



MALMESBURY and DISTRICT GARDEN CLUB

January/February NEWSLETTER 2024

www.malmesburygardenclub.org.uk

Chair and Secretary – Ellie Church



JOTTINGS FROM THE CHAIR

I wish you all a happy healthy New Year.

As I write this it is 11am, the clouds are grey and angry looking, I suspect more rain is on the way. Where does it all come from? Our rivers are swollen, the garden for the most part is like a bog.

However, I am still looking forward to the new season. The lighter nights will soon creep in and spring will be here.

I did notice six daffodils in bloom on Christmas Day, they are on the green in Little Somerford if you would like to see them.

I look forward to seeing you at the January meeting.



Ellie Church – Chairperson

SUBSCRIPTION TIME

*At the A.G.M. it was agreed that the annual subscription should remain the same.
I would be grateful if you could make a New Year resolution to pay as soon as possible.
The details of how, and where, to pay are contained in the form at the end of this Newsletter.*

*Thank you,
Sean O'Shea (Treasurer)*



Tasks for January/February



- Continue to plant roses – weather permitting
- Examine roses for 'wind rock' and firm in
- Continue pruning climbing roses, honeysuckle, summer jasmine etc.
- Cut out canker on fruit trees and paint over with pruning compound
- Prune apple and pear trees, but not if frost persists
- Spray peach and nectarine against leaf curl with copper fungicide
- Continue spraying fruit bushes and trees with a winter wash
- Continue clearing herbaceous plant tops
- Cut down summer flowering clematis in February – check variety first!
- Prune back winter jasmine after flowering
- Examine all stored corms, bulbs and tubers
- Set up early potatoes in trays to sprout
- Sow early broad beans and wrinkled pea varieties
- Sow early carrots and parsley under frames
- Plant shallots in late February

MEETINGS – EVENTS – ACTIVITIES

<p>Monday 8 January 2024 7.30pm in the Charlton Village Hall <i>My life as a farrier</i> Bernie Tidmarsh</p> <p>Bernie has a forge in Crudwell and has been shoeing horses all his life</p>	<p>Monday 12 February 2024 7.30pm in the Charlton Village Hall <i>Tales from the Potting Shed: a trip around all the gardens I have worked in</i> Nicola Hope</p> <p>Nicola has been trained in organic gardening and has worked in public and private gardens</p>
<p>Monday 11 March 2024 7.30pm in the Charlton Village Hall <i>A year in the cutting garden</i> Caroline Sheldrick</p> <p>Caroline is a qualified medical herbalist, she can inspire gardeners to identify, grow and use medicinal herbs in remedies and offers advice on Planting and propagation</p>	<p>Monday 8 April 2024 7.30pm in the Charlton Village Hall <i>Spring Gardens</i> Catherine Williams</p> <p>Catherine has been interested in gardening and has been a gardener for 30 years and she is also an author</p>
<p>Saturday 18 May 2024 Malmesbury Market Cross <i>Annual Plant Sale</i></p>	<p>Saturday 20 July 2024 Charlton Village Hall <i>Annual Show</i></p>
<p>Monday 14 October 2024 7.30pm in the Charlton Village Hall <i>Gardens of Versailles</i> Nathalie Mignotte</p> <p>Nathalie is a former lecturer at Hartbury College. Her interest lies in the relationship between faiths and gardens</p>	

The Dobies Seed Catalogue for 2024 is now available and we have copies at our meetings. Alternatively, if you prefer to place your order online, the discount code is

SUGD242X



Reports from recent meetings

Andrew Toman: Glorious Gardens – a Gardener’s Choice

In November, Andrew Tolman, Head Gardener at Highgrove until 2013, took us on a whistle-stop tour of his most favourite Glorious Gardens.

He opened his talk at Upton House near Banbury, famed for its skilful planting of tulips and polyanthus, where both are timed to flower at the same time, thus complimenting their colours for maximum impact. White and pink forget-me-nots provide an unusual spring bedding effect.

Next was Lord Vestey’s property at Stowell Park, near Northleach, with its neatly tended lawns and areas of cutting flowers for the big house, especially camassias, alliums and astilbes. Fruits



such as peaches, apricots, nectarines and grapes are also grown in profusion and entered into the competition between the great houses in the area.

Another of Andrew’s glorious gardens was Hanham Court near Bristol, where two sides of this large house are covered by a single wisteria, providing a spectacular display at flowering time. A water jet with a gold crown at the top, inspired by the one at Arundel Castle, surrounded with named roses, alliums and a mix of topiary, makes this a worthy choice.

Andrew never ceased to be amazed by the unusual and often flamboyant planting up of pots at Great Dixter, inspired by the great late Christopher Lloyd.

Hampton Court near Leominster, Herefordshire, operates a fully organic scheme of growing, and features a scalloped yew hedge, stunning yellow and blue border, plus planting of annual pink flax. Another feature of this garden is the tunnel

which climbs up from the lower garden, behind the waterfall before finally emerging into the centre of the Garden Maze. Fallen birch twigs are used as supports throughout this garden.

RHS Rosemoor near Exeter, always a riot of colour whatever the season, has become famed for the late-season colour in all of its borders. Also worthy of note is its circular pergola built as a framework for supporting gourds!

Coleton Fishacre, a National Trust property and another of Andrew’s Glorious Gardens, has gardens going down to the sea, thriving in its maritime climate and therefore favourable to desert gardens and a host of ferns. The house is home to works from the Art Nouveau and Art Deco eras.

Arley Hall, near Northwich in Cheshire, is famed for having the longest double herbaceous borders at any time of the year, and all set off by the 20 foot tall topiary of Holm Oak, a most unusual medium for topiary.

Another National Trust property is Biddulph Grange near Stoke-on-Trent, with its large and elegant house. It was once home to James Bateman famed for his travels, always returning home to Biddulph Grange with a vast array of plants from faraway places. He established the first-ever stumpery of the Victorian period, then went on to build a tunnel in the grounds leading to an Ice House and a Japanese Garden.



Andrew concluded his presentation nearer to home at Kingston Maurward near Dorchester, home to 35 acres of beautifully-restored gardens with year-round interest.

Annual General Meeting followed by

Margaret Stanford: Floral demonstration 'My Christmas from the Garden'

The December meeting was the 55th AGM of the Malmesbury & District Garden Club, to which 15 members attended. Last year's minutes were read and approved, followed by Sean's Treasurer's report. He thanked Pam Lucas for auditing the accounts. It was agreed to keep the subscriptions at £7.00 per head, or £10.00 per couple. The Plant Sale held in May in the Market Cross is the Club's main source of income and helps to fund the Annual Flower Show held in Charlton in July. Ellie Church agreed to stand again as Chairperson, with Sean O'Shea as Secretary and Treasurer. All other members of the committee agreed to stand as follows: Derek Tilney, Graham and Ann Rees, George Guest, Louise Williams, Gail Hughes and Margaret Medland. A sincere vote of thanks was given to Alison Goodall for her excellent presentation and hard work on the Club's newsletter, which is distributed either manually, by post or electronically to all members. Louise Williams and Pam Lucas were thanked for their unswerving duty in ensuring that members and the speaker all received suitable refreshments at the monthly meetings, also at the Annual Flower Show in July, and thanks were also given to Keith Matthews for his knowledgeable contribution to the newsletter with his witty, sometimes amusing articles on all topics relating to our gardens. In AOB, Carolyn Perchard requested that new classes were required for the July Show to bring it into line with other shows, and to tax members' abilities. This will be discussed ahead of the 2024 Schedule being prepared.



On conclusion of the business part of the meeting, Derek introduced our guest speaker, Margaret Stanford, who gave a festive demonstration entitled "My Christmas from the garden", in which she executed her skills in making a door wreath, candle centre piece for the table, also an arrangement using

small glass bottles and garden foliage on a tray. These items were then entered with the Christmas raffle. The Vote of Thanks was given by Derek, who then invited all present to share mulled wine and festive refreshments prepared by Louise and served with the help of Pam Lucas. This marked the end of another year's successful talks for Malmesbury & District Garden Club in 2023.

Margaret

[Thank you to Robert MacLachlan for these photographs of Margaret Stanford and her beautiful creations.]



The Annual Show 20th July 2024 – suggestions for new classes

I was very pleased to see there is already interest in this year's show. At our AGM in December several members said we should include some new classes in our schedule. This is an excellent idea especially as it is only you the members who know what you enjoy growing and it is that which will make our show a success.

Please e-mail me with your suggestions. I would welcome any suggestions in any of the sections: vegetables, fruit, flowers or pot plants. Please just let me have your suggestions. As far as extra work is concerned, it only involves printing an extra prize card or two. I really don't need suggestions to delete any existing classes – I just want new extra ideas.

Derek (derektilney@talktalk.net)

God help the King!

Andrew Tolman showed us a picture of the 'Stumpery' at Highgrove. I think that I had better describe a stumpery. The guide to Highgrove describes it as 'a tranquil, atmospheric garden that draws inspiration from the Victorian tradition of growing ferns among upturned tree stumps. It creates a rich habitat for wild life; this otherworldly space highlights the sculptural qualities of wood and features remarkable natural



features.' No wonder our King, then Prince of Wales, wanted a stumpery in his lovely garden at Highgrove.

Now, before you start getting enthusiastic, some very ordinary tree stumps fetch around £200 each and our Prince Charles planned to make a great arch of stumps which must have used a few hundred

stumps. Now here is the bit the guides at Highgrove don't tell you; having placed each stump in position, with all the pointy jagged roots sticking out in an artistic manner, our young prince was delighted when his father came to visit. He was most anxious to show his father the Victorian recreation he had worked so lovingly on. And so they repaired to the garden where Charles proudly pointed out his stumpery and awaited a word of paternal approval – after a short pause the Duke said 'when are you going to set fire to it?'



Derek

The after-Christmas blues

I'm sure many fellow gardeners will have been asked two questions at Christmas: 'How can I save my lovely Christmas tree' and 'How can I save the lovely Poinsettia I was given?'

I'm sorry to say you are on a loser whatever you say. That Christmas tree which had its tap root severed when it was dug up and had been in a warm house since the first day of December and you said it won't



grow again, might very well defy all the laws of nature and survive in a rubble filled garden for years. Your mother-in-laws' Poinsettia is another thing

entirely. I do hope you didn't correct her when she said she chose it for you because it had lovely flowers and I hope you didn't tell her the colour was in the bracts. Just be grateful and promise to look after it.

Over eight million Poinsettia plants were sold in the UK in the two months before Christmas. It is the only house plant many people ever own. Aldi in Malmesbury were selling Poinsettias in November for just £3.65 each. The story of the Poinsettia is interesting. The plant is actually a very tall shrub which was brought from Mexico to the US in the 1820's by their first Minister Joel Poinsett, who was also an amateur botanist. It was a German emigrant Albert Ecke, who in 1900 started selling Poinsettia plants from a street stall but it wasn't until 1923 that his

grandson Paul discovered the secret of grafting the plants and getting the bracts to come into colour at Christmas. In the 1960's, as a publicity stunt, Paul junior air mailed boxes of free plants to TV stations for their Christmas specials; these hugely popular shows were the first



TV shows in colour, spectaculars like the *Bob Hope Christmas Show*. The studio decorated the front of the sets with these new colourful plants. With this nationwide publicity his fortune was made. Everyone wanted that lovely Christmas 'flower'. I bet Paul didn't correct them and say the flowers were those tiny little insignificant things. It was not until the late 1980's that a university researcher discovered and published Ecke's secret of growing the plants and other growers were able to cash in on the Christmas bonanza. Nevertheless, the Eckes still have 70% of the US market and 50% worldwide sales today. Hybridising has resulted in producing a variety of colours in the bracts and grafting has meant more bracts. Then, to enable the grower to produce what looks like a very bushy plant, you will find two or more cuttings have been grown in each pot – after all they are only intended to last over Christmas.

So, if your mother-in-law gave you a Poinsettia for Christmas and expects to see it in bloom when she visits you in the summer, all I can say is 'Good luck!'



FROM THE GARDEN by KEITH

Comments from the garden

I knew sooner or later we would get some bad weather. This is just what is required to break down the rough turned soil on the vegetable plot.

Herbaceous revival

What do I mean? I must have worked in hundreds of gardens over the years, some very small and some very large, which were open to the public in spring and summer. What I noticed was that the large gardens had medium to large herbaceous borders (many different plants that flower once at various times of the year for a few weeks). Don't get me wrong, the smaller gardens had herbaceous plants dotted here and there, but no border as such. A border can be just two or three feet long and one or two feet wide.



Working in so many gardens and coming across so many different plants, some I had never seen before, I had to create a herbaceous border to grow a few of them. Take *Phlox russeliana* (Turkish sage), for instance, a downy leaved perennial which gives good ground cover; the leaves are heart-shaped and mid-green. During the

summer stout stems rise up three feet and are topped with several whorls of hooded butter yellow flowers. This plant grows in any ordinary soil, in sun or partial shade; it is a most unusual flowering plant and will be admired. *Physostegia virginiana* (the obedient plant or false dragon head), another one I just had to have, and again, one I only found in one garden. Why a name like obedient plant? The flowers, which are tubular, are held high on



3ft (90cm) strong stems; they can be moved by hand to a different position and will stay there, ideal for flower arranging. The flowers are white or mauve/lilac, depending on variety, and appear between July and September: a good one for

attracting pollinators. *Leonotis leonurus* (wild Dagga or lion's tail): I grew this one from seed for a hot bed as its colour is a striking orange, growing to a height of 3 to 4ft (90-120cm). Mentioning a hot bed, I covered this topic in the Newsletter in September/October 1997! I will cover this again in another Newsletter. A hot bed consists of hot colours – reds, oranges and yellows. *Leonotis* was one I placed in the hot bed. I was lucky enough to have a photographer who was compiling photographs for a book called *Cottage Garden Annuals* by Clive Lane (1997, page 16-17). The hot bed was at Luckington Manor, a garden this Club has visited in the past. *Millianthus major* (honey bush or peanut bush) was a plant I only came across once, a clump-forming evergreen needing protection from the wind. It is an attractive plant with toothed grey-green leaves with deep maroon flower spikes in May/July, ht 3-4ft (90-120cm). *Tellima grandiflora* (fringe cups) again only appeared in a few gardens. It has tall spikes of bell-shaped white or greenish-white flowers, appearing May/July above hairy scalloped emerald green leaves, ht 2ft (60cm). I came across many more unusual and interesting plants which I will mention again in Newsletters to come. One to whet your appetite is *Painter's palette*.

Keith's choice shrub

Cotinus (smoke bush) var.

Grace: a deciduous shrub or small tree; leaves are oval, purple-brown, turning bright red in the autumn. Its feathery plumes of tiny pink flowers are produced in mid to late summer. Ht 2-3 metres, but may be pruned in early spring.



No disease please

White blister: wallflowers produce tiny white pustules on lower leaves, singly or in ringed clusters, leaves become distorted and yellow with sunken areas. Caused by a fungus spread by spores on the air current or by water splash. Remove infected leaves and plants if bad infection occurs. This fungus affects summer plants more than spring and winter plants.

Plants to enjoy in January/February

Lonicera (winter honeysuckle), *winter jasmine*, *crocus*, *mahonia*, *Helleborus niger* (christmas rose), *Galanthus* (snowdrops), *Eranthis* (winter aconite), daffodils and

narcissus in variety, *Erica carnea* (winter heath) in variety, *Chimonanthus praecox* (winter sweet or japanese allspice), *Garrya elliptica*.



FROM THE VEGETABLE PLOT by KEITH

Comments from the veg plot

The carrots and beetroot are complaining of the cold weather, winter brassicas are also complaining, leaf cover is not enough, and as for the leeks ... it's too cold to take a leek.

Companion planting

What do I mean? I have often mentioned planting carrots with onions to help prevent carrot fly. I have tried many other companion plants to see if certain vegetables do well with others or if they do not. For instance, beans, peas and sweetcorn planted with potatoes beneath help to shade the ground against the hot sun, as all three grow higher than the potatoes. I have tried this and all vegetables cropped well. Carrots do well if planted alongside chives, leeks, tomatoes, onions and garlic, again all these help with carrot fly. The cucurbit family, including courgettes, melons, squashes, cucumber and marrow, are good if planted by beans, peas and sweetcorn, but not onions. Beetroot does well if planted alongside parsnips and swedes.

I do not companion plant every year as crop rotation sometimes does not allow it; it depends on the size of vegetable plot available. Crops all seem to grow well, though, even if you do not grow this way. However, in the past I have planted garlic in rose beds to keep the aphids away, marigolds around outdoor tomatoes did the same. It is worth trying some planting like this: it could be another way of not using sprays.

Seasonal activities

As I write this we have had our first hardish frost, -5 degrees. Last night I covered with fleece some summer shiners such as fuchsias and lilies I had taken out of the pots. In the past I have still lost them – not the end of the world.

This is the time of year we can plan our vegetable plot, what seeds to plant and where. Seed catalogues are popping through the letter box so it is a good time to order our vegetable and flower seeds, if you grow them. All areas where the crops have finished in the vegetable plot can be cleared, ground

roughly dug, and areas where you are going to grow Brussels sprouts, cabbage and cauliflowers in the coming year need to be just hoed, leaving the ground



firm. You will need to harvest your winter vegetables: a plank of wood will keep you off the ground if it is wet or frozen.

Keith's

choice herb

Lemon balm or bee balm (*Melissa officinalis*): lemon-scented and lemon-flavoured leaves. Small white flowers which attract pollinating insects and bees appear late summer, plants die down in winter and reappear in spring. Leaves can be used to flavour summer salads, jellies, summer drinks and iced teas, and can also be used as a replacement for lemon peel in cooking. New varieties include 'limoncello': this has a stronger lemon scent and a trailing habit making it perfect for pots. 'Mandarina' is another trailing variety and is reputed to have the scent of oranges.



No vegetable nightmares

Whiptail on brassicas: Leaves become mottled yellow and growth is reduced. This is due to a lack of trace elements in the soil, especially on acidic soils. It mostly affects the seedlings. Lime the soil and add a mixture of trace elements as directed.

Produce to enjoy in January/February

From the vegetable plot: leeks, turnips, swede, brussels sprouts, Jerusalem artichokes, parsnips, beetroot, kale, savoy cabbage. **From storage:** potatoes, onions, shallots, marrows, carrots and beetroot stored in peat or dry soil.

The Club's Trophies

Michael Grey Cup



Michael Grey was a Biology Master at the Grammar School, a keen gardener and beekeeper. Michael was killed in a road accident and his fellow members of the Club bought the cup in his memory.

About 1966 the Grammar School was on Tetbury Hill next to the cemetery, the junior school was where the Library is

in the Cross Hayes and the senior school was at Corn Gastons.

The Garden Club held its Annual Show in several places because our show was part of Malmesbury's Carnival and so our Shows were held on the August Bank Holiday. The Carnival Fete was held in a variety of places. For several years we held our show in a large marquee on the Junior School Grounds at Tetbury Hill. Then one year the school objected to the Fete being

held on their playing field as the main event was 'Knights Jousting on Horseback' and the school didn't want horses cutting up on their playing field. That year we had our marquee beside the river in St Alhelms Mead. The last time we had a marquee was 1980, and 1981 saw the show being held in Corn Gastons School Hall. By then the Carnival Fete was not much more than a car-boot sale and a dog show. The school didn't like dogs on their playing field, and so the Fete stopped being held there and as a result we moved our Show into the Town Hall, still on the August Bank Holiday.

One last memory. In 1976 we had a really fantastic main attraction at our Fete – the Mayor of Malmesbury was a sales representative for a national oil company. His employers were very proud that Mr Owen was Mayor of England's oldest borough and they sent us the world famous Royal Signals Motor Cycle Display team, between sell-out engagements at the Royal Tournament and the Bath and West Show, as the main attraction for our Fete – the Garden Club prepared for the extra visitors who would come to our tent. I think we got about the same number of visitors as we did for the Fete the previous year!

Derek



HELP! Your questions answered by resident expert, Keith

Please send your queries and problems to: info@malmesburygardenclub.org.uk

Q *I have inherited a couple of old sinks, any suggestions?*

A No problem. Old sinks are perfect for an alpine bed, they even have a drainage hole. First place some crocks (broken terracotta pots, small stones or pebbles) in the bottom, then a layer of gravel, all covered with a soil and horticultural sand mixture. A few planting suggestions might include alpine phlox in variety, saxifrage in variety, prostrate Veronica, gentians in variety and a dwarf conifer for a little height. Between some of your plants, place some slightly larger stones or pebbles, then cover the whole area with horticultural grit.

Q *My pampas grass is amazing, or could be if it was not for the sparrows constantly pecking at it. What can I do to stop them?*

A Netting or cotton strands could help but would be very unsightly. In the past, where I have had this problem in other people's gardens, I have sprayed the flower heads as they emerge with a soapy solution, and repeated it a few times, especially when it has rained. The birds do not like the taste and it makes them blow bubbles when in flight.



Q *I have spent a fortune on crown imperials (Fritillaria imperialis), but have yet to get them to flower. What am I doing wrong?*

A Beautiful! Everyone should grow them. A number of things could be the problem. First, do not plant them too deep, only cover the top of the bulb with two inches of soil. The appearance of the bulbs when purchased or received is very fleshy, like peeled onions; they should not be allowed to dry out. Secondly, do not allow them to dry out in the soil, especially if grown in pots, as it will affect the coming season's flowering. Thirdly, do not cut down the season's growth after flowering; let the foliage die down naturally even though it looks unsightly.

Some beautiful late summer colour from Keith . . .



RECIPE . . .

Potato, leek and bacon soup

Ingredients

25g butter	142ml pot single cream
3 rashers streaky bacon, chopped	4 rashers streaky bacon, to serve
1 onion, chopped	400g pack trimmed leek, sliced and well washed
3 medium potatoes, peeled and diced	
1.4l hot vegetable stock (we used low-sodium)	

Method

1. Melt the butter in a large pan, then fry the bacon and onion, stirring until they start to turn golden. Tip in the leeks and potatoes, stir well, then cover and turn down the heat. Cook gently for 5 mins, shaking the pan every now and then to make sure that the mixture doesn't catch.
2. Pour in the stock, season well and bring to the boil. Cover and simmer for 20 mins until the vegetables are soft. Leave to cool for a few mins, then blend in a food processor in batches until smooth. Return to the pan, pour in the cream and stir well. Taste and season if necessary. Serve scattered with tasty crisp bacon and eat with toasted or warm crusty bread on the side.



Ellie

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2024

Subscriptions for 2023 are now due. They remain the same as previous years, that is: £7.00 for single membership and £10.00 for couples.

I would be grateful to receive your subscriptions as soon as possible. They may be paid:

- at the monthly meetings
- by post to me, Sean O'Shea, at Redlands, West End, Brinkworth, Chippenham, SN15 5DA
- by using the Club Post Box at E & S Hardware Store, High Street, Malmesbury
- by Bank transfer to Lloyds Bank PLC; sort code 30 91 99; account 02440789; put your name as the reference so I can track your payment.

PLEASE SECURE CASH/CHEQUE IN AN ENVELOPE WITH THIS FORM

Enclosed £7.00 single membership £10.00 double membership

1. (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms): Membership No.

2. (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms): Membership No.

Tel. No.

Address:

.....

Email address.....

GDPR Declaration:

- I authorise Malmesbury & District Garden Club to hold records of my personal details as necessary for the efficient running of the club. These details include:
 - name and address
 - landline and mobile telephone numbers
 - email address (if disclosed)
 - application/renewal form
 - record of subscription payments
- I am happy for Malmesbury & District Garden Club to communicate with me by email, by post and by telephone.
- I am aware that I can request a copy of the details of my record and that I can ask for any inaccuracies to be amended or for records to be deleted. I am also aware that I can refer complaints to the Information Commissioner if I am not satisfied with the way my complaint has been dealt with.

For further details contact Mr. Sean O'Shea at the address above.

Signed: (1) **(2)**

Thank you

Sean O'Shea (Treasurer)