

Sedlescombe and District Garden Society

Newsletter No. 60 – May (3) 2020

Your President, Chris Hone writes.

Part 2 of the series about plants, once common but not seen so often these days. This time, it's the Azalea, a most confusing group of plants that have been extensively hybridised:

Azaleas.

Azaleas have been hybridised beyond recognition with hardy varieties as well as the semi-hardy species. Technically they are all Rhododendrons but I am going to write about Azalea Indica, a half-hardy variety which can be grown as a neat pot plant with loads of flowers. With their variety of colours, and single and double varieties, they can be forced to flower about Christmas time in competition with the Poinsettia. This is when you might see them in the Garden Centre, but I think they are a touch labour intensive.

After flowering, the plants need a lot of care to enable them to flower next year. All old flowers need to be taken off and the plants kept moist in a frost-free area. One needs to encourage new shoots which will eventually produce flower buds in the autumn for next year, but without commercial intervention they will flower later in April. The plants need an acid compost to grow in and should be watered with rain water. In my view, after obtaining one, one should re-pot them in a bigger pot, with ericaceous compost and then they should be trouble free for years. They can grow quite large.

The soil must not be allowed to dry out. They can be stood outside in the summer in a motley shaded spot. It is a good idea to bury the pot up to the rim. This ensures a trace of moisture can leach into the pot through the drainage holes and keeps the root ball cool. They should be brought into the greenhouse in the autumn, but remember to keep them a tad moist. Just leave them and they will flower when they are ready. Do not let them get frosted. They can be a source of pleasure for years, especially if you have "rescued" it.

They can be grafted or grown from cuttings, but I think this is a job for experts with specialized equipment so don't bother.

I enclose a picture of how we tend to see them in the Garden Centre and my single white one which I have had for over 10 or more years. I have re-potted it twice.



More from
Chris in this
series in June



Chris's own
beauty



Friary Gardeners, in Ore, for those who don't know, have supported the Garden Society regularly over the years and we are pleased to print the following article, written by Roger Hambrook.

'All Potted up and Nowhere to Grow'

Like all plant nurseries these are difficult times we find ourselves in particularly at this time of year but unlike others we are missing all our helpers, allowing only 2 or 3 staff in per day to attend and water the plants.

The project feels empty, missing that lively buzz of human interaction and purpose. It is only at times like these we can actually appreciate the contribution and help that our attendees make to the daily operations. We are well behind in potting up our small seedlings and plants. The walled gardens, out of necessity, have remained largely unattended. It is sad to think the compost heaps could be burgeoning this year!

On the bright side we have received lots of orders, via phone and e-mail and are operating a collection at the gate only, which is working well. Many of our trainees are registered vulnerable (as am I -over 70) and it could be a long, staggered progression to opening up again properly. What the future holds – who knows?

If any of our readers have any gardening questions, please feel free to send them to the Editor (sdgs.secretary@gmail.com) and we will endeavour to find an answer for you. Questions and answers will be printed in future issues.

As the National Garden Scheme open gardens are not happening at present, you may like to check out their website (www.ngs.org.uk/virtual-gardens) as they are producing videos of the gardens that would have opened.



Y

Our rainbow colour this issue is Yellow. I have included a dwarf yellow chilli, a yellow canary tomato (photos from John Tunstall) and a splendid flower arrangement entered a few years ago into our spring show by Karen Thomas



This lovely picture is from Tom and Carol Schollar's garden. A real breath of Spring I think you would agree.

Chris's book list is interesting and I have no doubt that many of you have favourite gardening reads apart from RHS guides and Hessayon. Please share your choices with a few words about each book and maybe we can have this as a regular feature. As usual please send to sdgs.secretary@gmail.com or phone 870455.

What gardening books would you recommend to a friend?

Chris Stovold suggests the following as good reading.
In My Garden by Christopher Lloyd 1994 – This is a selection of the articles written for Country Life. Helpfully they have been printed month by month, so it will help guide you through what to do.
The Alien Invaders by Dan Eatherley 2019 -This is a most interesting book, well written with great factual information. Highly recommended. Did you know hedgehogs were once a pest on the Outer Hebrides?
The Incredible Journey of Plants by Stefano Mancuso 2020 – A slim volume but entertaining none the less, detailing some of the more spectacular plant travels. One tale is of a proposal to bring hippopotami to Louisiana to help reduce the plague of imported water hyacinths....
The Hidden Life of Trees by Peter Wohlleben 2016 -The author, having worked for the forestry commission in Germany now runs an environmentally friendly forest. His studies and observations enabled him to write knowledgeably on how trees work together for mutual benefit.

Asparagus. Regretfully we don't grow it, so when we get the rare bunch we tend to treat it reverently and have it plain as a starter with butter and parmesan. However, if you were to chop the asparagus into bite sized pieces and mix in a cooked pasta of your choice, with a little olive oil, you would have a lunch. But, of course, many members do grow asparagus and have surpluses. Soup is the next choice for using asparagus and this can be served hot or iced for the hotter summer days. Chicken stock, cream and seasoning are all that is required in its basic form but baby spinach can be added, crème fraiche substituted for cream and chives (also from your garden) sprinkled on the top. Asparagus can be added to flans and risottos. The simple recipe below makes for a lovely light lunch, maybe with a tomato salad or served with salmon as a main meal, both with a glass of white wine. Perfect for a summer day.

1lb asparagus, trimmed and halved in length
 8ozs broad beans
 12 ozs penne
 6 tbsp olive oil
 2 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
 Grated rind and juice of one lemon
 3 tbsp chopped fresh mint
 4 tbps cream
 Grated parmesan

Grill, brushed with olive oil, for 3 to 4 mins on each side
 Blanch for 2 mins in salted water, remove outer skins
 Cook in boiling water for 10 mins until al dente
 Heat 2 tbsp oil in pan and add garlic and lemon rind and cook for 3 mins.
 Add the beans, mint and cream and heat gently
 Drain pasta and toss in remaining oil.
 Add the grilled asparagus, bean sauce, parmesan and lemon juice. Season to taste and serve.

Swifts and More

Inspired by the recent RSPB newsletter bearing the headline "Look Who's Back", I was moved to turn some scrap wood into a nest box for swifts. These amazing birds spend most of their lives on the wing catching insects and even sleeping, and only return to the nest to mate. When the offspring achieve a certain ratio between body weight and wing span, off they fly with the parents to the African continent for the winter. When I was told this by a representative of London Swifts, I asked what happened to the nestlings that did not achieve the required ratio. The answer was that they fly off to re-join the family when they do reach the required dimensions. Who tells the bird not only that it is ready to go but where to go? One of the mysteries of life! Anyway, back to the scrap wood and the nesting box. It needs to be mounted in their flight path at about 5m above the ground, be away from trees and any other obstructions to the bird's approach which is at speed, and facing north east or north west. These birds are endangered and it would be good to help them if we can. I've made the box, can anyone mount it in the required position please?

I have also got a stock of other bird boxes suitable for blue tits and great tits, robins and flycatchers and so on. I have made bat boxes in the past and probably could find enough wood to make some more if required. Let me know if you want a bird box. I charge £4 for the smaller boxes and would be happy to negotiate for larger boxes. Reg Glew



What to do in May 2



May is a busy time in the garden but most of these jobs can be done when pottering, others will need more work. Most information is from the RHS.

1. Start to take softwood cuttings from deciduous shrubs such as fuschia, hydrangea and lavatera. Collect non-flowering shoots preferably early in the day, trim below a leaf to make a cutting 2 to 4 inches long. Remove lower leaves and pinch out top before potting into compost.
2. Divide bulbs that have not flowered well as they could be too congested.
3. Control slugs that will find all your new growth very tasty.
4. Spring Clean house plant foliage – remove dust by wiping smooth leaves or using a soft brush.
5. Quick harvest – sow seeds of quick-maturing veg, such as baby carrots and radishes or harvest younger leaves of spinach, loose lettuce or mizuna for salads.

Greener Gardening

6. Add wildflowers to an existing lawn to create a meadow. Hold off mowing but at the same time don't let them get too swamped with grass.
7. Add a birdbath to your plot.
8. Plant for moths – tobacco plant and evening primrose will help attract moths in the summer months.
9. Be conscious of plastic. If you have lots of pots keep re-using them for as long as possible and then re-cycle carefully. Replace with recyclable or biodegradable products (old newspaper can be used) or use clay pots. When clay pots break they make good drainage material for your new pots.

For those of you who have Zoom, you may be interested in these lectures from Great Dixter

The Magic of Dixter
how self-sowers add to the layered system

An online lecture by Fergus Garrett



Wednesday 27th May, 5pm UK time

Hosted on Zoom

We hope you'll join Fergus for the second part of his online lecture series in which he will look at how self-sowers add a dynamic element to the layered system as well as updating you on how the borders are changing.

For more information and to book visit:

www.greatdixtershop.co.uk

Australasia and Japan Lecture

Fergus will repeat the lecture on Saturday 30th May, 9am UK time so as to be more convenient for those in Australasia and Japan. Booking will open for this event in the coming days (email notification will be sent when this happens).

What would make you join the Garden Society?

Sedlescombe and District Garden Society has now been in existence for 76 years but it must move with the times and constantly attract new members. List 1 below lists the activities and opportunities the Society provides at present. Which of these events would attract you to join us. List 2 is a list of other events we could hold and other reasons for joining us. Would any of these attract you more.

1. What we do now	Yes	No
2 Social events with speakers		
2 Social events with themes and food (i.e. Quiz night)		
2 Shows (Spring and Autumn)		
Spring Plant market		
2 Trips plus occasionally self-drive		
Summer Lunch, usually as a Garden Party		
AGM		
Regular Newsletters		
Friendly group offering a chance to meet local people		
Opportunity to enter shows		
Talking with other members to find out about local growing problems		
Plant swaps and sales		

2. Suggested events	Yes	No	Please make any comments you wish or add any other events and opportunities you would like to see SDGS hold
Garden safari			
Workshops, including advice for entering items in Shows			
Opportunities for very young gardeners			
Members Open Gardens /Afternoon Tea (in members' gardens)			
Winter lunch			
Sales of produce and crafts			

