



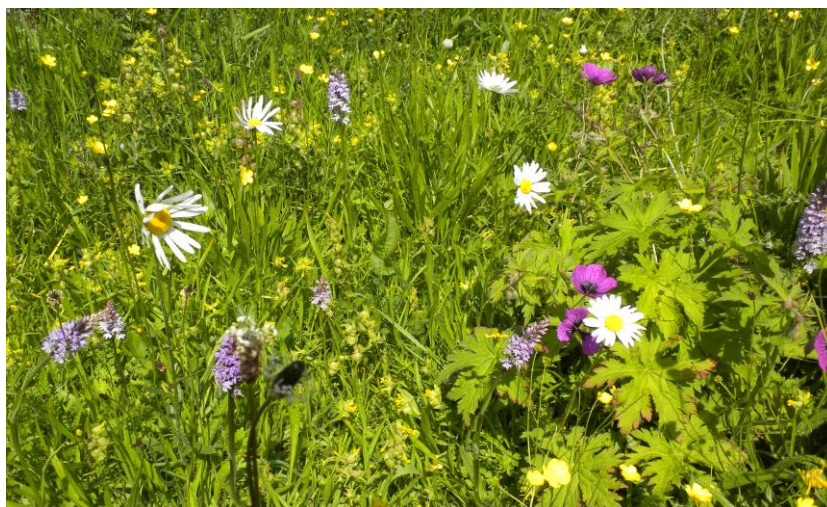
PRESIDENT – Anne Harrison, Kew Dip. Hort

Past Presidents: Mr. D.M. Ballard, NDH; Mr. T. Deans, NDH;
Mr. S.M. Davies, M.Hort. (RHS), DHE, Cert.Ed., MIHort.;
Dr. Susan V. Sherwood, BSc, PhD

NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2018

In this Issue

- **FOUR Summer Outings – BOOK NOW**
- **Roy Lancaster's talk – Programme published**
- **A Winter's Tale by Harry Delaney**
- **The Elusive *Smyrnium***



Orchids in the Wild Flower Meadow at Gresgarth Hall

Traditionally it is in our Spring Newsletter that we announce our summer visits to gardens and specialist nurseries. This year, our 40th Anniversary year, we shall resume our coach trips with a visit north in late August to two very special gardens, first to **Levens Hall**, the unique topiary garden and then to **Gresgarth**, the country home of garden designer Arabella Lennox-Boyd.

Visits earlier in the summer are to the notable local gardens at **Henbury Hall**, **Wollerton Old Hall** and **Hodnet Hall**, each with its own special identity and where the owners take great interest in both the design and the planting. These are accessible by your own transport.

In September we shall be joining the Bicentenary Celebration of landscape gardener **Humphry Repton at Tatton Park**. We will be viewing the watercolours in his Red Book of 1792 then we shall tour his designed landscape with Head Gardener Simon Tetlow and Harry Delaney.

Visit 1 - Henbury Hall, near Macclesfield

A tour of the private gardens with the Head Gardener, followed by tea/coffee and homemade cake.

Tuesday, 26th June 2018, meeting at 10.00 a.m. for a 10.30 a.m. start

Henbury Hall and its gardens are set in undulating landscape around two lakes and contain many exceptional trees and shrubs with several rare specimens of rhododendrons, magnolias, camellias and azaleas. Many will be in flower at this time.

A house on this site was mentioned in the Domesday Book, however the gardens largely date from the 18th century. After WW2, the estate was bought by Sir Vincent de Ferranti from the Brocklehurst family, then in 1984 Sebastian de Ferranti pulled down the original house and created an elegant new house in its place. The style of this house is based on Palladio's Villa Capra, known as The Rotunda, at Vicenza, and is similar to Lord Burlington's Chiswick House.



In recent years the gardens have been completely renovated following many years of neglect. The Walled Kitchen Garden is stunning and the restored glasshouses now contain an ever-increasing collection of exotics including Pteridophytes and Orchidaceae, many of significant botanical importance. The magnificent Foster & Pearson peach houses on the outer south facing wall are of special importance. You can see more wonderful images of the gardens at <http://www.henburyhall.co.uk>.

Arrangements for the day

We shall meet in the courtyard at Henbury Hall from 10.00 a.m. onwards ready for a 10.30 start. Tea/Coffee will be available from 10 a.m.

Sean Barton, Henbury's Head Gardener, will give us an introductory talk and tell us about the renovation of the gardens and the plants we shall see later. Sean will then take us on a guided tour of the Gardens. Afterwards we are invited to coffee/tea with homemade cake and biscuits.

How to get there

The Henbury Estate is accessible from the A537 Knutsford to Macclesfield Road. From the Knutsford direction, turn off the A537 into School Lane immediately after the Blacksmiths Arms pub which is opposite the Flora Garden Centre. The full address is Henbury Hall, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 9PJ and full directions will be sent out just before the event.

Cost

The cost for this private tour, the talk and light refreshments is £21.00 per person for both members and guests.

Visit 2 - A Combined Visit to Wollerton Old Hall and Hodnet Hall

At Wollerton, an introductory talk from the Head Gardener then explore the garden at your own pace. Light lunch of soup, a sandwich and tea or coffee. An afternoon visit to Hodnet Hall.
Monday, 30th July 2018, meeting at 9.45 a.m. for a 10.00 a.m. start

This is a fantastic opportunity to see two exceptional private gardens in a single day. First, we will visit the gardens at Wollerton Old Hall then, after lunch there, we move on to Hodnet Hall only half a mile away.

The garden at Wollerton has been designed and developed by the present owners Lesley and John Jenkins since 1984 when they purchased the property. It is set around a 16th century house and has developed into an important modern garden in the English Garden tradition with echoes of Arts and Crafts style. It covers 4 acres and is intensely cultivated with clipped yews, beech and limes creating a formalised structure for the outstanding planting (see <http://www.wollertonoldhallgarden.com/>).



Wollerton Old Hall



Hodnet Hall

Hodnet Hall has the remnants of the old deer park established in the 11th century. A new hall was built on an elevated site in 1870 but the formal gardens of that date were overlaid by 20th century developments by owner Brigadier A G W Heber-Percy. In the 1920s he built the dykes and damned the stream to make a chain of ornamental pools which create interest in the gardens to this day. There are woodland walks, sweeping lawns and a very lovely kitchen garden. In July we shall see roses, paeonies and hydrangeas in bloom (see <http://www.hodnethallgardens.org/>).

Arrangements on the day

We shall meet at Wollerton Old Hall Gardens in the main Car Park at 9.45. The garden talk by the Head Gardener will begin at 10.00 and then we will be able to tour the garden at leisure. We will have soup and a sandwich in Wollerton's Tearoom at 12.30 before departing for Hodnet Hall at 1.30.

Cost

The cost for visiting both gardens, the talk and light lunch is £23.00 each for both members and guests.

How to get there

Wollerton and Hodnet gardens are located in Shropshire not far from the Cheshire and Staffordshire borders. Wollerton Old Hall is signposted with a brown tourist sign on the A41/A53 crossroads at Tern Hill and at Hodnet.

Full addresses: Wollerton Old Hall, Wollerton, Market Drayton TF9 3NA and Hodnet Hall Gardens, Hodnet, Market Drayton, TF9 3NN

Visit 3 – By coach to Levens Hall in south Cumbria and Gresgarth Hall in north Lancashire

Wednesday, 22nd August 2018, leaving Reaseheath at 8.00 a.m.

Levens Hall in south Cumbria has been a family home since the 1590s. The garden was laid out in the 1690s by Guillaume Beaumont, a pupil of le Notre at Versailles and the garden retains many of its original features. Levens has been in the ownership of The Bagot Family since the 1880s and each generation has put its mark on the plantings. The speciality of the garden is the ancient topiary. There is an excellent plan of the garden at <https://www.levenshall.co.uk/public/1304/Levens%20Hall%20Garden%20Map.pdf>.

When we arrive at Levens Hall the Head Gardener will introduce us to the garden. We will then have time to investigate at leisure. You can eat at the Bellingham Buttery on the Levens site or you can bring your own packed lunch to eat in the garden. And there is a Plant Centre!!



The topiary at Levens Hall garden



The lake in front of Gresgarth Hall

Gresgarth Hall in north Lancashire is the country home of the Gold Medal winning garden designer, **Lady Arabella Lennox-Boyd**. This will be a repeat visit to Gresgarth for THEA; it was back in June 2011 when we visited previously. It made such an impression on us that we felt, in our 40th Anniversary year, we would like to take another look at it and give our new members the opportunity to explore this very lovely garden.

Gresgarth has a cultivated area of about 12 acres and includes lavishly planted terraces leading down to a lake, wild and bog gardens, dramatic herbaceous borders, an extensive walled kitchen garden, a hillside dotted with *Magnolia*, *Cornus* and *Rhododendron* and a serpentine beech walk. A striking Chinese-style bridge crosses the Artle Beck, a tributary of the River Lune, which flows through this romantic garden.

You can read more about Arabella Lennox-Boyd, Gresgarth and her garden designs at <http://www.arabellalennoxboyd.com/>.

Cost

The cost is £36.00 which includes the coach fare, driver's tip and entrance to Levens Hall and Gresgarth.

Visit 4 - Join us for an Exploration of the Humphry Repton Landscape at Tatton Park
Tuesday, 4th September 2018, meet outside the garden entrance at 10.30

2018 is the Bicentenary of **Humphry Repton** (1752-1818), the landscape gardener and watercolourist whose designs became popular at the end of the 18th century after the death of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and whose 'Red Books' have provided the proof of his philosophy and his work.

Uniquely in the Red Book Repton produced watercolours of the landscape as he saw it at the time of his visit to the estate. His proposals for improvement were revealed when a flap or slide on the page was lifted. In this way, the owner of the land could clearly see the benefits of following Repton's recommendations.



A Repton watercolour of Tatton Park before improvement

In 1791 Repton visited Tatton Park in Cheshire, the seat of William Egerton Esq. and produced a 'Red Book' for the site in the following year. This 'Red Book' now belongs to the National Trust. We invite you to join **Simon Tetlow**, Head Gardener at Tatton Park, and **Harry Delaney** for a viewing of the Tatton 'Red Book'. Simon will then take us on a walk through the garden to compare today's landscape to Repton's proposals of 1792. Simon has Repton's "before and after" watercolours on his tablet to simplify the comparison. This really will be walking in Repton's footsteps.

Arrangements on the day

We shall meet in the Stable Yard outside the entrance to the gardens at 10.30. The tour will take 2 to 2½ hours.

The maximum number for the tour is 20 however if more members wish to attend we shall run a second session starting at 2.00 p.m. the afternoon.

The cost

- You will pay £7.00 to enter Tatton Park and park your car (Blue Badge Holders - £3.50) This is a charge levied by Cheshire East who administer the Tatton Estate and is payable at the entrance gate.
- Entry into the Garden is free to RHS and National Trust members. Non members will pay £7.00

- There will be no further formal charge for the tour since we are all ex-students of Harry Delaney but we will ask members to give a donation of £6-8.00 to be used in the Garden. This will be collected on the day.

For more Repton Bicentenary events around the Britain, see <http://thegardenstrust.org/events-archive/>.

Special 40th RUBY Anniversary Study Day - Friday 1st June, 2018

Tickets STILL available

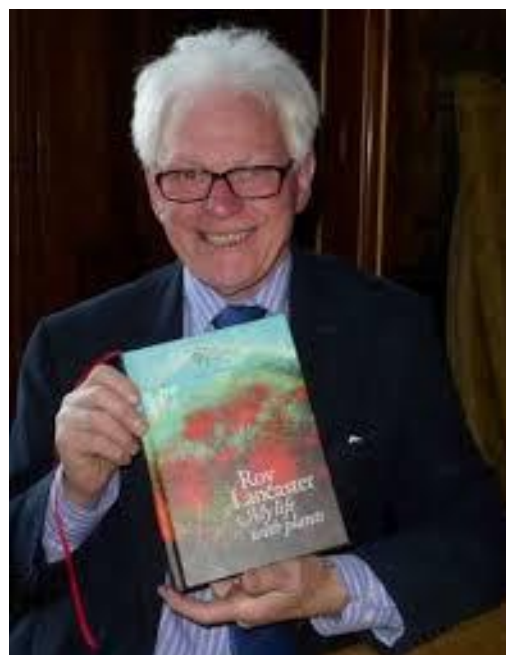
Have you bought your ticket for this event? We still have a few tickets remaining and it is now open to non-members. Contact THEA at horticultural.enthusiasts@gmail.com

Many “retired” members and horticulture tutors will be attending this Study Day and they are looking forward to meeting colleagues from the past. It will be a reunion after many years.

We have now had confirmation that Tom Deans will attend. He sent his “best wishes to all” and said “I look forward to seeing some of my 'past students' on the day!!!!”

Programme for the day

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| From 9.45 | Sign in
Coffee in Restaurant |
| 10.15 | Welcome to the 40th Anniversary Study Day:
Jo Worth, THEA Chairperson |
| 10.30 | Lecture: ‘My Life with Plants’
Roy Lancaster CBE VMH FCIHort FLS |
| 12.30 | Tree Planting in the Reaseheath Garden
<i>Betula albosinensis</i> ‘China Ruby’ |
| 1.00 | Lunch in Restaurant |
| 1.45 | Announcement of Winning Ticket |
| 2.00 | Lecture: ‘40 Years of Gardening Developments’
Anne Harrison, THEA President |
| 3.00 | Tea and Cake |



A Prize for the Winning Ticket Number

We will be asking Roy Lancaster to draw the lucky winning Study Day ticket number.

A Winter's Tale – Harry Delaney

While chatting to Harry Delaney the other day I happened to mention that I had visited Rode Hall recently and, as usual, the scent from the Daphne bholua on the top terrace was as wonderful as ever. But I had heard that this plant was unavailable in garden centres at the moment. We discussed why this could be; Harry

thought possibly there had been a failure of the rootstocks for grafting and instead he suggested this method of propagating the plant.

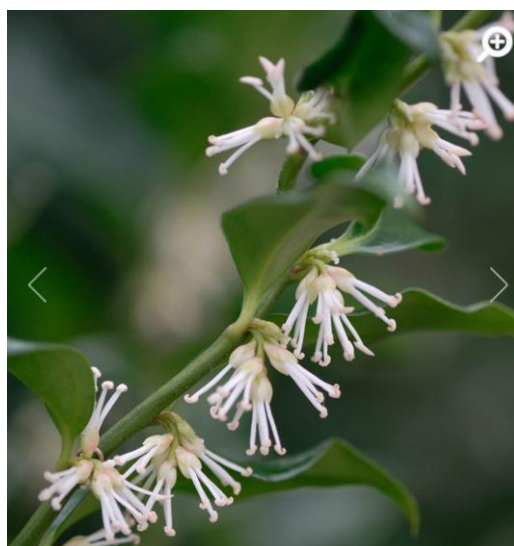
Editor

I hope, as THEA members, you garden every day of the year and not just from Easter until the end of October. Each season brings us its own special range of plants to delight, with flowers, leaf colour and shape, structure and scent to stimulate all our senses and inner being. Why then do gardeners shut down for winter when there are so many exciting “winter interest” plants to grow?

I have no trouble identifying gems of plants to liven up the garden throughout winter including *Chimonanthus*, *Mahonia*, *Hamamelis*, *Viburnum*, *Jasminum*, the shrubby *Jonquillas*, *Sarcococca*, the hellebores, *Cyclamen*, *Galanthus*, *Eranthis*; the coloured stems of *Cornus* and others. My list could go on. Fortunately, many gardens do open throughout the winter and have created gardens for winter display, including Tatton Park, Dunham Massey, Rode Hall, the Dorothy Clive Garden, Trentham Gardens and many others. If you don't grow these plants or visit the gardens that do, maybe you are only half the gardener you thought you were! So good after the plum duff of winter festivities, to wrap up, get out, exercise yourself and enjoy winter interest plants.



Chimonanthus praecox (Wintersweet)
www.jparkers.co.uk



Sarcococca confusa (Sweet Box)
www.crocus.co.uk

The winter-flowering plant which never fails to please is the beautiful *Daphne bholua* ‘Jacqueline Postill’. It flowers over a long period from January until late March or longer. It is fairly upright and gets up to 10 ft tall but its structure is not heavy. Plants are evergreen, semi-evergreen or deciduous to some extent depending on the severity of the weather. It is best grown with some shelter from walls, fences or lightly overhanging deciduous trees. It is not fussy on soils, tolerating alkaline to acidic soils which are loamy and well drained. Excessively wet or dry soils are not suitable.

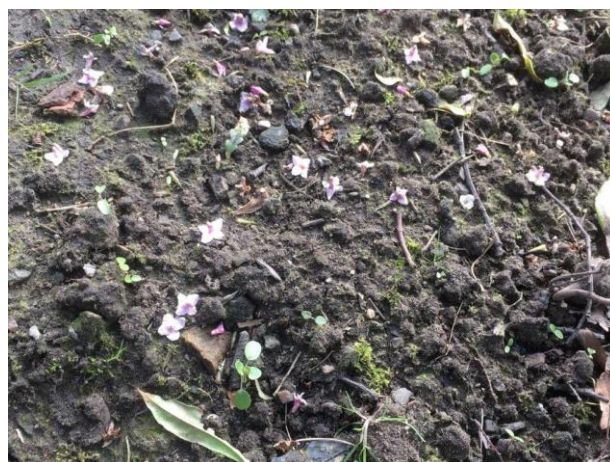
The flower buds are strongly pink followed by pink flowers with whiteish overtones. The plants flower freely and reliably but its most attractive feature is the scent emanating from the flowers – strong enough to “part your hair”! The scent can be enjoyed many many yards downwind or in confined areas where it will fill the whole area with fragrance. Every garden should have one – heavenly scent on earth!

Propagating the sweetly fragrant *Daphne*

The flowers are still attractive when they fall off and carpet the patio or soil surface which brings me to the other point of interest about this remarkable plant. When we visit Rode Hall (near Alsager), there are little notices in front of this shrub inviting you to collect the flowers, take them home and to sow them to raise new seedling plants! REALLY! Have they got our understanding of anatomical botany wrong; after all we teach you in class that tomato plants, for example, produce flowers, pollination and fertilisation occurs and the flower drops off to leave the fertilised ovary behind on the tomato plant; this swells with seeds inside, ripens and we harvest the fruits and usually eat them, but we could save the seed and use then to grow more tomato plants.



The flowers of *Daphne bholua* 'Jacqueline Postill'



The fallen flowers under the shrub

With our *Daphne bholua* 'Jacqueline Postill' shrub what actually happens is that when the flowers drop off, the flowers take with them the developed ovary with seed (ovules) inside. If you open up one of the flowers carefully from top to bottom you will see the tiny female ovary with seeds inside attached to the base of the flower. From my knowledge of plants and botany, I would say that this is a remarkable and unusual occurrence. I can only assume that the ovary in this case develops very rapidly on the parent plant before it drops off still attached to the flower base and that the petals transfer still more nutrients to the developing seed inside the ovary as they decay.

If you want to try your hand at raising new seedling plants, I suggest you collect up the fallen flowers, keep them somewhere cool but dry and when they are dry gently rub them together to separate the flower debris from the ovaries with seed inside (blow gently to separate the two). Sow the seed immediately onto the surface of a John Innes seed compost with some added coarse horticultural grade sand and grit. Cover the sown ovaries only thinly with fine grade vermiculite or a little of the compost itself. Ensure even moisture, keep out of direct sunlight and keep in a cool (cold) but frost-free place. They are likely to need the effects of winter chilling possibly over two winters! Yes, you will have to be patient!

If you want plants for your garden more quickly then you will have to buy them in from a specialist nursery (see RHS Plantfinder). Garden Centres do not seem to offer this plant for sale. If you cannot find this shrub in stock then buy either *Daphne bholua* 'Gurka' or 'Peter Smithers' both of which will delight you (the former was the seed parent of 'Jacqueline Postill').

All THEA members should experience this shrub in their own gardens and do remember to accommodate this plant close to your home where you can enjoy it immediately you step outside. Winter garden plants should be closer to the house and summer plants further away.

Harry Delaney

The elusive *Smyrnum*

Some years ago, on a visit to Dorothy Clive Gardens in the Springtime, a group of us noticed the path edge down in the dell was peppered with a pale feathery lime green plant (below). What was it we wondered – this light ethereal plant?



When we found one of the gardeners, he anticipated our question immediately (it seems it is a common one). “Oh, that’s *Smyrnum*, *Smyrnum perfoliatum*. Its common name is Perfoliate Alexanders.”

Such a pretty plant but so difficult to grow. I collected some seed and sowed them in my garden – but nothing happened. I bought seed and sowed them directly into the soil; again nothing happened.

Then two years later, just when I had forgotten all about *Smyrnum* it appeared one early spring. The following year it came up somewhere else. Of course, by this time I couldn’t even remember where I had first sown the seed!

It is reported that *Smyrnum* should be sown directly into the soil preferably in the shade. It is a biennial and in the first year will produce only a pair of leaves that could easily be ignored. By the second year the growth will be larger and it will flower and the black seed will scatter around. Worth persevering though; it enhances any Spring bed and they say it is excellent for floristry.

Freyda Taylor



Report: Day Course at Reaseheath, Friday, 23rd February 2018

There were two fascinating lectures that day so, in case you missed them, read on.

“The Life and Work of William Andrews Nesfield, (1794-1881)”- Dr Shirley Rose Evans, Garden Historian

Dr Evans gave us the most interesting talk on William Andrews Nesfield (1793-1881), the master of the Victorian parterre. She carefully set the historical scene around him during his lifetime. Born in 1794 he was the son of a clergyman so it was expected that he would enter the Church, however he chose an Army career instead and served in the Peninsular War. In 1818 he resigned his commission to become a painter - he was a highly skilled watercolourist.

Nesfield’s brother-in-law was the architect Anthony Salvin and by the 1840s they were working together on several sites with Nesfield designing terraced parterres to complement Salvin’s romantic buildings. The parterres he created were based on French originals from the 17th century. Careful scrolls of box were laid out against coloured gravels.

One such site was Crewe Hall, another Arley Hall but both gardens are lost now. The one garden that remains is at Whitley Court in Worcestershire under the guardianship of English Heritage. Following Shirley's lecture, several members asked about her book on Nesfield 'Masters of their Craft'. The cover is shown above.

Freyda Taylor

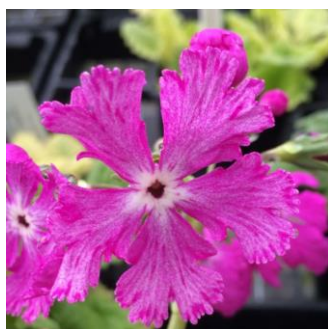
"Primulas and Auriculas" - Ingrid and John Millington, Hillview Hardy Plants, Bridgnorth

The Millingtons entertained us with a comprehensive talk about primulas and auriculas and some solutions to the pests and diseases that can be a problem. The couple started the nursery in 1986 – both are professionally trained horticulturalists – and hold the national collection on *Acanthus* (John) and *Albuca* (Ingrid). The nursery attends many of the flower shows, where they show auriculas in spring and other plants later in the season.

Ingrid began with an introduction to the Primulaceae family. There are 400 species; the majority of primula are short-lived, but are easy to grow from seed. She said that micropropagation had revolutionised the production of new plants, where hundreds of plants can be propagated at low cost.

Ingrid ran through a selection of cultivars, including *Primula* 'Jack-in-the-Green', which has a green ruff at the back of the petals and was much liked by the Elizabethans; *P. guinevere*, with a dark leaf and pale pink flower; *P. 'Crescendo'* (polyanthus), a sturdy group of plants with a good colour range that is often used for municipal bedding; and *P. saxatilis*, a candelabra style, which can grow in rocky conditions and is good for dry, difficult places.

P. sieboldii are becoming more popular. In Japan, where they excel in growing them, there are *P. sieboldii* festivals (similar to the cherry blossom festivals). These plants like dappled shade or woodland conditions. A notable variety is *P. sieboldii* 'Dancing Ladies', which is pink on the underside and white on the upper.



P. sieboldii 'Dancing Ladies'



P. 'Belarina Buttercup Yellow'

The Millingtons used to split plants in June or July after flowering but now with summers getting warmer, they do it in September. An auricula theatre, Ingrid explained, is for showing not growing – it doesn't offer the right conditions. They need air movement, light from all sides and cool, shady conditions. Ingrid and John grow them in plastic pots and drop them into clay pots for showing.

Ingrid also gave us an insight into the different classes of auriculas – border, alpine, show, edged, fancies and striped. In the border class, some good varieties include *P. auricula* 'Royal Velvet', which is vigorous with ruffled flowers, and 'Susannah', a double pink.



P. auricula 'Royal Velvet'



P. auricula 'Susannah'



P. auricula 'Sherwood'



P. auricula 'Lord Saye en Sele'

Alpine auriculas are good garden plants, with no farina. There are white-centred varieties such as 'Walton', 'Beatrice' and 'Blue Bonnet'; and gold-centred, including 'The Egyptian', 'Andrea Julie', 'Joe Perks' and 'Paleface'. Show auriculas have a central paste zone, and are covered with farina, but can be spoilt by rain. These include 'Trudy', 'Pot'o'Gold' and 'Alice Haysom'.

The edged have green, grey or white edges, usually with black flowers, for example, 'Silverway' and 'Sherwood', whereas fancies have a body colour that isn't black, and grey or white obscuring edges. Examples of fancies include 'Nankenan', 'Hinton Fields' and 'Dan Tiger'. Ingrid said that there has been a lot of work done on developing stripes, and these are easy to grow, including the interestingly named 'Lord Saye en Sele', 'Konigin der Nacht', 'Arundel Stripe' and 'Cutie Pie'. For the full range of their plants, see <http://www.hillviewhardyplants.com/>.

John Millington took over with a talk on pests and problems affecting the primula family, and some solutions. For slugs and snails, John said that nematodes are effective but expensive, and they don't kill snails. He didn't find wool compost very good, however, some members in the audience thought they were effective. Slug pellets based on metaldehyde have their disadvantages in that they don't work well in damp conditions and will be banned as the chemical has been found in water courses. John and Ingrid use a slug pellet based on ferric phosphate, which is approved for use by organic gardeners.

Vine weevil is a particular problem for primulas. The eggs cannot be seen in the soil as they're no bigger than a grain of sand and are laid at the base of the plant. There is no treatment available to the amateur gardener to kill the adult weevil. For larvae, there is Provado, but this is a neonicotinoid pesticide and will soon be banned. John recommends nematodes. However, it is important to use one that works at lower temperatures and applying little and often is very effective.



Vine Weevil Pupae (www.rhs.org.uk)



Vine Weevil Larva (www.gardenersworld.com)

Root aphids are usually a problem when compost is too dry or plants are grown in clay pots that dry out. The easiest way to deal with this is to wash the roots thoroughly.

John gave us some pointers for growing primulas. He said that growing from seed was a good way to produce plants. Fresh seed germinates quickly, however, stored seed needs cold stratification before it will germinate. John and Ingrid grow theirs as stock plants in 1½ litre pots, then split the plant.

They make their own compost from peat and potting bark, to which they add lime, potassium and a controlled-release fertiliser, for example, Osmacote. He said they'd tried many peat-free composts, and Melcourt Sylvamix Nursery Stock (a commercial product) was the only one that came close. However, this only contains a base fertiliser and is heavy. John said that adding grit to compost is often recommended to improve aeration but he says that adding potting (or orchid) bark is better.

John and Ingrid use plastic rather than clay pots. Clay pots can contain salts and dry out and are difficult to clean. A good way of cleaning plastic pots is by immersing them in water at 60°C for 10 mins, which is more effective than disinfectant. They divide their primulas in the autumn, overwinter them in a polytunnel, keeping them dry, and then start to water in the spring, adding a controlled-release fertiliser.

Congratulations to Neil Bebbington!

Warm and sincere congratulations must go to Neil, a former member of staff at Reaseheath College for gaining The Royal Horticultural Society's premier qualification of RHS Master of Horticulture award. Neil recently attended the RHS Awards Ceremony held in the RHS Council Chamber in Vincent Square in London where he was presented with this award by the President of the RHS, Sir Nicholas Bacon Bt OBE DL.



Apart from full-time employment Neil has been studying for this award for well over 4 years, completing assignments, dissertations, taking practical examinations, doing plant identification and giving lectures on agreed subject matter to satisfy RHS Examiners.

Neil, prior to working at Reaseheath, was trained by Bridgemere Nurseries and specialised in plant propagation. He worked there for nearly 20 years before moving to Reaseheath College as a Propagator and holding several posts including Instructor, Nursery Manager, and more recently Manager of Reaseheath's "state of the art" new glasshouse block and somehow mastered the computer systems to enable the first crops to be grown in it. About 18 months ago, Neil left to take up his present post with Greenwood Nurseries on the Wirral where he is establishing a brand new tree production unit.

Again, congratulations Neil on your recent success which is richly deserved.