

Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

May 2024 Newsletter

From the Secretary

Unlike the winter of 2022 – 3, I did not lose any plants this last winter. My problem has been the slugs and possibly snails that have eaten the petals off my daffodils and baby tulips. I have found little black slugs on and in the stems. The other problem has been the rain and cold winds making it impossible to work in the garden for more than a few minutes. The sudden hot spell has improved things but it makes one realise how much there is now to do.

The holiday, talks and trips are all organised for the year. Booking forms for three outings are with this newsletter so do think about joining them.

The committee wish you all good health and a good gardening year.

Jean Bowling

Plant sale, Saturday May 4th



After several days of pretty awful weather, we were blessed with a warm, sunny and dry day for the plant sale in St Michael's Church forecourt. There seemed to be fewer people about than usual for a Saturday morning – perhaps because it was a bank holiday weekend. The repair shop inside the church did not seem to bring us many customers either – they were presumably too much in a hurry to get their various objects repaired (or be told they were beyond repair). Nevertheless, we had total takings of £1209.17, of which £415.87 came from the card reader (hence the odd sum; there is a commission charged on card sales). After paying £365.10 for plants from the wholesale nursery, and a donation of £40 to St Michael's Church, we made a profit of £804. Thanks to all involved in a successful day.



Self-seeders and disappearing plants

The April issue of *The Garden* has an article of self-seeding plants, and a selection of favourites from a number of experts. This got me looking round our garden for wanted self-seeded plants (not to be confused with plants such as a small yew, a hazel bush and cyclamen that are “donated” by the garden wildlife). Most noticeable are the primroses that have seeded themselves across much of the front garden gravel bed, and bluebells that seem to have spread from the area behind the trees to a number of places in the back garden, and have flowered well this year. Our hamamalis in the front garden has produced two offspring this year – I assume that these are self-seeded, although it is possible that the seeds were helped on the way by birds or squirrels.

By contrast, in the May issue of *The Garden* Matthew Pottage writes of his delight in seeing masses of the Chilean firebush (*Embothrum coccineum*) in full flower in the wild. He writes “I couldn’t believe my eyes; this type of plant needs planting in quantities of ten, because

five will immediately drop dead, three will take a year or two to die and just one or two might grow if you are lucky.” How true of some plants we have bought. A couple of years ago we bought two plants of the supposedly fully hardy Chinese witch hazel, *Loropetalum chinensis*, with red leaves and flowers, in flower when delivered. We had these outside the front door in reasonably large pots, and a neighbour saw them, was intrigued, and we gave her a copy of the advertisement in *Radio Times*. Both our plants succumbed within a year, and the next time our neighbour visited we saw her looking for them – she seemed to be relieved that she was not alone on having lost her plants as well.

Last year the April issue of *The Garden* had a list of blue spring flowers to use instead of the grape hyacinth, *Muscari armeniacum*, which they say “can be invasive”. Would that they were in our garden! They have persisted to some extent where we planted them, but have not multiplied enough to be a nuisance.

What did I do right?

I am not sure what, if anything, I did to or for it last year, but our white camelia bloomed splendidly at the end of February, and thanks to the mild weather it was not frosted at all.

Even when there was a mild frost around, it is in a sheltered spot, and so is protected much of the time. However, in the 20 years since we moved here, this is the finest blooms we have seen.



Three outings to book now

If you are paying for outings by bank transfer, please make sure that you include your surname and the name of the outing you are booking (Canal, Hyde Hall or Turn), so that we know who has paid, and what you have paid for.

The booking forms are with this newsletter.

If you cannot print the booking form(s), just write to the organiser with the relevant information.

Something completely different: a trip on the Grand Union canal, Thursday 18th July, cost £10 pp

Come and enjoy the experience and beauty of the Grand Union Canal. We are using Waterways Experiences who are an award-winning, volunteer-run charity, operating three canal boats from a beautifully landscaped boat base on the Grand Union Canal, near Hemel Hempstead. They enable everyone, including the disabled, the disadvantaged, the young and the old

to experience the fun and the beauty of our waterways. Our boat will be the Shel Drake 3 which is purpose built for wheelchairs and mobility aids. The trip lasts 4 hours.

[Waterways Experience](#) provide tea and coffee, and we will provide some cake. We would be delighted to receive offers to make some cakes.

Visit To RHS Garden Hyde Hall and flower show, near Chelmsford, Wednesday 31st July



The burgundy, pink and silver border

Entrance to the garden and flower show is **free to RHS members**, who can each take in one guest. It is hoped that we will have sufficient members going so entrance will be free for all of us.

Cost £18 for the coach

This is the first day of the Hyde Hall Flower Show, with 'dazzling' flower displays and a wide range of nurseries selling hundreds of plants from succulents and roses to bonsai and exotics. Each nursery will have a mini display garden to help you get inspiration for your own garden. There will also be a number of trade stands selling tools, pots, ornaments and furniture.

Martin and Jill Fish, and a number of expert guests will give gardening talks and demonstrations in the Potting Shed, on a wide range of topics.

Hyde Hall has several places to eat and there will be extra outlets in the showground, together with live music from a ukele band.

Hyde Hall is the largest RHS garden with 365 acres to explore so there will be plenty to see in the rest of the garden, including colour themed herbaceous borders, vegetable beds and a cottage garden.

More information at <https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall>



The dry garden

Outing by car to Turn End Garden, Haddenham, on Wednesday 11th September 2024

Turn End is the family home, garden and creation of architect Peter Aldington and his wife Margaret. Three village houses were designed and built in Haddenham in the 1960s, and in 1998 were added to the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Turn End's garden, designed and made by Peter as a natural extension to the house, grew with the buildings, maturing into an internationally renowned garden. In less than an acre, space is used to create an illusion of size – courtyards with pools, a small woodland and a curved glade leading to a series of garden rooms.

Gardener Jackie Hunt will give an introductory talk about the site and its history. The house is not open but the small studio of Heather Hunter, their artist in

residence, will be open to visit. Heather specializes in artists' books and printing. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be served in the nearby studio of Paul Wilkinson. The garden includes gravel and stone pathways, narrow archways and several steps and is not suitable for wheelchairs.

Facilities: A small selection of home-grown plants and books by Peter Aldington are available to purchase (cash and cheque only, please). One unisex toilet is available on site, located at the entrance.

We have been asked to limit our number to 30 so please apply promptly.

More information at <https://www.turnend.org.uk>

Forthcoming meetings in the Drake Hall on Thursday evenings at 8pm

June 27th Andrew Mikolajski. Shakespeare's plants and gardens



Andrew is author of 40 gardening titles, including books on pruning, permaculture, orchids, roses and propagation.

He [writes](#) "I have a busy career as a gardening author, lecturer and speaker. I was a horticultural adviser on the new edition of the *RHS A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants* and more recently on a revision of the *RHS Encyclopedia of Plants and Flowers*. Previously, I have taught garden design and RHS certificate at Warwickshire College, and garden history at the English Gardening School.



"Plants and gardens had a particular importance to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Looking at the restoration project at Kenilworth Castle in particular, we explore what plants meant to the Elizabethans."

July 25th Nigel Hopes. John Massey's garden



Nigel's passion for plants started as a boy. He did work experience at Ashwood Nurseries and then went on to study Horticulture at Rodbaston College to National Diploma. From there he was a student at Birmingham Botanical Gardens where he stayed for over 10 years. He had placements at RHS Wisley and a planting hunting trip to South Africa.

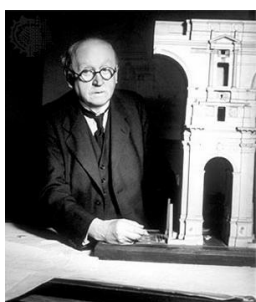
In 2018 he took on a new challenge as Head Gardener for Chelsea gold medalist John Massey VMH in his private garden, '[John's Garden](#)' at Ashwood Nurseries. We visited John's Garden in June 2019. It is a wonderful three acre site includes informal borders, island beds, woodland dells and a wildlife meadow set against the beautiful backdrop of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. It is regarded as one of the finest private gardens in the UK, with magnificent collections of trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials and conifers adding to the interest all year round, and an abundance of rare plants as well as familiar favourites. Nigel will show us many parts of the garden and then tell us more about some of the interesting plant groups there, such as hellebores, hepatica, lewisia and more. [Click here](#) for photos taken in John's Garden in June 2019.

We do not meet in August

September 26th James Bolton. The relationship between Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll

James Bolton set up his [garden design business](#) in 1992, following two years as head gardener at a private garden near Wantage. He had previously trained with the Direction des Parcs et Jardins in Paris. He was Faculty Director in Design History at the Ingham School of Design and a Lecturer at Middlesex

University. He now lectures extensively on garden history and runs Border Lines, the leading tour company organising visits to private English gardens and to the finest gardens in Europe and South Africa. He has also written a book on garden ornaments called "Garden Mania".



The last two decades of the 19th century reverberated with the row between William Robinson and Reginald Blomfield as to the pre-eminence, in the garden, of the architect or the gardener. At a stroke, the problem was solved by the partnership between Gertrude Jekyll (right) and Edwin Lutyens (left), so that a house by Lutyens, with a garden by Jekyll, became an Edwardian ideal. Their partnership thrived in the brash, new-moneyed Edwardian era, but the First World War ended that golden period and as Lutyens became distracted by the creation of New Delhi and Miss Jekyll, almost blind, became more and more reluctant to leave Munstead Wood, so the gardens they designed together were fewer and further between.



Visit to Sarah Nicholson's garden, February 21st

Twenty four of us went to see the snowdrops in Sarah Nicholson's garden in Wendover. It RAINED!! Two couples felt unable to join us for health, and therefore safety, reasons, which was a shame but understandable.

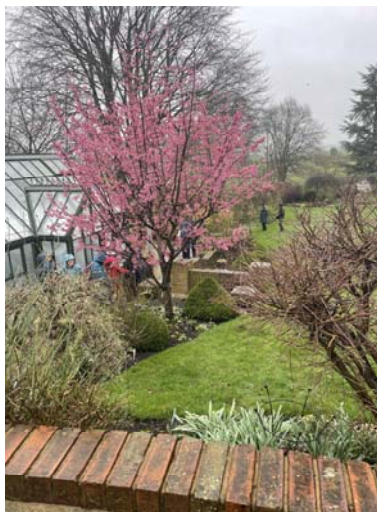
Sarah's garden is amazing summer or winter. It was heavily mulched which really showed off the snowdrops and the wide variety of hellebores. There are 81 varieties of snowdrop, including eight new ones purchased this year. Some had slightly gone past their best, different flowering times and also the warm February weather being the reason.

Sarah accompanied us around the garden pointing out and naming the snowdrops and hellebores. A list of the snowdrops is available if anyone would like to see it.

A variety of plants were for sale and we enjoyed tea and delicious cakes in Sarah's kitchen and dining room, keeping out of the rain! It did rain all afternoon but the visit was enjoyed by all and many said they would like to go again and see the garden in the summer. Sarah opens her garden for the National Garden Scheme for groups of 10 to 30 until the 9th of September by arrangement.



Irene Glyn-Jones



Sneaky squirrel

We are used to the squirrels bringing in conkers from the neighbour's tree, and acorns from somewhere nearby, to bury in our planters (sometimes in what they regard as fair exchange for the daffodil and tulip bulbs they dig up). Now they have discovered the neighbour's hazel bush, which, like ours, had a fine crop last year. I don't know if the neighbours planted their hazel, or whether like ours it was a present from the squirrels, in which case we cannot really begrudge them the fruits of their version of "grow your own" (much as I would have liked to have some fresh cob nuts, the squirrels seem to like them under-ripe).

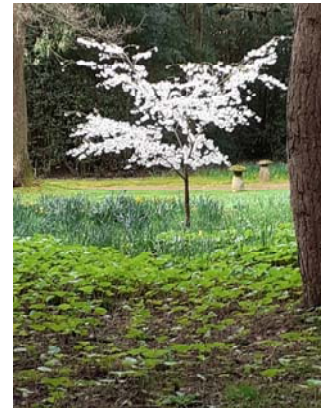
One squirrel has been particularly sneaky, jumping over the fence with a trio of hazel nuts in its mouth, then running across our lawn, and up the pole to sit on the bird table to start eating. Is this to fool the others into thinking that the nuts come from the bird table rather than the bush over the fence? After a few nibbles it then hopped down and finished the nut on the lawn, leaving the shells for us to clear up. Later, one brought nuts directly onto our (astroturf) lawn, nibbled some and then tried to bury another – it pushed a few blades of plastic turf aside, dropped the nut kernel and patted the plastic blades down as if it has buried it in a real lawn.

Visit to Stubbings, March 20th



We were blessed with a lovely Spring Day for our visit to Stubbings. Oliver, the son of the owners, gave us an introductory talk. His father started up the Beacon Garden Centre in Beaconsfield, now Dobbies, and the walled garden to Stubbings became a nursery for his garden centre.

We went through a gate to the private garden of Stubbings and the first thing we saw was a row of magnolias in the 60m herbaceous border. They were all at head height and made a stunning display. Below were some choice herbaceous plants including a nearly navy blue hellebore. Covering the whole wall behind the magnolias was a wisteria, which will be an amazing site when it flowers.



The huge lawn is now cut by three robot mowers; they are always fascinating to watch. On the lawn were some large trees including cedars and a monkey puzzle tree. Under the trees grew a variety of daffodils, surrounded by a low metal barrier to keep the mowers away.

The garden centre in the walled garden of Stubbings had a wide variety of shrubs and herbaceous plants. They specialise in topiary. In the restaurant they also had a flower shop and a delicatessen area.

As it was, warm and sunny we were able to eat our lunch outside. Everyone I spoke to praised the food and I think we all had a most enjoyable day.



Frances Billington



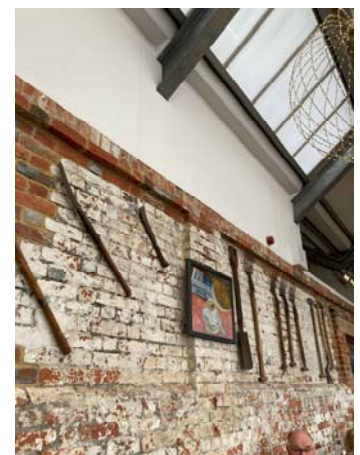
Eton garden song

Jolly gard'ning weather
And a mild summer breeze
Kneeler made of leather
Shade under trees
And we'll all grow together
With the flowers beneath the trees

To the tune of Tannenbaum

(or the red flag)

The meadow is quite lovely now
Flowers in all shades and hues
Self-seeders are all coming through
We'll keep the wild flowers blooming here.



Visit to Cambridge Botanic Gardens, April 18th

After several days of unrelenting rain, we were fortunate to have a crisp, dry and sunny day for our visit to Cambridge Botanic Gardens. We had an unexpected, unguided, tour of the narrow back streets of Cambridge en route, presumably because the driver's satnav locked onto the postal delivery address of the gardens, not the entrance gate. Nevertheless, we arrived more or less when expected.

The first impression was how well maintained everything was. We walked past wild flower meadows, all of which had obviously recently been edged, and in most of the empty plots (awaiting later sowing or later emergence of perennials) there were few, if any weeds to be seen. The meadow areas were filled with buttercups, cowslips, bluebells, cow parsley and camassia – all a good week or so more advanced than in Amersham, reflecting the fact that although north of home, Cambridge is only some 6m above sea level, compared with Amersham station at 147m, and many of our gardens higher still. Also, the gardens are surrounded by buildings, so providing a heat island effect.

The impression of excellent maintenance continued with the extensive glass-houses complex. Here there had obviously been a considerable amount of work recently, with what appeared to be new stone staging, and plants excellently displayed. The highlight of the glass houses was certainly the jade vine (*Strongylodon macrobotrys*), right, a leguminous vine endemic to the Philippines, most impressively in bloom with its racemes of turquoise / cyan claw shaped flowers. It required tropical conditions, so, unfortunately, would not be suitable for home cultivation unless you had a large conservatory and maintained it uncomfortably hot and humid. It is pollinated by bats, so, if it is to fruit “in captivity” it must be pollinated by hand – and maintenance of fresh seeds is important for conservation of this species that is endangered by habitat loss. There was also a plant whose common name is “self destructing palm” (*Tahina spectabilis*). This is a native of Madagascar, a fan palm with very large leaves, that dies after flowering. It appears to take some 30 – 50 years of growth before it does flower; perhaps unsurprisingly, it is critically endangered in the wild.

The rock garden was constructed from Cumbrian limestone during the winters of 1954 – 1958. This is a true rock garden, with some stones weighing more than three tonnes, arranged on the shore of the lake. The planting of alpine species is arranged geographically, as is common in many botanic gardens.

Something I had not seen elsewhere was the chronological bed, with plants arranged by the date they were first introduced to Britain. One surprise was an empty plot, awaiting emergence of its plants, with a label stating that the potato, introduced in 1586, is a perennial. Not what we expected, but then as we usually grow potatoes to dig up the tubers for food, it is not a perennial in commercial or home cultivation. When Parmentier was trying to popularise the potato as a food in France in 1771, he gave bouquets of the flowers to King Louis XV and his courtiers.

A final surprise as we rested on a bench was to discover that the large tree behind us, with a trunk some 8 inches in diameter, and clusters of white flowers, was a bay tree (*Laurus nobilis*) – perhaps we should not have been surprised, but I tend to judge the species by our rather slender 1.5m tall specimen.

Overall, a most enjoyable day – thanks to Althea for organising it so well.

[Click here](#) for more photos from the day.



Visit to Rodmarton Manor (but not Bampton), May 7th

The weather on bank holiday Monday was predictably awful, and we feared for the visit to Rodmarton the next day, packing waterproof jackets together with our sandwiches and flasks, as well as cameras.



Rodmarton Manor is an Arts and Crafts Movement house, built at the beginning of the 20th century for the Biddulph family, who still live there. The aim of the original owners was to encourage and foster (mainly local) craftsmanship, and during the guided tour of part of the house we saw many examples of the painstaking details, especially in the woodwork. Not only in the furniture (the double dovetail joints in the large tables were, to the grandson of a cabinet maker, fascinating), but in the decorative carving around the door frames and hand rails on the staircase. Painstaking handiwork in hardwood, not the factory-made beading sold in 2m lengths in DIY stores.



After the guided tour of the house, we were free to wander through the gardens, again in the Arts and Crafts style, with a series of discrete “rooms”, and splendid views out to the Marlborough Downs, framed by shrubs and topiary. The wild flower meadows had a superb mixture of cow parsley, buttercups, primroses, cowslips and camassias. There was no evidence that there had been daffodils earlier in the season, and we have no idea how the meadows will look when these early summer flowers die down. This was an exception to the usual comment on visiting a garden of “you should have been here last week” or “you should come here next week”; we were there at exactly the right time for the meadows. Although many of the other plants were either going over (especially tulips), or not yet ready, the whole of the garden was held together hedging, topiary and trees – and fortunately the box hedges and topiary seem to be free from blight and moth.



Unfortunately, the crazy paving throughout the garden has not survived well, and in many places really needs to be dug up and relaid – a massive undertaking. Similarly, the greenhouses are showing their age, and several are in urgent need of some restoration and repair, but those that are intact had a good selection of seedlings waiting to be planted out later in the season.



On the way home from Rodmarton we were supposed to be making a stop at Bampton garden centre, where they were keeping the café open for us to buy tea, coffee and cakes, not to mention the chance to buy plants. However, as we came up to the hump-backed bridge with the charming name of Tadpole Bridge, our driver stopped to make a phone call to be told that, no, our long wheel-base coach could not cross the bridge, it would be grounded over the hump. Fortunately, where we stopped was an inn, the Trout at Tadpole Bridge, whose landlady was delighted to have 44 unexpected customers wanting a cup of tea or coffee (and some few perhaps something a bit stronger). Some of us comforted ourselves that we had saved money by not stopping at the garden centre.



Thanks to Liz for organising a most enjoyable day

As we sat in the sunshine, or indoors in comfort, and made use of clean and welcome loos, people reminisced about other unplanned happenings on AGA coach outings: the grounding of the coach on a hair-pin bend on the A39 above Lynmouth (drizzle and a long walk for those who volunteered to go and fetch some sandwiches while we waited for a tow truck, not to mention lifts in a police car for those who urgently needed facilities in Lynmouth); and the breakdown just south of Birmingham late one evening, when fortunately the coach managed to limp to a petrol station where there were some rather primitive facilities and a small shop. Here we had to wait for a replacement coach to come out from Bicester – it was so late that any local coach companies who might have been able to supply a replacement vehicle had closed for the night.

As I reflected on the perils of travel, I remembered some of our problems not on AGA holidays: my unexplained delay for several hours in Naples airport before being told we would fly home tomorrow – yet people at home already knew this from checking with Ceefax (do many people remember this text system on TV sets in the 1970s and 1980s?); the return to San Francisco airport

[Click here](#) for more photos from the day.

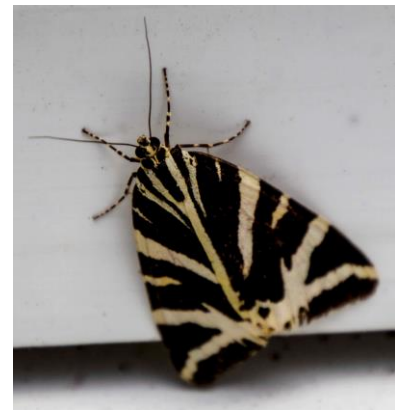
Two new visitors

The black and white moth shown on the right was resting on the outside of the conservatory one day in late August. If I had a smart phone, doubtless I could have photographed it into an app and identified it immediately. I do not have a smart phone, and while we have a number of butterfly and general insect books, we do not have a moth book, and our visitor was obviously a moth from its shape and antennae. So, I used my tablet (Kindle fire) to search for images of black and white moths. One looked promising, but I was unsure; it was labelled Jersey tiger moth. So, next thing was to look up images specifically of tiger moths. Bingo, we had a visit from a Jersey tiger moth, a species that is relatively common on the south coast, has been reported in London, and now seems to have reached as far north as Amersham. (What I did not expect, but should have, was for my search for images of tiger moths was for photos of antique, first world war, tiger moth biplanes to be included.) Not being a cyclist, I do not usually read the cycling group pages of the Chiltern magazine, but as I turned a page of the winter issue I saw a photo of a Jersey tiger moth, and the text told me that “it used to be confined to the Channel Islands and warmer parts of Devon and Dorset, but it’s now spread to London and the Home Counties”.

I did not manage to get a photo of our other visitor, but also at the end of August we had a hummingbird hawk moth supping nectar from our phlox. Unmistakable, hovering just like a miniature hummingbird – we have seen many of these beautiful birds on our two visits to upland Ecuador, and once staying with friends in northern Ontario. In Ecuador I was able to get photos, but in Ontario it was hovering round my feet as I was lying on a recliner, and could not get my camera without disturbing it. The hawk moth visited a couple of flower heads of phlox, then flew off before I could go upstairs for my camera – but there could well have been other visits; it was pure chance that I looked out of the conservatory window when I did.

a few minutes after take-off because the undercarriage would not retract (and the impressive sight of flying over the ocean to vent a full plane-load of fuel before we could land safely, not to mention the generous gift from the airline of a complimentary phone card (again, how many people remember them?) that was only valid for calls within the USA, yet we were on a non-stop flight from San Francisco to London!); and finally, the hours-long wait at Guayaquil airport in Ecuador apparently because the pilot of the incoming flight from Madrid had forgotten (?) to stop at the capital Quito en route, and had to turn round and go back.

Some of us may have noticed what appeared to be an airport with some large planes on the ground, as we neared Rodmorton. [Wikipedia](#) tells us that “Cotswold Airport is a private general aviation airport, near the village of Kemble in Gloucestershire, England. Located 8.3 km (5.2) miles southwest of Cirencester, it was built as an RAF station, RAF Kemble. The Red Arrows aerobatics team was based there until 1983. Since 2000, it is used for the storage and recycling of retired airliners, as well as flying schools, clubs, and industry.”



***Crocus colchicum* (not a true crocus) is a toxic plant.** It was popular among malingering slaves in ancient Greece, who would consume just enough to make themselves too ill to work for a day. The toxicity is due to the alkaloid colchicine, which arrests cell division and stops the build-up of uric acid crystals, formed in the turnover of DNA. It is used clinically as a short-term treatment for gout, and in experimental studies to count the number of cells that would have undergone cell division, but are now arrested in metaphase, when the chromosomes are clearly aligned, allowing easy counting when the tissue is viewed under a relatively low power microscope. Colchicine arrest is also used in horticulture to produce polyploid plants.

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

As ever, it will be much appreciated if some members could arrive about 7 pm to help put out chairs and tables; they do not put themselves out!

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; Blue Diamond (formerly Van Hage) garden centre; Little Chalfont Library; Amersham Library; Chesham Library; Coleshill Village Hall; Tesco Amersham

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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 photos from this newsletter in full size.

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

Half price entry to RHS gardens

We are affiliated to the RHS, and one of the benefits is a card allowing two AGA members at a time to visit one of the RHS gardens at half price. If you want to borrow the card, please contact Jean Bowling (secretary@amersham-gardening.org.uk)

