

Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

August 2023 Newsletter

From the Secretary

This time last year I wrote that I was looking out at my brown lawn. That was the case this year until a few weeks ago. With the rain we have had in the last few weeks the situation has changed. The lawn hadn't concerned me but the number of mature shrubs that were struggling did concern me. The roses and lavenders though have been brilliant so maybe in the future that is all I'll have in my garden! However both have been battered by wind and rain in the last few weeks but at least we have had the much needed rain.

The AGA holiday was reported on in the last Newsletter – and see Libby Crabbe's poetical memory on page 5. No mishaps this year. Plans are in hand for a holiday in 2024, details will be in the November Newsletter.

Thank you for the tea and coffee

Liz Moulton thanks all those members who have helped with tea and coffee at meetings, and now wants volunteers for May, June, July, September, October and November 2024. There is a rota so you are not expected to help at every meeting.

A new membership secretary

Clive Symes, who is standing down as membership secretary after 17 years, writes:

"I am pleased to let you all know that we now have a new Membership Secretary, Annie Jardine. Annie lives at Prestwood and has been an active member for the last ten years." Annie can be contacted by email at membership@amersham-gardening.org.uk, by phone at 01494 867146, or by post at 78 Clara Road, Prestwood, HP16 0NW.

Change of date for the Xmas social

The Xmas social will now be held on **Friday 15th December**, and not as shown in the programme card. More details in the November newsletter.

Talks and trips are organized for the rest of the year and the committee hope many members will participate in these, including the Christmas Social on **Friday 15th December**.

Jean Bowling

The editor adds: I have noticed that while this time last year my indoor / outdoor thermometer was showing an outdoor temperature in the mid or high mid-20s early in the morning and well above 30° in the afternoon, this year it has been around 10 – 12° most mornings, and has not risen above 20°. Our rain water butts are overflowing, and we have not yet taken the garden chairs out of the shed.

If you can help, please contact Liz Moulton Tel: 01494 784913, email libbym6740@gmail.com.

Many thanks to Liz for organising the rota and making sure there is always a supply of tea, coffee, biscuits, and compostable cups.



We let this dandelion flower as a useful early food source for pollinators in the circular bed in the front garden. At least, that is our excuse for not removing it; it was closely packed together with other plants.

Forthcoming meetings: we do not meet in August

September 28th Prof Sir Roderick Floud – Purchasing Paradise: the money that financed great gardens

Sir Roderick Floud, one of Britain's pre-eminent economic historians, tells us that gardens have been created in Britain since Roman times but that their true growth began in the seventeenth century; by the eighteenth century, nurseries in London took up 100 acres, with ten million plants that were worth more than all of the nurseries in France combined. His books *England's Magnificent Gardens* and *An Economic History of the English Garden* look at the history of England's magnificent gardens as a history of Britain itself, from the seventeenth-century gardens of Charles II to those of King Charles today. His ground-breaking study of the history, money, places and personalities involved in British gardens over the past 350 years gives fascinating insight into why gardening is part of this country's soul.



October 26th Dr Sandy Primrose – the language of flowers

Sandy Primrose is a biologist who has a very varied career. This includes being an academic undertaking research, a senior manager in the pharmaceutical, biotechnology and diagnostics industries, managing programmes for government on detection of food fraud and the safety of genetically modified foods, chairman of various early stage companies and non-executive director of various government bodies. In his spare time, Sandy is a very keen gardener and this enables him to indulge in his love of interesting and unusual plants. He lectures extensively on botanical themes including ecology, plants as drugs and sources of foods, and their role in local traditions. He aims to make his lectures both entertaining and educational by combining his love of plants with his varied business experience.



November 23rd Meriet Duncan – Creating a buzz about the bees

<https://mdthequeenbee.co.uk/aboutmerietduncan>

Meriet writes "I live in a beautiful small village on the borders of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Wales and am married with three grown up sons and two wonderful grandchildren. I have a deep love of the countryside and nature and, when I'm not writing or giving talks about the honeybees I can be found outside, either taking photographs, riding my naughty horse, (who I've had for 29 years), walking my dog or looking after the bees at my apiary!

"In 1995 I gained an Associateship of the Royal Photographic Society (ARPS), and went on to work as a professional photographer - for 22 years - specialising in editorial and portrait photography.

"About 14 years ago I became a beekeeper and subsequently refer to myself as an 'accidental beekeeper' as it's something I fell into rather than decided to do. From the very first moment a hive was opened up before me, I fell in love with the honeybees.



"It didn't take long before I became aware of the extent to which our planet relies on the honeybees and the more I learned about them, the more I wanted to tell everyone about these incredible little creatures."



Friday 15th December Xmas social

Note the change of date from that shown in the programme card – this is a Friday evening, not our usual Thursday. More details in the November newsletter

Visit to Jeanne and Michael Harrison's garden, July 12th



The weather was kind to us when 29 members made an evening visit to the Harrison's garden, with wine and soft drinks included, and all for the benefit of the association's funds, so many thanks to Jeanne and Michael for their hospitality and generosity.



Work on the garden only started some 4 years ago; when they moved in it was just lawn sloping steeply down from the house. The only help they had was from a builder to level the slope for what is now the upper lawn, and to assemble the greenhouse (for which Michael laid the foundations). All of the design work as Jeanne's, and they did all the work themselves, creating a circular lawn with a circular pond, raised beds and borders, etc. The lower part of the garden and a part to one side are still a work in progress, with a circular bed partly completed (and a water feature to be added), and new trees planted, but areas that are still undeveloped. Michael told us that he dug down 1 m to put in good soil for the silver birches.



You come into the garden down steps from the patio to a purple border with (in July) seedheads of alliums among lavender, purple statice and geraniums. This leads you along the curved path under the pergola (the Gertrude Jekyll roses were more or less over when we visited), alongside a curved raised bed on the left and the circular lawn on the right, to the circular pond. Further on you look down onto the work in progress that will be a circular white garden and water feature (partly completed), and through to the hedge, beyond which is a wildlife area. One notable and novel feature of the pond is that where it is bounded by the lawn rather than the path, the grass has been left some 6 – 8 inches tall, to provide an interesting boundary between the pond and the lawn.



The work in progress in the lower garden

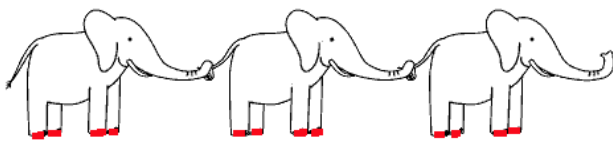
Of nitrogen and oxygen

As gardeners, when we talk about nitrogen, as in the NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium) ratio of a fertiliser, we mean soluble nitrogen containing salts – nitrates and ammonium salts. It was upsetting to read in *The Garden* in June that "some [lichens] also absorb atmospheric nitrogen, a common pollutant". Oh dear – nitrogen gas (N_2) makes up 78% of the atmosphere – hardly a pollutant. Of course, what they mean is oxides of nitrogen; mainly nitric oxide (NO), nitrous oxide (N_2O) and nitrogen dioxide (NO_2). These can indeed be considered pollutants, and especially when produced in vehicle exhaust fumes in urban environments they are highly irritating and potentially hazardous to people living or even standing nearby.

However, these nitrogen oxides, produced both by burning fossil fuels (mainly in vehicles) and natural lightning strikes, are soluble in water, and form nitrate and nitrite salts that can be converted by nitrifying bacteria to ammonium salts, all of which can be used by plants for growth. Excess production of especially nitrous oxide is undesirable; it is a green-house gas, contributing to global heating, as well as catalysing the destruction of (protective) ozone in the stratosphere. Excess nitrates in drinking water can be reduced by intestinal bacteria to nitrites, which react with haemoglobin in red blood cells and reduce its capacity to carry oxygen. This is especially a problem for young infants, who still have circulating fetal haemoglobin, which is considerably more sensitive to nitrite than is adult haemoglobin.

Elephants as a unit of measurement

Some of us will remember the elephant jokes of the 1960s, such as "How do you get two elephants in a mini?"
Answer "Two in the back and two in the front".
"How do you hide an elephant in a cherry tree?"
Answer "Paint its toenails red".



Silly fact – an elephant produces 10 L of urine at a time. As one website unhelpfully told me, this is equivalent to 5 x 2 L bottles of soda – even I can do this simple arithmetic.

On May 19th *The Guardian* had a story about New York City sinking some 1 – 2 mm a year due to the weight of its buildings, telling us "The researchers calculated that the city's structures, which include the famous Empire State Building and Chrysler Building, weigh a total of 1.68tn lbs [sic – it should be lb, not lbs], which is roughly equivalent to the weight of 140 million elephants."

There is an odd misunderstanding of percentages that has led some people to believe that we are now oxygen deprived. My 1956 *Concise Encyclopedia of General Knowledge* (it is still on my bookshelf, I almost never throw books away) tells me that the atmosphere is (was then) composed of 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen and 0.03% carbon dioxide, with the remainder made up of inert gases (argon, neon, etc). More recently, a Google search tells me that carbon dioxide has increased to 0.04% - a 30% increase over six decades. This 30% increase in carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere has been misguidedly interpreted as a 30% decrease in oxygen – obviously not; carbon dioxide is still only a very minor proportion of the atmosphere, although the increased amount is a significant cause of global heating.

I trust it no longer happens, but at one time over-officious nurses would remove plants from patients' rooms overnight because they had been taught that plants produce oxygen in daylight (correct – the process of photosynthesis of carbohydrates from carbon dioxide and water, producing oxygen), but consume it in darkness (again correct, because in the dark plants metabolise carbohydrates, consuming oxygen and producing carbon dioxide). However, the amount of oxygen consumed (and carbon dioxide produced) even in a room very full of plants will be negligible compared with the oxygen consumption and carbon dioxide production of the patient – or even the nurse while explaining why the plants are being removed.

Now elephants are being used as a unit of measurement. The June issue of *The Garden* has a note about a new record tree, an espalier pear tree at Houghton Lodge gardens in Hampshire, which is 16.44 m wide. I have a pretty good idea of how much 1 metre is, but (helpfully ?) the report says this is "longer than three adult African elephants trunk to tail". They don't say whether they mean the African bush elephant or the smaller forest elephant.

The Independent tells us, similarly unhelpfully, that this is "about the mass of 4,700 Empire State buildings." Surely more helpful to say about 760 million tonnes – still something I can't really visualise, but at last I know what a tonne of gravel looks and feels like after we replaced the small front lawn with gravel a couple of years ago.

Libby reflects on the AGA trip to the Isle of Wight 17-21st May 2023

Our first garden visit en route was to Exbury,
200 acres stretching down to the Beaulieu estuary
Where the clashing colours of orange and red rhododendrons and azaleas were a feast for the eyes,
Also camellias, magnolias and daffodils besides.
We walked past the grand Rothschild house of very strange shape,
Past the 300/400 year old yew from the inside of which young children could gape.
Into the sunken garden and through a side gate,
Where a stunning wisteria did make us all stare
Tumbling purple and white flowers filling the air.
One could take a train ride which stopped nearby
The dragonfly pond but none that day could we espy.
Then followed our calm crossing from Lymington to Yarmouth,
From where we were driven past hedges and verges so bright
With mayflower blossom and cow parsley – such a wonderful sight.
Gareth our driver we knew from last year dropped us at the Channel View Hotel which lived up to its name,
Then unloaded our cases whilst we collected in the dining room
Awaiting our room keys and food which eventually came.
The next day we visited Crab Cottage a pretty brick house covered with wisteria at the peak of perfection.
The garden was divided into two different sections
A croquet lawn leading into a wild flower meadow,
Plus a hidden water lily pond all overlooking Newtown Creek,
Then a coffee and delicious cake we did seek.
After which we strolled past well-filled borders and a terraced sunken garden with pond,
Looking back from the pavilion at the end we could see
A white wisteria running rampant over its frame.
Before driving onwards we visited the 11th century medieval church at Shalfleet which means shallow
stream.
We were then driven to Northcourt Manor
A large 16th century Jacobean mansion sitting proudly on a hill.
We crossed over the bridge where below flowed a rill
Edged with statuesque primula candelabras, arum lilies and gunnera leading to a boardwalk.
There were magnificent viburnum Mariesii in full bloom to the fore.
Up past the tennis court to the organic walled garden where we saw
Veg, espaliered apple trees and rhubarb galore,
Round past a pond and 2 deutzias with abundant blossom,
Up onto a terraced woodland area
Full of rhodos, camellias and the odd azalea.
Lunch and tea were provided by our delightful hosts
Who besides gardening run a b & b serving perhaps fried breakfast and toast.
Again nearby was the medieval Church of St Peter with a 1440 mural painting of St Christopher partially
exposed.
Numerous circular memorial plaques to previous owners of Northcourt were also disclosed.
The following day we could follow our own whims.
Whilst others went to Osborne House, Ventnor Gardens, The Garlic Farm or even the Needles, I walked
up the Shanklin Chine, a steep ravine and quite a climb.
Cascading waterfalls, verdant greenery and replica dinosaurs with even an egg,
But only a wooden squirrel, not a real one, did I find.
There was even some evidence of the PLUTO pipeline
(Pipeline under the Ocean) built to carry petrol ashore
To Cherbourg in France during the second world war.
Thereafter I met a friend from childhood days, who had moved to the island from South Africa, for a walk,
cake and a coffee Arabica.
Thursday dawned - a busy day ahead.
So to Farringford Tennyson's former home we sped.
A house beautifully restored to its late 19th Century splendour.
Having been bought by a single lady Rebecca Fitzgerald of significant means
It would seem.
To reach it we traversed a glorious walled garden.
All overlooked by Emily's arbour originally built for Tennyson's wife
As a retreat from the clamour of London life.

As a retreat from the clamour of London life.
 Next we motored on to the National Trust Mottistone Gardens set in a sheltered valley surrounding the ancient manor house, where we did find
 A beautiful sunken garden (built where the cowshed used to be) with spirally planted flowerbeds in an unusual design.
 Apart from herbaceous borders, veg and rose garden,
 One could take a stroll up a grassy open area, through an avenue of trees
 Underplanted with daffodils in the spring and wild flowers later and then at the top sit awhile admiring the view at ease.
 Our last day we crossed back across the channel to visit Furzey Garden near Lyndhurst first planted 100 years ago by the Dalrymple Family.
 Bought by Tim Selwood with monies from selling his business is the story.
 Restored gradually since the seventies to its former glory.
 Now owned by the Minstead Trust which supports people with learning difficulties through training and work experience.
 All the buildings are thatched with a large house to rent.
 It boasts rhodos, azaleas, other shrubs and trees a plenty,
 And an abundance of primulas of lofty habit.
 With winding paths down to the lake where floated the water bog bean
 Onwards to an open land area where alpacas graze.
 And in the hedge at a little fairy house we could gaze.
 Dotted around the garden are attractions of wickerwork and straw,
 One overlooking the Gold Medal garden designed in 2012 by Chris Beardshaw,
 Our return coach journey to Amersham Gareth our driver did ably steer
 But without so many plants as were purchased last year.
 Meanwhile our thanks for the beautiful photos taken by Keith, John, David et al
 Which will keep us all absorbed for quite a spell.

Libby Crabbe



Acronyms in context

Many years ago, a friend left a plant on our doorstep while she was going to be away, with the note “needs some TLC”. My father and I, both biochemists by training, were mystified – why should a plant need Thin Layer Chromatography”? Of course, our friend meant Tender Loving Care.

Other acronyms that mean one thing to a gardener and something quite different to other people include:

- AGA Amersham Gardening Association, or AGA range cookers (not an acronym, but a trade name usually in capital letters)
- AGM Award of Garden Merit (of the RHS), or Annual General Meeting
- AGS Alpine Garden Society, or Aylesbury (or Alcester) Grammar School, or Adventure Game Studio, or AGS (Aberdeen, Glasgow, Southampton) Airports Ltd
- FGM Fuchsia Gall Mite, or, medically, Female Genital Mutilation
- NPK Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium ratio of a fertiliser, or the Sim Squad gang of Tottenham, North London
- PLP Pretty Little Plant, or Parliamentary Labour Party
- RHS Royal Horticultural Society, or Right Hand Side
- RPS Rare Plant Society, or Royal Pharmaceutical Society or Royal Photographic Society
- VMH Victoria Medal of Honour (of the RHS), or VMH Solicitors of Edinburgh

Mystery bulb finally reveals itself



This rather unprepossessing bulb has lingered in the greenhouse for some years; we cannot remember where it came from (we suspect it was a gift, but cannot remember from whom), and it has, of course, lost any label it may have had. From time to time it produced a few straggly leaves. Then this year it produced a tall flower stalk (reaching 1m from the top of the pot) with an interesting bud that started out looking like a duck's head with a wattle.



Gradually it opened out and revealed itself to be an agapanthus.



Clever squirrel

We have a seed feeder for the birds on a post hanging over a small bird table that we use for crumbs, crusts, remnants of chips, roast potatoes, spaghetti and Yorkshire pudding, etc.

We have had to wire the top of the seed feeder on, because the squirrels managed to learn how to lift it off and spill seeds onto the table below.

Some time ago I saw a squirrel climb the post, hang on by its rear legs and punch the top of the seed feeder with its front paws. I assumed at first that this was a display of anger because the top could no longer be lifted off.

However, it has kept on doing this for several days now, repeatedly punching the top of the feeder, then jumping down onto the bird table below. What it has learnt (presumably by accident, and perhaps indeed by punching in anger at first) was that by tilting the top of the seed feeder away sharply, seeds fall out of the bird feeding hole onto the bird table. It can then sit on the bird table and eat seeds to its heart content. Any seeds that fall onto the ground provided a meal (or snack) for lazier squirrels, as well as birds that are afraid to disturb the squirrel in possession of the bird table.



Some requests for help

We always need people to meet and greet members and visitors at our meetings.

If you can help, please contact Felicity Vickery Tel: 01494 726284, email felicityvickery@yahoo.co.uk

We need people to help with the tea and coffee at our meetings. There is a rota so you are not expected to help at every meeting. If you can help, please contact Liz Moulton Tel: 01494 784913, email libbym6740@gmail.com

Please remember the raffle at each meeting. The profit on the raffles makes a very useful contribution to our expenses; subscriptions alone do not cover the cost of meetings and speakers.

Publicity. If you know where you could put a publicity poster please contact david.bender@btinternet.com

At present we have posters in the following places:

White Hill Centre, Chesham
Van Hage garden centre
Little Chalfont Library
Coleshill Village Hall

Committee and Contact Details

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Past newsletters

There is an archive of past newsletters from May 2014 to the current issue on our website at <http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/newsletter.html>

Local events

If you know of local garden events, open gardens, etc, please email newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk to let us know as early as possible, so that information can go out in the newsletter and on the website.

Photos from outings

You can see links to lots of photos from our outings at <http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/outings.html>

See the photos in this issue full size

[Click here to go to the Flickr site containing the photos from this newsletter.](#)

Click the button on the top right of the screen for a slide show; you can scroll through the pictures using the > and < arrows on the right and left of the screen

