



## Epsom Garden Society: April 2023

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*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)*

Your Sub is now due. It is £5 for the year. If you have a road rep they will knock for it. Alternatively you can pay by bank transfer: S J Roebuck, Halifax Bank, account 00114786, sort code 11-02-91. Please add your name as reference. Or you can send cash or a cheque for £5 payable to 'Epsom Garden Society' to Steve at 21 Higher Green, Epsom KT17 3BB. Your new card will be delivered by a road rep or posted.

If you wish to join us at Ramster gardens, Chiddingfold, GU8 4SN on Tuesday May 9<sup>th</sup>, please let Sue or Marian know by April 25<sup>th</sup>. Enquiries and bookings on [outings.egs@gmail.com](mailto:outings.egs@gmail.com) or 02083938019. The photos on the web-site are stunning!

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*.

A '*Spring Display Coffee Morning*' was held on Wednesday March 15<sup>th</sup> 10-12.00 at Epsom Sports Club, Woodcote Road, Epsom. It was a pleasure to see all the Spring flowers and arrangements that people brought, and we all enjoyed having longer to talk to each other than we usually manage at the tea break at our evening meetings. The Sports Club have a lovely Hall, and it was so nice looking out at the grass and sunshine. Thanks to **Carolyn Page** for bringing a super selection of seeds for us to help ourselves. We are also planning a *Summer version* on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> June, 10 – 12, so get planting those sweet peas! There will be a small *Plant Sale* outside, so please bring anything you can spare for this, and bags in case you find a treasure! Hoping to see lots of members there.

Next talk at the Sports Club is on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> April at 10am when **Peter Herring** will tell us about '*Magnolias*.'

On Monday 20th March **David Millais** from *Millais Nurseries* gave 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. **David** also brought some of his lovely plants to sell! This talk was four years in the planning and with many cancellations, so it was lovely that it finally happened. **David** has five consecutive Chelsea Gold Medals! He has been opening his garden for the yellow book for the last thirty years, and has just been given a sundial to recognize this by the charity. He hopes that fees for garden entry this year will mean that he has raised over £30,000, over the years. The garden is *Crosswater Farm*, Crosswater Lane, Churt, Farnham GU10 2JN, from 10 to 4.30pm on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> May. *Millais Nurseries* is adjoining, where you will find over 900 different varieties ranging from tiny alpine dwarfs to architectural big leaf specimens. The plant centre and trials garden featuring new varieties from around the world should be in full bloom. Admission £6, children free. Teas in aid of Christian Aid.

**David's father** opened the Nursery in 1970 and **David** took over in 1990. He has a staff of seven people and between them all they manage to propagate 30,000/40,000 plants a year. **David** goes on plant collection expeditions to find new plant material that the nursery can sell. We were horrified to see the photo of the old bus navigating an extremely dodgy bridge in Kathmandu. They had to get up the mountains to 2500 -3000 metres to be sure that the plants would be hardy enough for the U.K. Strangely, red flowered plants are not really hardy, whereas the white ones from the same area do well. Someone asked if they were poisonous and was shown a photo of a porter enjoying a little snack of nectar sucked from the base of a beautiful head of flowers, although the foliage might be poisonous to sheep. The large leaf rhododendrons grow in the wetter lower areas. **David** was exploring the Yalung valley collecting these, and woke up to find a leech sucking away inside his ear. Higher up, plants have smaller leaves, and can grow tucked away between boulders on the mountain side. They are covered by snow all winter, enjoy a monsoon in June and then gradually dry out until the snow returns again. This means that they really will have trouble growing in full sunshine on a hot patio, but in the shade will be fine. To propagate them collect seed in Autumn, dry them, but not on a radiator, to crack the seed pods. Then save in paper

bags, five years in a fridge, ten years in a freezer, if you are not ready to plant them, and plant in January with lamps to extend the light levels. Prick out the seedlings in May/June. It takes three years growth before the big leaf ones are ready to sell. **David** was pleased to see a beautiful specimen in Windsor Park, and on closer inspection found his Plant Hunter's identification mark DM22 on the label.

Azalea cuttings are taken in June/July. They take from six weeks to six months to root. August is too hot to try this, so they start again in September. **David** has invested in an Avaposensor, this measures humidity and mists water when necessary. More economical than a mister. There was a lovely photo of serried ranks of newly potted 5litre hybrids covered with snow, just like a little terracotta army.

Fungicide is only used four times a year now instead of every fortnight. Also, they have found a way of boosting the microbes in their compost tea by bubbling oxygen through the mix. They like to be organic where they can, and use nematodes to control vine weevil and put a tiny amount of copper in the irrigation water to control bugs. If you get bud blast, this is caused by an insect, and you will need to pick the swollen buds off and burn them. SB Plant Invigorator helps deter leaf hoppers and prevent fungal spores. You can apply three doses early in the year. This works well on roses too.

Rhododendrons really like acidic soil, pH 4.5 -5.5, moist but free draining, and dappled sun. On clay, build up the surface so that they are 2" above the ground, and use anything you can to loosen the soil. They root near the surface, so dig a wide shallow hole to plant. Best to plant in September to March so that they can settle in before Spring. Water well in June/July so that they think it is a monsoon, then you will get flower buds forming rather than growth buds. Tap water is fine. Feeding with slow release food like Vitax is good. **David** seemed to think this was tricky to get hold of, but **Cathy** had no trouble on Amazon.

Dead head spent flowers to prevent rot spreading down the stems, also you will get three new flowers for each one you remove, and it helps young or sickly plants.

If you need to prune, use secateurs after flowering, or loppers and saws in early Spring.

We asked about *Chelsea Flower Show*, and were told that it costs £10,000 to put on a Show, so you really need a story to interest Gardeners World. In 2013 they wondered what was happening in 1913? There was lots of Plant Hunting in the Himalayas then, so they made an exhibit based on this with a porters rucksack and basket like the ones in Nepal. Luckily **David** found these in an antique shop in Bangor, or it would have been very expensive to have them shipped in. Happily, Gardeners World loved it and kept featuring it on their programme, possibly because it was so colourful when everyone else was having a rather green year. This was a lovely talk, and now we all feel like experts!

The **RHS** will be holding *National Gardening Week 2023 from Monday 1<sup>st</sup> to Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May*, themed around the *Coronation*. This should be exciting as our new King is such a keen gardener. They are hoping to encourage gardening groups to put on activities during the week and share what they are doing.

Sad news, we have heard that **Patience Morriss** has died. She was our longest serving member on the Committee as she had taken over when her father retired at age 91 in 1970. She moved to Kingsbridge in Devon three years ago to be near her family. Before that you may remember her always running the raffle table at our Shows and Talks. I hadn't realised until I went to a Gardeners Question Time recording with her that she didn't give herself a ticket in case she won and it looked like a fix. It was lovely because on this occasion she did have a ticket and won first prize! She was so pleased and excited.

**What to do in the garden now:** Revitalise your rhubarb by dividing and propagating an overcrowded clump. Dig round and lift the entire crown and separate it with a spade. Make sure each section has a good root and at least one big bud. Choose younger pieces from the outside of the clump to replant and throw away the old woody core. Mulch the new plants with well-rotted compost or manure but don't bury the crown in the centre. If you are planting a new rhubarb dig in plenty of compost or manure and put in your plant so that the tip of the crown is just visible above the soil. You could extend the season by growing some different varieties, 'Grandad's Favourite' is early and 'Goliath' is a later variety, still ready to eat in July. Plant snowdrops, establish new colonies by moving a few from a group you have already, or invest in a new variety. They will establish more easily if they are already growing rather than from bulbs. A friend used to whisper if anyone talked to her when she was moving something, so that the plant wouldn't notice. Chit potatoes, prune roses and then feed them, move shrubs unless the ground is water-logged. Sow peppers and chillies now as they need a long growing season.

Would anyone like some old '**Garden Answers**' magazines from Jan 2021 – August 2022? Contact 020 8394 2168. If not, they'll go in the recycle bin.

*Best wishes Margaret*

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