same source. We invited Ray and friends from the AGS group to our house to present him with another bulb which he was very pleased to accept.

Over the years, we have visited Ray's garden a number of times at different times of the year, not only to see his snowdrops but also to see his crocus (he had a national collection for a number of years), many rare plants and to admire his wollemi pine and peony Aurelia after which his house was named. Sadly, as Ray became more infirm, he went to live at a local care home. We visited him just a week before he passed away on 23rd April 2023 at the amazing age of 100. He still thought being a resident at the care home was just a temporary move and that he was going to visit his garden the next day!

At his funeral, his daughter Annette said to us "are you able to cope with a few more snowdrops?". Much to our surprise, she contacted us a few days later to say that Ray had wanted us to have his snowdrop collection, if we could not cope with it, she would offer it to others. Of course we were thrilled to accept and subsequently collected some 75 pots of snowdrops plus copies of his records relating to them. The bulbs were duly repotted in our



compost mix. Some bulbs had desiccated and disappeared completely, others were

somewhat desiccated, but we hoped they could be saved given time. The rest were good firm bulbs and had managed to avoid any damage from the dreaded narcissus fly. In the collection of pots, there were named varieties such as Chris Sanders, Mrs McNamara and Santa Claus, others pots included species snowdrops such as alpinus, angustifolious, cilicicus and rizehensis. A number of pots had labels which only had numbers on them with little information.

Some records stated, for example, 'late plicatus' or had no details at all.



Interestingly, we could see from paper copies of his records given to us by his son in law Mike Sivers that his pot of galanthus Grumpy originated from 'The Patch' at Margaret Owen's. The records showed that other snowdrops had been given to Ray by Michael Myers, Ruby Baker, David Bromley and Colin Mason amongst others listed. This meant that more detective work was required. Winter 2023/24 would prove to be exciting to see which drops would flower and hopefully help us to identify them and verify the records. More than half of the pots did manage to flower, and it was so rewarding to be able to display a number of them at our NGS open days in February 2024 for others to see and enjoy as Ray's legacy continues to flourish.



Sue and Richard Bold September 2024.

FREE BULBS FOR COLLECTION

Veronica Cooke has a wonderful display of pots for Winter and Summer and at the end of May there will be 400 bulbs available to anyone who can give some of them a good home.

There will be white narcissi, orange and white narcissi; tulips in white and in orange and hyacinths as near to orange as I could find! In total about 400 bulbs.

Veronica will take them out of their pots as they finish flowering which will be end April till end May depending on the weather this coming spring. She needs the pots for bedding plants at end of May.

All these bulbs are free for members to collect. If they are transplanted quickly they should thrive although they might be better 2 years hence.

Her address is Greenacres Makeney Road Holbrook DE56 0TF; tel 07749277927; Email address veronica.cooke1@icloud.com



Articles Needed for the HPS Newsletter.

Please send to

plittle@hotmail.co.uk