



## Epsom Garden Society: March 2024

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*Dear Member, if you have any news or garden related small ads that you would like to be included in the Newsletter, please phone me, 07761 976764, or email me, [margarethaslam6@gmail.com](mailto:margarethaslam6@gmail.com)*

**Upcoming Events:** On Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> February **Cherrill Sands** is going to talk about '*Gertrude Jekyll*' at 10.15. We will have a raffle this time.

On Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March at 10.15am we will be holding a *Spring Display, Plant Sale and Seed Swap* at the Sports Club next to the Hospital. Please bring along anything you are particularly proud of in the garden, be it a pot of narcissi or some beautiful stems of flowering shrub, or even an arrangement evoking Spring. Also anything for a plant sale and Seed Swap, all contributions very welcome! No raffle this time.

On Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> April at 10.15am **Barry Newman** is going to give us ideas and advice on '*Vegetable Growing.*' Currently Vice Chairman of the *RHS Fruit, Vegetable and Herb Committee* and a former Chairman of the *National Vegetable Society*, **Barry** is another return visitor with a wealth of expertise who will be giving us hints and tips to get us all growing vegetables, whether novice or expert. We will have a raffle this time, so please bring anything that would make a good prize.

**Sue Glover** has arranged lots of garden visits for us to enjoy. The next one is on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March when we will be visiting **Vann** at Vann Lane, Hambledon, Godalming GU8 4EF at 11am. After a talk from the owner we will stroll around the 5 acre garden and enjoy the spring flowers and the Gertrude Jekyll water garden. £20 payable in cash on the day to include refreshments. Not suitable for wheelchairs, and no dogs please. Make your own way there, or **Sue** will arrange car sharing if you need or can offer a lift to anyone. Let **Sue** know if you would like to come, [sue.192@live.co.uk](mailto:sue.192@live.co.uk). 07810117140.

*Surrey Horticultural Federation* have organised a Spring Talk with **Nick Hamilton** talking about '*Barnsdale After Geoff*' [1996 – present day], at Normandy Village Hall, Manor Fruit Farm, Glaziers Lane, Normandy GU5 2DE, at 2.30pm on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> March. Non-refundable tickets are £10 for us as we are an affiliated society, send a cheque to Treasurer **Katharine Deaville** at 8 Hookley Close, Elstead, Godalming, Surrey GU8 6JG with SAE. Or tickets on the door £15.

On Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February we were invited to a talk about '*How to Plant, Propagate and grow Peonies*' given by **Alec White** from Primrose Hill Nursery. This was organised by the Tendershoots Garden Network. We are part of this collaboration between Garden Clubs who enjoyed Zoom meetings during Covid, and are continuing to run them. He didn't train as a horticulturalist, but was encouraged by his Grandparents, and enjoyed a Saturday job at a Garden Centre, at first because it didn't mean such early starts as newspaper deliveries. The owners advised him later to choose something else for a career as there wasn't much money in it, so he went on to study law. However, his heart wasn't in that, so he bought a bedding plant nursery, and found this was a struggle, watering and opening vents and coping with frost. In 2007 he started growing perennials, and remembers walking out into the field and looking at all the plants growing and flowering, and suddenly noticing two enormous blooms, standing above all the other flowers, and he was hooked!

His Nursery is eight acres in Bedfordshire, and is clay, but drains well because it is a sloping site. He grows the plants in the field for the first year and then in containers for two years until they are ready to sell. He really enjoys exhibiting at Shows, sometimes traditional bowls and occasionally something like the waterfall of peonies flowing into a bath that won a medal at Chelsea. When Chelsea was in September a year or so ago they had to pick the flowers in spring and preserve them in resin. Peonies come in lots of different shapes, colours and even scents, which Alec has arranged on his web-site so you can choose the exact one for your garden. Even the seed pods are attractive, and the plants are really tough and you can just leave them alone to get on with it! They will survive temperatures of -25', and actually need three months cold over winter to produce good flowers. There are thirty species throughout the world, and do well in Alaska and New Zealand, but not anywhere too warm.

There are three types of Peonies, the herbaceous ones flower in the Spring and then die down, the woody ones are shrubby, and about 3' tall, and are found in China and Japan, ten days of huge flowers, and now we also have the intersectional peony, best of both worlds as it is a cross between the two. **Mr Toichi Itoh** in Japan in 1948 was the first person to manage to do this as it is very tricky. The seedlings may take two winters to germinate and then another five years before they flower. Sadly **Mr Itoh** never saw the flowers as he died before they bloomed. His widow knew the plants were precious but didn't know how to care for them, so sold the seedlings to an American horticulturalist, **Louis Smirnow**, and he continued the work. The first flowers were all different shades of yellow, but now other people have been experimenting and many colours are available. Each plant will have 50 – 70 flowers and will hold their own weight without support, and will flower for ten weeks. They die down to ground level after flowering.

How to choose? It is personal taste, but you might get hooked and need a bigger garden! Budget too, the fancier kinds can cost £500 with the difficulty of production. Bare root in Autumn is the cheapest, but possibly poor quality, and you are probably best to buy container grown as your plant will last for decades. You can have a long display by choosing varieties with different flowering times, mid season is 'Bowl of Beauty' in May and late is 'Shirley Temple' that can still be flowering in July.

Flowers come in many different shapes, double, single, and anemone with tufted petaloids in the centre. Also the foliage can be ferny or even very rounded depending on the variety. Later flowering peonies can have leaves that change colour in the Autumn. If you want a strongly scented one, perhaps to grow by the front door, try 'Catharina Fontijn', this has very pale pink flowers.

Growing advice: buy mature plants, three to five years old.

Plant in full sun, or part shade and avoid soil that gets water-logged or your plant will rot.

Use some good fertiliser, but not tomato feed as peonies don't like nitrogen.

Don't plant too deep, the crown should be no more than 2.5cm below the surface.

If your peony is grafted make sure the graft is at least 10cm below the soil surface.

Dig a hole large enough for the roots to spread out and for the peony to have room when it reaches its final size.

Give it a good soak on planting, but then don't over-water. Peonies have fleshy roots and store water and food in them.

At this point **Alec** wondered if we had any questions as we had all been muted so that the talk wasn't interrupted. He found the silence rather alarming as he was used to a lively hall full of remarks and comments. Of course everyone had been typing in their questions, and there were lots!

'Should we dead head peonies?' 'Just the seed pod if you want to, they can look quite decorative, but don't cut back the leaves as it is still growing until the leaves have turned brown and died back.'

'Is there a peony named 'Golden Wedding' for a present?' 'No, don't think so.'

'Can you move peonies?' 'Yes, but be careful not to replant too deep.'

'Can You propagate them?' 'Yes, divide the root, but make sure each section has a few eyes on it. You can try planting the seeds, exciting because you don't know what they will look like, and it will be five years or so before you see. Just plant the fresh seeds outside in garden soil, and mark where they are so you don't dig them up.'

Don't mulch your peonies or the soil level will gradually become too high around them and they will stop flowering. They are a really good cut flower and last a week or so in a vase. When you go to pick them take a bucket of water with you and plunge them straight in, and they will drink a lot at once. Best to pick when the buds feel soft, like a marshmallow, rather than hard.

They do not seem to suffer much from pests, ants sometimes can be seen farming aphids on them as they like the sugary secretions, but they don't do any harm. Alec is offering a 20% discount on his plants until the end of February with the code TENDER20, and this might be extended because he sold out of all the Itoh plants within hours. *Thank you for this lovely informative talk.*

A member kindly tells us that **F. Giles** are not taking any more mowers in for servicing at the moment. If you go onto their website you can register to join a virtual queue, and they will contact you when they are ready for you to take your mower in. They are no longer offering us a discount either. Might save you a wasted journey.

An early warning that our £5 sub will be due at the end of March. If you pay online it will be direct to the EGS account rather than to Steve. Please delete his account no...4786. EGS bank details next month.

*Best wishes Margaret*