



March 2024

# Newsletter

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**Dear Members,**

It was lovely to see so many of you at our meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> February and again at our Annual Dinner on 14<sup>th</sup> March.

Paul Williams kept us all entertained with his stories and videos of the life on show in our gardens that we would miss if we didn't pay close attention to what is under our noses and the Annual Dinner, catered by Sue Dalby, was thoroughly enjoyed by all who were able to attend. As well as socialising over the lovely food and drink there was the chance to win one of the beautiful raffle prizes artfully put together by Alison Watson. We also announced the results of the daffodil growing competition and the annual awards for the most points accumulated in the monthly potted plant and flower spike competitions. Garden vouchers for £10 were given to those in first place.

#### Daffodil competition

We had a gorgeous display of blooms grown from the February Gold bulbs given out at the end of last year.

Winner – Sheena Clark

#### Potted plant competition

1<sup>st</sup> – Felicity Hill, 2<sup>nd</sup> Alison Watson, 3<sup>rd</sup> Mary Cotterrell

#### Flower spike competition

1<sup>st</sup> – Edward Cotterrell, 2<sup>nd</sup> Alison Watson, Joint 3<sup>rd</sup> Felicity Hill and Derek Hill

As the damp, wintry conditions of February continue into March, it is hard to believe that Spring is indeed here:

- Meteorological spring started on 1<sup>st</sup> March
- Astronomical spring started on 19<sup>th</sup> March (a day earlier than usual due to the leap year)
- Daylight-Saving Time (when we “Spring forwards” into BST) starts on 31<sup>st</sup> March

Even if we don't feel spring-like as humans at least the plants are all waking up from their winter slumbers and The Committee is working on plans for our summer garden trip and we will update you with the details in the next few weeks. In the meantime we hope that you are able to make the most of the occasional sunny spell and progress with your seed sowing and propagation plans. If you can pop in a few extra for our Annual Plant Sale on 11<sup>th</sup> May that would be lovely – we always have a great range of plants on offer and we usually sell out. So anything you can provide is great and really helps us make the most of this event as a fundraiser for the society.

*Ann*

## BDHS GQT

Those of you who were able to attend the GQT event on 13<sup>th</sup> Feb or who have been able to listen to the broadcasts on Radio 4 will know that our members were very well represented in the questions chosen for the panel. They had a wide range of questions to choose from and as a result there were many that could not be tackled on the night. Some of the answers from the panel raised a fair amount of debate (!) and, given the expertise of our members, it prompted some discussion that we could do a similar thing.

So, as we mentioned at our last meeting, we will run with a "GQT" theme for a few months and take your questions to "The Committee" to answer a selection each month via the Newsletter. A form is attached to the e mail this newsletter was sent to you in and is also on the website. You can use this to send your questions to us, either directly to me via e mail, or on paper to Doug Timmis (address is on the form).

This month we have two questions:

From Jane Brennan

*I would like to develop a really good patch of trillium. I particularly enjoy the deep red/maroon variety with mottled leaves. I have some red and white ones but they have not multiplied as I hoped. The garden is wet in winter always with run off from field then dry in summer!*

Trilliums grow from a rhizome, with the shoots emerging in March/ April, flowering and setting seed from July before dying down in September/October. Most trilliums are fully hardy.

They grow best in a partly shaded, deciduous woodland habitat. They prefer a neutral to acid soil but will grow successfully in any fertile soil that is rich in organic matter and does not dry out.

Although trilliums are moisture lovers they will not tolerate waterlogging, so this could be the reason that they have not flourished and they will not thrive on heavy, wet clay soils. Planting in raised beds could be a solution for you, or else dig out the clay to a spades depth and fill with a mixture of loam, garden compost, well-rotted manure and composted bark bulked up with sharp sand. Mound the material so it is at least 10cm (4in) above the surrounding soil level. This will allow the plants to root deeply but prevent them from sitting in waterlogged conditions over winter.

From Robert Leeming:

*In 2023 I was surprised that the apples were so small on all our trees when we have not altered our treatment of them. The usual cause is nutritional according to "experts" but the trees are in differing locations and wondered if there were any other factors at play?*

Extreme heat and droughts in the UK in 2022 caused stress to apple trees, which resulted in an inconsistent crop in 2023. While some trees produced a decent amount of fruit, others were significantly less laden, or had smaller fruits.

Favourable conditions in the September meant that while the apples may not have been abundant they did have a great flavour. The last 70 days before picking influence the apple flavour and the lack of a heatwave in August and the good sunshine with some, but not excessive, warmth in September brought the fruits to maturity with plenty of sugars, some acids and bright colours – all of which make for tasty, appetising apples.

## Recipe of the Month

Like me you probably have the first pink stems of rhubarb poking through the ground in your gardens and allotments. This jam is a fantastic way of preserving the lovely pink colour of the early season rhubarb to enjoy later in the year.

### Rhubarb & Ginger Jam

#### Ingredients

- 1kg pink rhubarb, trimmed weight
- 1kg sugar (you may like to use jam sugar as rhubarb has a v low pectin content)
- Zest and juice 1 lemon
- 100g stem or 75g crystallised ginger, finely chopped
- 5 cm piece root ginger, peeled

#### Method

1. Wash the rhubarb under cold running water and slice into 2cm pieces. Tip into a large ceramic or plastic bowl, add the sugar and stir to coat the fruit with the sugar. Leave overnight for the fruit to soften and to allow the sugar to dissolve into the rhubarb juices. You may need to stir the mixture occasionally to encourage this process along.
2. Add lemon zest and juice and chopped stem/crystallised ginger. Finely grate the peeled root ginger directly over the rhubarb. Stir the mixture thoroughly, cover loosely with cling film and leave to one side for about 2 hrs.
3. Pop a few saucers in the freezer. Scoop the fruit and all the sugary juices into a preserving pan and set over a medium heat. Stir until the sugar has completely dissolved and once the sugar has dissolved bring to the boil. Continue to cook at a fairly swift pace, stirring occasionally to prevent catching, until the rhubarb is really tender and the conserve has reached setting point (104°C) – this should take about 15-20 mins.
4. To test for a set, drop ½ tsp of the jam onto a cold saucer, leave it for 60 secs and then gently push it with the tip of your finger. If the jam wrinkles the setting point has been reached. If not, continue to cook for a further couple of minutes and test again.
5. Remove the pan from the heat and leave to one side for 2-3 mins before pouring into sterilised jars. Seal immediately and label with the date once completely cold.

Makes 4 (and a bit) 1 lb jars

Makes a lovely filling for a sponge cake or warmed as a topping for a steamed sponge with custard.

## Monthly Flower Spike and Pot Plant Competition

Points are awarded for first, second and third positions (First – 5 points, Second – 3 points and Third – 2 points).

Prizes are awarded for the highest aggregate points at the end of the year. Multiple entries are allowed in the “Flower Spike” class, though only one award will be made per entrant.

### Pot Plant

- 1<sup>st</sup> Anthurium – Joan Russell
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Cyclamen – Celia Davis
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Narcissus “February Gold” – Alison Watson



1<sup>st</sup> Anthurium  
Joan Russell



2<sup>nd</sup> Cyclamen  
Celia Davis



3<sup>rd</sup> February Gold  
Alison Watson

### Flower Spike

- 1<sup>st</sup> Hellebore – Edward Cotterrell
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Hellebore – Mary Cotterrell
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Prunus Mume – Alison Watson



1<sup>st</sup> Hellebore  
Edward Cotterrell



2<sup>nd</sup> Hellebore  
Mary Cotterrell



3<sup>rd</sup> Prunus Mume  
Alison Watson

The competition was judged by our guest speaker, Paul Williams, who said he was spoiled for choice and had a difficult job making his decision. Thank you to everyone who entered - the photos of the winners are also on our website.

Now that Spring is well and truly “sprung,” please bring along your flowers and plants for us all to enjoy at our next meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> March.

## NOTICE BOARD

### BDHS Meetings:

#### 2024 Monthly Meeting Dates

7:30pm Tea & Coffee. Please remember to bring a mug with you if possible, it helps the environment and the clearing up after the meeting. Speaker starts at 8pm

Guests are welcome - there is a small charge of £3 for entry which includes refreshments.

28 <sup>th</sup> March	Roger Umpleby (Entomologist)	How to love Lily Beetles and admire slugs!
25 <sup>th</sup> April	Richard Rallings (Mynd Hardy Plants)	Five centuries of women and gardens
30 <sup>th</sup> May	Mike King	My obsession with Sarracenias
27 <sup>th</sup> June	Josh Egan (Pershore College)	Classic plants for classy people
26 <sup>th</sup> September	Catrina Fenton (Garden Organic – Ryton)	Seed saving & The Heritage Seed Library
31 <sup>st</sup> October	Nigel Hopes (Hopes Garden Plants)	A year in the life of John's garden

#### Other BDHS dates:

11 <sup>th</sup> May	Plant Sale - Village Hall, Balsall Common
20 <sup>th</sup> July	Annual Show - St Peters Hall, Balsall Common
25 <sup>th</sup> July	Social Evening - 6:30pm (Venue tbc)
28 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2024	AGM – 7:30pm

Further events/details will be announced once they are finalised

#### Other Dates for your diary

14 <sup>th</sup> April	Middleton Hall Plant Hunters Fair	10:00 – 16:00
	<i>(Tickets £4, must be prebooked via the website and include entrance to the gardens - <a href="http://www.middleton-hall.co.uk/events/plant-hunters-fair">www.middleton-hall.co.uk/events/plant-hunters-fair</a>)</i>	
20 <sup>th</sup> April	Alpine Garden Society	11:30 – 15:30 at Woodrush High School, Shawhurst Lane, B47 5JW
	<i>(Further details on the website: <a href="http://www.alpinegardensociety.net/shows">www.alpinegardensociety.net/shows</a>)</i>	

## Some jobs for the next few weeks...

Now that Spring is here there's plenty to do in the garden...

- Keep feeding the birds – remember to put out water/defrost birdbaths when frosty
- Keep on top of the weeding – seedlings may not be growing much in the cold temperatures but the weeds are and one benefit of all the rain we've had is that they are easy to pull out!
- Deadhead spring bulbs as they finish flowering, leaving the leaves in place for at least 8 weeks or until they die down naturally
- Lift and divide large clumps of Snowdrops after they have finished flowering (controversial give the answer on GQT, but most of our members swear by this method of planting/propagation)
- Finish cutting back / splitting hardy perennials and feed, then apply mulch to beds & around trees
- Lift and divide herbs
- Cut dogwoods, willows, cotinus and paulownia right down to the base to promote vigorous new growth
- Complete the pruning of shrubs & climbers that flower on new growth such as Buddleia, Hydrangea, Lavatera, Sambucus and Hardy Fuchsias
- Finish pruning late summer flowering (from July onwards / Group 3) clematis
- Plant woody shrubs so that the roots can start to grow before the demands of the foliage begins
- Mulch fruit trees and bushes; bare rooted fruit can still be planted
- Lawns can be mown lightly when dry, spike & feed if required, tidy up lawn edges. Grass seed may be sown & turf laid
- Hardy annuals can be sown outdoors, but half-hardy annuals should be sown under glass to protect from frost
- Plant shallot / onion sets, asparagus, new rhubarb crowns, strawberry plants and early potatoes
- Plant out autumn sown Broad Bean seedlings
- Start Dahlia tubers off in damp potting compost; when shoots appear these may be used for cuttings.
- Tidy up alpines as they start to flower, removing dead foliage, then mulch with grit to keep the foliage off damp soil
- Plant lilies and other summer-flowering bulbs in pots and borders
- Feed ericaceous shrubs, such as rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and Pieris, with an ericaceous fertiliser