

# Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

## November 2020 Newsletter

### From the Secretary

When lock-down began the committee was hopeful that life might be back to normal in September. Of course that did not happen and we still have no idea when groups of 100+ will be allowed to meet. Meanwhile we have organised monthly talks via Zoom which we hope to continue for as long as necessary. For next year we may not be able to run outings if the number of people allowed on coaches remains low as it would make the trips too expensive but we are planning local outings that members can attend by car – see page 2.

The Newsletter will continue and members are welcome to e-mail any articles of interest, or photographs, to the editor ([newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk)). The next Newsletter will be issued in early February 2021 and items need to be with David by the end of January.

The committee will keep looking for opportunities to find members things of interest. Meanwhile we hope 2021 will bring better news and hope you will all keep safe and have a successful gardening year.

Jean Bowling

### Free renewal for 2021



The November newsletter usually contains a form asking you to renew your subscription by the beginning of January. This year we have not spent much money on speakers – only two meetings before lock-down, and three or four Zoom meetings in the autumn and early winter (see page 2 for details) – and we have not paid for hire of the Drake Hall since the last physical meeting in March. In 2019/20 the Drake Hall cost us £1058; a Zoom licence for a full year has cost us only £144.

So, the committee has decided that renewal of subscriptions for 2021 will be free of charge. You don't have to do anything. You will not receive a printed programme, because the programme is in a state of flux as our valiant speaker secretaries, Sue and Jules, try to find speakers who are willing and able to use Zoom, while keeping their options open for physical meetings.

You will also not receive a new membership card – don't worry, if you are asking for a discount at a garden centre or nursery, it is unlikely that anyone will care that your card has last year's date on it.

### See the photos in this issue full size

Click <https://www.flickr.com/photos/127260098@N04/albums/72157716698323621> to go to the Flickr site containing some of 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



## Forthcoming meetings

These meetings will be held by Zoom. The link for each meeting will be emailed about a week in advance.

### 26<sup>th</sup> November: John Baker: Gardens of Russia



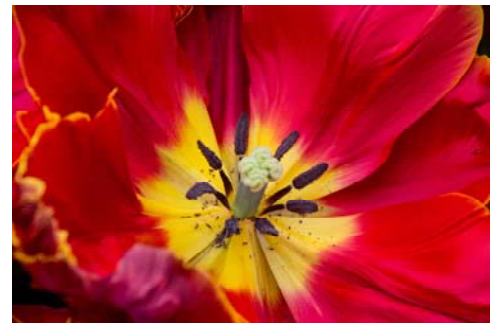
In 2014, John, a retired Director of Engineering and his partner June Head of Technology for a Perfume Company, came to talk to us about hostas. They hold the National Collection at their home in Hampshire (Hanging Hostas in Lindford) and when we visited in 2015 we saw over a thousand hostas packed in to their smallish garden. There is a BBC video of a visit to Hanging Hostas at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMiVUWUktRk>

This time he will tell us about the gardens of Moscow and St Petersburg, plus his experience of village flower shows.

The photo on the left is from the splendid Peterhof gardens in St Petersburg.

### 17<sup>th</sup> December: Keith Moffmeister: Chenies through the year, tulips and Blue Peter in the tunnels

Over the years we have enjoyed many of Keith's photos from our annual garden holidays. Now he will show us photos of Chenies through the year, as a curtain raiser for a visit there in tulip time next year. Note that this meeting is on the third Thursday, not our usual fourth Thursday, because we thought that not many people would want to attend even a Zoom AGA meeting on Christmas eve.



### 28<sup>th</sup> January – to be confirmed

### 25<sup>th</sup> February: John Baker: Gardens of Japan



A return visit from John Baker, with a talk about gardens that are very different from those of Russia.

The photo on the left was taken in the Japanese garden in Hasselt in Belgium.

## Outings

As you are all aware, due to Covid 19, we have not been able to arrange any outings this year. For 2021 we are in the process of arranging some local visits using our own transport.

The programme will include a visit to Chenies in April with the details to be sent out after Christmas. In addition, we will also be visiting the gardens of two of our own members.

We were extremely disappointed that this year's trip to Norfolk had to be postponed. However, we are currently planning to re-arrange it in 2021. The hotel is holding 50 places for us from 20<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> June, but we can't confirm prices until we know the size of the coach. Under the current Government guidelines Motts have advised that

only 26 single or 39 total including couples can be accommodated on a 50-seater coach. The deposit is not due until March, by which time we should have a better idea of what is happening.

In the event that we cannot travel further afield next year, the outings group would welcome any recommendations or suggestions you may have of local gardens to visit.

Joan Clark – <mailto:joan-clark@hotmail.co.uk>

# Secret Garden

## Listen, do you want to know a secret? Do you promise not to tell?

Deep in the heart of Watford, (yes, Watford) is a garden that is a best kept secret. It is a beautiful magical oasis of tranquillity with paths leading you around the garden and woodland, some of its area is tamed but others are quite wild. Just walk through a pair of black and gold gates.

Once upon a time the house and garden were owned by Henry and Daisy Colbeck. Henry was a renowned architect, and he designed the house and then, with his wife, created the original gardens.



The garden is approximately 3.5 acres (1.4 hectares) and is designed to provide areas of interest. So what is there to see: a pond with wildlife, including dragonflies, damselflies, frogs, newts, fish (massive carp) and water insects, the fernery, large herbaceous borders, an aviary with budgerigars, quail, assorted finches and other varieties of small birds, a rock garden, woodland and so much more.

The icing on the cake is the one and only resident gardener, Nick Harris who over the past 11 years has lovingly tended the gardens and gradually is developing new areas of interest. He is always keen to chat about the garden and to share his extensive knowledge of the plants.

## So how did the garden start life.



Originally it was owned by Lord Capel, the Earl of Essex who then sold the land in 1888. Between 1942 and 1958 the Colbecks gradually bought the land piece by piece for a total cost of £4,986. They travelled the world buying plants and getting ideas for their garden; this you can see from the range of unusual and exotic plants in the garden. Some of the plants are labelled.

In 1965 the council worked with the Colbecks, increasing the size of the gardens to today's 3.5 acres. On the death of Mr Colbeck, the council took full control and continues to develop it. Nick is always finding new ways to make more interest and is currently developing an Australasian plant area. He likes to create a natural feel to the gardens and to encourage lots of wildlife. In the future he is looking "to build a bee and butterfly garden, complemented by various new plants across the grounds"



To the front of the garden is an open area which is semi formal, and if you go through the brick arch, this is all that remains of the original boundary of the gardens, it leads to the woodland area. On your journey round you can see a standard trained *Wisteria sinensis*, which is draped with lilac flowers, there are dahlias, palms, canna lilies, bamboos, a redwood. Azaleas, rhododendrons, daffodils, bluebells and woodland flowers are to be seen in spring. You can find a tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), Indian bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*), maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) and various acer species.

There are benches to sit and just watch and listen to the birds. Every season there is something to see and enjoy.

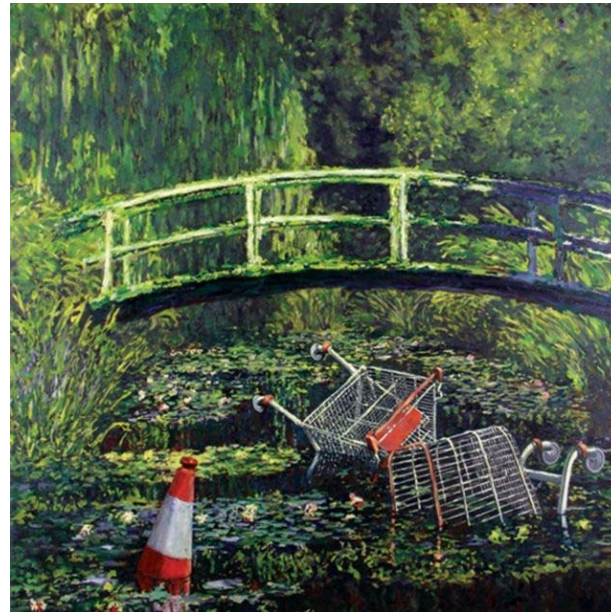
**So where is this garden?** Cheslyn House and Gardens, Nascot Wood Road, Watford, WD17 4SL

There is a small free car park and a toilet should you need one but otherwise it is totally unspoilt and free to enter. Liz Moulton is hoping to arrange a car visit there in 2021 so watch this space.

Helen Farndon

## Show me the Monet

Our last physical meeting was in February, when Carole Petipher talked about Monet's Paradise on Earth, and, of course, showed us the painting of the Japanese bridge over the water lily pond (below left). On October 21<sup>st</sup> Banksy's dystopian re-interpretation of the painting (below right) sold at auction in London for £7.5 million. While we don't have water lilies in our pond, we do have a "Monet bridge" over it, bought from Coulson's bridges of Essex.



## Now you see them, now you don't

Back in the early summer we cleared some very overgrown pots from the edge of our pond, in preparation for fitting new netting to keep out both herons and leaves. That evening I saw nine frogs sunning themselves on the newly cleared edges. Since then, they seem to have disappeared, although there has been one at the other end of the garden, hiding under the wild marjoram in the narrow border alongside the patio. We know it is there because it hops out onto the patio when we water the border.

Another evening when I went out to feed the fish there was a small (presumably juvenile) grass snake, about the size of a pencil, in the near corner of the pond. Since then, it seems to have disappeared. Probably just as well – if it grew large enough it could make a meal of the goldfish, although it would make a meal for our two surviving koi, which are now about 25 years old – we bought four of them at the size we could afford (about £5 each) from the nearby koi farm when we lived in Kenton, and brought them with us in a 90 gallon water tank when we moved to Amersham.

## A rose carpet?

Jean Bowling tells us that there is a rose on sale that is described as "flower carpet". She bought one a few years ago thinking it would be low growing and provide good ground cover. The picture on the right shows it now – a lovely rose and well worth purchasing, but "a carpet" is not how she would describe it, so beware.



## The value of gardens

We are used to valuing our gardens, but it was interesting to see a note in *The Garden* in August about the wild-life value of gardens – they estimated that domestic gardens cover some 1 million acres (400,000 hectares) – more than all of the nature reserves in the UK.

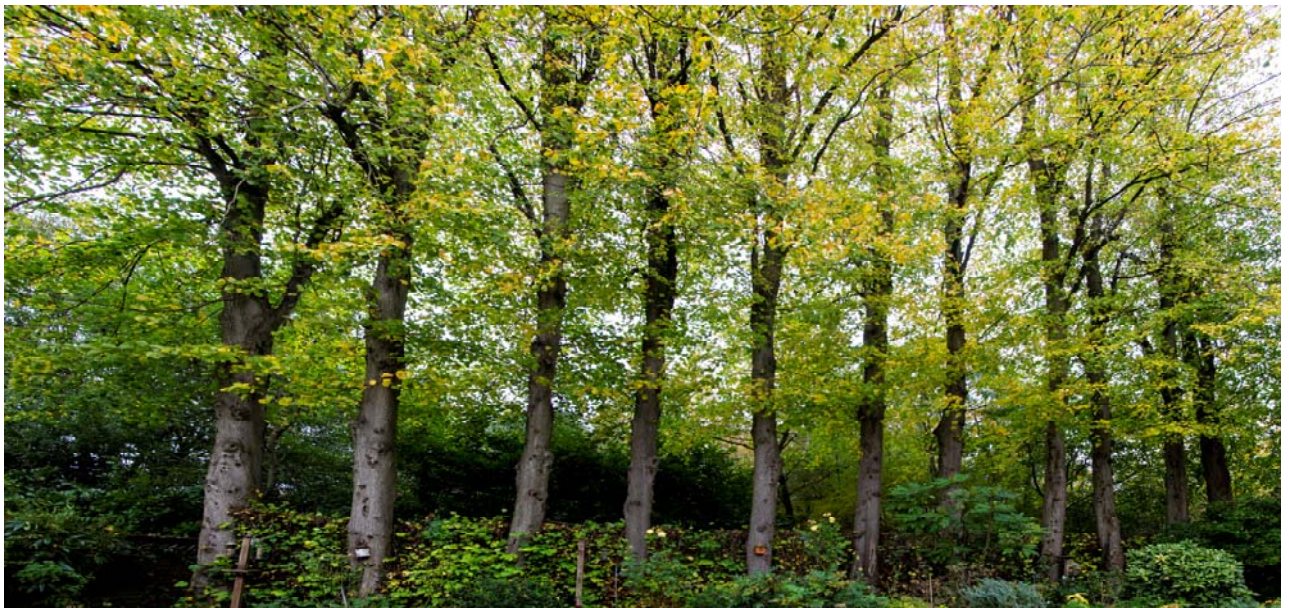
Then in October there was an item on the BBC News website about trees. Based on computer interpretation of aerial photographs, there are more trees in urban areas than in the countryside. Obviously, many urban trees will be street trees, but there are also plenty in gardens. By contrast, in the countryside many trees have been felled in the past for agriculture and to create grazing land. There are large treeless areas in Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire. Areas such as the Lake District are also relatively tree poor as a result of the historical felling of trees for firewood and building material.

Over the years I have been much involved with Perivale Wood Local Nature Reserve in Middlesex. This is mainly an oak wood (with splendid bluebells in spring)

– but almost all the oaks are the same age, because of felling to build warships for the Napoleonic wars.

We certainly do our bit for trees in gardens. There are 12 lime trees along the back of the garden (see below), and then a couple more limes on our side of the boundary hedge and a couple of sycamores on the neighbour's side, not to mention the neighbour's large sycamore at the edge of our front garden. We have reason to be grateful that all of these trees are covered by tree protection orders. The original plan for Eagle Close was for three bungalows, then our house. However, the trees between us and no 6 are protected, and too close to the buildings to allow all three bungalows to be built. As a result, we have a considerably wider garden than neighbours further along the road. Eagle Close only has even numbered houses, because only one side has houses – more puzzling for many people is why there is no number 2. We don't really understand either.

David Bender



Look carefully at the photograph on the right of Clematis Cottage in Chalfont St Giles.

Can you spot the mistake?



## Gordon Barrett was delighted with a new variety of tomato

Gordon grew tomato Orkado from Thompson & Morgan. He writes "I have been growing tomatoes for more years than I care to mention - these are the finest I have ever cultivated. Everything that T & M claimed, with an exceptional flavour. Whilst outdoor was suggested, I grew mine in the greenhouse.



Superb outdoor cordon variety perfect for British summer weather. Early to ripen first trusses with an average of 8 round, deep red fruits up to 140g (5oz) each. The firm, well-flavoured fruits resist splitting and are ideal for slicing.

**SOWING INSTRUCTIONS:** Sow seed on the surface of a free-draining compost and cover with about 6mm (1/4in) of compost or vermiculite. Place in a propagator at 18-21C (65-70F) until after germination which usually takes 7-10 days.

**GROWING INSTRUCTIONS:** Transplant seedlings when large enough to handle into 7.5cm (3in) pots. Plant outdoors, 45cm (18in) apart once all frost risk has passed, or plant in the greenhouse in individual large pots, or 3 plants per growbag when 20cm (8in) high. Plants require sideshoot removal and support for the best yields. Water and feed plants regularly with a high potash feed once the first truss has set.

 Tomatoes are packed with antioxidants and high in vitamins A and C and lycopene, all helping to stimulate your body's immune system.

## Meanwhile ... did we buy a dud batch of compost?

We were less lucky with our tomatoes in the greenhouse. We grew tigerella from seed – a variety we have grown before and that has given a good yield of interestingly striped fruits with a good flavour. Not this year. We had a very poor crop indeed from the four plants in the greenhouse, and very few flower trusses (so not a problem of pollinators getting into the greenhouse), despite the usual use of Tomorite. The seeds germinated well, and we gave seedlings to several of our neighbours. When we asked, they told us they had a good crop. Were they being polite, so as not to suggest they thought we had given them rubbish plants, or was there a problem with the bags of compost we ordered on-line in the early stages of lock-down? It was not Bloggs' cheapo special offer compost, but one of the well-known brands – of course, it could have been old stock that had been stored badly.



The suggestion that it was the compost and not our horticultural ability to blame is supported by our dahlias. As usual, we planted up the tubers that had been overwintered in the greenhouse into containers of compost in late April. Then, after all our containers were full, and we had exhausted the compost we had bought in early March, we were offered more dahlias. OK, we can always find more containers, and there are always places we can put them. These new plants were potted on in the same compost as the tomatoes, then fed and watered the same way as the others, albeit in two different parts of the garden. Plenty of leaf growth, but only a few flowers on "Twining's after eight" and none at all on honka. Meanwhile, even in to mid-October the other dahlias, in the other compost, are making a splendid show.

## A visit to Sarah Raven's English garden at Perch Hill, East Sussex.

We had a wonderfully colourful day at Perch Hill on an open day in August including great tea and cake.

Started over twenty four years ago by Sarah and Adam Nicholson, when it was a ramshackle ex-dairy farm. Since then they have converted the farm into an organic ninety acres, planting new hedges on old lines, encouraging wild flowers into the meadows, introducing a herd of Sussex cattle and a flock of Romney cross sheep.

The Sarah Raven brand was started in 1999 with a seed list but has moved on into plants which are trialled and tested at Perch Hill.

They also grow plants in Lincolnshire using rainwater in glasshouses heated with a biomass boiler using straw

and waste cardboard as fuel.

They were awarded the 'Best Gardening Brand' for the fourth time in 1999.

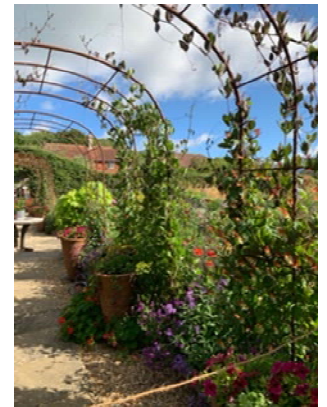
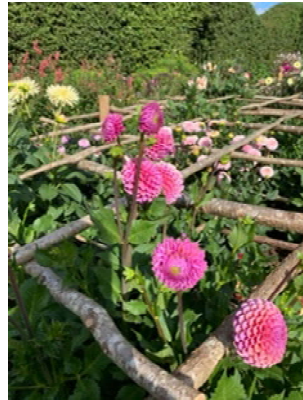
The flowers produce up to three crops each season and are used for one day courses and workshops from bulb days to symposia on vegetables and colour combinations.

For more information, click

<https://www.sarahraven.com/customer/pages/visit-the-garden>

A great day out, also not far from Great Dixter

Barbara Wilding



## A magic expanding hose ?



Our expanding hose had a dramatic and fatal encounter with a rose bush. Dramatic because of the way it jumped around as the water under pressure burst out, and fatal because you can't repair a burst expanding hose – there is no way to join two parts together. However, the replacement worked superbly. Without even taking it out of the box the garden became very wet indeed.

OK, this was the day we had 2 inches of rain in one day.

## The joys, perils, and dramas of growing your own vegetables and fruit.

Sowing, growing and eating your own home-grown vegetables is internationally a pleasure. That ecstasy as you sniff your first tomato, cucumber, or strawberry is memorable. Sharing this experience with youngsters doubles the delightful experience as you watch their expressions of awe and wonder.

But be warned - every silver lining has a cloud lurking and this year has not only brought Covid 19 to our doorstep but rogue courgettes. Who would have



### Take heed

Cucurbitacins have been bred out of most commercially sold seeds but using seeds from previous year's crop can be dangerous. Avoid growing gourds next to ornamental breeds of pumpkin and squash. These contain toxic substances which can end up infecting edible varieties through cross-pollination.

Experts have also warned that seeds taken from the fruit of edible strains have the risk of reverting to forms with higher levels of the toxins — and gardeners are

### The silver lining

The rogue courgette saga of this year is rare. Reputable nurseries put a lot of time and effort into ensuring that seeds are of the finest quality as their reputation is their living.

Keep growing fruit and vegetables and enjoy the fruits of your labour and keep sharing all the anecdotes and

thought those innocent looking, shiny green plants with beautiful yellow flowers could be so dangerous?

The first I knew of the problem was when a friend emailed to warn me. I was incredulous and sent out a warning to as many people as I could. Anyone eating the rogue courgettes suffered sickness, diarrhoea, extreme stomach pains for up to five days and even loss of hair. I have since found out that in some cases it could be fatal.

The culprit is a naturally occurring substance in one of a group of chemicals named cucurbitacins. These naturally occurring toxins are occasionally found in pumpkins and gourds such as courgettes and are designed to defend the plants from herbivores. They are recognisable by their bitter taste and sometimes unpleasant smell.

discouraged from saving and planting their own seeds for this reason.

High temperatures, dryness and other stresses when growing can also lead to an increase in cucurbitacins.

Most important – do not eat a courgette if it tastes bitter even if it means throwing out the whole dish. Best use the lick test (just lick the courgette when you harvest it).

photographs about our successes and learning experiences, not to mention the recipes.

Did I tell you about my first experience about growing lettuces and carrots...

Helen Farndon



James Wong had a piece in *The Guardian* about this in late August - apparently all of the gourd family are "promiscuous" and will cross-pollinate happily with (not very) nearby plants. He suggests that it can be a particular problem if you grow both courgettes and ornamental gourds and keep courgette seeds for next year.

## Your Garden's History

You may not live in a stately home or a National Trust property, but your garden will have a history and a tale to tell. This has been brought home to us recently.

We moved to a house in Chesham Bois in 1968. It had been built in the 1920s by the family from whom we bought it and had had a tennis court and a pavilion! It had a big garden! At some point in its recent history this garden had been split and a bungalow had been built for a widowed Granny.

Our part of the garden contained the pavilion and a large area of kitchen garden. The tennis court was now next door, where it was well used. We inherited some cold frames leaning up against a shed. There had up till then been a gardener. We could see from the marks on the lawn that the vegetable beds had been very much bigger and I suspect it was a relic of "Dig for Victory"! It



Hilary's article reminds me of the garden I grew up in in Ealing. Avalon Road was so-called because the houses had been built in the 1920s on the orchard of the farm that was centred on what is now the Myllett Arms pub on the A40 Western Avenue – more or less opposite the art deco building that was originally the Hoover factory, then a Tesco superstore and now flats.

Our garden contained remnants of the orchard – two apple trees (a James Grieve and a Worcester Pearmain) and two large pear trees. All of these trees over-topped the house – they were planted long before the advent of dwarfing rooting stock. James Grieve is a delicious apple when it is fresh from the tree, but is little grown commercially because it does not store well – it goes pappy quite quickly. Nevertheless, we always had

was very much a garden of its time and like ones we had grown up with.

Soft fruit, red and black currants, rhubarb and gooseberries occupied an area at the end of the main garden. The flower beds were fairly standard.... phlox, chrysanthemums, with climbing roses and honeysuckle.

Our predecessors left little evidence of their lives other than a passion for tennis! There had been place for rubbish by the bonfire with a few bits of broken china but little else. I think **we** may have left plastic soldiers!

One of our sons took a metal detector into the woods behind and found a broken plough share which suggests it had been farmed in the past.

The soil was clay with flints and chalk only 18 inches down, very hard to dig.

Four years ago we "down-sized" to a bungalow in Old Town Chesham, barely a mile away! The contrast in gardens and soil was dramatic. We now have light river soil that needs "feeding" regularly but is a delight to dig!

Wherever we dig we find bits of tiles and bricks and many other signs of occupation over hundreds of years.

Since we lived here, keen members of the Chess Valley Archaeological and History Society have conducted a "dig" in our back garden and found signs of life going back to mediaeval times. We may find Roman items since they had settlements all along the Chess which runs a few hundred yards away ..... and may flood the area!

It is quite a different gardening experience! Our predecessor was a keen gardener and left us a variety of clematis plants and a pond set among rocks and acer bushes.

Hilary Unwin

fruit on the table – as a neighbour's child once commented "even when no-one was ill in the house".

My mother started bottling apples from the first windfalls, and the bottled stewed apple lasted through the year until the new windfalls arrived. I am told that on one occasion when we stopped at a café for a meal and I saw on the menu "stewed apple 1/6", I exclaimed "Do you mean people **pay** for stewed apple?".

When my father started making wine, we spent many happy hours crushing apples in buckets to extract the juice – a change from gathering elderberries, which was another autumn activity.

David Bender

## Committee and Contact Details

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## Discounts for members – remember to take your membership card to claim your discount

[South Heath Garden Centre](#), Meadow Lane, South Heath, Great Missenden, HP16 9SH, offer a 10% discount on some items.

Gardening and outdoor ropes, buy online from <http://www.buyrope.co.uk>, and use the code Amersham10 at checkout for a 10% discount.

## 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](mailto: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 lots of photos from our outings at <http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/outings.html>

