



## Epsom Garden Society: March 2023

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Show Secretary: Cathy Flitter 07821 277708

*Dear Member, if you have any news or garden related small ads that you would like to be included in the Newsletter, please phone me, 01372 724138, or email me, [margarethaslam6@gmail.com](mailto:margarethaslam6@gmail.com)*

**Marian Oliver and Sue Glover** have arranged an outing for us to **Ramster Gardens**, Petworth Road, Chiddingfold, GU8 4SN on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> May. Plenty of Spring colour with rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias, also a sculpture trail. Make your own way, to meet as a group at the tea hut for coffee at 10.30. Cost £8, pay on arrival, and return to the tea hut for lunch at 1.15. Further details email **Sue Glover** on [outings.egs@gmail.com](mailto:outings.egs@gmail.com), or phone **Marian** 0208 393 8019. If you would like to come please let them know as the owner will need to know numbers, and please take a companion if you have mobility problems as the garden is quite large and we may not all stay together. Also, let **Sue** know your address and phone number if you either need or can offer a lift.

Our Treasurer, **Pam Davis**, has been working very hard contacting our sponsors and arranging benefits and discounts for us. We have been offered a 10% discount on full priced plants at **The Old Moat Garden Centre, Chessington Nursery and Ashted Park Garden Centre**. You will need to show them your membership card, the old one is fine, a new one will be with you next month. Tell them you are claiming a discount before they ring everything up on the till. **Rainbow Gardening** are the new owners of **Farm Lane Nursery in Ashted**, and are kindly offering us 10% off all sales, and have booked a table at our Flower Show in September, and have offered us a tour of their Nursery, date to be arranged yet. They also sell honey as they have set up beehives in the huge field behind their Nursery.

Thank you for all this, **Pam!**

Also **Dobies** are offering us a 40% discount on seeds in their on-line catalogue, and a discount on other items, tell them *our Society's code SUGD104K*.

**Cathy Flitter** writes: As we are again not in a position to run more than one Show in the year [Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September for your diaries], we are planning a '**Spring Display Coffee Morning**' on Wednesday March 15<sup>th</sup> 10-12.00 at Epsom Sports Club, Woodcote Road, Epsom. Plenty of parking available. This will be a relaxed, non-competitive opportunity for you to bring Spring items to place on a display table for all to admire whilst partaking of coffee, cake and a good chat! Basically anything you would like to share with other members can be included, vases of Spring foliage, pots of home grown bulbs, your best cut narcissi or a pot plant you are particularly proud of! We are also planning a Summer version on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> June, so get planting those sweet peas! Hoping to see lots of members there, please let us know if you are bringing something to grace the display.

For probably the last Monday evening meeting for a while [sadly numbers are unsustainable right now, but we will keep on trying], **David Millais** from **Millais Nurseries** will be giving us a talk on '**Rhododendrons – From the Himalayas to Chelsea**'. **David** is a renowned expert and is kindly donating his fee to **Perennial**, the Gardeners Charity. This will take place at St Barnabas Church Hall, Temple Road, Epsom and please note the slightly revised start time of 7.30 for 7.45pm. Please try to be prompt as we find members flagging when refreshments get too late in the evening. As an additional bribe, **David** will be bringing some of his lovely plants to sell! This talk has been four years in the planning and with many cancellations, so lots of support will be welcome!

As you may have gathered, we are working hard to keep the Society going as best we can and are hoping for lots of extra support from our members for all the new and exciting plans for 2023 and beyond. Many societies have closed or had to drastically reduce what they do. Together with different meetings, outings, our new 'display coffee mornings' and lots of wonderful discounts thanks to **Pam's** work, I think our Society is looking extremely good for the future, do please find time to attend at least one event this year and keep Epsom Garden Society going for many years to come.

Our Secretary and Publicity Officer, **Kim Shrosbree**, has updated our *Facebook account* for us. [facebook.com/loveofgardening/](https://facebook.com/loveofgardening/) Please follow us on Facebook.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> February **Graham Blunt** from *Plantbase Nursery* in Sussex came to give us a talk on '*Overwintering Exotics.*' On the way he decided a more useful talk would be '*Climate Change and how to stop your plants dying because of it.*' We have all lost plants in the long Summer drought, and it has been terrible for professional plants-men. Wisley had intended running a Hebe trial and had planted eighty varieties, but now seventy-eight have died and they have quietly abandoned it. Graham advises us that if our plants look droopy in the evening, wait and see what they look like in the morning. If they are still wilting then water, otherwise their roots will start to grow towards the surface and you will have to continue with life support!

Another problem has been UV rays, they used to only be strong over a few hours at mid-day, but now they can last all day. **Graham** took a large Agave in his van to *Harlow Carr* for a display he was due to make, and lifted it out into the sunshine when he got there, but the next day the leaves were covered in white blotches. Diagnosed as sunburn, and not included in the display.

The temperatures were so high too, when the thermometer in the plastic tunnel reached 33 degrees for several days in a row, **Graham** assumed that it was broken, but sadly it was true. Even jungle plants struggled as they are shaded by companions in the jungle and temperatures are usually about 25 degrees.

After all the heat there was almost a ground frost in October and then warm nights in November with double figure temperatures. Plants started growing again and the leaves stayed on the trees. Even cacti and succulents found the temperatures a trial in the Summer and stopped growing. Now the Spring has been too wet and scientists say we are in for further weather disruption. Graham keeps an eye on weather forecasts, and says checking what Poland is having sometimes helps as it travels across to us three days later. He knew the 'Beast from the East' was coming but not quite what to do about it!

Worse for some people, **Tom Hart-Dyke's World of Plants** has lost several continents, and specialist Dahlia growers with tubers stored in unheated sheds have found that they have all rotted away. **Graham** grows his plants in tunnels that he can heat to different temperatures to please different groups of plants, but the really chilly weather around the shortest days meant that he couldn't open the doors or the wind would whip the covers off, and the sun wasn't there to warm the tunnels up, so botrytis has set in and he is losing plants to that.

He warns us that peat is going to be banned from use in potting compost next year, but doesn't think there will be enough materials such as coir and wool to meet the demand. This is already causing problems in America, one shipment of plug plants worth £4000 heading for *Plantaholics* was destroyed by American Customs because of the compost around their roots.

You might think reading the above that it was rather a grim talk, but not at all, **Graham** was such a cheery speaker. He told us he was definitely a glass half full chap, someone might come along and top him up! *Thanks, Graham, for this lovely talk.*

I have been reading '*Is that cat dead?*' by **John Robertson** lately. He was the volunteer who took people for guided walks around the *Poison Garden at Alnwick Castle*. The most often asked question during the Summer was the one about the cat, and **John** was sometimes tempted to say he just thought the most suitable decoration for a poison garden would be a dead cat. Actually **Digger** wasn't dead at all, she was the resident cat and just enjoyed sleeping in a rather abandoned and splurged out posture in a sunny patch.

**John** had given up telling children to never eat berries in case of dreadful consequences, when he realised that they would just feed one to their friend and watch to see what would happen. A lady spoke up when he said this and told the group that her brother had fed her a deadly nightshade berry when she was sitting in the pram. Consequence? Three days in hospital.

I was interested to read about Ragwort, *senecio jacobaea*, alkaloids in it are supposed to be very poisonous and attack the liver in horses, and yet it tastes so sour that it is very hard to swallow even one small leaf. However, horses and cattle will eat it if there is nothing else, and once it is made into hay the nasty taste disappears but it is still a cumulative poison. Strangely, once the grazing field returns to normal, they may start to seek out the ragwort. It is possibly addictive, and in Mexico some of the sixty varieties are sought by the Mexican Indians for their psychoactive properties. One odd thing, for some reason it was introduced to New Zealand in the 1800s, and spread everywhere and became a terrible nuisance to farmers. They were very pleased to discover that sodium chlorate weedkiller would finish it off, but unfortunately the fumes

were absorbed by their cotton trousers and the friction with the saddle as they rode around their estates would sometimes cause their trousers to explode. Luckily in 1946 an alternative weed killer was found.

Rhubarb is famous for being both nice and nasty, the pink stems make lovely crumble puddings, but the leaves contain oxalic acid and possibly anthroquinone alkaloids which can cause drowsiness, comas, internal bleeding and finally death. During World War 1 advice to use rhubarb leaves as a vegetable was given, then had to be hastily withdrawn after several deaths.

Other creatures may not be susceptible to the same poisons that we are, and in the North West of Scotland rhododendrons are particularly prolific and may be the only plant flowering early in the year. Bee keepers are aware that sometimes bees die from visiting the rhododendron exclusively and take action to prevent the bees foraging until other plants come into flower and the danger passes. Our old friend the ragwort however, can be present in honey produced from areas with a high density of plants. The concentration of alkaloids is too low to cause noticeable effects but the honey has a bitter unpleasant taste and a dark colour. Bee keepers recognise this and discard those jars without tasting them.

People are surprised to see fennel in a poison garden, it is included because it can be mistaken for hemlock which will really hurt you. Even little shreds hitting the skin while mowing down a clump can cause light sensitivity in the skin with rashes and heat bumps, and even persist for several years after coming in contact with it. Where this explanation breaks down though is that fennel smells deliciously of aniseed whereas hemlock smells of mice.

It also seems odd to see Rosemary in a poison garden, but the aromatherapy oil made from it is believed to be capable of causing a miscarriage. There are lots of lovely folk lore stories about Rosemary, apparently the flowers were white until Mary draped her cloak over the bush on the flight to Egypt, and the flowers turned blue and have been ever since. Also the plant is not supposed to live longer than 33 years, Jesus's time on earth. One lady said 'that's not true!' and when questioned said 'Until I got married at thirty-eight I was Rosemary Bush!'

Small Ads: **A1-KO IH 1600 DS Garden Shredder, £20.** {Blades replaced recently.} 01372 743351.

**Supers and frames for bee-hives, £20 each.** And has anyone got a 1963 sixpenny piece or a 1963 threepenny bit? [For a celebration birthday], please phone 0779640 5752.

*Best wishes Margaret*

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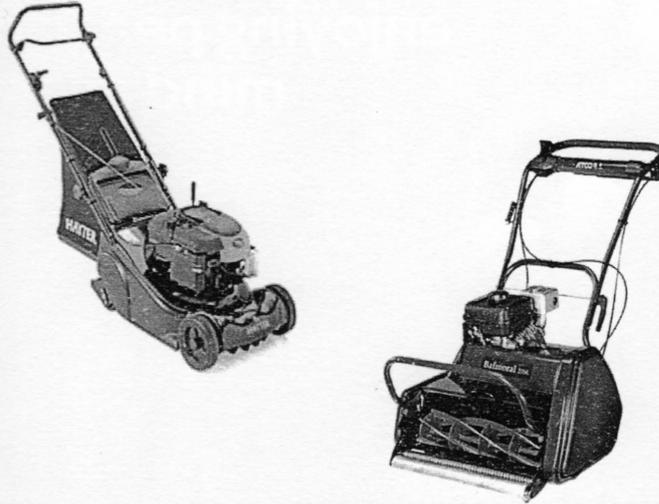
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