

MEOPHAM GARDEN ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



Photo : Jo Latimer

Winter 2011

Spring Show 26th March 2011

Calling all members to enter. If you have never exhibited before, just have a go. Yours may be the best exhibit on the day. Make sure you follow precisely the 2011 schedule. All entry details should be phoned through to our Show Secretary Sharon Sperling between 6 and 9pm on the Thursday prior to the show. The fee is 10p for each entry. Exhibits may be staged on the Friday evening between 9 and 9:30pm and between 10am and 12:45pm on the day of the show. The doors open at 3pm and admission to the show is free. Take the opportunity to buy plants, raffle tickets, tea and a slice of cake before the prize giving at about 4:15pm.

LATE ENTRIES WILL NOT 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

February 20th Snowdrops & Hellebores at Meadow View, Hodsoll Street

Once again Barbara Macknish will be opening her garden to the public between 11am – 3:30pm to view her magnificent display in aid of the Eleanor Foundation. There will be a plant stall and teas will also be available. Entry is £1.

March 14th Growing Hamamelis Chris Lane

March 26th SPRING SHOW

April 11th Winterdales Cheese Makers

May 9th Herbaceous Perennials Laurie Manser

June 13th Garden Outing to Green Leas, Pilgrims Way, Wrotham

Garden Safari

For our fund raiser we are planning to hold a garden safari in June or July of this year. We are counting on the support of members to make this event successful. So if you think you would like to open your garden please let a member of the committee know.

Recent Events

November 8th Culture of Vegetables, Varieties, Colour & Flavour Mr Kemp

The vegetable growers in the audience were treated to very detailed instructions on how to get the best from their vegetables. We were also told that Tozer Seeds who Mr Kemp works for now sell directly to the general public so take a look at their website (www.tozerseedsdirect.com).

December 13th Christmas Supper

A break in the bad weather allowed our Christmas celebration to go ahead as planned. The 54 members and friends who attended enjoyed an excellent meal followed by some lively entertainment by Alan Simmonds, a ventriloquist.

January 10th AGM

The AGM was well attended and after the business of the evening we enjoyed watching an old programme on making a Kitchen Garden presented by Geoff Hamilton. The Chairman's report for 2010 is appended to this newsletter.

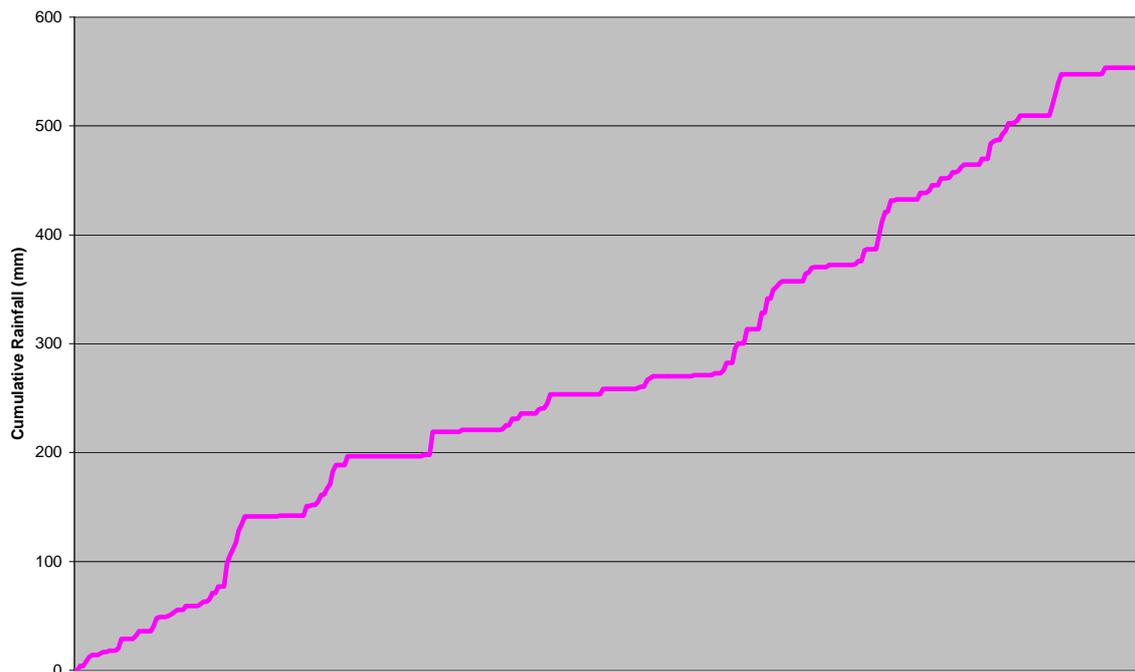
Members' Show

The Members' Show starts at the February meeting and details of the classes can be found with the Monthly Programme in the 2011 Schedule. The first class is the 'Selected Item' and is specified but the second item, 'Member's Choice', can be anything from the garden which is perhaps looking spectacular on the evening or is of special interest. The entries are judged by a club member and points out of 10 are awarded for each exhibit. These points are totalled at the end of the year and the entrants with the most points from both classes will each receive a cup and prize money of £2.50.

Plant Stall

If you have plants you wish to sell, please ensure that they are labeled and provide the plant stall with a list of your plants showing the asking price and the quantity of each as you will receive 50% of the takings from the sale of your plants. Please remember to take any unsold plants home at the end of the evening. Members may advertise other items such as garden tools on the notice board without charge, but if a sale is achieved a donation to the Association would be appreciated.

2010 Rainfall Figures



This graph shows the cumulative rainfall for 2010. The total of 544mm was around 200mm (8") less than that recorded for the previous 2 years.

The year started cold with snow and Altnaharra in Scotland recorded a minimum temperature of -22.3°C on 8th January. January was the coldest since 1987 and February continued to be cold and dull with above average rainfall. March started dry and cold but it was windy towards the end of the month. High pressure was in control for most of April which gave us a generally fine and dry month with above average temperatures. May was cool to begin with but record temperatures were set in Scotland between 20 – 24th and a maximum temperature of 28.8°C was recorded at Heathrow on 24th. It was the driest May since 1998 with about normal sunshine. June was the third sunniest since 1929 with the second part of the month being very warm. Gravesend was the hottest in the country on 27th with 30.9°C and the 31.7°C reached on July 9th was the hottest recorded temperature of 2010. July was drier and sunnier than average but August was the coldest since 1993 being wetter and duller than normal. September was drier than average with about normal temperatures and sunshine levels. Once again Gravesend recorded the highest temperature of the month at 24.6°C on the 22nd. There was a wet start to October before it turned cold. The first 3 weeks of November were also wet before it turned much colder and we had our first winter snowfall at the end of the month. It was the coldest November since 1993 and the snow continued into December. Even with a brief spell of less cold weather mid month it was still the coldest December for 100 years and the coldest month since February 1986 with mean temperatures about 5°C below the 1971-2000 average. Altnaharra again recorded the lowest temperature of -21.3°C on the 2nd. The snow returned just before Christmas but by the end of the month temperatures had returned to more normal values.

YACON - Update

For the past two years we have been reporting on the results we have had growing Yacon (*Botanical name: Smallanthus sonchifolius*, Family: Asteraceae).

This year, in addition to planting some in open ground and in the greenhouse, we placed one crown in an 18 inch pot on the patio in a sheltered position and with sunlight filtered through a conservatory for most of the day. It was well watered and we used a slow-release fertilizer supplemented with a small amount of growmore later in the season. It was the most successful of those that we planted.

The top growth was almost as vigorous as the plants in the greenhouse and it was considerably sturdier. A few tiny (one inch diameter) yellow flowers appeared in September. The foliage began to suffer towards the end of October so we cut it down and found many large tubers almost filling the bottom of the pot.

In The News

There has been a great deal of troubling news highlighted in the press of late. Much of it has relevance to gardeners both directly and indirectly. Below we draw your attention to just a small selection.

Bees

In January 'The Independent' broke the story about *neonicotinoids*, a pesticide family that is implicated in the widespread deaths of bees and other pollinators. The Labour MP Martin Caton told Parliament that the assessment regimes for them are inadequate and Green Party MP, Caroline Lucas, said Defra "seems extraordinarily complacent about the health of bees".

It is too early in the season for us to assess whether there has been any impact on the bees in our area. However, we can be alerted to note the numbers and time of appearance of the different kinds of bees and other pollinators this year.

Sudden Oak Death

The two common British oaks have demonstrated a resistance to the pathogen (*phytophthora ramorum*) that causes what is known in America as Sudden Oak Death (SOD). However, the Japanese Larch is not and millions of larches have been felled to prevent the spread of a lethal virus from Asia. Some 1.4 million larches have been cut down in the past 15 months, and another 1.2 million must go in the next three or the problem will only get worse.

The first sign of PR is when a tree's foliage, usually from the top, starts to wilt or blacken and by then, it's too late. Another indication is when the inner bark turns brown instead of green, and a black fluid starts to flow through ugly external lesions. Death usually follows. Cutting down and removal is the only treatment otherwise the disease will spread not just to other trees (beech, sweet chestnut and horse chestnut are known to be susceptible), but to a range of plants, including rhododendron, viburnum, pieris, lilac and camellia (the pathogen devours their leaves and shoots).

So we should be alert to the presence of PR. Any infected plants should be destroyed to prevent further infection.

Amazon Rain Forest

Reuters reported that scientists have found that the widespread drought in the Amazon rain forest last year was worse than the "once-in-a-century" dry spell in 2005 and may have a bigger impact on global warming than the United States does in a year. Simon Lewis from University of Leeds said that if events like this happen more often, the Amazon rain forest would reach a point where it shifts from being a valuable carbon sink slowing climate change to a major source of greenhouse gases that could speed it up. The study shows that the combined emissions caused by the two droughts were probably enough to have cancelled out the carbon absorbed by the forest over the past 10 years and if they are driven by global warming, a vicious cycle of warmer temperatures and droughts could conceivably lead to a large-scale transformation of the forest over a period of decades.

Food Prices & Security

The Telegraph highlighted news from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO) warning that the high prices, already above levels in 2008 which sparked riots, were likely to rise further. The food price index hit 230.7 points in January, up from 223.1 points in December and 206 in November. In 2000 the index stood at 90 and did not reach 100 until 2004. The index highlights how food prices, which throughout most of the last two decades have been stable, have taken off in alarming fashion in the last three years.

Experts point out that, in theory, the situation is not as bad as in 2007 and 2008, when the world faced a genuine shortage of food. Now there are plenty of stocks, particularly wheat, being stored. In Britain arable farmers have been sitting on grain from last year's harvest and have been able to sell wheat at £200 a ton, double the price of just a few years ago.

In the run-up to the 2007/2008 food price crisis, the World Bank estimated that some 870 million people in developing countries were hungry or malnourished. The FAO estimates that number has increased to 900 million. Experts said that hoarding of food by some governments was making the problem worse.

Regarding population, one child per family, worldwide, for the next several generations might be a better, perhaps the only benign, option. But, as with global warming, the policy makers are only looking for short term gain. Reducing the number of people trying to live on this speck of dust in the universe would alleviate many otherwise intractable problems that face humanity. We are presently heading for a global version of the disaster that overcame Easter Island.

Perhaps, as gardeners, we are better prepared to reduce the impact on our own budgets. Of course one answer is to be as self-sufficient as possible.

Peak Oil

Scientists led by the London-based Oil Depletion Analysis Centre, say that global production of oil is set to peak in the next four years before entering a steepening decline which will have massive consequences for the world economy and the way that we live our lives. A reduction of as little as 10 to 15 per cent could cripple oil-dependent industrial economies. In the 1970s, a reduction of just 5 per cent caused a price increase of more than 400 per cent.

Demand is increasing as China and other countries continue industrialising. Sadad al-Huseini, who retired as chief executive of the Saudi oil corporation two years ago, says that, to meet the demand, we shall need the equivalent of a whole new Saudi Arabia every couple of years and that can't be done indefinitely.

Dr Campbell a former chief geologist and vice-president of several major oil companies explains that the peak of the cheap and easy to extract oil happened in 2005. However, some oil-rich countries are reporting that their reserves are twice as large as can be justified. Dr Campbell is quoted as saying, "When I was the boss of an oil company I would never tell the truth. It's not part of the game."

Oil is used at all stages of agricultural operations from tilling to harvest, processing and transportation. It is required as feedstock for fertilizers and is used in their manufacture. The price of oil therefore directly affects the cost of food. Once again, we gardeners have the opportunity to mitigate some aspects of these price increases, at least for ourselves. We should be extremely reluctant to allow any organic material to leave our gardens and we should take advantage of offers of uncontaminated manure available at a reasonable price.

Genetically Mutilated Food

With the world's population increasing at around 6 million per month, how will the world be fed into the future? Some believe GM foods are the answer, but there is much evidence to the contrary that the large biotech companies such as Monsanto don't want us to know about, for instance:

- Thousands of sheep, buffalo, and goats in India died after grazing on GM cotton plants
- Mice eating GM corn for the long term had fewer and smaller, babies and more than half the babies of mother rats fed GM soy died within three weeks
- By the third generation, most GM soy-fed hamsters lost the ability to have babies
- Rodents fed GM corn and soy showed immune system responses, signs of toxicity and cell abnormalities that may lead to cancer
- Soy allergies skyrocketed by 50% in the UK, soon after GM soy was introduced. Cooked GM soy contains as much as 7-times the amount of a known soy allergen

It seems that the initial increase in production is short lived, perhaps 3 years, but once GM seed is planted the only option for farmers is to purchase new seed each year from the likes of Monsanto. Farmers have even been sued by Monsanto where GM crops have been found growing on their land after cross-contamination. Canadian Percy Schmeiser (Google him) lost his plant breeding business when Monsanto canola contaminated his plants and he was even fined \$50,000 - a monstrous injustice. In the UK, top vegetable grower Medwyn Williams fears the same could happen to him should GM ever be allowed in the EU. He has spent many years selecting and saving seed from open pollinated vegetables. Wikileaks released a memo from an American diplomat showing that Monsanto was behind pressure that was being exerted on Spain to support the removal of the EU ban on GM crops. Even the poor of Haiti burnt the GM seed that was offered as aid.

Checkout <http://www.gmfreeze.org> and take action to keep the UK free of genetically engineered food, animal feed and crops. Also, to see what madness lies in store if we kow-tow to the United States and Monsanto, Google *Senate Bill S 510* and check out the links <http://www.ethicalinvesting.com/monsanto/news/10040.htm>, <http://www.responsibletechnology.org/gmo-dangers/> and <http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2011/01/03-5#comment-1713842>

We have to be pro-active to avoid GM crops being grown and GM foods being sold in the UK. Write to your MP to make them aware of your concerns and boycott any GM produce that appears on the supermarket shelves. People power can work. A few years ago Iceland had to withdraw their GM foods when the public refused to buy them. But at the moment there is a loophole; in order to make rational decisions we need know whether or not our farm animals are being given GM feed and we are denied this information.

The Chairman's report for 2010

Happy New Year and I hope you are looking forward to the meetings and other events planned for 2011 but first lets take a brief look back at 2010.

You will probably remember that the January meeting was cancelled due to snow and as February was due to be the first Member's Forum we were able to accommodate the necessary AGM business at the beginning of the meeting. The Member's Forum seemed to be enjoyed by those present and I hope the one this year will be as lively.

Growing Vegetable Organically was the subject of our first full meeting in March. Speaker Vanessa Jones told us how she had tamed her plot and gave us much to think about.

We were transported to Japan by Colin Jones in April to learn about their gardens. In May the Guerrilla Gardener, Richard Reynolds made a welcome return to update us on their activities. It was his first 'return' visit and he is the only speaker that I know of who the committee have decided would always be welcome.

We had a very pleasant evening at Julia Jarman's garden in Pembury during June. Also in June we had a stall at the Istead Rise fete. This did not produce the revenues we have enjoyed in the past from the Nurstead Fetes and as an alternative fund raiser the committee have decided to run a Garden Safari this year. Please consider opening your garden for the Safari sometime during June or July (date to be arranged).

Our Summer Social was held in July. Once again it consisted of a small show with three classes. Those present voted for their favourite entries and congratulations are due to Barbara Macknish, Elsa Small and Tony Thomas who were deemed to be the class winners.

Derek March our bee-keeping friend came to speak to us in August. This time he spoke about the rise and fall of Walled Gardens. In September we had an interesting practical demonstration of Topiary by Judy Older.

In October Heather Fooks spoke to us. During the first part of her talk she spoke about various tools, some good and some not so good that are aimed at making gardening easier. She donated her fee to the Gardening For the Disabled Trust and showed us how the trust are able to adapt gardens so their owners are able to garden in spite of their disability.

Also in October we visited RHS Hyde Hall and Saling Hall the garden of Hugh and Judy Johnson. Although it was a dull day, it remained dry and both gardens had plenty to offer us.

In November Mr Kemp from Tozers Seeds gave us a very detailed talk about growing vegetables.

Luckily our Christmas Supper was able to go ahead in spite of the early onset of winter. The meal was much enjoyed by those present and this was followed by some lively entertainment provided by Alan Simmonds. I would like to thank Hazel Borrow for organising the evening and Gail King and her helpers for the striking table arrangements and of course to everyone who helped with the clearing up.

Both of our shows were well supported and it was particularly pleasing to have so many new exhibitors. Thanks to Barbara Macknish, Sharon Sperling and Clare Williams for their efficient organisation of both events.

I would particularly like to thank all of the committee for their support and efforts during the year. Of course there are others who have helped too: Vera Bingham who ran our raffles and Mike Hughes who has kept us well informed with the quarterly newsletters. I am particularly pleased to have got the Meopham Garden Association website up and running at last. My thanks go to my husband, Jeff who did the initial design and construction. This site is still very much under development and I hope to have the time to make further improvements during this year. This site is our advert to the world but I also hope that the membership use it regularly. I do my best to make sure any information left by our speakers is made available.

Sadly we lost 2 of our 3 Life Members; Meryl Burgess and Bill Roberts during September. Meryl's family asked if we could inaugurate an award in her memory and the committee felt that we should remember Bill in a similar way. So 2011 two new trophies presented for the first time. Start planning your entries now!

It would be good to see a regular turn over of committee members in order to keep fresh ideas coming along. Joining the committee should not be seen as a life-long commitment but an opportunity to influence the running of the club in the short term. We are fortunate that serving committee are willing to stand again but a few new members would be most welcome. We meet 10 times a year for between an hour to 1 ½ so most of the club business is carried out in around 15 hours per year.

Finally, I would like to thank everybody for their support during 2010 and wish you all happy gardening in 2011