

MEOPHAM GARDEN ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER



Great Dixter

Summer 2004

Autumn Show

Make a note of the date: Saturday September 18th. Start now to read through the schedule, which starts on page 12 of the Association booklet, and make a list of the plants that you have in pots or in the garden that you can turn into winners in five weeks' time. For pots of foliage or flowers you should play Goldilocks with feed and water – not too little, not too much, but just right. Protect blooms and foliage against the elements – wind, rain and scorching sunshine and against the attentions of foraging insects. Make sure all your vegetables get plenty of water. Fruit of all kinds will need to be protected against plundering birds and possibly even foxes and badgers. Check the rules on page 4 and call Jayne to make your entries before 9 pm on Thursday September 16th.

Recent Events

10th May Growing Flowers for Drying Mrs Caroline Alexander

Caroline Alexander who runs the Hop Shop at Shoreham came to speak to us about 'Growing Flowers for Drying'. Drying flowers is nothing new; those found in Egyptian tombs still had their colour. She explained how they started in the 1980s by drying hops for decoration using techniques developed by the Dutch and learnt by trial and error what varieties of plants to grow and at what stage to cut to get the best end product whether it be essential oils or the flowers themselves. They exhibited at the Chelsea Flower Show from 1993 – 1997. They now grow 45 acres of lavender mainly used for essential oil production. She brought along some of the flowers that they use and explained how they successfully dry them.

14th June Garden Visit to Rock Farm, Nettlestead



12th July A Naturalist in South East England Mr John Buckingham

John Buckingham treated us to an excellent slide show whilst describing a year in the wildlife of our area. He told how coastal plants are heading inland because of our road network and how they like the salt we use on roads in winter. There are many birds that have special relationships with a particular plant or tree. For example the nuthatch is only found where there are oak trees and elephant hawkmoths feed on fuschias. Many birds consume vast numbers of insects particularly when feeding young so by encouraging them and other fauna such as ladybirds and lacewings into the garden you can greatly reduce the number of infestations of, for example, aphids and you may not need to resort to chemicals.

13th July Visit to Pashley Manor Gardens

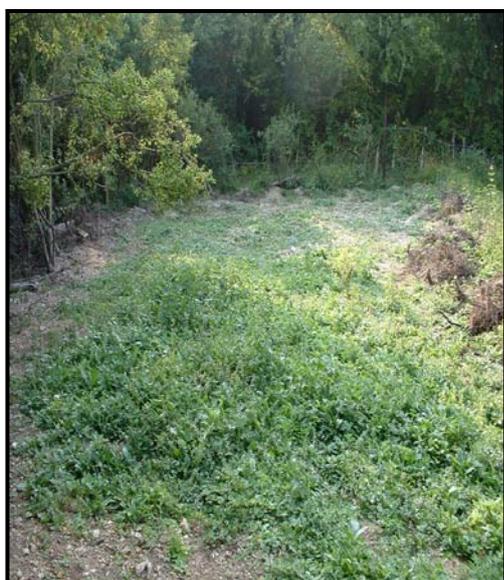
Vera chose a nice sunny day for our visit to Pashley Manor. It was a little breezy, but it was warm enough for us to concentrate on the plants, the planting, the lake, the walks and the overall effect. All rounded off with tea, cakes and conversation on the terrace.



Forthcoming Events

13 th September	Trees and Shrubs	Mr David Butt
18 th September	Autumn Show	See front page
11 th October	The Small Greenhouse	Mr H. C. Newman
8 th November	Badger Watch	Mr Dick Pettet

The Wildflower Meadow



The seed was sown on the 9th May and so began the dry spell. I watched the forecast anxiously waiting for some rain. Just as I was wondering how to get water to the site the rain arrived. The picture was taken a few days ago and although patches are starting to look quite green I'm going to have to do something about the nettles and blackthorn that have regenerated. The dominant plant is scarlet pimpernel with other natives that have remained dormant for years finding the right conditions for germination. Underlying the rampant natives there are some grasses that featured in the mix of seeds that were sown. The foxes and rabbits have also enjoyed digging up the nice loose soil.

(Jo Latimer)

Biological Control

A couple of years ago we used a codling moth pheromone trap among our apple trees. It was slightly late being placed in position, but we did seem to get some benefit from it. This year we just didn't get around to buying the kit and so we may have a lot damaged apples to turn into sauce as soon as they are harvested. We have heard that the moths will overwinter under a piece of hessian if it is placed around the trunk of the tree. The trick is to remove the hessian, and dispose of the moths, before they decide it is time to make the journey to the upper parts of the tree.

We don't practice high levels of hygiene in the greenhouse. We never fumigate and never spray insecticide inside. Any pots that are too far gone have to be taken outside for spraying. Mostly we treat *before* the pots are taken in – especially if they have come from a garden centre. We try not to disturb any spiders that make their homes in the greenhouse. Recently, I noticed an infestation of greenfly building up on the stems of some strawberry plants I had taken in there from some outside staging because the birds were not leaving us any. I caught a couple of ladybirds and set them to work on the greenfly. In just a few hours the greenfly had all been devoured. The blackfly that smothered the beans and the artichokes were all dealt with by ladybirds, hoverflies or their larvae.



Finally, we seem to have an inexhaustible supply of tiny black flies in the greenhouses, probably fungus gnats, and brought in on compost or purchased pot plants. They are generally only a nuisance, but a large infestation can be detrimental to delicate seedlings. However, over a few months, our carnivorous plant, “Pinguicula Moranensis Caudata” (courtesy of Bob Parnell) will trap over a hundred of these pests, controlling their numbers so that we see very few.

Historical Snippet

Forsythia

Common Names: Forsythia, golden-bell

Botanical Name : *Forsythia*.

Family : *Oleaceae*

The Scottish gardener William Forsyth was a showy character, like the shrub that bears his name. After Robert Fortune had brought back forsythia from China and it had become popular, its ease of propagation and hardiness caused it to be planted in gardens everywhere. Then, like a lot of wildly popular plants, it fell into disrepute, and so-called discriminating gardeners talked of it as “vulgar”.

Forsyth, too fell into disrepute. In 1770 he became director of the Chelsea Physic Garden. He was able and enthusiastic, reorganizing and replanting the Chelsea garden, exchanging seeds and plants with gardens abroad, making the first British rock garden with forty tons of old stone from the Tower of London and lava brought back from Iceland by Sir Joseph Banks, and helping to found the Royal Horticultural Society. However, in spite of all this laudable horticultural activity, he seems to have been a bit of a rascally entrepreneur. He invented, or claimed to invent, “Forsyth’s Plaister”. By 1799 overuse of forests had left few great trees suitable for wartime shipbuilding, and those that remained were often diseased. In his gardens, Forsyth had used his plaster to seal wounds in fruit trees after he had removed diseased limbs, and he offered to sell the recipe to the British navy. The navy fell for it and the treasury paid him fifteen hundred pounds – an immense sum in those days. The secret recipe turned out to consist of cow dung, lime, wood ashes, and sand

mixed to a malleable paste with soapsuds and urine. Its efficacy was challenged by Thomas Knight, an expert on the cultivation of fruit trees, who refused to concede that “man, with the aid of a little lime, cow dung, and wood ashes is capable of rendering that immortal, which the great God of nature evidently intended to die”. A Quaker doctor, John Lettsom, supported Forsyth, but when challenged by Knight with a wager of a hundred guineas that he could not “produce a single foot of timber restored after being once injured to the state asserted by Mr Forsyth”, he replied primly that his religion did not allow him to make wagers. Forsyth, however, died in 1804 before the controversy could be resolved.

Of course, Forsyth may have believed that his plaster was truly effective – or it may even have worked. His instructions included cutting away diseased parts of the tree before applying the cure and, as we are discovering increasingly, plants as well as people have self-healing powers we do not fully understand. The trees, with canker removed, may simply have recovered as they would have without the plaster.

The forsythia asserts itself every spring with brilliant blasts of yellow, even sometimes where the house it adorns has fallen into ruins. Occasionally this bold showiness is devastated by an early frost, but mostly forsythia gets away with it, and cheers us all up with its very audacity.

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