

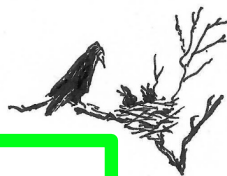


Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs

Magazine

Issue LXVI

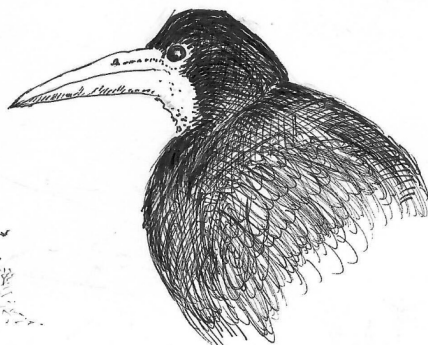
Spring 2023



Thaw

*Over the land freckled with snow
half thawed
The speculating rooks at their nests
cawed
And saw from the elm-tops delicate as
flowers of grass
What we below could not see
Winter pass*

Edward Thomas



Contact Details of the Officers & Committee Members of The Somerset Federation of Gardening Clubs

President:	Philip Harwood	Tel: 01749 679182
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Secretary:	Wendy Williams	Tel: 01749 344823
Treasurer:	John Dunster 8, Copse End, Winscombe. BS25 1JS	Tel: 01943 844777
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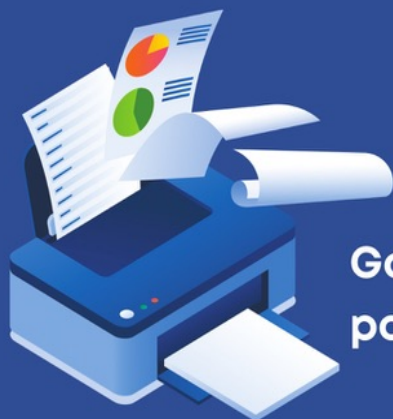
Website: <https://www.SFGC.org.uk>

Speakers & Judges List

To access the updated Speakers & Judges list your Club registered contact will need to request/or already have access details to a Private area. There have been a large number of amendments over the last few months. Please use the updated list to book speakers and judges.

To help us keep this up to date we would appreciate nomination of speakers and judges that could be useful for other clubs. Please ensure the speaker and/or judge is aware of their nomination.

The future is with technology



Goodbye print & postage



This will be our last Magazine to be sent out in print form.

Because of the high cost of postage and printing, the SFGC magazine will, in future, be sent by eMail to Clubs and be available on the SFGC website, where it can be read or downloaded. We hope you will understand the need for this change.

www.SFGC.org.uk

Introduction

Spring



***There is no time like Spring,
When life's alive in everything,
Before new nestlings sing,
Before cleft swallows speed their journey back
Along the trackless track –
God guides their wing,
He spreads their table that they nothing lack, –
Before the daisy grows a common flower
Before the sun has power
To scorch the world up in his noontide hour...***

Christina Rossetti

Winter seemed to start late, Salvias and roses flowered until Christmas, but since then it has been a more typical winter, the sort that we remember, less storms, more frosts which hopefully has reduced the pests, though the downside is that I know I have lost more tender plants this year than in recent winters. The hedgehogs have been quite confused by the warm and cold spells and seem to have been waking more often to take food and water. They have been moving hibernacula more than I ever seen before as well as using the houses.

I get quite few enquiries about the Speakers' and Judges' list which was last updated and printed on 18th February 2022. I think the last year or so has seen more changes to the way people are operating than ever before, some withdrawing completely, many opting to offer Zoom talks only, some preferring to



travel in daylight hours, and costs increasing, quite considerably, in some cases. It is impossible to keep a printed version totally up to date, so please double check the list on the Members only section of the SFGC website before making bookings to check that the person you want is still doing talks and what their costs are. For access to the members' section please contact David Talling webmaster@sfgc.org.uk

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the AGM on Friday 5th May, kindly being hosted by Wincanton. Invitations will be sent out in due course.

I wish all clubs every success with recruiting new members and their flower and produce shows. Let's hope this summer is not quite as hot. Nor indeed too wet!

Wendy



Don't SPRING into
garden clean-up too soon.....

Wait until temperatures are
consistently above **10C**(50F)

Many butterflies, bees &
other pollinators are
currently wintering in
dead leaves & hollowed out
stems of last years plants.



LET THEM BEE



Chairman's Corner Spring 2023



Sitting here in the office, I am thinking, 'shall I write about the garden or the new piece of land we are renting', then I remembered that I wrote all about that in the spring issue last year, although I said we would keep you updated of progress, Mo wrote a little article about the structure we had erected and the vegetables that she was growing...so not much more to add at

this stage, so back to the drawing board!

So.....I started to look through our website and began reading all the past Newsletters that David (our webmaster) puts together and to reminisce over all the events that have happened since I became chairman; it's incredible to think that Mo and I joined the Federation committee back in 2010 (or rather a case of being 'shanghaied'!!) and that I was voted in as chairman in 2011 at the AGM held in Shipham, my goodness where do the years go!

On becoming chairman, my first thought was that the Federation had to move towards embracing technology, that so revolutionised the company where I worked before retirement. This company was spending millions in hardware, software and creating the training required for all of our staff (myself included!) However, I never found it easy to understand and recognise this new way of working, so I had much sympathy for employees who also found it difficult. I always ensured that any extra training was available as often as they needed it, to help them for the future.

At the Federations AGM in Cannington College some years ago, our then chairman in her address to the audience humorously spoke of the 'devil', i.e. computing and then being extremely surprised, when asking how many representatives attending if any of them used email, approximately 50% raised their hands!

Our Federation has evolved cautiously over the years with at first using email to contact clubs, then in the Spring of 2014, Tina Franklyn arrived on our committee to take the first step in building our website. To say we had a number of issues in those early days, is putting it mildly, but with Tina's help they were overcome especially

so, when in 2015 David Talling arrived to help and the following year took over from Tina. (Thank you Tina for all you did in those trying times.)

Over the following years, David has completely rebuilt our website and transformed it into what it is today, our thanks to him is immeasurable. The changes made are too many to speak of here, so perhaps I will talk about these in future issues of the newsletter.

Our Federation formed in 1984 has also seen many changes with its committee over the years. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them for all their past contribution and to also thank the current committee and our President, who have helped take our Federation and its technology into the future, well done to all of you.

Finally, our thanks now go to Richard D'Arcy (chairman) of Wincanton & District Gardening Association and his committee who are hosting our AGM on Friday 5th May. I do hope that I may see as many of you as possible and look forward to meeting you and put names to faces!

My very good wishes to you all and your club members, for a pleasant and happy, productive gardening Spring and Summer!

God Bless,

Erl

February 2023



At least something's growing!

During that cold snap in January when the Spring bulbs we dutifully planted with so much optimism failed to break the surface I was rather pleased with the smallest of achievements in the freezing temperature. Thanks to a leaky tap I had succeeded in growing an icicle from the ground upwards, a sort of icy stalagmite.



Pip Harwood

Hedges and their Edges.

A hedge and all the undergrowth at its base provide a massive diversity of habitats for wildlife including insects (up to 1500 species), birds (at least 65 species nest in hedges whilst others visit), invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, snakes and small mammals (over 30 species), plus 600 species of wildflower grow in the hedge and at its base. No wonder hedges are so aesthetically pleasing and an iconic feature of the British countryside promoting health and well-being for all.



That is not all. Hedges provide boundaries for human parishes, farms, and footpaths and safe corridors for small mammals especially bats to move along from one sanctuary to another gathering food as they go and nesting sites. In new sanctuaries they can mate with others of the same species so enlarging their gene pool and promote the re-establishment of locally

extinct populations.

Even more they provide shelter from strong winds to gardeners and grazing animals alike and a wonderful selection of different herbs both in the hedge and beneath the hedge.

There is also food for free for foragers such as blackberries, sloes, crab apples, elderberries and if you are lucky hazel nuts. Others provide medicines such as hips, elderflowers again and hawthorn – a well-established heart regulator. When I was a child farmers called hawthorn leaves 'bread and cheese' which they ate when working in the fields.

Hedges store carbon both in woody growth above ground and in roots, leaf litter and other soil organic matter at and below ground level. In addition, hedges across slopes capture eroding soil and can increase soil organic carbon for up to 60m uphill.

Despite such positivity hedges and their edges are under severe threat because of intensive farming practices that require larger fields, development, and the high cost of maintaining hedges. Post and rails are the cheaper option. Even so there is much more

awareness of the value of hedges not least **The Great Big Dorset Hedge** (www.dorsetcan.org.hedge)

Environmental groups have committed to creating a continuous hedge of about 90 miles length across the county from east to west. This is to create corridors of access for as much wildlife as possible.

Field maple, dogwood, hazel, hawthorn, privet, blackthorn, buckthorn, dog rose, elder, guelder rose, wayfaring tree and holly are all native plants suitable for hedging whilst small trees can be planted at intervals to give added interest and to provide singing posts for songbirds such as the thrush. Examples are crab apple, rowan, and cherry.

Management of a hedge.

Avoid cutting annually because flowers and therefore berries, seeds and nuts will not have a chance to form since they only produce on the **second** year's growth. Thus if hedges need cutting it would be preferable to cut a small section each year possibly a third

Aim to keep some sections of the hedge at least 6 feet high so that they act as corridors for bats.

Do think about the foot of the hedge (see above) where many creatures are likely to hide during inclement weather and throughout the winter .Being tidy by strimming the hedge base can cause huge destruction to wildlife. The strimmer might well be called a weapon of mass destruction.

Di Redfern



Working in the Garden?

Think Hedgehog

Every year hundreds of hedgehogs are admitted into rescues with serious and sometimes fatal injuries.

STRIMMERS - LAWN MOWERS - GARDEN FORKS - SPADES - NETTING - CHEMICALS

Injuries that could be avoided by simply checking before gardening & by putting things away after use.

PLEASE BE WILDLIFE AWARE

Do Chickens Have a Place in a Cottage Garden?



A hundred years ago a cottager would probably have had chickens and rabbits, even a pig, in the garden to provide food for the family. Life has moved on a bit since then so is it still a good idea?

Here are some pros and cons to consider before taking what

may seem a small step but which could disrupt your life more than you would think possible. (At the time of writing there are restrictions because of Avian Influenza but with luck these may be lifted in the Spring.)

Pros

If you pick the right breed and look after them properly, they will lay lots of eggs. The eggs will be at least as good as supermarket 'ordinary' and will be 'free range' if you let your hens roam on grass. Eggs will be absolutely fresh and you will have pride that they are your own produce, so will taste that much better!

You will probably become attached to your hens. They are quite interesting when you get to know them and have individual characters. Some will become tame - I had one that would settle on my knee when I sat down (outdoors, obviously, as hens are anything but house-trained). Hens make around 30 different sounds and you will quickly learn to identify 'Alarm', 'I've found something tasty' and 'Hey everyone, I've laid an egg'. The others are a bit more subtle.

Hens produce a surprising quantity of droppings, which are excellent as a compost activator. Less of a blessing if you don't make compost.

Cons

Hens are a commitment! They will need attention at least twice a day, every day of the year. Will your neighbours look after them when you are away?

Hybrids are egg-laying machines and burn-out after a year or two but traditional breeds can frequently live to four or five years old. Will

you have the heart to ‘dispatch’ Becky, who has fallen asleep on your knee so often, when she stops laying?

Hens make a mess! Their feet are powerful and their claws are sharp, designed for scratching. (You’ll find out how powerful and sharp if you pick them up the wrong way.) They scratch the grass or soil to find food and will eat all sorts of garden nasties. Woodlice seem to be a particular delicacy and even slugs will go down, although without any relish. Hens also make dust-baths. All this activity will cause a lot of damage and if you give them the free run of your garden it will never look tidy again. You will therefore probably choose to restrict them, which means closing off a part of the garden. If you are aiming for ‘free-range’ eggs, that will need to be a substantial area and they will still destroy parts of it with dust-baths.

You can keep them in a small area but you will end up with hard, bare earth, with a few nettles around the edge. You can use a small run and move this and the house every few days but can you keep this up? I tried and the novelty wore off very quickly.

Hens make noise! I find the sounds they make homely but will your neighbours feel the same? Cockerels are raucous but I assume you will not be thinking of breeding so everyone’s beauty sleep need not be disturbed.



Hens have enemies! The house and run must be secure. A fox will call every night to check your security – if you don’t believe this, just leave the door open one night and count your hens in the morning. Badgers may also take an interest, as will weasels. Unruly

dogs will chase hens and some cats will stalk and attack. Finally, you must not leave the hen’s food out overnight as this will attract rats.

Hens have bugs! If you buy from a reputable source your hens will be vaccinated and will have no bugs. Provided they have no contact with other hens they should stay healthy but beware pheasants, which will

come to eat the hen's food and leave pests. Common problems are worms and red mite – mites are difficult to get rid of.

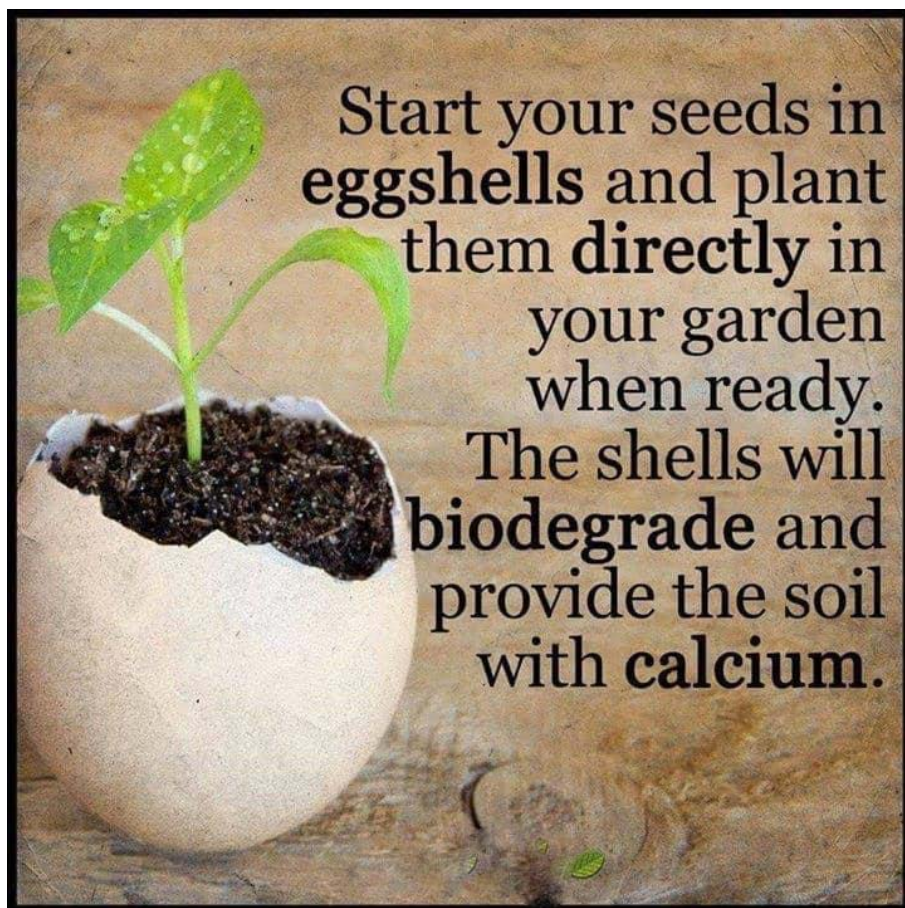
Hens smell? No. Wet droppings whiff a bit but if you keep the house clean, you'll have no problem.

Hens cost money! A bag of food will last a few hens a long time but the setting-up costs will mount up. Unless you have a suitable building ready, there is a house to buy, plus feed and water equipment. Most people buy 'Point of Lay' pullets so you will not have long to wait for your first eggs but they are costly.

If you are happy to make the commitment, all the other problems can be overcome and I hope you decide to go ahead and enjoy the results!

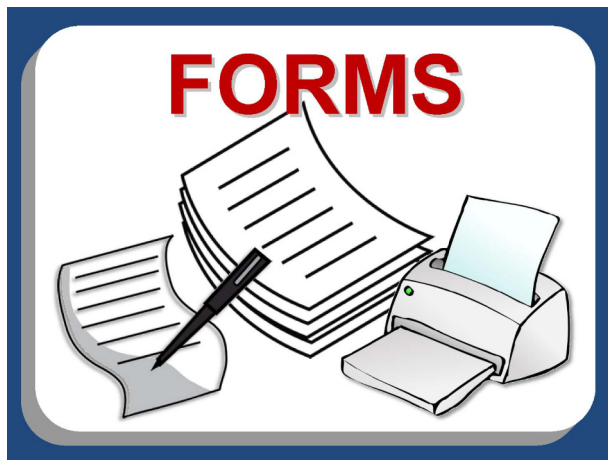
Nick Matthews

Sampford Arundel Gardening Club



***‘That Old Chestnut’ -
the act or process of recalling past experiences, events, etc***

To all our Clubs Members, I thought the above phrase rather apt in writing here a reminder to our club members of the following!



It is so **important** that we have the correct information on our data base of your clubs contact details. So often do I receive an email advising me of a change of name for a club's committee, which in itself is given with the best intentions, however we need more information than just a name and a telephone

number. It's imperative that we have a Club Details Form completed and signed with all the relevant details and returned - not only to comply with the Data Protection Act (DPA) but to ensure that correspondence from the Federation is sent to the designated person of that club. This form can be found on the Federations' website on the 'Membership' page at the bottom... link as follows:

<https://www.sfgc.org.uk/download/sfgc-club-details-revised-dec-2021.pdf>

Recently a club committee contacted us and asked why their club had not received any correspondence from us, for some considerable time, either by email or by post; on checking our records, it transpired that their previous committee member had resigned and we had not been informed.

So, please, do let us know of any changes, although I appreciate form filling can be a little red tape, it is necessary to keep our data base strictly up to date.

Thank you all very much - for your co-operation.

*Mo (Plomgren) - Database Secretary for SFGC
enquiries@SFGC.org.uk*

Withdrawals of Speaker & Judges since February 2022

The **ONLY** place for an accurate list of Speakers and Judges is now on the website designed and produced for Club committees. We cannot stress enough that if your Club does not yet have access details for the 'members' private website then please get your registered SFGC Club contact to email the SFGC webmaster. **The Speakers and Judges list is no longer published as a printed copy and will only be available through the website.**

Christopher Bond

Margaret Webster

Angela Morley

Edna & Mike Squires

Bryony Huntley

Elizabeth Holman

Philip Kerton

Pat & Bill Wilson

Mark Walker

Chris Birchall

Jonathan Garrett

Victoria Logue

Helen Kearney

Christine Stones

Susannah Applegate

Ann & John Bebbington

Mervyn Reed

Marion Dale

Tony Burges

Louise Hodgson

Chris Webber

SFGC

Speakers & Judges List



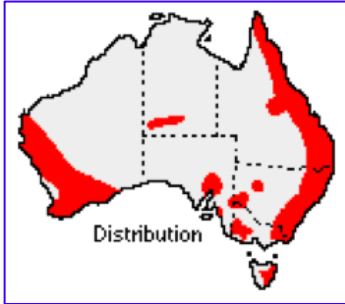
It is **ESSENTIAL**, that before you book a speaker, the **UPDATED** list on the '**members**' website is checked. This list is updated as the corrections, deletions and additions are received. If you do not have access to the 'members' website then get your authorised contact to request details from **webmaster@sfgc.org.uk**

The printed copy of Speakers and Judges list is no longer produced.

A letter from Canberra

"All gardeners know better than other gardeners" Chinese proverb. My heart is with Australian native flora. There are an astounding 24,000 species and it's hard to pick a favourite. If I were to do so, it would be Callistemon or Bottlebrush.

Bottlebrushes are members of the genus *Callistemon* and belong to the family *Myrtaceae*. They are closely related to paperbark melaleucas which also have 'bottlebrush' shaped flower spikes. It is difficult to tell to which genus some species belong. There are 40 species currently called *Callistemon*.

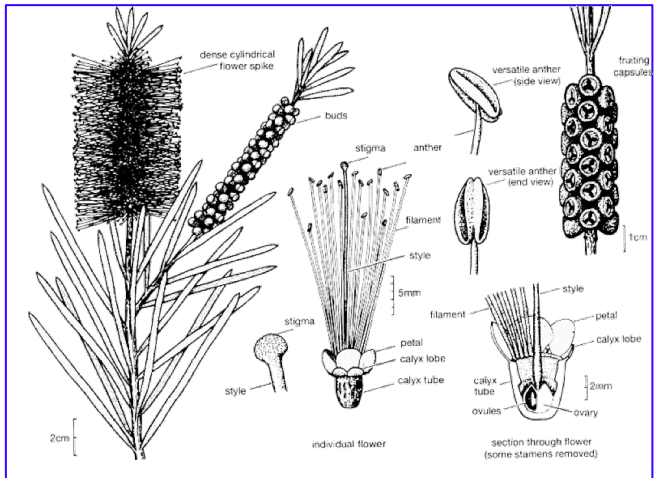


Bottlebrushes occur in the east and south-east of Australia. Two species occur in the southwest of Western Australia and four species in New Caledonia. Bottlebrushes can be found growing from Australia's tropical north to the temperate south. They often grow in damp or wet conditions such

as along creek beds or in areas which are prone to floods.

Filaments give the flower spike its colour and distinctive 'bottlebrush' shape. The filaments are usually yellow or red, sometimes the pollen also adds a bright yellow flush to the flower spikes.

Each flower produces a small woody fruit containing hundreds of tiny seeds. These fruits form in clusters along the stem, and are usually held on the plant for many years. The seeds are not released from the fruits for several years, but in some species the fruits open after about a year. Fire also stimulates



the opening of the fruits in some bottlebrushes. The new leaves of many bottlebrushes are very ornamental. The leaves are often coloured and, in some species, they are covered with fine, soft hairs.

Bottlebrushes make excellent garden plants. Plants are woody shrubs which range from 0.5 m to 4 m tall. The flowers can be spectacular

and are irresistible to nectar-feeding birds and insects. Most species are frost tolerant.

The popularity of bottlebrushes as garden plants commenced soon after European settlement and Crimson Bottlebrush (*Callistemon citrinus*) was introduced to Britain by Joseph Banks in 1789.



Many species can tolerate (or thrive in) damp conditions, yet most are very hardy and will tolerate drought and limited maintenance. They grow well in a wide variety of soils, except those which are highly alkaline. Plants grown in full sun produce the best flowers. Plants can be lightly pruned after flowering to keep them in shape. Many cultivars have been selected from natural variants and hybrids between species.

I like *Callistemon viminalis* or Weeping Bottlebrush. I'm growing some in pots ready for planting next year. They'll look like this as mature shrubs.



This letter reproduces publications from the Australian National Botanic Gardens. I thank ANBG and its contributors.

Bill Upton
Canberra February 2023

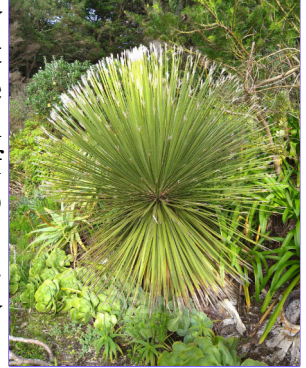
Flowers of the Isles of Scilly

Flowers of the Isles of Scilly Spring is always a very special time in the garden. It's when we finally see some floral colour after the grey of winter.



However, those of you who know the Isles of Scilly, just 28 miles, or a 15-minute flight from Land's End, will know that every season is colourful and flower filled. I have visited the Islands every year since 2003, generally in the spring but over the COVID years, it was in the Autumn as we grappled with travelling restrictions, rules and regulations.

In the world famous Tresco Abbey Gardens, they are so sure of flowers in the dead of winter that the gardening team carry out a flower count on New Year's Day every year. This year the total was 278 different blooms. They included plants from across the world, especially South Africa and Southern Europe as well as lots of less hardy varieties of our native plants. In March we are used to seeing an abundance of narcissi, freesias, rhododendrons, proteas, banksias, aloes – numbers too huge to list here (and not very



interesting!). Early summer brings the first flowering of the agapanthus which bloom along the lanes across all of the islands for the whole summer.

On our visit in 2021, when coming into land at Tresco, I could see a large area of the ground covered in bright pink. This seemed odd in November but when we arrived at our cottage, we were greeted with the usual

seasonal vase of freshly picked flowers and discovered they were nerines. I set out the next day to find this pink field, and found it tucked away from where the visitors usually walk, although nowhere is really off limits on Tresco. Never have I walked through a field of nerines, but I've attached a few pictures so that you can



see what it is like as we come into Winter. If you ever get the chance, do visit this wonderful archipelago. It really does not matter what time of year. There are flowers all the year round.

Judi Chambers

Bampton in Bloom

Rosa rugosa

If there is no room for a whole hedge one perfect compromise that makes a sumptuous impact is Rosa rugosa 'rubra'. The flowers are a

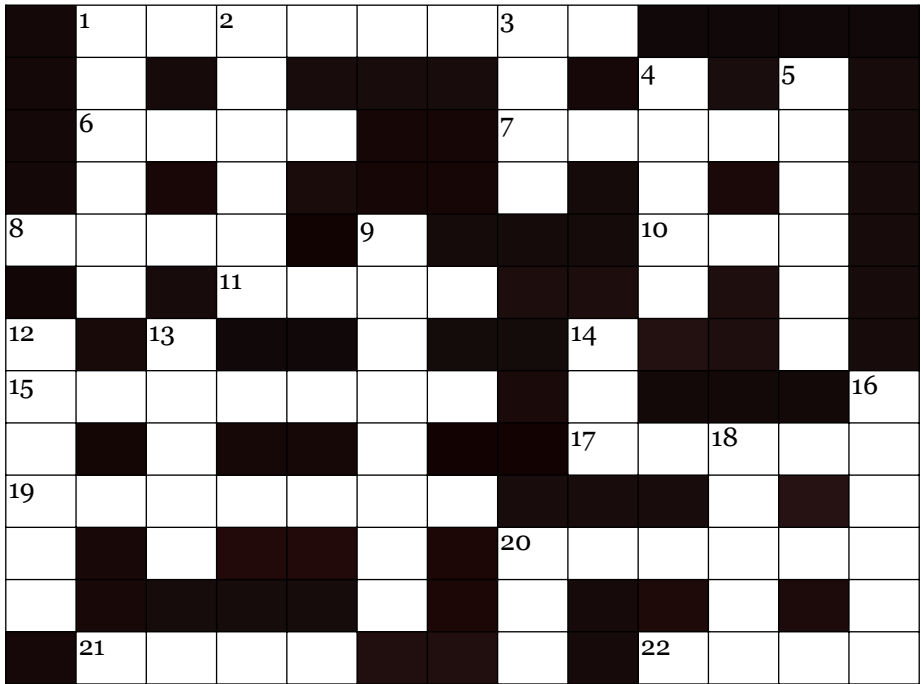


striking cerise in colour, single so perfect for pollinators with a sweet but strong wafting fragrance. The flowers open from long buds to reveal a large centre of bright pollen coated yellow stamens. This rose flowers from May to late autumn by which time tomato shaped hips are beginning to appear. The leaves are a bright green that turn to a deep golden yellow in the autumn. The rose is extremely healthy seldom showing any diseases.

It does have very long and sharp prickles!

Di Redfern

Gardening Crossword - by John Dunster



Across

1. Pear said to be different in heaven.
6. Pristine Plant.
7. Work hard to produce new plants.
8. Beer with a portion of duck.
10. Plant that comes up in May.
11. Search around for something down to earth.
15. I get all confused with husbandry.
- 17 & 9 down. Father presumably doesn't need stilts to catch this insect.
19. Walker rose.
20. Plants of historic interest on the moor.
21. Allotment scheme.
22. Give up making pots.

Down

1. A member dads put out to grass.
2. Bean smuggler.
3. Herb a wise old fellow.
4. Form of lacy cross found on a tomato.
5. Don't go fellows, lose a letter and find part of a flower.
9. See 17 across.
12. Arranging asters looks hard.
13. No good market for plums.
14. The place for tired flowers.
16. Plant you will find some days in a new shop.
18. Figure it's what you do to your garden.
20. Half sodden piece of turf.

Solution on page 26

**Somerset Federation of
Gardening Clubs**

AGM

Friday 5th May 2023

**Wincanton Memorial Hall,
High Street, Wincanton.**

BA9 9JF

**Doors open 6.15pm for 7pm start
followed by an illustrated talk.**

Kindly hosted by
Wincanton & District Gardeners Association



Refreshments - Raffle - Plant Sale

Wincanton and District Gardeners Association Update

We have now comeback to our full strength of meetings, shows and trips since the end of covid.

We have had several very interesting talks on many interesting subjects and these have been attended by many of our members.

Our membership again this year is slowly growing and we are pleased, despite having to make a small increase to our membership fee this year.

At our meetings we have a members flower of the month competition



which involves members bringing what they think is their best flower for that season or time of the year. They are all displayed and members can, at coffee time, vote with a bean. The flower with the most beans is then declared the winner. We have 1st, 2nd and 3rd places. They are also given points and at the end of the competition in July all the points are totaled.

At our Annual show in September a cup is presented to the winner. This is all for a bit of healthy competition between our members and also for a bit of fun.

At our December meeting we change flower of the month to a Christmas Table Decoration, which brings many interesting ideas.

We are now arranging some interesting events for this year starting with a Group visit to The Newt in Somerset. This will include a guided walk and talk by their head gardener.

We hope to visit RHS Rosemoor in June and have a visit to a private Garden at Ditcheat in May. We then have our members Rose and Sweet Pea Show in July and of course the big one, our Annual Show on September 2nd.

Also this year on 5th May we are hosting the SFG AGM here in Wincanton, as you can see we have a really full year planned ahead for us.

We would look forward to welcoming any new members or visitors to our meetings, which are held on the 1st Friday of each month except June, August and September.

Gill D'Arcy
Association Secretary.

Colours of Summer

Like colours of the rainbow
In the garden they appear
Every summer they are standing
Just like they did last year.



Bright red poppies standing tall and proud
Petals so delicate and fluted
Foxgloves in every shade of pink
Standing so tall like soldiers saluted.



Dark blue delphiniums waving about
Pale pink stocks trying to compete
Purple lavender that is just coming out
Newly planted borders looking so neat.



Perfumes are wafting every where
Pollen being carried by the bees
A garden of colour so tranquil
We must not forget the trees.



Grasses that sway in the breeze
Acers with leaves so red
A pure white arum lily emerges
In the middle of another flower bed.



Nature is such a wonderful thing
Each season the changes occur
But summer time is such a delight
I love it at this time of year.

© Gill D'Arcy
Wincanton and District Gardeners Association

Nettles! - They are not to be Despised

Most of us realise that nettles are edible and do you good but we may be reluctant to eat them because they sting! The sting disappears once the nettle is cooked. In fact nettles provide us with iron, vitamins (B, C) flavonoids, proteins and other essential minerals too. Here is a simple recipe to try – nettle soup. It comes from the book 'Wild Food' by Roger Phillips.



Preparing nettles

Firstly prepare the nettles using only young leaves before they flower. Wash and drain them. Nettle soup freezes easily which is a plus.

Chop up one large potato, one carrot, one onion and garlic to taste. Sauté them in a 2 litre saucepan with a tablespoon of olive oil and a bit of butter to taste. When the onion starts to soften and the potato is forming a slight crust, drop in the nettles and give them a quick whisk around with a spatula. Then add a litre of boiled water and 2-4 cups of stock. Stir it all up and let it bubble for about 12 minutes, or until the potato is soft. Liquidise it once it has cooled, then return to the pan to warm it when you are ready to serve. To serve, pour the soup into a bowl and add some cream. There are various other ingredients that can be added so it is worth experimenting.

For much the same nutritional reasons nettles make an ideal plant food especially for use in the greenhouse. They have more nitrogen and less potassium than comfrey, so they are best for feeding leafy greens such as salad leaves and brassicas. Select younger leaves, as they contain more nitrogen and less tough cellulose and lignin, so they break down quickly in water.

Fill a container half to three quarters full with leaves, top up with water, then cover it and wait 3 - 4 weeks, then strain the solution. The resultant mixture may need to be diluted to the colour of weak tea.

However even more important is that most of our favourite butterflies depend on nettles as the ONLY food for their caterpillars. Here they are - the Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral and Painted Lady. Sometimes Comma butterflies lay their eggs on nettles too as do several types of moth.

Thus they are vital for the lives of our most well known butterflies. The adults are not nearly so fussy and will take nectar from a wide variety of flowers! The caterpillars are really not even fond of the small nettle or dead nettles so it would be good to boost the declining numbers of these beautiful insects by providing a patch of nettles in a sunny corner of the garden. I have read that it is possible to provide nettles in pots but Butterfly Conservation says that this does not really work because they need a much larger and wilder area safer from predators. Here is the Butterfly Conservation web site butterfly-conservation.org.



The caterpillars (Peacock?) have broken out of their web and are feeding on the nettle leaves.

Being unaffected by their well known sting, nettles are a good choice for caterpillars because they offer protection from predators including that from herbivores such as cattle, sheep and deer all of which are keen to avoid the sting. Birds too love to find caterpillars especially when they are feeding youngsters. I have read that each chick can eat 100 caterpillars a day so 5 chicks would need 500 caterpillars. Exhausting work and no wonder a butterfly needs to lay so many eggs.



Numerous leaves have been eaten by the various stages (instars) of caterpillar growth.

The eggs and larvae of these butterfly species are present on nettles between April and June, with adults emerging between May and October. Insects employ various ways to survive. Female butterflies lay many, many eggs during their short life to ensure that even a small number of these eggs will survive. Caterpillars (butterfly larvae) hatch from eggs. The eggs are usually laid in a protected location on the nettles that the soon-to-be caterpillar will eat. Often, as they grow, the masses of larvae surround

themselves in silk webbing to provide protection, so that they don't become a feast for passing birds.

It's important to treat nettles like any other garden plant if you are growing for the benefit of butterflies. Cut them regularly to get good fresh growth from the nettles. March and October are good months but ensure that there are no eggs or larvae on the leaves. Watch out for any leaves that are curled or folded in any way. Something is going on inside!

Just one example. The Peacock Butterfly lays her eggs in batches of 400 eggs a process that may take up to 2 hours. She will choose the middle of a large nettle patch often next to a woodland edge or hedgerow.



After 2 weeks or so the first larvae (or instars) hatch and start to build a communal web around themselves for protection whilst eating day and night. As they grow they will move on to new leaves. They moult again into the second instar which is twice the size of the first. . After as little as 4 days the larvae moult into the third stage still in their communal web. They eat by day and night and when one leaf is eaten they move on to a new one and make a new web. After a week the larvae moult into a fourth stage or instar and a new web is made.

Altogether there are 5 instars. The caterpillar is now about 42 millimetres long and fully grown and must individually start looking for a place to pupate. Once a site has been found the larva will spin a silk pad from which it hangs head down in a J shape. After about 2 weeks the pupa colours up when the wings of

The Pupal Stage the adult are clearly seen through the pupal case before the actual butterfly emerges if it has been very fortunate.

Di Redfern

Final Cuttings

Now here's a bit of history. The Somerset Federation's first newsletter was produced and issued in January 1990. Long ago and a different era. Not quite grey shorts and snake belts but our weaponry consisted of carbon paper, letraset and much two-fingered typing. Someone had access to what was called a word processor but the members on the committee generally kept their heads down on that score.

The newsletter itself amounted to a double-sided sheet of green A4 - very exciting, bashed out on an old typewriter from my scribblings sent down to West Chinnock from Wells, via Her Majesty's Postal Service.

What it contained was the usual exhortations about sending us names of speakers and judges, info of events etc. etc. *The more it changes, the more it's the same*, as the French saying goes.

Now three decades on, change is in the air. Our and your information is going online. It is a change we are destined to make. So let us ensure its success. That first newsletter quoted Kipling:

*Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made
By singing 'Oh how beautiful!' and sitting in the shade.*

My best offline wishes for all your clubs for your futures.

Pip Harwood

Hon. Pres.



Spring 2023 Newsletter - Crossword Solution

Across: 1. Paradise 6. Mint 7. Graft 8. Kale 10. Yam 11. Root
15. Tillage 17 & 9 down Daddy Longlegs 19. Rambler 20. Sedges
21. Plot 22. Stop

Down: 1. Pampas 2. Runner 3. Sage 4. Calyx 5. Stamen
9. See 17 across 12. Stares 13. Slump 14. Bed 16. Hyssop 18. Digit
20. Sod

