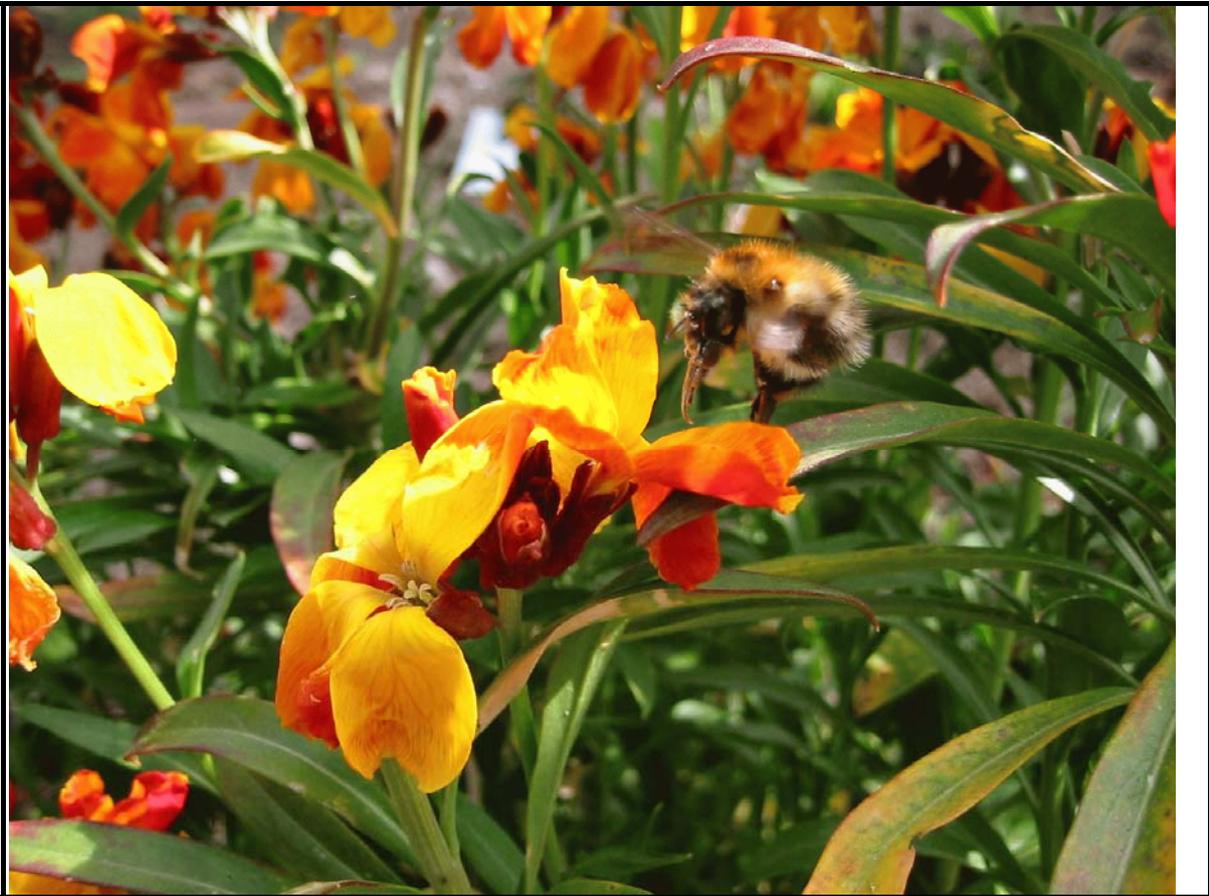


MEOPHAM GARDEN ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



Spring 2003

This year our Summer Social takes place on 9th June 2003 and includes a visit to Meopham Valley Vineyard. We meet at the Wine Shop - 6:30 - 6:45pm.

We will have the opportunity to try 6 wines as we tour the vineyard. Please wear suitable shoes and bring something to sit on. If the weather is bad we will have our refreshments and wine in the barn.

Tickets can be obtained from Tony Thomas. The cost is £6 including refreshments.

Recent Events

February

Mr Newman, a regular speaker from Hadlow College gave a talk entitled 'Pests and Diseases'

March

Mr L Hodgkiss gave a most interesting talk entitled 'Pelargoniums from Start to Finish'. There was plenty of practical advice on their propagation and care. He also showed a few slides to indicate what can be achieved if you know how.

April

After the disappointment when last year's fuchsia speaker failed to turn up we were very pleased to welcome Mr Holmes for a talk entitled 'Aspects of Fuchsias'. He gave a practical demonstration on propagation showing us how the type of cutting will determine the type of plant obtained. He brought along a selection of his bonsai fuchsias some of which were 16 years old and only about 1ft tall. He finished by presenting some slides, mainly of prize exhibits from fuchsia shows.

Spring Show - Show Secretary's Report

There were 244 entries compared to 280 in 2002. For the classes introduced this year: Snowdrops – 2 entries (only 1 arrived on the day), Crocus – 1 entry and Miniature Tulips – 7 entries. The poorly supported classes this year were pot or bowl of alpine bulbs or plants, the crocus class and parsnips.

Mr. Everest judged the daffodils (Class 1) particularly thoroughly and awarded the Chairman's Cup to Barbara Macknish. The Association hyacinth class (Class 2) and the Meliker Cup went to our chairman Douglas Nicholson. The hyacinth bulbs were not up to the usual standard with many producing short double heads of flowers. Next year's hyacinth (Sky Jacket) is a blue variety, closer to the species colour and should produce better blooms.

Katherine Green collected the Hasler Vase, awarded for the best entry in Classes 4-8 and the Certificate for the best bloom in the whole show. She also won the Harvel Spring Challenge Cup for accumulating the most points in Section 1. She had a total of 42 points, well ahead of Tony Thomas who had 27 points.

The Oldham Goblet for the best flower arrangement was won by Winifred Hughes. The two floral art classes are regularly supported by 3 of our members, but how about some fresh competition? It would be good to see others having a go at the Autumn Show.

The Domestic Section was well supported with 26 entries overall. Here too it would be lovely to see more members entering their culinary creations in future.

Thanks go to everyone who helped set up and dismantle the show, those who baked wonderful cakes to sell and who ran the refreshments and to Vera Bingham for running the raffle.

Jayne Macknish

The **Autumn Show** is on Saturday 13th September and Jayne is looking for more entries than the 182 there were last year. She would especially like to see some entries from new exhibitors so please look at the schedule now and start nurturing some potential entries. It's all good fun and you may even win the Everard Bowl for the new exhibitor with the most points from both shows.

Forthcoming Events

June 9th – Garden visit to Meopham Valley Vineyard

For details see front of Newsletter

July 14th – Houseplants and Win – Mr H. Townsend

August 11th – Exhibiting, Having the Edge – Mrs June Wilkins

Food Miles

We are all aware that modern supermarket imports have made it possible to buy fruit and vegetables that are seasonal in the UK all year around. Onions imported from New Zealand travel about 12000 miles by sea and even the ingredients used to brew beer in Germany may have travelled total of nearly 24000 miles.

In order to reduce the impact on the environment there have been calls for us to eat more locally produced food but according to a report in Which? (January 2003) this might not be the straightforward answer it seems. It's all very well to buy produce from a local farm but what if the farmer uses environmentally unfriendly means to produce his crops? Intensive agriculture causes drinking-water contamination and damage to wildlife. It has been shown that growing flowers in greenhouses in Holland uses as much fuel as growing them in the sun of Columbia and flying them to Holland.

All the major supermarkets have policies to buy local produce where they can but the definitions of what is 'local' vary considerably. Waitrose is the only supermarket whose local produce must come from within 30 miles of the store and these goods are marked with a weathervane. For the other supermarkets, 'local' can mean the UK. Look carefully at the labelling. Marks & Spencer's labels will even give the farmer's name and location. The local produce is often speciality food which costs more to produce and therefore to buy.

The type of transport used also makes a difference. Planes are by far the least fuel-efficient way to transport food long distance whereas shipping is the most efficient but we also have to be aware of the shelf life of the crop being transported. It is estimated that more than a quarter of all lorries on our roads are involved with food transportation.

If we avoid buying any imported produce we can also end up harming developing economies. The sugar cane industry in Mozambique has been hard hit by subsidised sugar exports from the EU.

So what can we do?

As gardeners we ought to consider growing at least some of our food at home thus removing transportation and hopefully environmental damage from the equation. Many foods do not need much space and choosing crops which do well in our unpredictable climate can provide a worthwhile alternative to just buying what's on offer at the supermarket. For example it only takes a few runner bean plants to provide ample supply of fresh, tasty beans over a long period in the summer. Admittedly self-sufficiency in potatoes requires rather more land than the average urban plot can spare.

Buy local produce when you are sure it has been produced in an environmentally friendly way.

Don't completely avoid buying imports as buying from developing countries can help their economies.

Buy Fairtrade products where the producers are guaranteed a fair share of the price you pay.

Avoid buying food that is 'over-packaged' as disposal of packaging also harms the environment. Be prepared to recycle as much packaging as possible. Our local council now provides special strong clear bags which are used to recycle items such as plastic, paper, card and tins.

Of course there are also fruits such as bananas that have to be imported. But even the country's favourite fruit is now under threat from a virus.

There is a movement known as the 'Campaign to end European farm subsidies'. See www.which.net/campaigns/food/production for details.

Historical Snippet

The beautiful and the edible still tend to be divided by Gardeners. We enjoy potatoes but would never, like Marie Antoinette, wear a corsage of their flowers. We grow millions of gladioli for their flowers but never think to eat their corms which are said to taste like chestnuts when roasted and were certainly eaten in Africa, where many of them originated.

Before the African gladioli were common in the West, the Mediterranean and the rare British gladioli had been grown in gardens and used medicinally. John Gerard called them "Corne-flagge" or "Sword-Flag". They were known in ancient Greece and some scholars think they were the original hyacinth because the wild Greek gladioli have markings on their petals similar to those on the hyacinth. The name "gladiolus" comes from the Latin word *gladius* (a sword), from the shape of the leaves. An ancient name for the gladiolus (and the iris) was "*xiphium*" from the Greek *xiphos* (a sword). John Parkinson, with his usual vivid accuracy, described the "stiffe greene leaves, as if it were out of the side of another, being ioyned together at the bottome." By the time he was writing, the new gladioli had already been imported, and Parkinson said, "John Tradescante assured me, that hee saw many acres of ground in Barbary spread over with them." It must have been a splendid sight. Barbary was the Mediterranean region of

Africa and gladioli are not what we hear about there nowadays.

By far the largest number of our modern gladioli come from South Africa. From the end of the eighteenth century they were imported in huge quantities, including many sent back by James Bowie, a disreputable adventurer who botanised with Francis Masson. A large number of hybridisations of gladioli have been made. An important one was made in 1820 by Robert Sweet, whose career as a hybridist ended when he was accused of stealing garden pots from Kew. Another was the 'Maid of the Mist', sent home by Francis Fox, the engineer who built a cantilever railway over the Zambesi River at Victoria Falls. This gladiolus was found flourishing in the waterfall's misty spray and had adapted to the constant moisture by developing a hooded upper petal which kept its pollen-bearing stamens dry. It introduced yellow and orange shades into the hybridised gladioli's colour spectrum.

In most of Britain and North America gladioli have to be dug up and stored over winter, Of course even if the climate is warm enough to leave the corms in the ground, mice share none of our compunctions about eating what is beautiful and can destroy a bed of gladioli as effectively as the severest freeze.

(Adapted from *100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names* by Diana Wells)

Make a note: 26 July 2003 10:30 am to 1:00 pm Meadow View, Hodsoll Street.

Following the success of the snowdrop 'safari' earlier this year, Barbara Macknish is once again opening her garden for your enjoyment. Refreshments will be available.