



February 2026

Newsletter

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Dear Members,

Welcome to our February Newsletter and 2026.

Thank you to all who attended the very well attended January meeting and to everyone who has paid their subscriptions. We welcome those new members who have joined us for 2026.

We have a wonderful selection of speakers this year. To start us off on the 29th January we enjoyed a visit from Nigel Hope, Head Gardener at John's Garden/Ashwood Nurseries who kept us all enthralled with an engaging talk full of really useful information and beautifully presented inspiration.

As the weather improves and you start planting and growing seeds, we would like to ask that you plant a few more seeds than you may need and bring them to our plant sale on Saturday 9th May at the front of village hall. This is always a great success and an opportunity for us all to buy plants that perhaps we may not have considered. We will be providing members with a few plant labels at our next meeting.

The Narcissus Falconet bulbs that we sold for you to grow on will be judged at the March Meeting which is on the 26th and the prize is a £10 gift voucher.

Plug plants (Begonias and Pelargoniums) will be available at our February meeting for growing on and submission at the Annual Flower Show Competition in July.

On a sad note we have received notice of the death of one of our long time members, Cyril Davis. Members are welcome to attend his funeral service at Oakley Wood Crematorium (North Chapel), Bishops Tachbrook, Leamington Spa CV33 9QP on Tuesday, 17th February at 2pm.

Please enjoy reading our newsletter and we look forward to contributions and ideas to include in future issues. Please email michelle@sutreyfit.co.uk or sharonmarie1406@btinternet.com

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our February meeting. See dates for your diaries at the end of the newsletter.

Sharon & Michelle

Grow Plants that were around when Dinosaurs Roamed the Earth

Dinosaurs are now extinct but the plants that were around when they roamed the earth are very much still with us. Many of these have stunning architectural form and make a real conversation starter when grown in your garden. All of the below can be easily grown in the UK (the tree fern needs some winter protection though). So why not grow something that was alive over 200 million years ago?

Dicksonia antarctica - The Soft Tree Fern



Tree ferns are native of Australia and New Zealand but will grow happily in the UK as long as the crown of the plant where the fronds emerge from is protected in winter. They form a trunk as they grow which is composed of matted roots. In the spring and early summer fronds unfurl from the centre of the plant. These are covered in small hairs when they first emerge, a brown fur coating which is very tempting to stroke. I have known the fronds not to start appearing until June so don't panic if you don't see growth in spring. In general the more you water tree ferns the bigger the fronds. Tree ferns are watered differently from many plants, you water a tree fern by pouring the water into the top of the plant where the fronds come from. It is also a good idea to water the trunk as the tree ferns roots are on the outside of the trunk and not in the pot or in the ground! Feed your tree ferns for best results, use either a proprietary tree fern or fern fertiliser. This is diluted in water and poured into the crown of the plant during the growing season in spring and summer. Tree ferns grow best in a semi-shaded area. In winter protect the growing tip where the fronds emerge from. Place straw into this area and cover the tree fern with horticultural fleece. If moveable, and in a pot, move to a sheltered spot by the house.

Ginkgo biloba



Grow Plants that were around when Dinosaurs Roamed the Earth (cont..)

Ginkgos were actually considered to be extinct until a plant was found 1691 when it was found in Japan by the botanist Engelbert Kaempfer. It was not classified as a Gingko until 1771. There are now about 200 different cultivars. Ginkgo are deciduous and there are dwarf forms and those that will grow into a tree. There are also male and female forms. It is preferable to grow male forms in the garden as the female Ginkgo produce fruit that has the smell of rotting meat! (ewww yuk). They don't reach seed bearing age until they are 25-35 years old so that may not be a problem for you if you aren't going to be in the property that long! They like full sun and are completely hardy in the UK. They are extremely low maintenance and have no major pests or diseases.

Araucaria araucana - Monkey Puzzle Tree



The Monkey Puzzle Tree was seen in gardens everywhere in the 1970's but is less commonly seen nowadays. It was at its height of popularity in the Victorian Era. No one really knows where it got its name from but it is rumoured that the barrister Charles Austin said "it would puzzle a monkey to climb that". It is an extremely prickly plant and slow growing when young, but will eventually grow into an unusual looking tree. In their native Chile they are endangered. They are evergreen and can reach 30 metres and live for 1000 years! They are fully hardy in the UK and will grow in sun or partial shade in a moist but well drained soil. They are extremely low maintenance.

Article downloaded from Gardening Focus

Recipe of the Month – Forced Rhubarb Tart

Supplied by Michelle Sutcliffe

With long pink stems, rhubarb is one of the most distinctive vegetables (due to it's lack of seeds it is not technically a fruit) out there. Part of the Polygonaceae plant family, it originated over 5,000 years ago in Asia, but now the plant grows in North America and Europe as well – with a particularly big presence in Yorkshire in the UK. The 'Rhubarb Triangle' is an area of West Yorkshire between Wakefield, Morley and Rothwell famous for rhubarb production; at one point it produced 90 percent of the word's forced rhubarb. But in recent years production has expanded to other parts of the country too. It's bright pink hue makes rhubarb one of the prettiest vegetables around, and its tart taste makes it a popular ingredient in puddings. In the UK, most varieties can be harvested from late April or May, but one kind is drawn out of hibernation early, allowing us to enjoy it earlier in the season – hence the name, forced rhubarb. Rhubarb is usually cooked in sweet recipes, such as crumbles, pies and jams.

Recipe

Ingredients

For the sweet pastry:
250g flour
150g unsalted butter
60g icing sugar
1 egg, beaten

For the rhubarb filling:

2 large sticks red rhubarb
50g caster sugar
2 tbsp of chopped pistachio

For the frangipane:

100g butter
100g caster sugar
100g ground almond
15g plain flour
2 eggs, beaten

You will need:

25cm x 8cm shallow tin

Method

To make the pastry, rub the flour, butter and sugar together in a large bowl until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add the egg and vanilla and knead gently until the pastry comes together and forms a smooth dough. Set aside in the fridge to chill for one hour.

Preheat oven to 100 C. Whilst the pastry is chilling, prepare your rhubarb. Cut the rhubarb into batons the same width as your tin. Place in an ovenproof dish and sprinkle with sugar. Cover with foil and cook in the oven for 30 minutes, until tender. Leave the rhubarb to cool, and then strain the liquid.

Tip: this can be reduced on the hob and used as a glaze.

Turn the oven up to 165 C. Whilst the rhubarb is cooling, make the frangipane. To start, gently melt the butter in a medium pan. Once melted, remove from the heat and whisk in the sugar for 2 minutes, until creamed. Add half the beaten egg mixture and whisk until smooth. Fold in the remaining egg along with the flour and ground almonds until fully combined. Set aside.

Remove your pastry from the fridge. On a clean, floured surface roll to approx. 3mm thick, big enough to fit your tin. Line the tin with the rolled out pastry and leave in the fridge to cool for a further 10 minutes. Once cooled, evenly pipe the frangipane into the lined tin and top with the cooled rhubarb batons.

Bake in the preheated oven for 30 – 40 minutes, until golden brown. Leave to cool for 10 minutes then brush with the rhubarb glaze and sprinkle over the pistachio. Serve warm.

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 competition period (March to February). Multiple entries are allowed, though only one award will be made per entrant.

Pot Plants



1st Alison Watson
Hyacinths



2nd Marion Keeley
Snowdrops



3rd Laura Eden
Christmas Cactus

Flower Spikes



1st Margaret Sears
Clematis



2nd Ellie Atkinson
Hellebore



3rd Helen Goodwin
Witch Hazel

The competition was judged by our guest speaker, Nigel Hope, who had a small selection to choose from. As January is not the most abundant month of the year for flower spikes or outdoor grown flowering pot plants thank you to everyone who entered, the photos of the winners will also be published on our website.

NOTICE BOARD

2026 B&DHS Meetings:

Monthly Meeting Dates (Thursdays at 8pm unless otherwise stated)

Doors open from 7:30pm with Tea & Coffee. Please remember to bring a mug with you if possible, it helps the environment and the clearing up after the meeting. The meetings start promptly at 8pm

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

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| ➤ February 26 th | What Life is Like for a Garden Designer – Pip Smith |
| ➤ March 26 th | David Austin Roses – Liam Beddall |
| ➤ April 30 th | Classy Plants for Classy People – Josh Egan |
| ➤ May 28 th | Vintage Garden Tools – Carol and John Matthews |
| ➤ June 25 th | Sweet Peas – Phillips Cooper |
| ➤ July 30 th | Summer Social Evening |
| ➤ September 24 th | Plants for the Late Garden – Jack Wildgoss |
| ➤ October 29 th | The Garden Chemist – Dr Alison Foster |
| ➤ November 26 th | Annual General Meeting – 7.30pm start. |

Other BDHS dates:

Thursday 19th March - Annual Supper - Village Hall Balsall Common (TICKETED event £20 per person)

- The annual dinner many of you would have seen on the membership form is slightly different this time. After many years of a fairly formal dinner we have decided it's time to try something a bit different. This year we will be holding an Annual Supper. This will be a 2 course cold supper, served from a buffet. It will include Salmon, Ham, Coronation Chicken a selection of salads and a choice of deserts. Coffee, wine and soft drinks will be available throughout the evening. After the supper we will be having a prize quiz.

Saturday 9th May – Plant Sale – Balsall Common Village Hall (outside)

- Our very successful annual plant sale – please drop plants on the morning of the sale - labelled

Sunday 14th June - Annual Garden Trip - Dorothy Clive Garden and Hodnet Hall Garden, Shropshire.

- Tickets are £35.00 per person and limited to coach capacity. Departure at 8.30am from Co-Op car park Balsall Common. Additional £2.50 pp charge for guided tour at Dorothy Clive Garden only.

Saturday 18th July from 8.30am MEMBERS' FLOWER SHOW - St Peter's Church Hall, Balsall Common

- More details will follow over the next months. We need as many entrants as possible to ensure a successful show and future of our Society.

Other Dates for your diary:

Saturday 14th February - 11am to 1pm - Snowdrop Saturday - Hatton Church.

- Take a walk around the Church with 1000s of snowdrops on show.
- 11am - Phil Smith with a film on local wildlife.
- 11.45 - Janet Harrison with a talk on Spring Bulbs
- Nicola Perriman has photographs of snowdrops and also leads the Leek Wooten Snowdrop walks plus craft ideas with flowers.
- Tea and cakes, of course. Free of charge, hopefully something for everyone.

Tuesday 17th February, 2pm

- Funeral service for Cyril Davis - Oakley Wood Crematorium, North Chapel – Bishops Tachbrook, Leamington Spa.

Wednesday 11th March 7pm - 9pm - Shrewley and District Garden Society - Shrewley Village Hall

- An illustrated Talk (just awaiting confirmation) and a chance to catch up over refreshments and homemade cakes. Payment will be on the door

Friday 20th March 7.30pm - Spring Flower Show - Rowington Village Hall

- A beautiful Spring Show with classes on many types of narcissus/daffodils, polyanthus, Spring flowers, also a cake decoration for Spring, an Easter Bonnet, Spring flower photograph and a poem celebrating Spring. (Class list available nearer the time).

Some jobs for February from the RHS website monthly gardening tips and advice pages.....

Sowing and planting

Plant lily bulbs in pots for flowers this summer. Grow them on indoors or in a cool greenhouse, then move them out onto the patio when coming into flower, so that you can enjoy the blooms.

Pot up dahlia tubers stored over winter (or bought this year) to start them into growth. Place pots in a light, warm place to sprout and keep the compost moist.

Hardy annuals can be sown in pots or modules to provide colour.

Sweet peas can be sown in a cold frame or in a cool room in the house. Any sweet peas that were sown in autumn can now be potted on individually.

Summer-flowering Dutch iris bulbs can be forced and used as cut flowers.

Place gladioli corms in seed trays or boxes and place in a light, warm spot around 10°C (50°F) to encourage them to sprout before planting. This will ensure an earlier display.

Root cuttings can be taken of Papaver (perennial poppies), Verbascum (mullein), Acanthus (bear's britches) and Phlox.

Check on tender plants overwintering outdoors to ensure protective coverings are still in place.

Alpine bulbs coming up in rock gardens or containers benefit from overhead protection from the rain and snow. A sheet of glass or re-used Perspex placed on piles of bricks will do the job.

Cutting back, pruning and dividing

Cut back deciduous ornamental grasses such as Miscanthus and other perennials left for winter interest.

Continue to deadhead winter pansies and other winter bedding. Pansies will carry on into the spring and even to early summer, if deadheaded frequently.

Cut off old leaves of hellebores that produce flowers from ground level (including Helleborus × hybridus and H. niger) to expose the flowers and remove possible foliar diseases such as hellebore leaf spot.

At the end of the month prune back the stems of pot-grown fuchsias, which are overwintering under cover. Place in a well-lit, warm place to encourage new growth, and keep watered.

Divide and plant bulbs-in-the-green such as snowdrops (Galanthus) and winter aconites (Eranthis hyemalis).

Divide clumps of herbaceous perennials that you want to propagate, those that have become too large for their allotted space, and those that are flowering poorly or have lost their shape.

General maintenance - soil

[**Prepare beds for new roses**](#) when conditions allow. Avoid doing this when the soil is wet or frozen.

[**Test your soil for pH**](#); this can help you choose suitable plants for your garden, and allow you to rectify any nutrient deficiencies with a spring feed. Simple pH tests can be done at home, and the RHS also offers a soil analysis service, which can also measure nutrient levels.

[**Improve the drainage of heavy soils**](#) by working in lots of organic matter.

[**Clear up weedy beds**](#) before mulching.

[**Mulching with a deep layer of organic matter**](#) helps to condition the soil, suppress weed growth, insulate plant roots from temperature fluctuations, and conserve soil moisture during the summer. Lighter soils can be mulched now, but heavier soils are best left until March, when the soil is less saturated for walking on.

Rather than applying a traditional feed, it's better to mulch the soil with homemade compost. This will provide the nutrients most plants need.

General maintenance - containers

[**Check whether containers need watering**](#). Pots that are sheltered by eaves or balconies can miss out on any rainfall. Check the compost at a hand's depth to see if it feels dry. Aim to keep pots moist, not wet.

Long-term pots and containers benefit from topping up with fresh peat-free John Innes compost. Old compost can be removed and replaced if there is not much room.

Problems

Remove dead leaves from around the basal rosettes of alpine plants such as saxifrages to prevent rotting.

[**Top dress spring-flowering alpines**](#) with grit or gravel to show off the plants and to help prevent stem rots.

Snowdrops can be vulnerable to [**grey mould \(Botrytis\)**](#).

On winter pansies watch out for [**downy mildew and black leaf spot**](#). Remove any infected leaves, and badly affected plants may need to be removed and added to the green bin. To avoid the build-up of diseases, don't plant pansies in the same place every year.

Look out for rots (such as crown rot, [**sclerotinia, delphinium black blotch, Phytophthora root rot and antirrhinum rust**](#)) on emerging perennials and shrubs.

[**Hellebore leaf spot**](#) can be a problem on old foliage of hellebores. Cutting back the old leaves should reduce the problem, and allow the flowers and new growth to be better seen.

Protect [**sweet pea plants from aphids**](#) as they can transmit [**sweet pea viruses**](#); pick off any aphids that you spot. Check autumn-sown sweet peas growing in cold frames, and keep watch for [**mouse**](#) and [**slug damage**](#).

Protect lily, delphinium and hosta shoots from slugs and snails before they appear with night-time hunts for slugs and snails.

Inspect stored tubers of plants such as dahlia and canna for signs of drying out. Do not let them become bone dry or they will desiccate; but too wet and they may rot.

Planning ahead

Plan your summer bedding and container planting schemes in good time for [ordering the necessary bulbs, annuals and seed](#), and for propagating the relevant material.

Look online and in catalogues for summer-flowering bulbs, summer bedding and herbaceous perennials for spring planting.

To win a copy of the RHS magazine please submit your answers to the quiz below to Sharon Nelson, Editor - sharonmarie1406@btinternet.com The first correct entry received to be announced at the next meeting.

- 1 What is the name of the technique where potato tubers are exposed to light to encourage shoots?
- 2 What do you call an area where a plant or animal lives or grows?
- 3 What is the scientific study of plant life called?
- 4 What is the best tool for pruning trees?
- 5 What does 'crop rotation' mean?
- 6 What is the name of the scale used to measure the heat of chillies?
- 7 Which tree has a seed known as a conker?
- 8 Which tree has seeds that act like helicopters?
- 9 What is the only native British broadleaf tree to produce pine cones?
- 10 Which native plant is used in modern medicine to treat heart disease?
- 11 What part of the tree grows under the ground?
- 12 Which flower is known for its yellow trumpet and blooms in spring?
- 13 Which flower has been carried by royal brides since the 1850s?
- 14 Which vegetable, often harvested in spring, is used for crumbles and pies?
- 15: To which plant family does the fig belong?
- 16 Which four herbs are mentioned in the traditional song "Scarborough Fair"?
- 17 Aspirin was originally obtained from the bark of which tree?
- 18 What word means fear of vegetables?
- 19 Which of these is botanically a vegetable: Tomato, Courgette, Aubergine, or Rhubarb?
- 20 What is the name of the white, bell-shaped flowers also known as February Fairmaids?
- 21 What part of a flower becomes the fruit?