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# NEWSLETTER – Spring 2025

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**Editorial**

Hello.

At long last here is our Spring Newsletter. After a miserable, wet winter we've now switched to very dry weather, but at least we've had some sunshine!

We had an excellent study day in February – both speakers were very good and interesting and we had a lot of positive feedback from members. I think it will be a challenge to top that for our autumn study day. We have included reports on each of the lectures which we hope you will take the time to read. All credit to Paul who wrote up Matthew Wilson's lecture as he managed to capture a lot of the detail.

The THEA committee has been busy planning outings for this summer – we hope some of these will appeal to you (hopefully, all of them!) and we look forward to seeing you there. As ever we are looking for suggestions for gardens to visit, both fairly locally and further afield – if you have any suggestions for 2026, please email us at [horticultural.enthusiasts@gmail.com](mailto:horticultural.enthusiasts@gmail.com).

Hoping to see lots of you on our outings and at the next Study Day.

Best Wishes to you all

Debbie Holden (Chairman)

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## SUMMER OUTINGS for 2025

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### Below are details of our Summer 2025 outings

We have asked members for suggestions for garden visits for 2025 and we've selected from some of those – thank you for sending them to us. We've also been influenced by Rosie Irving and Monty Don with their choice of Great British Gardens!

Again this year, we have decided to arrange a **coach trip** combining York Gate Garden near Leeds (a Rosie Irving “must see” garden”) and Breezy Knees Garden near York. We hope you will support us and join us on the trip – because of the cost of the coach we need sufficient numbers to make this viable so we **would ask you to book early once booking opens**. Please see below for more details.

Our other outings this year are all “self-drive” and include:

- Ashwood Nurseries and John's Garden (back by popular request)
- Plas Cadnant Garden and Crûg Farm Plants in North Wales
- Two Cheshire Gardens: Sandymere and Norley Bank Farm

At this stage we're giving you the overview of the visits, the dates and the estimated costs – get the dates in your diary ASAP. We will open booking for the trips individually over the next six weeks and will email you with the details. We hope this will simplify the booking process.

Again, we are doing the bookings via TicketSource – they do charge a modest fee for bookings but it makes the whole process so much easier to keep track of and it means you can book online and pay by credit or debit card. When booking, if prompted, you don't need to pay for TicketSource insurance – if you need to cancel your booking just let us know and we can sort it out provided we have sufficient time and we haven't paid for the garden(s) concerned.

Any problems or questions, just email [horticultural.enthusiasts@gmail.com](mailto:horticultural.enthusiasts@gmail.com) or contact one of the committee members.

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### Visit 1 – Ashwood Nurseries and John's Garden – Thursday, 12th June

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We visited Ashwood's in April 2023 and we had an excellent tour of the garden – most members said they'd like to come back for another visit at a different time of year . . . so here we are!



Ashwood Nurseries is a traditional plant nursery and garden centre in the West Midlands. 'John's Garden' at Ashwood Nurseries is a three-acre private garden created by nursery owner and Chelsea Gold medallist John Massey. Informal borders, island beds, woodland dells and a wildlife garden are set against the beautiful backdrop of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal.

The garden has magnificent collections of trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials and conifers in addition to the fine displays of bulbs and a notable collection of Malus and Amelanchier.

We will have a tour of the garden with a member of staff.

See <https://www.ashwoodnurseries.com/> for more details.

### **Arrangements for the Day**

We are aiming to arrive at Ashwood no later than 11:15 am and the tour will start at 11:30 am.

There is a tearoom at Ashwood Nurseries serving a range of light lunches and cakes

Ashwood Nurseries is a wonderful specialist nursery and they offer a fine selection of plants, including award winning hellebores. The perfect opportunity to add to your plant collection!

And, just saying, this is also quite close to David Austin Roses so you might be tempted to pay a visit there while you're in the area. It would be churlish not to!

### **How to Book**

The cost for visiting the garden and the tour is £12.50 and tickets will be available via TicketSource **shortly** – we will notify you by email. Guests are always welcome.

### **Address**

Ashwood Lower Lane, Kingswinford, West Midlands, DY6 0AE

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## **Visit 2 – Plas Cadnant and Crûg Farm Nursery – Tuesday, 1st July**

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This year we are visiting two Welsh gardens – Plas Cadnant and Crûg Farm Nursery. The two gardens are fairly close together so it makes sense to combine the two into one visit.

Note, this event is “self drive” and public transport really isn't an option. If travel is a problem for you, then let us know and we can see if we can facilitate some car-sharing.

### **Plas Cadnant**

For this outing we're off to North Wales, to Anglesey. Described as one of North Wales's best kept secrets is the hidden world of Plas Cadnant Gardens, situated at the side of the Menai Strait, hidden from view near to Menai Bridge on the Isle of Anglesey.

Former owners of Plas Cadnant were related to the Tremayne family of Heligan House, now famous for its Lost Gardens. In 1996, the present owner bought the 200 acre Plas Cadnant Estate and work began on the restoration of the historic garden and grounds. Since then large parts of the gardens have undergone a spectacular transformation and have been restored to their former glory.



The Plas Cadnant Gardens are part of the Estate's ongoing restoration project. Extending to nearly ten acres, the garden has three distinct areas: The large 'Walled Garden', The 'Valley Garden' with its waterfalls and The 'Upper Woodland Garden'.

Please note that some of the garden areas are not suitable for less abled visitors due to steeper inclines and gravel paths. These areas are definitely not suitable for wheelchairs or mobility scooters.



### **Arrangements for the Day**

We are aiming to arrive at Plas Cadnant for 10:45 ready for our tour at 11am. We will have the garden to ourselves for an hour before they open to the general public.

Tea/coffee and cake and light lunches will be available in the restaurant from midday.

For more information, see <https://plascadnant.co.uk/2/en-GB/THE-HIDDEN-GARDENS>

### **Address**

Plas Cadnant Hidden Gardens, Cadnant Road, Menai Bridge, Isle of Anglesey, North Wales, LL59 5NH

### **Crûg Farm Plants**

Following on from the visit to Plas Candnant, we will cross the water back to the mainland and head to Crûg Farm Plants. It's about a 15 minute drive (7 miles) heading towards Caernarfon.



Crûg Farm Plants is the creation of successful plant hunters, Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones. Sue and Bleddyn have travelled the world hunting for plants and many of the plants you will see are not normally seen in cultivation. Do not worry if you do not recognise them as help is at hand. Sue and Bleddyn have yet to meet anybody who can walk through the gardens and recognise everything they see.

From the woodland, you make your way into the walled garden, where you will see more wonderful collections growing – palm-like Schefflera and Daphniphyllum, huge-leaved Tetrapanax, all wonderful stuff.

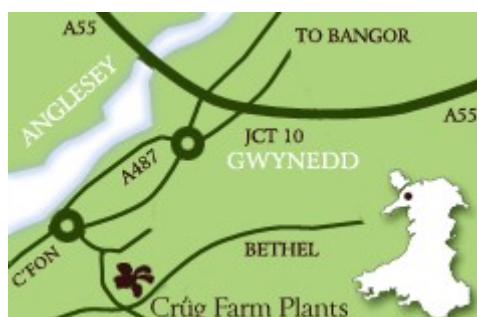
Although they do not generally open to the public anymore, they do open for pre-booked visits and NGS open days and have an extensive online catalogue of unusual and rare plants – well worth a look.

if you wish to pre-order plants for collection on the day please get in touch with [mailorder@crug-farm.co.uk](mailto:mailorder@crug-farm.co.uk).

At any time of year you will find something of interest to tempt you.

### Address

Crûg Farm Plants, Griffith's Crossing, Caernarfon, Gwynedd, LL55 1TU.



<https://www.crug-farm.co.uk/>

### How to Book

To book for Plas Cadnant **and** Crûg Farm Plants, the cost of entry to both gardens and a guided tour at each is £24. Tickets will be available via TicketSource shortly – we will notify you by email. Guests are very welcome.

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### Visit 3 – Two Cheshire Gardens – Sandymere and Norley Bank Farm – Monday, 21st July

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We are planning to visit two Cheshire gardens – quite close to each other near Delamere Forest.

#### Sandymere

In the morning we will visit Sandymere, the home of Sir John Timpson. Sixteen landscaped acres of beautiful Cheshire countryside with terraces, walled garden, extensive woodland walks and an amazing hosta garden. Turn each corner and you find another gem with lots of different water features including a new rill built in 2014, which links the main lawn to the hostas.

There is a well stocked extended terrace round the house which has matured enough to make the most of an ambitious planting scheme. With a new feature at the end of the duck filled lake, a wild flower garden, and a new boat house, Sandymere continues to fulfil its promise that there is always something new every year.



### **Arrangements for the Day**

We will meet at Sandymere at 10am where we will be greeted by the head gardener, Rachel.

Rachel will give us a tour of the garden followed by light refreshments

### **Address**

Sandymere, Middlewich Road, Cotebrook, Cheshire, CW6 9EH

5m N of Tarporley. On A54 approx 300yds west of traffic lights at crossroads of A49/A54.

### **How to Book**

The cost for visiting the garden and the tour is £11.50 including tea/coffee and tickets will be available via TicketSource **shortly** – we will notify you by email. Guests are welcome.

### **Norley Bank Farm**

Norley Bank Farm is the home of Neil and Margaret Holding who have developed this garden from scratch over many years, with a lot of hard work and dedication. It offers a traditional setting of courtyards, barns, fields and gardens which are filled with shrubs, perennials and annuals to give a very colourful display. A newly planted orchard is home to their free range hens and also an enclosed cut flower garden with raised beds that surround a wooden greenhouse. The pond was restored in 2013 having gradually become silted up and home to some thirsty crack willows. It is now a wonderfully mature pond full of wildlife with a backdrop of trees and flowers. A second pond has been dug to attract great crested newts. On sunny days, there is an abundance of damsel and dragon flies. They specialise in breeding Coloured Ryeland sheep that can be seen in the fields and they foster two donkeys on behalf of the donkey sanctuary.



## Arrangements for the Day

We will meet at Norley Bank Farm at 2pm where we will be greeted by Neil and Margaret who will show us their wonderful garden.

### Address

Norley Bank Farm, Cow Lane, Frodsham, Cheshire, WA6 8PJ

### How to Book

The cost for visiting the garden and the tour is £12.50 and includes coffee and cake. Tickets will be available via TicketSource shortly – we will notify you by email. Guests are welcome to come along.

The drive between the two gardens is approximately 10 minutes.

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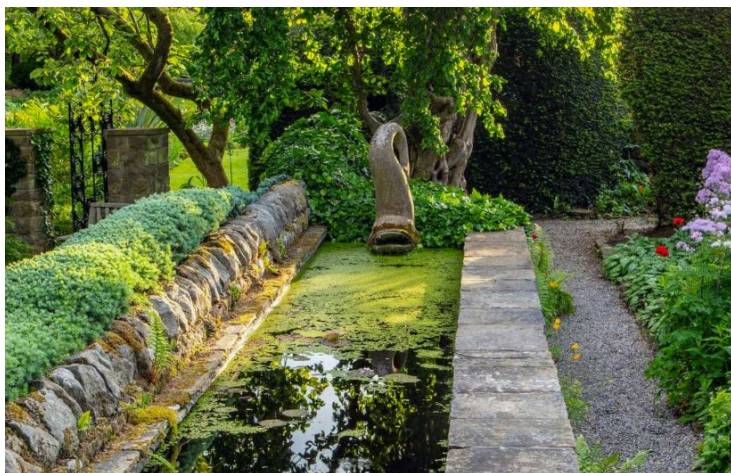
## Visit 4 – Coach Trip to York Gate and Breezy Knees – Wednesday, 6th August

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This year, by popular request, we have decided to go to York Gate and Breezy Knees gardens for our 2025 coach trip. Both are definitely “Great British Gardens” and it makes sense to try and combine the two gardens in one day, even though it will require a fairly early start.

Note, the size of a group visit to York Gate is limited, which means that we will have to limit this coach trip to **26 people maximum**. For this reason, I would suggest making your booking quite quickly after booking has opened in order to secure your place.

### York Gate



Near Leeds, York Gate is widely considered one of the UK’s best small gardens, designed in the Arts & Crafts style as a series of beautifully crafted outdoor rooms. It was created by the Spencer family during the 20th century and entrusted to Perennial in 1994 so that the garden could live on and continue to be enjoyed by the public.

See the web site for more information:

<https://perennial.org.uk/gardens/gardens-menu/york-gate-garden/>

## **Breezy Knees**



Described by Monty Don as "a beautiful modern garden created on the grandest possible scale". Breezy Knees features an amazing array of gardens which provide colour and interest al every time of year.

There is also a specialist perennial nursery and cafe.

See the website for more details <https://www.breezyknees.co.uk/>

### **Arrangements for the Day**

We will meet at Reaseheath College at 8:45 am to board the coach. Departure will be 9:00 am sharp.

The drive to York Gate is just under two hours so we hope to arrive by 11 am and then we aim to leave at 12:30 pm. From there we will board the coach and drive on to Breezy Knees garden, a further 40 minutes away so we should arrive by 1:45pm saving plenty of time to enjoy refreshments and explore the extensive gardens. We estimate departure time will be about 4pm (to be confirmed)

### **How to Book**

Coach costs have increased significantly over the past few years, hence to cost of the coach from Reaseheath to York Gate and Breezy Knees plus garden entry in to both gardens **£51**.

Tickets will be available via TicketSource shortly – we will notify you by email.

## Reports from the February Study Day

Our February Study Day was very well attended with over 80 members and guests. IT worked perfectly and everything seemed to go according to plan – always a relief.

We enjoyed both lectures enormously – both speakers were excellent. We had really good feedback after the event, which is really nice. Below are write-ups of some of the main points of the two lectures.

### **‘Great British Gardens – what makes them great – will they withstand the test of time?’ by Rosie Irving**



Our first speaker of the day was Rosie Irving, well known for her long career as a TV producer/presenter and author, and also for the garden tours she leads with her partner and rosarian, Michael Marriott.

Rosie took as her starting point a number of gardens that we would all acknowledge as being ‘great’ in some way or another and then posed the question ‘what happens when the present owners sell up or die?’ Should those gardens be preserved in their present state or should they be allowed to change? And what is it, exactly, that makes a garden ‘great’? Her view now is that to maintain their existence they must be able to change; but as a corollary she thinks that ‘listing’ (which some see as forcing a garden to be set in aspic) may

actually turn out to be a good thing, as it does reduce the risk of a significant garden being damaged by poor new owners. She then took us on a tour of some of her favourite gardens, including a few that are not normally open to the public but which she has visited during her curated tours.

### **York Gate (Leeds)**



herbaceous borders.

This is a small garden divided into 14 rooms over 1 acre, created by mother and son team Robin & Sybil Spencer. The rooms are tied together visually by a trained cedar hedge along a wall which is visible from many parts of the garden and mirrors the roof shapes of the nearby house. The design is relieved using focal points of flowers and antique urns/statues. She noted the use of decorative paving patterns and a pavement maze and particularly liked the use of *Ophiopogon planiscapus* ‘Nigrescens’ to delineate the path from

### **Great Dixter (Northiam, East Sussex)**



This garden was created by Christopher Lloyd and his mother. It is very artistic and colourful, with a billowy beauty and great bursts of colour and has been an inspiration to many gardens. Great Dixter is fortunate to have had Fergus Garrett take over as Chief Executive (of the charity now responsible for the garden) and Head Gardener, as he is very much on the same page as the Lloyds, although there was some controversy when the Rose Garden was turned into a tropical jungle. He recognises that the garden requires a lot of maintenance but encourages change – horticultural students who work at Dixter are allowed to express their ideas.

### Woolbeding Garden (Sussex)



The house and gardens were built in the 1700's and are now managed by the National Trust. It is a large estate garden with 26 acres divided into 3 distinct parts. There are formal gardens near the house, with much use of Belgian espalier topiary and pleached hedging. A more romantic pleasure garden area, further from the house, features sculptures and follies. NT has used a series of modern garden designers to restore neglected areas, but these new designs continue to give nods to the past.

### Dorset Walled Gardens (Sherbourne, Dorset)



This is a private garden on the site of an organic farm. It was designed by the Bannermans, who had worked previously on Woolbeding, and who introduced to it their very romantic style. It is a very pretty garden that Rosie believes will last test of time.

### Levens Hall (Kendal, Cumbria)



The garden has been preserved since 17th century and contains the world's oldest topiary garden with highly stylised shapes that take 6 months to clip each year. In order to emphasise the topiary, underplanting is kept simple with 30,000 annuals and bulbs put in each year.

### Rousham (Bicester, Oxfordshire)



This garden in Oxfordshire dates to the picturesque landscape movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was designed by William Kent and is made up of different parts e.g. dovecot and walled garden. Every path ends in a statue or building. There is a beautiful parkland with hand clipped laurel shrubs to produce areas of light and shade alongside the paths, so as to create a sense of romance. It has been described by Dan Pearson as "a magical landscape" and Arne Maynard says of it "a sense of place governs its layout and features".

### Oxford Botanic Garden (Oxford)



This is the oldest botanic garden in the UK, built more than 400 years ago. The Walled Garden is its oldest part, with borders containing plants now arranged by their genetic relationships, but there are other more decorative areas as well. The future of this garden would seem to be assured, as it is owned by Oxford University and is supported by a ' Friends of ' charitable foundation.

### **Sissinghurst (Sissinghurst, Kent)**



Created by Harold and Vita Sackville-West in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>C, it has multiple garden rooms with a strong topiary backbone. It includes the famous white garden, where the texture of the many plants create the interest and excitement rather than the colours. However, Rosie doesn't feel everything is successful in this iconic garden: in particular, she thinks that the Delos "Mediterranean" garden, created after a visit to the island in 1935, does not sit easily with the medieval style tower that forms its backdrop.

### **Knepp (Horsham, Sussex)**



The walled garden at Knepp was created with 400 tons of crushed concrete. The garden clearly follows the same thinking as the rewilding experiment being undertaken in the wider farming estate at Knepp.

### **Hadspen (now the Newt)**

A lovely garden with a 200 year history which no longer exists (as Hadspen) as Sandra and Nori Pope returned to Canada and it has now been completely redesigned and remodelled by its present South African millionaire owner. Rosie felt she couldn't go there as it would spoil her memory of Hadspen but one member who had been to the Newt recommended it.

### **Veddw (Nr. Monmouth, Wales)**



Rosie described this as a 'Marmite' garden, as it is all about the hedging and sculpture and so not to everyone's taste. It has a black dyed pool with a curved yew hedge backdrop – the dye allows crisp reflections. The design uses lots of the same plants and black painted hit and miss fencing. The overall effect is striking.

### **East Ruston Old Vicarage (Nr. Stalham, North Norfolk)**



This started with a tiny patch of land when owners – Alan Gray and Graham Robeson – bought the house. Now garden after garden (in total, 32 acres) has been added as the owners have bought more farmland and incorporated it. There is an iconic view of Happisburgh lighthouse via a hole in the hedge. The owners are trying to set up a trust to ensure the garden's survival.

### **Wollerton Old Hall (Market Drayton, Shropshire)**



Obviously an old favourite, designed with artistic flare by owner Lesley Jenkins. There are 14 linked garden rooms spread over 3 acres. It is a dynamic garden as Lesley does continue to make changes. Rosie expressed concern at what will become of such a wonderful garden when the current owners are unable to manage it.

### **Patthana Gardens (Wicklow, Ireland)**



This is an unconventional informal Irish garden built by T J Maher. Although small it does use calming blues in part to make it feel larger. Rosie believes however that it is the setting rather than the planting which makes it great.

*Report by the THEA Committee*

### **“Dynamic Gardening” by Matthew Wilson**



Matthew started his talk (which contained plenty of humour as well as interest) by describing his background and journey in horticulture, from growing up in his parents’ cut flower nursery, gaining vital skills from training with and working for the RHS at Hyde Hall and Harlow Carr through to becoming a garden designer and setting up his own business.

He described his approach to design by using four garden design projects which he has worked on in the last 20 plus years. Matthew picked out key points from each, before setting out key principles in how he sets out his plants.

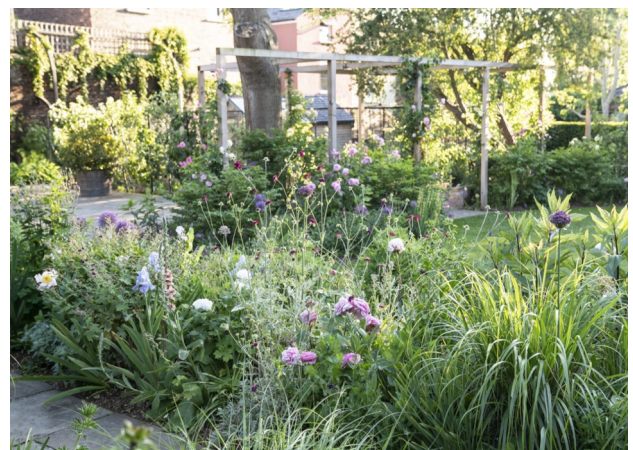
The first project he described was the dry garden at Hyde Hall. He became the RHS garden curator at Hyde Hall in 1999. Matthew described this as the most significant appointment in his horticultural learning journey – particularly his work on the dry garden there which was designed to be self-sustaining without fertiliser or irrigation. The garden at Hyde Hall was particularly challenging with very low annual rainfall (less than the annual averages for Tunis and Beirut!) and a heavy clay soil. Matthew created a garden which would have no irrigation apart from initial watering in after planting and any rain. The planting scheme involved 8000 plants with 1200 different varieties chosen to cope with the harsh conditions at Hyde Hall – with the dryness and the harsh cold easterlies from the nearby North Sea. Key points he made about the garden were the careful

choice of plants to cope with the conditions and the use of self-seeding to achieve a rapid establishment. He used plants like *Stipa tenuissima* and nigella to give a long season of interest and to link the site into the wider landscape (using the vibrant yellow of early season euphorbias to compliment the yellow of oil seed rape in fields).



Views of the Dry Garden at Hyde Hall

The second project was the garden at Highbury Hill in London. The clients had bought the house because of its relatively large wildlife friendly if overgrown urban garden. Here the brief was to use the best features of the existing garden by keeping many of the plants – particularly bearded iris and a characterful hawthorn tree – and by cleaning off and reusing the hard landscaping so that as little as possible had to be brought onto site. Key points made by Matthew were that the reuse, recycling and upcycling did not necessarily save money but was beneficial for the planet and gave opportunities in design. Another key point was that even if overlooked by neighbours a sense of privacy could be achieved without a tall boundary fence/hedge using multiple layers of planting.



Multiple layers of planting to help create a sense of privacy at Highbury Hill

The third project – Ivy Cottage in Knaresborough, Yorkshire – involved a very awkward steep narrow doglegged site where the top of the garden was 12m above the roof line of the house. To overcome this Matthew used water features – rills and splash pools – to cascade down the garden alongside paths with

shallow but broad steps. He also designed in reasons to stop on the journey up the garden such as small patios with seating. He framed the house with four *Acer griseum* trees. He also used any areas of gravel as opportunities for planting using plants like *Erigeron karvinskianus*.



Broad steps and rills linking multiple terraces with usable spaces and a place to rest at Ivy Cottage

The last project he discussed was Acomb High House in Northumberland. Here the property had a strong sense of place being developed piecemeal over 300 years. It had a number of mature trees and features which the client wanted to retain. In his design Matthew had to work with these constraints – as nothing lined up. So, he used beech domes with water features to create a structure linking the house with the garden.



Beech domes providing structure and linking the house with the garden

Matthew then went on to describe how he went about developing his drift planting looks. He uses a no dig approach to preparing his beds – putting down a layer of cardboard with a thick green compost mulch over it. In two to six months, the ground is ready to plant into.

His computer planting plans are used to ensure the right number of plants are ordered but are only a guide to final placing of the plants. Key points in how he lays the plants to achieve “naturalistic” looking drifts are:

1. Set out drift rivers of plants in diagonal angles through the beds,
2. Place trees at the boundaries between different drifts of plants rather than putting a circle of one species of plants around them,
3. Move the odd plant away from the rest to intermingle the drifts and replace odd plants with what he described as incidental plants (species used for this purpose included *Actaea*, *Verbena bonariensis* and in woodland settings *Digitalis*).

Another important concept used in his designs was the use of a colour palette to put hotter darker colours in full sun but put lighter pastel colours further away particularly if against a dark background such as a hedge. He also advocates using colours to link with the house and hard landscaping (e.g. the trunks of tree ferns placed by rust coloured corten steel water features).

**Report by Paul Brickwood**

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### Other Items of Interest

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#### **Dr D G Hessayon Obituary**

Like many people of a certain age, when I first started to take an interest in gardening the first books I bought were the inexpensive “Garden Expert” paperbacks by Dr D G Hessayon. They were clearly illustrated, easy to follow and it didn’t matter if you got some mud on them! I have quite a collection of them and the vegetable one is still my go-to book when it comes to plant spacing!

I was sad to hear that Dr Hessayon died recently aged 96, but was fascinated by the obituaries about him – not only was he a best-selling author, he became the managing director and chairman of a major UK agrochemical company. I was pleased to hear that his contributions were later acknowledged by the RHS by being awarded Veitch Gold Memorial medal.

There are plenty of obituaries available online, but here’s one below if you’re interested.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/feb/24/david-dg-hessayon-obituary>

#### **Gardeners’ World two-for-one offer**

Every year, Gardeners’ World magazine offers a card giving garden entry to 100s of UK gardens on a two for the price of one basis. For a keen garden visitor it is a must have! This will be available with the May edition of the magazine which should be available from 10<sup>th</sup> April. Although the cost of the magazine is a bit of a shock, it will soon pay for itself.

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### Dates for your diary

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- THEA subscription renewal will be due on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025 (don’t worry, I’ll remind you nearer the time!).
- Autumn Study Day – 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025