



Gardening with hardy perennials

Somerset Group Newsletter

January 2020



<https://somersethps.com/>

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Cover photograph:
Crocus tommasinianus
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Issue Number 64

Editorial

Hello, and welcome to the Somerset HPS January newsletter. As I write, the garden is still in the grips of what looks like a perpetual carwash; teeming rain and violent winds have battered us for weeks on end. The schizostylis lining the path by the greenhouse were beaten flat as soon as they began to flower, and the friendly babbling brook that runs in front of our house has transformed into a growling muddy torrent. I've retreated to an empty bedroom where, brightly lit by Bill's tripod-mounted photography lights, I am busy filling walls and rubbing down woodwork, resolutely ignoring the apocryphal conditions outside. I'm not generally a fair-weather gardener, but I draw the line at braving a monsoon.



Last summer brought two gardening debuts for me. Firstly, I entered the Wootton Courtenay Flower and Produce Show. I have never been a fan of local horticultural shows, but having been co-opted onto the committee I felt I had to show willing, though frankly the point of the thing eluded me. Sceptically I dug out my Royal Albert tea set and filled a tiny cup with ruby-flowered *Astrantia* 'Venice', *Pennisetum* 'Karley Rose', purple sedum and the green/bronze umbels of *Bupleurum longifolium* and, much to my surprise and grudging pleasure, found myself with a First Prize ticket on the day. The whole event brought the village together and evidently gave everyone so much enjoyment, I can see now why it is so popular.

Apart from a fairly successful crop of chard and a smattering of shallots back in the 1990s, to my chagrin I have never grown vegetables. So our major project late last summer, which involved the construction of four large, raised vegetable beds on a patch of land accessed over the stream, broke new ground for me. The metaphorical ribbon was cut when a gruff but knowledgeable gardener whose garden I visited in September gave me four little kale plants and told me to sow broad beans in October. I obeyed his advice to the letter and the baby plants are doing well under a fleece tunnel cloche. I suspect much of my first year's produce will be preyed upon by mysterious creatures while I'm not looking, and the learning curve will be precipitous at times, but I understand the value of enviromesh and I'm keen to follow Charles Dowding's no-dig principals, so there's hope.

This January's newsletter contains some great articles, kicked off by Jane Hunt's detailed account of the Somerset Group's trip to Ireland last June. What a diverse range of gardens, and such a glorious setting there in County Wicklow.

Marion Jay

Chairwoman's Letter

I volunteered to be Chair because I want to help the group continue and thrive. It is a lively, friendly group and it helped me settle into Somerset. I've been a member of the HPS for many years and I served on the Committee of the HPS Wiltshire mini-group. My background is in biological science and I am especially interested in the ecology of the garden; how all the components fit together, including the soil.

I grow a full range of plants, having a south-facing front garden and a more sheltered large rear garden, and this is reflected in my membership of several of the Specialist Groups: Shade and Woodland, Geranium and Half-Hardy. My conservatory is full of cacti and succulents, but it is hardy plants that form the majority of my collection. The Asteraceae (daisy) family is a particular favourite, especially those that have the typical daisy-shaped flower.

The HPS seed list came today so I'm in heaven for a few days, comparing it with my wants list and contemplating what I will grow next year. Sowing seeds is my favourite method of propagation, although I am getting better at taking cuttings.

I hope you will be inspired by our programme of talks and visits in 2020.

Caroline Reeves

Membership Cards

You will receive your membership card with this newsletter. **Please add your name and membership number** (on the envelope address label), and remember to pay your 2020 subscription either by post, BACS or at the January meeting (see page 5). We are using this method to save on time, effort and cost.

Caroline Reeves

New Members

Just three new Somerset Group members this season. A warm welcome to:

Ruth Grandfield - *Wiveliscombe*

Alexandra and Geoffrey Dart - *North Curry, Taunton*

Plant of the Month Competition

For those of you who may be new members, or would appreciate a reminder of the full rules of the competition, they are as follows:

Members are invited to bring a flower and/or a pot plant to each of our seven meetings at West Monkton Village Hall throughout the calendar year. The entries will be judged by our guest speakers and the top three in each section will be awarded points: 3 for 1st, 2 for 2nd and 1 for 3rd. Points will be accumulated during the year and the overall winners will receive gardening vouchers as their prize.

Cut Flower Category:

The requirement is a single flower, if that is how the plant grows, usually displayed in a vase, e.g. a narcissus or a dahlia. If it is a flowering shrub, for example with clusters of flowers along the stem, then it is the whole stem that you display. The point is that it is not a flower arranging exhibit, so multiple blooms or stems are not what we are looking for.

Pot Plant Category:

Much the same rule applies. The requirement is for a single plant in a pot. For a plant that naturally produces little offsets all around the central growth, as many succulents do, you do not have to remove all the offsets!

Bulbous and Similar Plants Category:

Following a request to have a separate category for bulbous and similar plants in the Plant of the Month Competition during the first half of the year, we will be trialling this during 2020. The new category will be part of the competition from our January meeting to our April meeting, inclusive.

You are welcome to enter a single cut stem of any flowering bulb (or rhizome or corm), which will only be judged against similar stems. A single stem bearing multiple flower heads is also acceptable. Points gained in this category do not count towards any other category.

If you submit an entry in the Bulbous and Similar Plants category, you may also enter the stem of another type of plant in the existing Cut Flower category at the same meeting (making three entries per meeting in total).

A potted bulb should be entered in the Pot Plant category, as before. A small prize may be awarded for the new category, depending upon the response.

Jane Hunt

Subscriptions

Just to remind you that subscriptions for 2020 are due this month. The cost remains the same, at £5 for single and £8 for joint membership. It is easiest to pay by standing order but for those who prefer to pay by cheque, the usual payment slip is included with this Newsletter. If you would rather pay Caroline, our Membership Secretary, direct, you can do so at the next lecture meeting.

Please note that to be a member of our Somerset Group, you are required to be a member of the National Hardy Plant Society. A Somerset Group membership cannot be issued without a National membership number. National subscriptions can be renewed on the National HPS website - <http://www.hardy-plant.org.uk> - and you can subscribe to *Cornucopia* at the same time.

Alternatively, you can pay by BACS transfer online to the Somerset Group bank account:

Bank Branch:	NatWest, Bridgwater
Account Code:	Hardy Plant Society (Somerset Group)
Sort Code:	60-03-27
Account Number:	46429956

**Please remember to quote your Somerset Group membership number
(it's on your Newsletter envelope address label).**

In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018, please be advised that your full membership details are stored electronically. For full details of the Somerset HPS GDPR policy, go to bit.ly/shps-privacy

Cornucopia

Cornucopia is a twice-yearly magazine which brings you the pick of the best articles from the HPS Local Group newsletters. Featuring plant profiles, articles on historical gardens and advice from gardeners around the UK, it's a great read.

The magazine is a snip at only £3 a year (incl. postage). Subscribe when you renew your membership, or you can subscribe separately at bit.ly/hps-cornucopia by following the link to the order form. Alternatively, call Clare at the Administrator's Office: 01386 710317. Non-members can now subscribe to Cornucopia too - why not give a subscription to a gardening friend?

HPS Somerset Group Visit to Ireland, 2019

This summer HPS Somerset organised its first gardens holiday. Members of the Group were joined by friends and relatives, members of Somerset Plant Heritage and other HPS Groups. We left frighteningly early on a sunny Sunday morning and travelled by coach and ferry to Bray, a few miles south of Dublin in County Wicklow, close to the beautiful Wicklow Mountains.

Our first day was spent visiting the superb gardens of brother and sister June and Jimi Blake, who have established gardens in different parts of the old family estate which their parents farmed. Many of the old farm buildings had been left as delightful ruins in June's garden, and the footings of an ancient coaching inn and the old coach road were visible amongst the flower beds.



Photos © Jane Hunt unless otherwise specified

June Blake's sumptuous planting provides colour all year round

June took us on a tour of her garden and explained her planting ethos. The garden was laid out in a grid pattern with each rectangle filled with herbaceous plants of all kinds, with the intention of providing a successional display throughout the year. Several hundred dahlias had not long been planted, to bring late summer colour, and each bed had a different plant - such as *Stipa gigantea* - repeated to give continuity. The more you looked at each bed, the more you saw, as plants featured individually rather than in the block planting often associated with herbaceous borders.

We then drove around the corner to Jimi's quite different garden: Hunting Brook Gardens. Having enjoyed a delicious home-cooked lunch in his conservatory, the group were treated to a garden tour by the engaging Jimi. There were so many unfamiliar but desirable plants, including a vast array of different salvias and an amazing *Cirsium eriophorum*. Jimi explained where he had obtained many of them, and he was clearly trialling some for garden worthiness. He was understandably dismayed to find that some had become lunch for the local rabbits!



© Claude Guillion (Wikimedia)

Biennial *Cirsium eriophorum* grows up to 5ft (1.5m) tall before producing its woolly, thistle-like purple flowers



The group listens as Jimi Blake describes his approach to gardening

A lot of Jimi's plants were not hardy, and we were amazed to find that so many huge specimens were moved every autumn, to reside in the conservatory over winter. We finished with a walk down through the woods, where Jimi again showed us a number of interesting shrubs he had planted amongst the trees, including

collections of aralias, scheffleras and magnolias. From the stream, we wandered up again to a wildflower meadow with stunning views towards the mountains.

Tuesday took us to two very different gardens. In the morning we visited Knockrose - a traditional cottage garden that was made on an ancient site on the edge of The Pale,

the boundary between the 'civilised' area ruled by England from Dublin during medieval times, and the wild lands held by Irish tribes. The present house itself was built 250 years ago, directly on the footings of a former fortification.



Jimi wades into fresh late-spring foliage in his borders



***Iris sibirica*, *Euphorbia griffithii* and dark-leaved penstemon at Knockrose**

Knockrose is situated on The Scalp, a cleft in the mountain above, from which huge granite boulders have tumbled in the past. We were told by the owners that until fairly recently there were no windows in the side facing the mountain, in case of rock falls! Three ley lines also converge in the garden, which the owners felt contributed to the feeling of peace and serenity enjoyed there. The garden certainly didn't lack in atmosphere and emotional charge for many of us.

The afternoon took us to Valclusa, a mountainside garden with many large and impressive specimen trees and shrubs, and a small but well-stocked nursery. Wonderful views of the Powerscourt waterfall (the highest in Ireland) and surrounding mountains could be enjoyed from the top of the garden.

That evening some of us took the opportunity to climb up to the top of Bray Head, to enjoy the wonderful views over the town and sea whilst the weather was so good.

Wednesday was rather drizzly; the famous 'soft weather' of Ireland. It didn't hamper the group's enthusiasm for garden visiting though, and we headed to the other side of Bray to visit Corke Lodge. The owner, Alfred Cochrane (an architect), joined us in the dry of the coach and gave us an introduction to the development of the gardens, explaining that the ruins positioned throughout the garden had been rescued by a builder friend from the demolition of one wing of nearby Glendalough House.

The planting consisted of green foliage plants in the main, including tree ferns, cordylines, neatly clipped topiary and a huge, writhing cork oak tree which accentuated the slightly eerie atmosphere. Alfred commented that we couldn't have picked a better day, as the weather lent itself to the gothic ambience of the gardens; gloomy and atmospheric! He was quite right and, despite the lack of flowering plants beloved of HPS members, the visit was much enjoyed by the group.



Gothically-inspired Corke Lodge Garden

From Corke Lodge we drove to Dublin Botanical Gardens in Glasnevin, via an impromptu tour of the city of Dublin by our wonderful driver, 'Dave the Bus'. Dave confessed that his knowledge of Dublin was a bit sketchy; he told us he had been there several times but only with Chinese tourists who had had their own Chinese

guide! Nevertheless we all appreciated the chance to see well-known spots such as Phoenix Park, the Guinness Brewery and Merrion Square.



© Informatique (Wikimedia)

Glasshouse at Glasnevin Botanical Gardens, Dublin

It was still raining lightly when we reached the Botanical Gardens, so we took the opportunity to take shelter in the amazing glasshouses and marvel at the outstanding plant collections from around the world. However there was still a lot to be seen outside, with a large collection of bearded irises still in bloom and a superb rock garden being most memorable.

Our final day took us to Mount Usher Gardens. We had a long guided tour which I, for one, was most grateful for as there was such a huge variety of unusual trees and shrubs (over 5000 in total) to be seen. Amongst the amazing tree collections were 16 species of nothofagus, 16 of eucryphia, 50 species of eucalyptus and 28 species of Southern Hemisphere conifers. The gardens were beautifully laid out and well-established, their development having begun in the 1880s, inspired by William Robinson's ideals of 'wild gardening'. We were told that the garden was managed on organic principles and no chemicals had been used to control unwanted pests and weeds since 1980. Having travelled one way round the garden on our tour, some of us returned to see it again from the other direction. Wonderful vistas greeted us around every corner.

By this time, as you can imagine, the baggage hold in the coach was groaningly full of all our precious plant purchases, and even more were made at Mount Usher. Long-suffering Dave made room for the extras and then we were off to our overnight hotel and the journey home.

Jane Hunt

Trip to Newton House - 9th July 2019

Newton House...wow, where do you start? First, navigation. Lots of us had difficulty finding it, including Janet, who issued the joining instructions! There are no signs for the place and you need accurate sat nav (due to a fault on Helen's iPhone, ours was not functioning), and even a lady at a bus stop only about a mile from the house hadn't the foggiest idea where it was; she didn't appear to have even heard of it. So, despite the advertised botanical gin business, it's a bit of a secretive place.



All photos © Roy Stickland

The elegant architecture and gardens of Newton House, near Yeovil

Once we reached Newton House we found gracious living amidst 60 acres of estate, with impeccable parterre beds and beautiful mature trees framing the gardens. The gardens and pleasure grounds cover around two hectares, and slope down to the River Yeo. They were laid out in the mid 18th century, with further landscaping in the 19th. A river meandered through the estate, which also had lots of newly established trees.

Meadow plantings incorporated ordinary perennials, such as lupins and solidago, scattered thinly throughout. The same wildlife-friendly style had infiltrated some of the borders; a sort of scatter-and-grow approach in which seeds of bee-friendly plants (mainly hardy annuals) mingled with herbaceous perennials, their seedheads left to self-sow for the following year.



Unusual sculptures add a surprise element to the garden at Newton House

Quirky garden features and well-placed viewing points gave the garden a distinct character. There were strong structural forms, including an unusual hedge comprising close parallel lines of hypericum and purple hebe - both of which were in flower - drawing a very definite line between the formal parterres and the parkland expanses beyond.

For the car enthusiast, an E-type Jag, a Jensen Interceptor, a top end Chevrolet, a Morris Minor and an immaculate collection of vintage Bentleys were all housed in carpeted garage bays.

Roy Stickland

Summer Plant Fair at Lower Severalls, July 2019

The sun shone on the gardens of Lower Severalls on the day of the Somerset Group's Summer Plant Fair, and the avenue of stalls was a beautiful riot of colour. One visitor was overheard saying 'it's like being in a giant sweetshop!', and bags of swaying plants were hauled out to cars throughout the day. Lots of plant advice was on offer, and the HPS stall boasted some enviably rare donations which attracted a buzz of interest. CB Plants had steady sales, and helpers at the tea tent were kept busy as visitors flocked to the garden for refreshments.



© Bill Hodgson

Business was brisk at Lower Severalls in July

All in all, it was a great success: 326 people came through the gate - 62 more than last year - and the Group made £325 in pitch fees (compared to £375 in 2018) and £328 in plant sales (£107 in 2018).

With figures improving, hopes are that the fair at Lower Severalls will become a regular fixture in the Somerset Group calendar.

Right: A popular stall where salvias and verbenas jostled with daylilies and red hot pokers



© Bill Hodgson

Trip to Prospect House - 4th September 2019

Prospect House is well-named; one enters through an unobtrusive door in a wall and follows a winding path past the house among clustering trees and shrubs until one reaches an open gravel space, from which the ground falls away and there is a wonderful view of soft green hills. Quite far below, the tower of St. Mary's church sits in the middle of Axminster, although the town itself is hardly visible.

There were plenty of welcoming tables and chairs around the gravel space, and an empty greenhouse where an art exhibition had just finished. Fox Plants were selling plants (mainly salvias) on a stall, and there was tea and cake on offer in an open wooden outbuilding. Turning slightly back on myself, at the top of a slope, I followed the edge of the garden which was thickly planted. A bit lower down were a group of apple and pear trees. The garden had many interesting shrubs and small trees, such as ginkgo, davidia, eucryphia, cercis, cercidiphyllum, myrtle, stone pine and holly.

Reaching the middle of the garden there were some more open flower-beds, with roses, ornamental grasses, phlox and a great many different salvias, and then the trees closed in again around the edge of the garden, shielded from the road by a wall and a mahonia hedge, with grapes emerging from it. Box hedges throughout were very fresh and green-looking, and the owner told me that during 30 years, I think, he had never had problems with diseases such as box blight or honey fungus.

Lavinia Mansel

2020 Programme

All lecture meetings are held at West Monkton Village Hall (TA2 8NE) and are free to members (except for the Group Plant Sale in April). Non-members are welcome, at a modest charge of £2 per person. Doors open at 10.30am and tea/coffee and biscuits are available before the lecture. The Group has a plant stall and a book stall at most meetings, plus a 'Plant and Flower of the Month' competition.

Further programme details may be found on the website, which is updated whenever fresh information is released. Location maps or directions will be supplied once a place on a trip, or ticket for an event, has been booked.

Information on how to book is at the end of the Programme pages.

Saturday 18th January – 11.00am

Lecture

David Usher – ‘Gertrude Jekyll: Her Plants and Designs’

David was Head Gardener for 15 years at Hestercombe Gardens, near Taunton, where he restored the gardens to Gertrude Jekyll's original design from the many drawings that were available to him. This talk covers Jekyll's career, from her beginnings in horticulture to the designs which made her one of the most influential women in the history of British gardening.

Plants for Sale

Wednesday 12th February

Winter Social & The Snowdrops of East Lambrook Manor Gardens

East Lambrook Manor Garden entrance and talk – £5.25 per person

We will gather in the Rose & Crown pub, opposite East Lambrook Manor Gardens, for lunch – a snack or a slap-up dinner (you choose) and then head over to East Lambrook Manor Gardens at 2.00pm for an introductory talk and to see their growing snowdrop collection.

<http://www.eastlambrook.com/pages/>



© Bill Hodgson

2020 Programme (Feb–Mar)

Saturday 22nd February – 11.00am

Lecture

Stephen Griffith – ‘Abbotsbury – Past, Present and Future’

Stephen first arrived at Abbotsbury Subtropical Garden in the aftermath of the great storm of 1990, when hundreds of trees were lost. As Head Gardener, he set about repairing the damage and discovering the history of the garden. He has since travelled the world in search of new plants, bringing his finds back to thrive in the shelter of Abbotsbury’s microclimate. Now its Curator, he will guide us around the garden and perhaps inspire us to experiment with more tender plants ourselves.

Plants for Sale

www.abbotsbury-tourism.co.uk

Wednesday 4th March

Coach trip to the Orchid Festival at Kew Gardens

£36.00 for those aged 60 and over, and £37.70 for everyone else

Immerse yourself in the tropics this winter by exploring the wonders of Indonesia through Kew’s iconic 25th annual orchid festival. Rainforests and volcanoes will be brought to life inside the Princess of Wales Conservatory through an exotic array of vibrant orchid displays.

Over 5,000 species of orchids can be found in Indonesia, alongside the staggering wildlife found nowhere else on earth. This year’s festival is a celebration of the cultural and natural diversity that is scattered across the country’s archipelago of 17,504 islands, and the scientific discovery being made by Kew’s intrepid scientists.

As well as visiting the orchids, there will be plenty of time to enjoy the rest that Kew has to offer.

NB – As Kew tickets have to be pre-purchased, there will be no refunds for illness within the last week. The coach will depart from Hankridge Farm, Taunton and there will also be a pick up at Great Western Rd car park (free) in Clevedon.

<https://www.kew.org/about-us/press-media/orchid-festival-2020-indonesia>

2020 Programme (Mar)

Saturday 21st March – 11.00am

Lecture

Dr. Andrew Ward – ‘*Marvellous Mints and Perfect Poppies*’

Dr Andrew Ward and his wife Helen own and run Norwell Nurseries, near Newark in Nottinghamshire. They specialise in rare and unusual herbaceous perennials, as well as the more usual choice of plants. This talk covers a selection of Andrew's favourites from two diverse plant families, and includes the myriad spires of salvias, ajugas and phlomis contrasting with the diaphanous chalices of papavers, meconopsis and sanguinarias.

Plants for Sale: Members may pre-order plants direct from Andrew and he will bring them to the meeting. Email wardha@aol.com or call 01636 636337 to pre-order.

www.norwellnurseries.co.uk

Saturday 28th March 10.00am - 4.00pm

HPS Somerset Early Spring Plant Fair

East Lambrook Manor

Admission £3.50 (£4 for non-members)

The Spring Plant Fair at East Lambrook Manor Gardens is a highlight of the Somerset HPS year. With an array of stalls displaying the best of early spring colour, it is hardly surprising that this event is increasing in popularity every year. The jewel-like colours of spring blooms are such a joy after the long days of winter, and there is such a wide variety available here. East Lambrook's own nursery will also be open, with a wonderful range of cottage garden plants on offer.

Refreshments available in the Malthouse Cafe on site.

Full details of nurseries will be posted on the Somerset HPS website in January

<http://www.eastlambrook.com/pages/site.php?pgid=66>



© Bill Hodgson

2020 Programme (Apr)

Saturday 18th April – 11.00am

Lecture

Jane Moore – ‘Colour in the Garden: Clever Colour Combinations’

Jane Moore joined The Bath Priory as Head Gardener in March 2003, bringing her trademark passion, enthusiasm and experience to the hotel's four acres of walled gardens. She has received many accolades, including a silver medal at Chelsea in 2003, and is well respected in the horticultural world as an innovative gardener with a broad knowledge of plants and gardens throughout the country.

In this talk, Jane brings her own broad plant knowledge to bear on sensational colour combinations through the seasons.

Plants for Sale

www.thebathpriory.co.uk/hotel/gardens

Saturday 25th April 10.00am - 12.30pm

Group Plant Sale

West Monkton Village Hall, Monkton Heathfield

Admission £1

Members can contribute to the Plant Sale in two ways: (a) take a table in your own right, or (b) grow plants to donate to the Group table.

If you want your own table, please contact Sally Gregson (details on back cover). The charge will be £5, payable on the day. This will be waived if you commit to donate all your takings to charity. There are only 16 tables available and it's first come, first served. If you have good quality plants to donate to the Group table, just bring them along on the day.

Clear and accurate labelling is vital - customers are far less likely to buy a plant when they can't identify it - so please put the **genus and species or variety** on the label, if you know it. If you don't know the species or variety, then the genus and flower colour would be better than nothing.

If you are able to help with the Plant Sale, we would love to hear from you - please use the website contact form, or phone Sally Gregson on 01749 676966.

2020 Programme (Jun-Jul)

Tuesday 2nd and Wednesday 3rd June, 2.00pm

**Self-Drive Trip to Vellacott,
Lawford, Crowcombe, Taunton, TA4 4AL**

You are invited to enjoy the delights of Pat and Kevin Chittenden's beautiful garden, with wonderful views over the Quantocks. The Chittendens are anxious not to overcrowd the garden and the limited parking available, so the visit is to be spread over two days and numbers will be limited on each of the days. Please specify which day you would prefer when booking.

Refreshments will also be available to purchase on the day.

Tuesday 16th June, 2.00pm

Self-Drive Visit to Westbrook House, West Bradley, BA6 8LS

Entry: £10 per person, including refreshments

We are visiting Westbrook House, which covers 4 acres with three distinct gardens including a formal layout around the house. Further away from the house there is also a meadow and orchard with species roses and lilacs. Planting and layout began in 2004 and continues to the present.

Saturday 4th July, 12.00 midday

Plant Swap and Lunch – Ann & Peter Owen at Watcombe

92 Church Road, Winscombe, BS25 1BP

£12 per person

We are very pleased that Ann and Peter Owen will be hosting our ever popular Plant Swap and Lunch in their exquisitely designed garden in Winscombe. They have a ¾ acre mature Edwardian garden with colour-themed, informally planted herbaceous borders. A strong framework separates several different areas; a pergola with varied wisteria, unusual topiary, box hedging, lime walk, pleached hornbeams, cordon fruit trees, two small formal ponds and a growing collection of

2020 Programme (Jul)

clematis. Many unusual trees and shrubs and a small vegetable plot.

Attendees are requested to bring a few surplus plants – seedlings, young plants and rooted cuttings – to swap with others. Numbers will be limited to 30.

Sunday 5th July, 10.00am - 4.00pm

HPS Somerset Summer Plant Fair

Lower Severalls, Crewkerne, TA18 7NX

Admission £3.50 (£4 for non-members)

The Summer Plant Fair at Lower Severalls is not to be missed. Colourfully stocked stalls flank the avenue, offering late-flowering perennials to fill those awkward gaps in your borders. This is the place to seek those more unusual plants, and find out how to grow them. Lower Severalls' own nursery, CB Plants, will also be open for business.

Wander round the gardens and find a secluded bench on the lawn. Enjoy tea and a slice of cake in beautiful surroundings. Take home some new treasures for your garden.

Further details will be given in the June Newsletter.

<https://www.lowerseveralls.co.uk>

Thursday 30th July

Coach Trip to Broomhill, nr Dorchester, and Abbotsbury Sub Tropical Gardens

£28.50 per person (including tea/coffee and cake at Broomhill)

Following February's lecture by Stephen Griffith on 'Abbotsbury – Past, Present and Future' we will be paying a visit to the gardens.

On the way, we will be visiting **Broomhill**; once a farmyard, now a delightful, tranquil garden set in 1½ acres. Island beds and borders are planted with shrubs, roses, masses of unusual perennials and choice annuals to give vibrancy and colour into

2020 Programme (Jul-Sep)

the autumn. Lawns and paths lead to a less formal area with large wildlife pond, meadow, shaded areas, bog garden and late summer border.

We then make the short journey on to **Abbotsbury Sub Tropical Gardens** to enjoy the many exotic plantings as well as the collection of hydrangeas, which should be at their best at the time of our visit.

The coach will depart from Hankridge Farm, Taunton and there will also be a pick up at Cartgate service area, off the A303 near Martock.

www.abbotsbury-tourism.co.uk

Wednesday 2nd September, 2.00pm

Self-Drive Visit to Babbs Farm,

Westhill Lane, Bason Bridge, Highbridge TA9 4RF

Entry: £8.50 per person, including refreshments (tea/coffee and cake)

Babbs Farm is a $\frac{3}{4}$ acre plantsman's garden on the Somerset Levels, gradually created from fields surrounding an old farmhouse over the last 20 years, and still evolving. Trees, shrubs and herbaceous perennials have been planted with an eye for form and shape in big flowing borders. There are various ponds (formal and informal), box garden, patio area and conservatory.

Ian and Teresa Moss will have salvias and other plants for sale.



© Jane Hunt

2020 Programme (Sep-Oct)

Saturday 19th September – 10.00am (Hall opens at 9.30am)

50/50 Plant Sale, followed by:

Charlie Pridham – ‘Climbing Plants’

Lecture starts at 11.00am

Charlie and his wife, Liz, run Roseland House Nursery in Chacewater, near Truro, Cornwall, where they hold two National Plant Collections: *Clematis viticella* and *Lapageria rosea*. They also grow a great range of other exciting climbing plants and conservatory plants, so this talk should inspire us to cover that bare wall or fence in something unusual and interesting.

The **50/50 Plant Sale** prior to the lecture at our September meeting each autumn is a popular event. The Group keeps half the money taken and returns the other half to the seller. The hall will be open from 9.30am – 10.00am to receive your plants.

Please ensure that each plant has two identical labels, both of them bearing the name of the plant, your name and the price. One will be removed so that the amount you are owed can be totted up and given to you at the end of the meeting, when you can also reclaim any unsold plants and your labels (tip: write in pencil on the labels so that they may be reused).

Selling will take place between 10.00am and 11.00am, at which point the lecture begins. Offers of help with selling on the day will be most welcome.

Plants for Sale: Members may also pre-order plants direct from Charlie Pridham and he will bring them to the meeting. Email charlie@roselandhouse.co.uk or call **01872 560451** to pre-order.

www.roselandhouse.co.uk

Saturday 17th October – 11.00am

Lecture

Sally Gregson – ‘Practical Propagation’

Somerset Group member Sally Gregson runs Mill Cottage Plants, in Wookey. Together with Bill Hodgson, she created the video on fern propagation for the Somerset Group (see website). This talk is a purely practical explanation and demonstration of how to make more from your garden, including some ‘tricks of the trade’. How to get plants for free – what’s not to like?

www.millcottageplants.co.uk

2020 Programme (Nov)

Saturday 21st November – 10am for 10.30 AGM.

Lecture

AGM, followed at 11.15am by:

Bob Brown – ‘My 30 Best Plants’

Some of you may have visited Bob Brown’s nursery, Cotswold Garden Flowers, near Evesham. His mail-order catalogue is a delight, with pithy comments and marks out of 10 for plants: scores that he changes if a plant fails to live up to its initial grading. Known for his forthright views and occasionally controversial opinions, in this talk Bob will be taking us through his best ‘doers’. It promises to be an entertaining hour in the company of a true plantsman.

<https://www.cgf.net>

Booking Information

All coach trips and garden visits must be pre-booked with Penny Berry:

Tel: 01278 662720

Email: p.berry487@btinternet.com

If you would like to book places on any of these events or trips, please complete and return the entire enclosed Booking Sheet. The Joining Instructions for each event will then be sent to you via email or by post.

To receive the Instructions via email, simply fill in your email address on the Booking Sheet **even if you believe I already have a note of it**. In addition to emailing your Joining Instructions, I will also email your booking confirmation. **Please print your name clearly**, and remember to advise me of any change to your email address.

To receive your Joining Instructions by post, **please** remember to send me **TWO SAEs** for **EACH** event you wish to attend.

Please note, I am in charge of bookings only. For queries or detailed information about our trips and events, contact Jane Hunt on **01934 732441** or email hunt.frogshole1@btinternet.com

Penny Berry

Slow Gardens: Designs for Life

Several years ago in Italy, Carlo Petrini started the Slow Food Movement in protest against the proposed McDonald's at the foot of the Spanish Steps in Rome. Since then the idea of taking time to prepare, savour, and enjoy food in the company of others has grown to encompass other aspects of our stressful lives. Perhaps it's time for the idea of Slow Gardens to take root.

Presented with a new, often very small, garden it's all too tempting to budget for a one-off, quick-fix visit to the garden centre and cram the space with perennials and annuals, just like Charlie Dimmock once did on that renowned gardening programme. After a couple of years the perennials get too big; the bullies overwhelm the pretties, and the garden becomes an overcrowded, unsatisfactory mess. Over-planting in the first place; not allowing for the potential growth and ultimate size of those plants; and digging out any that fail to live up to expectations immediately, combine to cause a deep sense of dissatisfaction. Instant gratification has its penalties, in gardens as in fast-food outlets. Gardens are not just about 'exterior decorating'.

Surely the deeper pleasure and satisfaction of gardening lies not just in creating a framework and getting the planting right, but in allowing it to evolve and mature; to drive the dynamics of the space, and to create new environments and different ecologies, both for plants and wildlife.

In very small gardens, just the width of the new house and as long as a piece of string, perhaps one could start by planting a small tree. It's not usually what appeals to 'new gardeners'. But as our summers get hotter and the sun becomes fiercer, the coolth of dappled shade suddenly becomes much more appealing. The crown of a small, deciduous tree, after a few years, would foil neighbouring eyes in winter and even block the view entirely in summer. And beneath there would be space to plant some of the most beautiful plants in the world's flora. I write as a lover of



© Bill Hodgson

Epimedium 'Amber Queen'

hydrangeas and epimediums; of delicate ferns and subtle golden grasses; spotted erythroniums and crisp, white snowdrops. A comfortable chair or two with a small table in dappled shade would invite time to sit with friends over coffee or a glass of wine, enjoying the scent of the flowers and the soporific hum of bees.



© Gumsaint (Wikimedia)

Dry gardens need little maintenance once established

On a light, sandy soil, the gardener could embrace the conditions and make an edgy, dry garden. Big pots, architectural grasses, Californian poppies, and clouds of Mexican daisies (*Erigeron karvinskianus*). These ephemerals self-seed freely around balls of dwarf lavenders, rock roses, and any number of silver-leaved sub-shrubs. All would be happy growing through a thick mulch of gravel. The whole area would require little maintenance once the initial preparation had been done. There should be no need for watering or staking, and lawn-mowing would be a thing of the past. Again, space could be left for a small table with a bright parasol, and chairs for friends and family. In spring the silver-leaved plants would need a little tidying up, a haircut; the 'weeds' removed from among the 'volunteer seedlings', and the garden would be ready for the summer.

Some gardens are seemingly blighted with damp, heavy ground where none of the garden-centre stalwarts will grow. Such a small, sunny garden would be the ideal place for some traditional cottage-garden plants, from snowflakes (*Leucojum*), cowslips and snakeshead fritillaries (*Fritillaria meleagris*) in spring; through taller



***Hesperantha coccinea* (left) and *Eupatorium maculatum* (right) both enjoy clay soils which retain moisture for longer during the summer months**

Asiatic primulas, aquilegia, and rodgersia in mid-summer; to coral-red schizostylis (*Hesperantha coccinea*), tall border phlox, and Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*) at the end of the season. These would grace more traditional flower beds, perhaps arranged around a zig-zag rill edged with pavers. With a pump installed out of sight in a corner, the angles of the rill as it crossed the garden could accommodate a larger, paved area for a table, chairs, and a parasol. Ferns would thrive in shady nooks, and winter-red elephants' ears (*Bergenia cordifolia* varieties) planted with low, bronze sedges (*Carex buchananii*) soften the corners and ease the edges.

As any of these planting schemes matured, the dynamics of the garden would change and adjust to new conditions. The single tree would grow and cast more shade and so the planting might have to be altered: the winners divided, the losers perhaps moved elsewhere. In the dry garden the gravel might need to be topped up from time to time. And some of the perennials would need to be dug up and split every five or six years in the cottage garden.

So perhaps it's time to relax our anxious need to control nature, to become more laissez-faire and enjoy the gentle change of the seasons.

Sally Gregson

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