



## STAFFORDSHIRE GROUP

Newsletter  
Spring 2021 No. 49

## Flower Portraits winners

'Echinops Coronavirus'  
by Gerry Freeman  
(number 3)



Clematis close-up by Clive Plant (number 2)  
First Prize on the back-cover: Dicksonia (tree fern)  
and Colocasia by Eileen Johnson

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## Editorial

Welcome to this Spring 2021 edition, which is very much about the Photographic Competition. The Committee thought it would be nice to show all the pictures of the 2020 Photo Competition and not just the winners this time! The winning pictures can be found on prime spots in this newsletter, but all the landscape pictures are on page 22-25. On page 28-29 you'll find the Flower-Portrait pictures, followed by the Wildlife pictures on page 30. Unfortunately the pictures can't all be shown in full as that would take too much space in this paper version but in the Spring E-Letter you will find the pictures in full.



We have an interesting article about the Genus *Geranium* or in common language also known as the Cranesbills!

A good friend of mine has had a nursery growing a wealth of varieties in this genus for some years and some of you might know about his collection through his catalogue or website. He has a page in the latest national newsletter about his nursery, which is actually in our own Staffordshire, as he has also been kind to offer collections of Geraniums as a main prize for the competition!

Clive sent me two funny articles; one on the different types of gardeners we can be split into and one about having a go with zooming on page 5. If you aren't zooming yet you now may well have a go!

We've had some fabulous Zoom meetings from last year and Ruth has written a piece about our February lecture by Don Witton. I do agree with Don also, that many gardeners can be over worried seeing weeds growing in their garden. I am fortunate that these sorts of problems, like Don, have never bothered me much on my allotment. 'Weeds', or native plants I'd like to call them, are just the plants in the right place at the right time! Yes; I know the saying goes: 'in the wrong place' if you are a gardener who likes to be in total control! But these weeds are doing their right job for the immediate habitat, soil conditions and climate! They'll disappear when you make that habitat unsuitable for them or just replace them with similar, more attractive plants. Also filling it up rather than leaving spaces is a good tip!

I've been writing a blog all about the virtues of all our native plants in the British Isles since 2018 and discovered many amazing uses and virtues of these most neglected plants. It would be great to start a real Ethnobotanical Garden, which is a botanical garden showing them off and educating us before

all knowledge has gone or just kept in the many books written about them! Most of my 'posts' cover an entire family as writing about individual plants would take me too long! There are about 100 families I like to write about. Only the most important weeds get one post such as the nettle, dandelion, elder and ground elder. If you fancy learning more about some of the uses of your native weeds have a look at my blog at <https://wonderfulweedweekly.co.uk/my-dream-for-an-ethnobotanical-garden>

We've got the usual articles and reports of the January AGM but it wasn't enough to fill up this Newsletter so I decided to have a look at some of all the Newsletters of our Group since it started back in 1997! As the present-day editor I've been given the box with all HPS Staffordshire Group Newsletters to look after. There have been some wonderful items but unfortunately it was all before our digital era so nothing has been copied on disks in 'word', so time-consuming for me to retype!

Fortunately my predecessor Jackie has saved all the articles and newsletters in her time as an Editor so I've chosen 2 articles written by former Chairmen of our Group. One article is all about the art of making good compost by the late Ben Green. Another article is all about ornamental grasses by Trevor Holmes, who is still fortunately with us!

I am very keen to reuse those often splendid, informative articles but could do with a volunteer who could type them all into 'Word' for me? If you have got some spare time and enjoy reading them again please get in touch with me.

The Committee decided to send a questionnaire last summer about what you members wanted to get out of the Staffordshire Group.

Concerning the Newsletter suggestions were:

- Articles by members of their own garden & plant experience.
- Articles relating research visits.
- Poems and quizzes
- Spontaneous reflection of members thoughts/activities/observations at the time.
- More pictures
- Cultivation details for particular plants by some members with specialist knowledge. If they don't want to write anything we could interview you!
- Tips (from members) about recommended plant nurseries, both local and further afield, plus seed sources.

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So please if you have anything for the next autumn newsletter from the above list then also get in touch with me. See page 32 for my address.

For now, I hope you enjoy the read and your garden this spring!

## Chairman's Letter

We had all hoped that we would be able to meet in person some time at the start of the year but that was not to be. Now, with spring flowers in the garden and Easter just around the corner, the hope is to meet up with friends for coffee and a natter. The garden will be the centre of attention and all the hard work over the last few months will be rewarded.

Trying to organize a programme of talks and events has been like "the movable feast" with ideas and dates planned, only then not to be allowed under the changes in government regulations. The committee has worked very hard to keep the show on the road and I am grateful to them all. The Zoom lectures over the last few months have proved to be popular keeping the Staffs HPS Group's meetings on track.

We are now planning for a full series of lectures in the autumn see page 31 for the details and I hope they will all be face to face. It will be good to see you all again and catch up with your news. As yet we have not planned any Garden Visits but when restrictions are lifted and allow car and bus trips these will be arranged; so keep a look out on the website: [www.staffshps.webador.co.uk](http://www.staffshps.webador.co.uk) for any "Pop up Events". The details will also be sent out by email.

I like many of you now to have a wish list ready to see, buy and go to during the summer. Enjoy the sun, fresh air and meeting friends and have a great gardening summer.



From 'The crazy world of gardening; cartoons by

## THE 24<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This was held by Zoom to conform with the Hardy Plant Society National expectation. Helen asked members to raise a hand when required for proposers and seconders. Then after the AGM there would be a short break before the speaker.

1 Apologies: Wendy Farrell

2 Minutes of the last AGM – January 2020

Minutes of the AGM meeting were published in the Spring 2020 Newsletter. Taken as read and accepted by all present.

3 The Chairman's and Secretary's Reports

Officers' reports, Chairman and Secretary, as published in this Newsletter.

4 The Treasurer's Report

Ruth had circulated copies of the accounts and these and her report are printed in this Newsletter.

Proposed: Sandy Lewy

Seconded: Sue Potter

5 Election of Officers

There was only one nomination for each of the posts and the following will serve for the next year.

Chairman – Helen Harrison

Vice – Jackie Hemingway

Secretary – Fiona Horwath

Treasurer – Ruth Plant

6 Election of other Committee Members:

There were 3 nominations for committee members:

Lesley Greening, Hilary Dent and Bernie Norbury, they will serve for the next year. As and when required 2 or 3 further committee members may be co-opted

Pippa Morgan has now retired from the committee. Thanks were given to Pippa and her husband for all their work over the last year.

7 Appt of Examiner for 2021

Colin Horwath was appointed again, all agreed.

8 Date of Next AGM Meeting

Friday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022

Helen expressed the Society's thanks to Bernie and her daughter for acting as hosts.



## Chairman's Report for 2020

Owing to National Covid restrictions 2020 was a very short season for our local HPS events, and learning new skills became the norm, with Zoom helping to keep us all in contact even adding some new members to our group

All the committee have worked to keep the group well informed and entertained, some I feel must be acknowledged. Zoom was new to most of us and many thanks go to Bernie Norbury who has spent many hours helping as host to our Zoom meetings, also our thanks go to her daughter Rachael for technical support and keeping me on the right track.

The speakers that we so enjoy have given Carol Galley I am sure many sleepless nights changing and rearranging the now excellent 2020/2021 programme. Our thanks go to her for all the extra work.

Ruth has, on my and the committees behalf sent out regular email updates and reminders, also this year had the Newsletters to post out, always keeping a keen eye on our finances.

Our Newsletter editor Yoke van de Meer has worked under very difficult conditions this year doing an excellent job, managing to produce two News Sheets via email extra to the usual printed Newsletters. Please do give her your support by supplying articles for future editions, thank you Yoke for keeping us all so very well informed.

My personal thanks now go to our new Vice Chairman Jackie Hemingway who was voted into place at the first committee meeting of the year. She most ably proceeded to chair the committee and members meetings at the end of 2020 when I was unavailable.

We are losing one committee member this year and when we do meet again in person, teas will not be the same without Pippa Morgan and her husband Francis.

Please keep in touch via our new website, my hope is that we will all be able to meet up during the summer months and that you all stay safe and well.

## Secretary's report 2020

Looking back at last year's report, I had hoped we would enjoy sunny days for good gardening. Fortunately, we had plenty of sunny days in April, May and June 2020, and just as well, since gardening was pretty much all we were allowed to do! Let's hope by late Spring THIS year we will be enjoying a little more freedom.

We did manage 2 lecture meetings, in January and February 2020 and these were well received. By March we were in lockdown, and sadly the National AGM had to be cancelled. Hopefully there will be the opportunity for this by September 2021. Nothing of HPS formal import happened until later in the year, but I'm sure those of you online valued Facebook and email contact from our Staffordshire Group. Thanks again here to Ruth and Clive. Also for the December Zoom meeting - Anita Wright did us proud with some festive floral suggestions.

National HPS were in touch once the lockdown situation established, encouraging contact between groups, and exchange of information. The Seed Exchange has been managed under reduced circumstances, and I hope many of you have participated.

By the summer once lockdown was eased, a goodly number of members met - socially distanced of course- at Alison Rose's lovely garden in Milwich. Despite the rain, there was friendship and cake to enjoy, and plants to purchase. Thank you so much, Alison!

We managed just one Plant Fair in 2020, a Flowerpower Fair at Sandon Hall. It was great to see members mask to mask, if not face to face, and the Staffs HPS self-serve version of Click and Collect worked brilliantly.

To conclude, I'm sure, like me, you desperately miss your Hardy Plant friends and meetings- phone and email are all very well, but here's to the first PROPER meet-up when we can have a hug and chat about plants to our hearts content.

**Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020**

	2020	2019
	£	£
<b>Income</b>		
Subscriptions	1,071.00	1,044.00
Visitors	28.00	248.00
Raffle	103.00	405.03
Catering	35.90	148.25
Card Sales and Interest	31.51	46.10
Monthly Plant Sales	160.10	383.40
Summer Plant Sales	76.55	227.40
Annual Plant Sale	-130.50	1,707.50
Open Garden Event	57.80	390.00
Surplus/deficit (-) on outings	0.00	-89.00
	<u>1,433.36</u>	<u>4,560.48</u>

**Expenditure**

Administration	199.85	244.68
Speakers	400.00	1,791.46
Catering	7.92	125.04
Raffle Prizes	0.00	0.00
Magazine incl postage	1,047.66	603.76
Equipment & Website	0.00	0.00
Advertising	175.59	230.60
Room Hire	72.00	283.50
Photo Comp Prizes and Cards	60.00	64.00
	<u>1,957.93</u>	<u>2,943.04</u>

Surplus/Deficit (-) for the year

-524.57    1,617.44

**Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2020**

Funds at start of year (1 January 2020)	6,772.26	5,154.82
Surplus/Deficit (-) for the year	-524.57	1,617.44
Funds at 31 December 2020	<u>6,247.69</u>	<u>6,772.26</u>

**Represented by:**

Current account	2,850.01	3,548.79
Capital Reserve Account	3,654.68	3,651.47
Floals	130.00	100.00
Cheques not presented		0.00
2021 in advance (subscriptions)	-387.00	-528.00
	<u>6,247.69</u>	<u>6,772.26</u>

Treasurer: Ruth Plant

*Ruth Plant* 15/1/21

Examiner: Colin Horwath

*Colin Horwath* 15/1/21

## Treasurer's Report

We made a deficit in 2020 of **£524.57** which, considering the effect of the Covid epidemic is a good result. Income was down by around £3000 compared to 2019, this reflecting the lack of plant sales and other income generating activity during the year when we could not meet. We only were able to meet in the Village Hall in January and February 2020.

### **Notable points are**

Subscriptions were £1071 which is 119 members. This is an increase of 3 members compared to 2019.

The only summer plant sale that took place was at Sandon in August 2020, and this raised net income for the group of £76.55.

There was a net cost for the Annual Plant Sale of £139.50 as we place the advert for the sale in the previous year.

The Open Garden event at Alison's garden in August raised £57.80 for the group as well as being a significant morale raiser.

Expenditure in 2020 was broadly in line with that in 2019 with the exception of additional postage costs of £249.88 for the two editions of the newsletter. In a more normal year we look to avoid the vast majority of this cost by hand delivery if possible. For speakers fees we had 5 events and this compares to 8 in a normal year.

The reserves at 1 January 2021 stand at £6247.69 and it is clear that even if we are unable to meet properly again in 2021, or hold plant sales, the group is still on a sound financial footing as we continue serving the members in very uncertain times.



*Chrysosplenium macrophyllum* flowering in Ruth and Clive Plant's garden.

## Tales from Across 'The Pond'

### What Is Your Gardening Style? (by Clive Plant)

(inspired from an article by Mary Ellen Banks Adams County Master Gardener)

Overheard at a recent Friday HPS Meeting, "I'm not really a gardener", but/maybe, "Everyone is some kind of a gardener?" It might be fun to sit back and try to discover just how our gardens reflect our gardening style:

#### **The Dirt Gardener**

If you are the type of gardener that everyone describes as having Green Fingers, then chances are you are a Dirt Gardener. You are happiest in your garden all year round, and in making plans for each new season of bloom and growth. You have a pair of Wellington boots and a Big Hat, and you might own a pair of gloves. You are out in the early spring getting your beds cleaned up (of course, you already did your autumn clean-up, but you can't be too careful) and getting your tools and equipment ready for the new season. You add your own composted soil to your beds and you add amendments according to your Soil Test results. Once your plants are in the ground, you go out in all kinds of weather every day to weed, fertilize and tend your plants. You divide and transplant your darlings, and if you don't move them into another new bed you've just created, you share them with friends and family. You are a daily dead-header. Your vegetable garden is organized for continuous production, and you constantly monitor your plants for bugs and diseases. You also monitor your rain gauge religiously, you water using drip hoses, and your rain barrel is in constant use. In the autumn, you clean out your annuals, trim your perennials, and prepare your gardens for the slumber time of winter. Your "off season" is spent reviewing your successes and failures, and in making plans for next year.

If you are like most people, though, you are "way too busy" for that level of involvement. For you, a garden is important, if not essential, to your home environment.

#### **The Fair Weather Gardener**

One who recognizes that you have only so much time to spend tending your garden, and you like to Keep It Simple. Your garden has shrubs and perennials, and these require minimal, if any, maintenance. You add annuals in the spring and chrysanthemums in the autumn, to give colour and low-maintenance interest to your plot. What time you can spare to spend in your garden is golden time for you, and it rewards you with beauty and enjoyment every day.

Does neither one of these types really describe you as a gardener? Never fear, there are many variations of gardening styles!

#### **The Lucky Gardener**

A person who gardens almost by accident. You are a Zen Gardener, who doesn't know how it works, but it really works for you. The plants you put in don't have a lot of attention, and you put them in whatever space is available, but they thrive and bloom in abundance. You water when you remember to, you don't use fertilizer, and you still have a garden that is the envy of your neighbours.

### **The Artistic Gardener**

Do you love colour in your garden? Colour is everywhere, and it doesn't matter if the blooms clash or harmonize. You fill the garden beds with plants that are in luscious bloom from the season's beginning to the season's end. Climbing roses, flowering shrubs, ground covers, annuals and perennials – all these contribute to the riot of Colour in your garden. You add more splashes of colour with garden art, and there are mobiles and chimes that give a soothing aspect to your garden environment.

### **The Friendly Gardener**

You choose plants and shrubs according to how they will provide for your feathery and furry friends. Your garden plan is focused on the birds, bees, and fauna that inhabit your environment. You select native plants for food and cover, and include a water feature in your garden. The plants in your garden are chosen to attract beneficial creatures. You watch for the arrival of birds, butterflies, and pollinators each year, and you get really excited when you discover the nesting family in your bird box.

### **The Experimental Gardener**

These are people who love to study the nursery catalogues each year, searching for something to add to their gardens – and it's got to be NEW. You aren't happy unless you find something that will add an exotic and exciting punch to your garden beds. Even in 'sunny' Staffordshire, you have the knack of finding something from a tropical or more temperate climate that will happily thrive in your garden.

### **The Container Gardener**

But what if you don't have a garden? If a small patio or balcony is as close as you can get to nature, then you might be a Container Gardener. You use containers large and small, on shelves or stands, draped over the railing, and perched on tables to brighten your outdoor environment. Shade or sun, it doesn't matter, you have found a way to enjoy green, and growing colourful plants.

The apartment dweller may also need growing things around them, and if this describes you, you are an Indoor Container Gardener. House plants are your salvation and your joy, and you have a wide variety of foliage and flowering plants. If you are fortunate, and you have a large window that gives just the right kind of light for your plants, they will give you colour, beauty and interest all year long. Also you have the added benefit of your plants' aspiration to improve the air quality of your home.

### **The Desperate Gardener**

You might be thinking right now, "None of these describes me – I kill everything I touch."..... well, you are then most likely the Desperate Gardener, who, in spite of failures, keeps on trying! Rest assured there are plants out there that will grow and prosper in your garden no matter what you do to them. Don't give up, and one day you will meet up with the right plants, and then you will be hooked for life.

Did you find a little bit of yourself in one or two or more of these descriptions?

Then you, my friend, really are a Gardener.....A Hardy Plants Gardener no less!

## Hardy Geraniums or Cranesbills (by Gary Carroll)

Hardy Geraniums, (or Cranesbills, as they're commonly known), are just so diverse. It is pretty much possible to find one for any part of the garden, from dry shade to damp shade, to dry sun, wet areas, rockeries or even woodland type conditions.

There are around four hundred species in the *Geranium* genus, only around 15 or so of which are grown in gardens, but even within that relatively small amount of species, there are a good couple of hundred different varieties that come in many forms and colours, from low, sprawling spreaders, to neat clump formers, to ones that grow up strong and sturdy, to around 3-4 feet!

Hardy Geraniums work so well with many other plants, too. They go hand in hand with Roses in particular, but also work superbly with other shrubs, certain ones can be planted under trees where little else will grow, and of course they are a mainstay of the perennial border, offering a variety of colours and textures for different times of the year.

If you're thinking of growing Cranesbills, or grow some already but are considering extending your collection, here are the main 12 species, most of which there are numerous varieties of, plus some information on each one, which should help you to choose the right Geranium for the right place in your garden...

***G. cinereum*** – These are the small alpine types. Perfect for rockeries, they love the sun and need really good drainage. The many varieties of these offer some really bright, striking colours.

***G. clarkei*** – This species has one of the most popular Geraniums, Kashmir White. There is also Kashmir Pink, Purple and Blue, but the Blue one is actually a hybrid, not a true *clarkei*. They are good strong growers that spread well. They have attractively cut foliage and large flowers.

***G. endressii*** – This species is one of the parents of the huge *x oxonianum* group of Geraniums. The other parent being ***G. versicolor***. A vast array of varieties of these have been crossed over the years and many are still available to buy. They are by far the most commonly grown Geraniums.

**G. himalayense** – No guesses as to where these originate from! There are a few varieties of these, mainly in blue, but also white. They are good strong growers and perfect for sun or partial shade. There is also a dwarf form available.

**G. macrorrhizum** – These are great for growing under trees or anywhere that you may have dry shade. They are mostly mid height (around 16”) but there are taller and shorter varieties too. They come in white, soft pink, cerise and magenta. This species is also one of the parents of the *x cantabrigiense* group, the other parent being **G. dalmaticum**. The **cantabrigienses** are fantastically versatile in that they prefer damp shade, but they will actually tolerate dry sun pretty well too. All of the ones mentioned here, also have the advantage of being semi-evergreen.

**G. maculatum** – These are one of the woodland species. Perfect for under trees, but best off in dappled shade where the soil does still get moisture. They are really strong growers and will deform a pot if left in it for too long! They come in a variety of whites and pinks and there are also varieties with red/bronze foliage.

**G. nodosum** – These are the other type to consider if you have dry shade, but if you also want something a bit lower growing. These are delightful little plants which have pearlescent flowers that come in pink, white or purple.

**G. phaeum** – These are one of the earliest Geraniums to flower, which makes them ideal for providing nectar for early pollinators. They do well in shade as well as sun, but it is imperative that the soil remains moist.

*Geranium phaeum* 'Album' has relatively large, pure white flowers with golden anthers. Foliage is usually all green.





**G. pratense** – One of our natives! Gorgeous blue or white (or both), flowers, held usually quite high above light green foliage. These grow best in full sun, but importantly where the roots can remain moist.

**G. psilostemon** – This straight species is the tallest commonly grown Geranium, achieving up to four feet in height, in the right place! There are several varieties and also hybrids of these, with the common trait of having a magenta flower with a black centre to it. The varieties and hybrids are all shorter than the species though, and there is also a dwarf one!

**G. sanguineum** – There are a lot of varieties of these, in a vast array of different shades of pinks, purples and white. Perfect for dry sun at the front of a border, they have very nice foliage that often turns red in autumn. 'Ankum's Pride' is a compact spreading perennial to 15cm tall, with rounded leaves divided into narrow lobes, and bowl-shaped clear rose-pink flowers in early summer



**G. sylvaticum** – And finally, another woodland sort! Much like the maculatums, dappled shade and a good humus rich, moist soil would suit these early and short flowering (but not to be disregarded), Geraniums.

'Amy Doncaster' is one of the bluest forms available, the deep blue colour contrasting with the white eye. To 90cm, with good, clean foliage



On top of all these species, there are the smorgasbord of hybrids, plus perhaps one or two species not mentioned, like **pyrenaicum** and **soboliferum**. The list goes on! So, rest assured that whatever your garden looks like, there's a Geranium for you!

If you would like further information, why not head over to Cranesbill Nursery ([www.cranesbillnursery.com](http://www.cranesbillnursery.com)) where you can browse online, and/or request a free guide or catalogue, to help you decide on which varieties to grow.

You can also contact the owner, Gary, on [gary@cranesbillnursery.com](mailto:gary@cranesbillnursery.com), or 07500 600 205.

## “Once Seen Never Forgotten” (by Ruth Plant)

For our February Zoom talk we welcomed Don Witton back to speak to us, and his subject was “Once Seen Never Forgotten”.

Don gave us a wide-ranging and fast-moving presentation covering a varied selection of topics.

He started off with some of his holiday snaps ....and what places he has seen!

We journeyed through the landscape of Cumbria, South Africa, Australia and the USA.

We then started to focus on glorious gardens he has visited in both the UK and abroad.

I was particularly taken with the **Lauteret Botanic Garden** which is set in the most spectacular scenery in the Alps about midway between Turin and Grenoble. The garden was created in 1899 by combined effort of the Touring Club de France, Professor Jean-Paul Lachmann of the Université Scientifique de Grenoble, and M. Bonnabel, local hotelier. It was moved in 1919 to make way for a new road, and is now sited with excellent views of the Meije glaciers. The garden was abandoned during World War II, subsequently restored by Robert Ruffier-Lanche, declined again after his death in 1973, and revived in the early 1980s. In 1998 it was recognized by the Conservatoire des Collections Végétales Spécialisées (CCVS), and in 2005 it became a part of the Station Alpine Joseph Fourier.

Apparently today the garden contains more than 2,100 species of alpine plants from around the world, and continues to be managed by the Université Grenoble Alpes as it has since its creation. A visit to this garden is certainly one for my post-Covid bucket list!

In his sections on U.K. gardens **Breezy Knees Garden** stood out as one I surely must visit. This is closer to home, just outside York, and boasts 20 acres of planting that looked to me to be the perfect Hardy Planters Garden. I was also very taken with views of **Bressingham** in winter and reminded that as **Powis Castle** is on our doorstep we should visit there more often. Make a note! Don also showed us his lovely allotment, and my, how the planting has matured since my last visit (admittedly many years ago now. We must visit again as soon as practical - Sheffield watch out!

Don selected fourteen Fabulous Flowers to show us and looking at my notes they say... grow more *Erodium*: they do well in pots in a sunny place. So that's an action I can complete no matter what social restrictions are in place! He talked about plants that are important to us because they came from people who are or were important to us, plants for foliage, plants that fleeting and all the more addictive for that, and plants from our past which sometimes mean we love them and sometimes that we don't want to grow them. All of these feature (or don't!) in our gardens.

At the end of his talk Don admitted that he hadn't yet seen **Inverewe Gardens** in Scotland, and this is now on his bucket list to do. Also that in a normal year, once he has finished opening his allotment in May, he is travelling (and he does a lot!) and he lets the weeds grow and doesn't worry about it too much. That's very reassuring and I think just proves that he has his gardening life balance pretty perfect!

A refreshing and thought-provoking talk from Don.

## Making use of Grasses (by Trevor Holmes- From autumn 2005)

### Introduction:

Our interest in grasses began in the mid-nineties when Bednall Head nurseries was still in existence. I was always looking to grow new plants which would increase our range and had a longer shelf life than bedding and hanging basket plants. Grasses became a viable option as they could be propagated quite easily by division or seed and, more importantly, could be potted on if unsold at the end of the season – a useful advantage in the nursery business.

### The uses of garden- worthy grasses and where to plant them:

With the current trend towards small gardens and the now popular gravel gardens, growing grasses in containers is one way to display them.

There are a variety of colours and forms of grasses available to enhance the visual impact of many settings in the garden when grown in containers.

Although choice is very much a personal thing the use of *Hakonechloa macra* 'Alboaura', the golden Hakone grass, would be popular with many gardeners as displayed by Adrian Bloom at 'Foggy Bottom' in Norfolk.

We have had pleasing results with *Carex morrowii* 'Evergold', *Carex buchananii*, *Anemanthele lessoniana* (syn. *Stipa arundinacea*), *Festuca glauca* 'Elijah Blue' and the black bamboo *Phyllostachys nigra*.

Grasses can also be planted directly into a gravel garden where they will give winter colour and, given the right conditions, will seed around. Many of the blue and silver leaved grasses are suitable for gravel gardens as the conditions are generally dry, for example *Festuca glauca*, *Leymus arenarius*. Many grasses and sedges with bronze leaves make good companions for the blue leaved varieties such as *Carex buchananii*, *Carex comans* 'Bronze form', *Stipa tenuissima* and *Uncinia rubra*.

Grasses also have their place in the mixed border where they associate well with many perennials adding colour and form when flowering varieties have come to the end of their season. *Stipa gigantea*, the giant feather grass which grows to 6 feet, prefers a well- drained soil and makes a bold statement in a border with tall stems topped with open oat-like flowers becoming golden yellow and lasting through to the autumn.

### Other uses of grasses

*Miscanthus* is a genus of perennial grasses familiar to many gardeners which originated from Asia and was introduced to Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Miscanthus* has some beautiful cultivars which are attractive in the winter garden keeping their structure and flowerheads.

The RHS website recommends 4 different cultivars of *Miscanthus sinensis*: 'Kleine Silberspinne', 'Flamingo' and 'Morning Light' which will grow until 1.5 metre or 5' and 'Ghana' which can grow to 2.5 metre or 8'. I personally always liked the cultivar 'Zebrinus'. This has arching, linear leaves bearing transverse bands of cream or pale yellow.

But *Miscanthus* was developed originally as an energy crop and research has shown that it has many uses in different commercial fields.

- a) Renewable energy – Energy crops have been developed to contribute towards UK targets for renewable energy generation and reducing greenhouse gases, with *Miscanthus* being one of only two crops to be supported by the government as an energy crop.
- b) Thatching – *Miscanthus* has been used for thatching for centuries in Japan and, with 40% of the present thatching material (reed grass) being imported, it is seen as a viable alternative. Tests have shown that *Miscanthus* straw was found to have as good as or better durability than reed.
- c) Bedding - quality horse bedding can now be manufactured from *Miscanthus*. This has been found to be economical and quickly biodegradable and can be put straight on the soil.
- d) Alternatives to plastic pots, which are the life blood of the enthusiastic gardener, can now be manufactured from 70% *Miscanthus* blended with natural resins to produce a 100% biodegradable product that can be used as effectively as conventional pots.

### **Benefits of grasses to the environment**

- a) *Miscanthus* is a renewable crop and when grown as a crop for energy the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> taken out of the atmosphere during the growing season is released by the plant on combustion, making it CO<sub>2</sub> neutral
- b) Wildlife Enhancement - *Miscanthus* in its natural environment exists in mixed populations of other grasses and broadleaved plants. It dominates by its capability to grow taller than competing weeds, but allowing a diverse flora to develop in the under storey. Research has shown that *Miscanthus* stands attract more insects and birds than conventional arable crops. *Miscanthus* provides an excellent and unusual source of game cover with low to zero regimes.

The subject of grasses is controversial; you either love them or hate them, but nobody can deny that in recent years they have become very popular.

## Composting - My Way

(By Ben Green-published in spring 2005)

The compost heap has a vital role (or roles) in my garden. Each year in January and February I clear all my borders, weed, rake off leaves, prune and divide plants. Then everything gets a 2-3" layer of compost. In all I need over 60 barrow loads of the precious material. In the past I always saved some of the oldest and best to riddle for use as potting on material.

My heaps are set against the west wall of the vegetable garden. A heap is usually about 4' from back to front and is limited laterally by old iron fencing, or old trellis, lined on the inside with opened up cardboard boxes. At the base goes coarse material, ripped up cardboard boxes, leaves, twigs and weeds taken from the borders and shredded prunings. If the weather is dry enough I like to collect the rubbish raked from the borders with a rotary mower. The chopped up material composts faster. Weeds, grass cuttings, kitchen waste are built up in layers, which I like to alternate with shredded prunings as the season progresses. Brown paper, sticky flaps from envelopes, cardboard, vacuum cleaner contents all go on the heap. If there is a shortage of shredded material I roll cardboard up into tubes and build into the layers of grass cuttings, which obviously predominate in the summer months.

It is possible to get away with adding weed seeds although it is sensible to avoid adding nettles or seed heads of docks and to remove seed heads from *Astrantia*, *Sisyrinchium* and *Aquilegia* if you prefer not to have these all over the garden. Root of docks and dandelions can be crushed or shredded. Let couch grass rhizomes dry out before picking up with the mower or putting through the shredder. Big nettle rhizomes are usually shredded but often it is sufficient to screw them up somewhat before adding them to the heap.

When a heap reaches chest height I start another although I may add more grass cuttings as it sinks. If I have a heap made up largely of shredded prunings I will dig furrows into it that I fill with grass cuttings. This means it is possible to accelerate the breakdown of such material and compensate for excessive dryness. Apart from this working in of grass cuttings I do not attempt to turn the heaps.

Counsel of perfection tells you to leave the heap for 12 months. Sadly the demands for mulching do not permit this and I find that I can use heaps finished in the previous autumn but may need to lift the topmost material onto a new heap.

I do not cover the heap, I will only add water if there is a preponderance of dry waste. Nature takes its course. In 9 to 12 months-old heaps, worms are only obvious in the upper layers (if the heap has been topped up), but the newer heaps will have large populations of red earthworms.

These are mostly *Lumbricus rubellus*, *Dendrobaena rubidus* and *Eisenia foetida*. Their pink colouration is due to haemoglobin, which enables them to thrive in the relative low oxygen conditions in fermenting layers in the heaps. They are all true compost worms and are always associated with rich sources of decaying material.

The robins appreciate them when the compost is spread.

## Evoking memories (by Bernie Norbury)

The bright cerise pink of *Calluna vulgaris* 'Pink Madonna' transports me back to the top-deck bus journeys of my school-bound teens. Grown amongst other neatly clipped mounds of a bungalow's sloping garden and later in the journey, as the wild abandoned sprawl over heathland. My roadside heather border brightens the daily exercise of passersby, but will it evoke memories for them, who knows?

The County flower of Staffordshire also happens to be *Calluna vulgaris*, Bernie found out. See also in Wikipedia about the County Flowers in the UK:



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County\\_flowers\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_flowers_of_the_United_Kingdom)

## HPS Photo Competition 2020 Foreword (by Roy Alexander)

Here are this year's results and another very difficult task of choosing the winners it was.

Generally speaking I was impressed by the quality of the pictures.

I realise that they will have been taken on a range of cameras including, increasingly, smart phones and I try to bear that in mind however some of the pictures were so small it was impossible to see them properly; the file size needs to be at least 100k and nearly all smart phones will do that easily.

I try to choose on the rough basis of "would I like that picture on my wall?"

That is obviously a very personal choice and you may well not agree

I have given each a mark out of 20 and made a brief comment then given the results for each category

I was pleased to see that there were more entries this year with some great pictures.

Keep it up.



# HPS Photo Competition 2020 : Results

## Landscape

### **1<sup>st</sup> Eileen Johnson: ‘Impending Thunderstorm’**

Beautiful, atmospheric picture. The sunlit hut attracts the eye to the top right while the path leads the eye in from the bottom left. The colours and lighting are lovely.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Janet Lee: ‘White Blanket’**

Lovely monochrome winter scene. Would make good card or book cover with space for words. Simple but effective.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Bernie Norbury: ‘Kew’**

Well composed shot of the Alpine House at Kew. Sharp, lovely sky.

## Plant Portrait

### **1<sup>st</sup> Eileen Johnson: ‘Dicksonia & Colocasia’**

I love this Fern! The rich greens stand out from the dark background and the eye is pulled in to the centre of the frame by a spiral form. The plant at the top of the frame adds extra interest (see back-cover)

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Clive Plant: ‘True Blue’**

Beautiful close up of a Clematis. Pin sharp in the middle and the colours are gorgeous

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Gerry Freeman: ‘Echinops Coronavirus’**

Another stunning close up. Lovely colour, sharp detail and stands out from the background.

## Wildlife

### **1<sup>st</sup> Jean Harrison: ‘Goldfinch Feast’**

Very good picture of this goldfinch feeding. Very clear bird and the seed head upon which it's feeding and good separation from the blurred background. Could have been improved by cropping the top third of the background which is a little distracting. (see front-cover)

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Gerry Freeman: ‘Don’t Know If I’m Coming or Going’ (see opposite page)**

The photographer has got in close and this exotic looking caterpillar fills the frame well. Very close pictures of small objects are very difficult to get clear and this is isn't quite sharp all over but quite a good effort.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Clive Plant: ‘Gathering The Christmas Decorations.’ (see opposite)**

Good picture of a toad. Quite well framed. Not quite sharp though.



# Landscapes

P. Hargreaves >



Suleman ^

Shivaun

Pat Broome >



Plant (Offcot Garden at Kinnerley)

Clive



< Gerry Freeman  
P. Vaughan-Sawer



Geraldine  
Smith



^

Jean Harrison >





< Rose and Steve Laidler



Hanna



Clendon >

Ann Buckland ^

^ Alison Rose (showing 'Crown Princess Margareta' Rose)

< Geraldine Smith

**Landscape winners:**



**Number 3: ^ Bernie Norbury (Kew Alpine House)**

**< Number 2: Janet Lee  
'White Blanket'**

**Number 1: Eileen Johnson  
'Impending Thunderstorm'**



## **New members**

Since the Spring 2020 we have welcomed 6 new members and also 7 regular zoom attendees as we all grapple with the impact of the Covid restrictions.

Amanda McDonnell from Stafford  
Diane Cooper from Gnosall  
Stella Parker and Margaret Horton from Lichfield  
Pam Vaughan-Sawer From Boston  
Mary Davis from Rugeley  
Pauline Savage  
Julie Mitchell  
Lizzie Pellowe  
Juliet Niven  
Jane Whitney-Cooper  
Olive Mason  
Geraldine Smith

The Garden Gate at Grafton Cottage (picture by Peter Hargreaves) see page 32



## WHO'S ZOOMING WHO? by Clive Plant

Today's landscape of life is 'not as we know it'. Closed shops, deserted towns and empty roads. We now only shop if it's necessary. We keep six feet apart, sanitise hands in and out of shops and also wear masks. Not much is going on to tempt us out into our new virus threatened world.

Except there is a very good reason to stay in. Our computers are all fired up and a 'Zooming' link about to be clicked on.

'Not for me' I hear you say.

Then you are, it would seem, 'not going out'.

The Covid virus has given us Zoom, the new 'going out'. Join in. It's a must do. I myself am a 'Covid convert'. For some reason my default answer to some things but not all things, is a NO! Safe I would say. So I missed out, in our early Covid days of 2020, in 'not going out'.

Ruth went out.. on her own, zooming merrily away. I couldn't stand it for too long, watching her enjoying herself out of the corner of my eye. Chatting to long lost friends. The odd bout of laughter between the exchange of niceties.

I just had to join in and start 'going out' myself. It's just so easy. Even our own HPS Group is zooming thanks to Bernie Norbury. The link to a Zoom meeting comes to you on e-mail, then click on it at the time of the meeting, and our Friday monthly evening, speaker included, is for now, part of the new normal, but in the comfort of your own home.

Last week we were zoomed in to The Andromeda Garden in Barbados for a talk by Sarah Price and hosted by the Monmouthshire Group [a small charge to buy a ticket ie. the link in an e-mail]. Fantastic. Not available anytime soon in the Great Haywood Village Hall!

So make it an event like myself and Ruth do...prepare a blazing log fire, pull up a couple of easy chairs and settle down with a couple of G&T's..or two. Turn your screen to off, and you can even have your Village Hall snooze!

Whether you are 'staying in' or 'going out', you are more than likely 'zooming'....so it's the best of both worlds.

I would say it's a life saver. After gardening, jigsaws, reading and the rest of our hobbies, then settle down to the Staffs.HPS Group Zoom Meeting or another Groups offering, and savour those speakers who have adapted to giving a Zoom talk. Who knows where in the world they will Zoom from into your cosy home? Must we go back to the Village Hall?

Guess we should, otherwise how do we fill our carrier bags full of plants?....

Until then we should all 'go out' and join a 'Zoom' meeting, coming soon, to a computer near you.

## Flower Portraits



From  
top  
left

to right: Shivaun Suleman (*Clematis* cv.); Bernie Norbury (evergreen *Iberis sempervirens*); Pam Vaughan – Sawyer (Lichen); Pat Broome (Sweet William); Geraldine Smith (*Rudbeckia*); Jean Harrison (*Rosa* ‘Crown Princess Margaret’)



From top left to right: Emily Hamilton (Anemone Bordeaux); Janet Lee ('A Generous Gardener'); Ann Buckland (Shasta daisies and?); Rose and Steve Laidler; Alison Rose (*Primula* Belerina 'Buttercup Yellow'; Hanna Clendon ('Angel-type' of *Pelargonium*)



**Wildlife Photo entries:**



Shivaun

Suleman (hedgehog); Pat Broome (Pond); Eileen Johnson (New (Bee) Colony); Janet Lee (Fox: 'Not a Care In The World'); Geraldine Smith (Canada Goose on pavement)

Emily Hamilton (Pigeon); Ann Buckland (Bees on flowers); Bernie Norbury (Eggs in nest); Alison Rose



## Speakers from April 2021 till February 2022

(by Carol Galley)

April 16th: Tamsin Westhorpe ‘Stockton Bury Gardens’.

September 17th: Timothy Walker ‘How to be a 21st Century Gardener’

October 15th: Neil Timm ‘World of Ferns’.

November 19th: Paul Cook ‘RHS Gardens Harlow Carr and Bridgwater’.

December 10th: Advolly Richmond ‘Percy Thrower; ‘A Man For all Seasons.’ Christmas Social to follow talk.

January 21st 2022: Samantha Hopes ‘*Roscoea*: A Guide to the Genus and its Cultivation.’

February 18th: Alan & Jill Whitehead ‘Fish and Chatto – Garden Heroes’. These talks will continue to be offered on Zoom until we are able to meet again in the village hall.

## Outings & Events for 2021

Sunday 25th April: HPS Plant Stall at Sandon Hall 9.30am to 2pm

Saturday 17th & Sunday 18th July:

HPS Plant Stall at Lichfield Festival of Gardening, Curborough 10am—4pm

Sunday 1st August: HPS Plant Stall at Sandon Hall 9.30am to 2pm

Saturday 4th Sept.: HPS Plant Stall at Eccleshall Show, Sugnall 10am to 5pm

**See our Facebook page or emails for news on pop-up events and the Annual Plant Sale normally held in May at the Village Hall.**

## **2021 Group Member's Gardens open for charity as part of the National Garden Scheme.**

At the time of writing the National Garden Scheme is open in England accordance with the latest Covid requirements and restrictions with only large gardens with pre booked tickets, and local visitors only being permissible. These restrictions are due to be relaxed in stages over the coming months if all goes well.

The good news is that the plan is for refreshments to be served from 12 April onwards, and that the requirement for pre booking will be relaxed from 17 May. Never did a cup of tea and a piece of cake in a garden sound more welcome. Fingers crossed that this all will come to pass!

A number of our members do plan to open their gardens on the following dates, but please check with the NGS website for the latest position before making any plans to visit.

See the NGS website WWW. <https://ngs.org.uk>

### **Birch Trees - Copmere End, Eccleshall, ST21 6HH**

**Open by arrangement June July.**

Susan & John Weston 01785 850448 [johnweston123@btinternet.com](mailto:johnweston123@btinternet.com)

**The Garth - 2 Broc Hill Way, Milford, Stafford, Staffordshire, ST17 0UB. Planning to Open 6<sup>th</sup> June.**

Mr & Mrs David Wright 01785 661182 [anitawright1@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:anitawright1@yahoo.co.uk)  
[www.anitawright.co.uk](http://www.anitawright.co.uk)

**Grafton Cottage - Barton-under-Needwood, DE13 8AL . Planning to Open 27 June, 9 July, 11 July, 25 July, 1 August, 8 August.**

This garden also makes a donation to Alzheimer's Research Trust.

Margaret & Peter Hargreaves 01283 713639

### **Monarchs Way, Park Lane, Coven, Wolverhampton WV9 5BQ.**

**Planning to open 19 May. Please book your visit through NGS website as very limited parking spaces.** <http://www.monarchsway-garden.co.uk>

This a new opening under the scheme. Eileen & Bill Johnson

### **The Old Vicarage - Fulford, nr Stone, ST11 9QS.**

**Planning to open 10 July.** Mike & Cherry Dodson

**23 St Johns Road - Rowley Park, Stafford, ST17 9AS.**

**Planning to Open 14 May, 11 June** Fiona Horwath 07908 918181 [fnahorwath@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:fnahorwath@yahoo.co.uk)

**Yew Tree Cottage - Podmores Corner, Long Lane, White Cross, Haughton, ST18 9JR.**

**Planning to open 2 May, 1 July, 8 July 15 July & 25 July.**

Clive & Ruth Plant 07591 886925 [pottyplantz@aol.com](mailto:pottyplantz@aol.com)

