

MEOPHAM GARDEN ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



Photo by Mike Hughes

Spring 2006

Summer Show 12th June 2006

Our summer social event this year will be a small show with the winner voted for by those present. There is no charge to members but for a mere £2 non-members will also be welcome to come along and take part. Refreshments will be provided and there will be a quiz and a raffle. There is no need to pre-book your entries just bring them along on the evening and exhibit. The three classes are as follows:

1. A fragrant rose
2. A plant **grown** in an unusual container
3. A vase of garden flowers (Association vases will be provided)

Forthcoming Association Meetings & Other Events

- May 8th Garden Design Ken Akers
- June 6th Coach trip to Hyde Hall. Details from Jackie Fullalove
- June 12th Summer Social as detailed above
- June 24th Nurstead Fete
This annual event is well attended and has been a good fund raising exercise in previous years. We are having a stall and Jennifer Ward has kindly offered to co-ordinate the club efforts again this year. She is asking for people to provide tombola prizes, plants and help on the day. Start thinking about this now and sow a few extra seeds or pot-on a few extra seedlings so we have a plant stall fit for a garden association. Please let Jennifer have your donations or deliver them to Nurstead during the morning of the fete.
- July 12th Visit to Yalding Organic Gardens meet there at 6:45pm for 7pm
This is a WEDNESDAY as they are not open on Mondays. The charge of £10.50 includes a guided tour of the gardens followed by a cheese ploughman's. The treasurer will need to have names and money by the June meeting. Please note there will be no meeting at the village hall on Monday 10th July.
- August 14th Houseplants Mr David Godden
(including Plant Clinic)
- August 23rd Coach trip to Great Dixter via Rye
This is the garden created by the late Christopher Lloyd and since his death in January it has been run by a trust who, hope to preserve the garden. If you are interested please let Vera Bingham have names and money as soon as possible. Pick up points, times and cost (in region of £14/£15 to include seat on the coach and entrance to house and garden) will be confirmed by the June meeting. We will stop off in Rye in the morning to give travellers an opportunity to look around and have lunch.

Cobham Gardeners Society

For further details of these events please contact Chris or Di Spree:

- May 10th Culinary Herbs Jean Bowles Meadow Rooms starting at 8pm
- June 10th Summer Show at the Meadow Rooms starting at 3:15pm
- June 24th Car outing to Beth Chatto's garden. Depart Meadow Rooms 9:30am.
- July 5th Visit members gardens starting at 7pm
- July 19th Visit to Stoneacre, Otham, Nr Maidstone. Meet there at 7pm.

Recent Events

February 13th Dig for Victory Russell Bowes

At the beginning of the war the UK was importing around 70% of its food whereas Germany was growing 80% of its food. The UK was short of 50,000 farm workers and so the Woman's Land Army was formed to fill the void. There were up to 45,000 women working the land and they produced up to 32% of our food. Allotments were everywhere including Hyde Park as 2 million more acres were in cultivation by 1940. It was only in August 1950 that the WLA were told to stand down.

February 19th Snowdrops at Meadow View, Hodsall Street

Once again Barbara Macknish opened her garden to the public to view her magnificent snowdrops and in spite of the wet afternoon a total of £460 was raised for the Eleanor Foundation.



March 13th The Weather Lore Ian Currie of frostedearth.com

On a cold evening Ian told us of many weather related events such as how the Zulu Express was lost for a week in a March blizzard which did nothing to warm us up especially as the hall heating wasn't working. Ian told us how to determine if a frost is likely by reading the outside temperature at 2pm and 6pm. At the time of the meeting the soil temperature was nearly freezing and he uses a soil thermometer to determine when spring arrives in his opinion. The soil temperature must be above 6°C for 14 consecutive days. His forecast of another 10 days of cold weather made on the night proved accurate and we all know how that hampered our preparations for the Spring Show.

March 25th Spring Show

Despite the prolonged winter weather that caused a number of local and national associations to cancel their shows, our show went ahead and still managed to attract a large number of entries and visitors thanks in no small part to the tenacity of our members.

Although there were fewer exhibitors, the judges commented on the quality of the exhibits and found it very difficult to choose a class winner particularly in Class 1, where the chosen variety of hyacinth, China Pink was a delight. The winner was Maureen Parnell who took away the Chairman's cup and was also awarded the Diploma for the best bloom in the show. The Melliker cup for best in class 2, the named daffodil (St Patricks Day) together with the Hasler vase for best exhibit in classes 3-11 were won by Barbara Macknish who also won the Harvel Spring Challenge cup for the most points in the rest of the floral section. Elizabeth Thomas won the Oldham Goblet for the best floral art exhibit.

The tea room did a roaring trade as those present enjoyed the refreshments which included delicious home made cakes. Thank you to everybody who exhibited and helped 'behind the scenes' to make a very successful show.

April 10th Gardeners Question Time Helen Yemm

We were delighted to welcome journalist Helen Yemm as she gave us advice on dealing with a wide range garden problems from pests such as slugs and snails to pruning clematis. She also gave hints on dealing with weeds and uses of herbs. Many interesting questions were asked and an orchid owner was advised how to persuade it to flower.

Historical Snippet

Sow-Thistle

Sow-Thistle, or swine's thistle, hare's lettuce, milk weed, milky dickle. Wherever there is a garden or piece of ground that is not already crowded and hidden by stalwart plants, this weed will be there. Only from the hottest of tropical localities is it absent. This is a man's companion plant, which follows him wherever he goes, until it is now almost universally distributed and its country of origin is obscure. It must first have come to Britain with the Romans, as the earliest records of its fruits found here are all from their settlements, in Pevensy, Bermondsey, Ashby and the Silchester site of the Roman town in Hampshire.

For the Romans it was a salad herb and a vegetable with such classic recommendation for being nourishing, curative and very sustaining, as their learned Pliny recorded. He stated that the venturesome Theseus dined of a dish of sow-thistles before tackling the terrible bull that was rampaging around the plain of Marathon. He captured the beast and presented it to the goddess Athene, who had suggested his strengthening menu. Pliny had a great opinion of this plant's medical prowess for relieving such human ills as gavel, bad breath, deafness or wheezing. And nearer our time, Culpeper finished his impressive list of its medicinal accomplishments with its peasant use a cosmetic that is "wonderful good for women to wash their faces with, to clear the skin and give it lustre". To try his claim, the tea should be used as a lotion or the milky juice can be extracted with a juicer.

The sow-thistle is highly valued today as a veterinary herb that is rich in minerals and has such a cooling action that it is advised for the treatment of fevers, high blood pressure, heart disorders and other complaints suffered by animals. And it is instinctively a favourite food among them; often it is taken with eagerness when nothing else with tempt them. One of this plant's ancient names, hare's thistle, and another, hare's lettuce, is said to have been given because, according to one old writer, "when fainting with the heat she recruits her strength with this herb; or if a hare eat of this herb in summer when he is mad, he shall become whole". Older still are the names hare's bush and hare's place, where this hunted animal will rest for safety and peace.

Although the demand for your sow-thistles may be constant to feed the pet rabbits of neighbours who have used up their own supplies, it should be of interest to know the smoothest, tenderest, young leaves of this ancient pot-herb make a palatable, of rather bitter, addition to salads, as they are eaten on the Continent, or they may be cooked as a vegetable. Not only are their mineral constituents valuable, but they also contain useful amounts of Vitamin C.

As a vegetable, wash the tender young leaves and put them into a pan without shaking off the water. Add a good lump of butter or margarine and cook over a low heat. Keep turning the leaves to prevent burning and to mix the butter evenly over them all. When they are nearly cooked season with salt and pepper to your taste. Like spinach and other greenery the flavour of this weed is enhanced by the addition of chopped chives or spring onions; and when cooked, a squeeze of lemon juice gives the vegetable an appetizing tang. I prefer my edible weeds in a mixture, nettles, dandelions and sow-thistles being a good combination.

Adapted from "How to enjoy your weeds" by Audrey Wynne Hatfield

Poetry Corner

Weeds

Carole Estrup (Ergonica Weed Poetry Winner June, 2005)

There were two friends who gardened well;
One's name was Anne, one's Isabell.
Anne trimmed the hedges, raked the leaves,
And swept pine needles from the eaves.

A manicured retreat Anne kept;
She raked 'n raked 'n swept 'n swept.
Oh! Curse a weed if it would dare
To show its branches anywhere.

Now Isabell, a different case;
Allowed all weeds to grow in place.
"A plant whose harvest we don't reap,
Makes it no less a plant to keep."

The years fled by, their friendship shattered;
To stand their ground was all that mattered.
When Isabell died, Anne tended her plot;
An orderly mound was what she got.

'Round the tomb she'd chop and hoe;
'Twas fate, for Anne would never know
That when she died, poor weeding slave ...
Great weeds would grow upon her grave.