

MEOPHAM GARDEN ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



Winter 2006

As we go to press there is a vacancy for Show Secretary and unless a volunteer comes forward at the February meeting the Spring Show will be cancelled. This will have serious implications for the future of the Association.

The position involves a few days of work immediately before and during the show and there are members who are well used to providing help and support where required even before being asked.

Spring Show 25th March 2006

Assuming that we are able to hold the show, remember to follow exactly the instructions given by the new (or acting) Show Secretary with regards to letting them know your entries. The fee is 10p for each entry. If you have never exhibited before, just follow precisely the schedule in the **2006 Programme** and have a go. Yours may be the best exhibit on the day. Exhibits may be staged on the Friday evening between 9 and 9:30 pm and between 10 am and 12:45 pm on the day of the show. Admission to the show is free, doors open at 3pm and prize giving is at 4:15pm.

NO LATE ENTRIES WILL BE ACCEPTED

If you enter something in the show, please help clear up afterwards and be sure to take your own entries home. Buckets and black sacks will be provided to help with the operation. Please do not expect others to clear up for you.

Forthcoming Association Meetings & Other Events

Feb 13th Dig for Victory Russell Bowes

Feb 19th Snowdrops at Meadow View, Hodsall Street

Once again Barbara Macknish will be opening her garden to the public to view her magnificent snowdrops in aid of the Eleanor Foundation. There will be a plant stall and teas will also be available.

Mar 13th The Weather Lore Ian Currie

Apr 10th Gardeners Question Time Helen Yemm

May 8th Garden Design Ken Akers

Recent Events

November 14th Orchids & Flower Power Dr DA Griffiths

Dr Griffiths spent time in the Far East where he was lucky enough to see some of the most spectacular orchids growing in their natural environments. He told us that orchids are strong reflectors of ultra violet light. In order to attract male bees they give off the scent of a female bee. Once the male is inside the scent then swaps to the male scent and the bee tries to escape. Each plant can produce up to 7 billion seeds but they are difficult to germinate as a fungus is necessary. Orchids tend to be propagated vegetatively or genetically by recombining DNA.

December 13th Christmas Supper

Once again members and their friends enjoyed an excellent meal followed by our after dinner speaker Mr Paul Bellamy who entertained us by demonstrating the various musical boxes he brought along with him.

January 10th AGM

Prior to the serious business of the evening, Ann Nicholson gave an illustrated talk about her travels in Vietnam. After a short refreshment break the AGM was held.

Plant Stall

Members are reminded that they may bring along to the plant stall any surplus plants, labelled and priced for sale. They will receive 50% of the takings from the sale of their plants. Members are asked to provide the plant stall with a list of plants showing the asking price and the quantity of each. A higher percentage from the sale of gardening equipment may be received. Members may advertise on the notice board without charge, but if a sale is achieved a donation to the Association would be appreciated.

News From Cobham Gardeners

On Wednesday 8th February, the Society was delighted to welcome Medwyn Williams MBE 10 times Chelsea Gold Medal winner for his fantastic vegetable displays. He gave the packed Meadow Rooms a fascinating insight into growing vegetables to be at their best for the show and how to keep them looking fresh for the 8 days from harvest to the end of the show. He finished with anecdotes of his encounters with the Royals and celebrities who seek out his stand.

8 th March	An Insight into Garden Centre Operations Carol Ross of Millbrook	
8 th April	Spring Show	Starts 3.15pm at Meadow Rooms
22 nd April	Plant Sale	Owletts from 10am
10 th May	Culinary Herbs	Jean Bowles

The meetings start at 8pm in the Meadow Rooms in Cobham.

WTO JUDGEMENT RULES EU GM-BAN 'UNLAWFUL'

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has ruled that the EU's reluctance to authorise GM foods broke trade rules and is illegal under international law. The judgement will force the EU to abandon any objections to GM crops and open our markets to GM imports from the US. The ruling is a deliberate attempt by the US and the agri-business industry to extract compensation from the EU and to deter any developing nations who are leaning towards an anti-GM position.

Our Euro-MP, Caroline Lucas said the decision was an assault on those who remain concerned about the health, environmental and social impact of GM crops. It has ruled that free trade should take precedence over the precautionary principle and over the democratic right to regulate for the protection of either health or the environment.

This decision could also have serious implications for anybody gardening organically as studies have shown that GM crops can 'infect' non-GM crops over significant distances.

The WTO is a secretive and undemocratic body dominated by United States corporations whose teams of lawyers have the skill, time and finance to overwhelm any opposition.

Historical Snippet

African Violet

Common Name: African Violet, Usambara Violet.

Botanical Name: *Saintpaulia*.

Family: Gesneriaceae.

There are probably more African violets in American bathrooms than in Africa. From a plant's point of view, in spite of the toothpaste, warm steamy bathrooms are quite a good imitation of a tropical rain forest, and African violets flourish in them. They come from the humid forests of the Usambara Mountains in northern Tanzania. African violets grow naturally in rock crevices where small amounts of soil have been deposited and water drains away rapidly. Though they thrive on 80 percent humidity, they must not be over-watered. They get much of their water from the atmosphere through the fine hairs which cover the surface of their leaves. These hairs take in moisture from the air, like miniature roots, and also trap raindrops, separating them so the leaves don't suffocate. The roots themselves remain relatively dry.

African violets were sent to Europe in 1892, by Baron Adalbert Emil Walter Redcliffe le Tanneux von Saint Paul Illaire, district governor of Usambara, in what was the German colony of Tanganyika. When the young governor, some say in the company of his future wife, Margarethe, was exploring his territory, he found these new plants. He collected plants, or more probably, seeds to send back to his father, Baron Ulrich von Saint Paul, a keen horticulturist who took them to Hermann Wendland, director of the Royal Botanic Garden at Herrenhausen (Hanover). Wendland described the new plant as "of embracing beauty ... one of the daintiest of hot house plants" and he named it *Saintpaulia*, after the two barons, father and son. He added *ionanthia* because of the purple, violet-like flowers. Another African violet introduced at the same time was later called *Saintpaulia confusa* because it was confused with another species!

When the British took over the colony (later known as Tanzania) after World War I, more African violets were discovered. The flowers were soon available in purples, pinks, near-reds, whites, and bicolors, with single or double flowers. There are no yellows or oranges, and the leaves vary. They can be propagated by rooting a single leaf, although some people are better at this than others.

But there is no shortage of the plants in American nurseries, supermarkets and even dime stores. Sadly though, there is a shortage of them in their native Tanzania. They can only grow in a shady rain forests, and these days forests are being felled everywhere for agricultural needs and for modern houses – with modern plumbing.

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

Poetry Corner

Winter is the time of promise because there
is so little to do - or because you can now
and then permit yourself the luxury of
thinking so.

Stanley Crawford

Through winter-time we call on spring,
And through the spring on summer call,
And when the abounding hedges ring
Declare that winter's best of all.

W. B. Yeats

Someone painted pictures on my
Windowpane last night --
Willow trees with trailing boughs
And flowers, frosty white,

And lovely crystal butterflies;
But when the morning sun
Touched them with its golden beams,
They vanished one by one.

Helen Bayley Davis, Jack Frost

At Christmas I no more desire a rose
Than wish a snow in May's
new-fangled mirth;
But like of each thing that in season grows.

William Shakespeare

In the bleak midwinter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter,
Long ago.

Christina Rossetti, A Christmas Carol