



## Epsom Garden Society: May 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)*

Thanks to all who have paid their sub either direct to our bank or via their rep. Our bank details are Lloyds Bank, Epsom Garden Society, acct 00359728 sort 30-93-08

On the 8<sup>th</sup> May **Sue Glover** has organised an outing to **Westways Farm** at 2pm, Gracious Pond Road, Chobham GU24 8HH. About 4m North of Woking. From Chobham Church proceed over the roundabout towards Sunningdale, at the first crossroad turn right into Red Lion Road up to the junction with Mincing Lane. The garden covers six acres and contains some rare rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and magnolias underplanted with bluebells, lilies and dogwood.

Dogs are welcome.

The cost for entry is £10 and includes refreshments. Contact **Sue Glover** at [sue.192@live.co.uk](mailto:sue.192@live.co.uk) if you would like to come.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> May we are at the Sports Club again at 10.15am for a talk about '**The benefits and how to propagate Aloe Vera**' by **Louise Camby**, who is specially interested in plants for health and well being. She will be bringing samples for us to try and kindly donating part of her fee as well. No raffle this time please.

On 29<sup>th</sup> March we enjoyed our **Spring Show and Plant Sale** at Epsom Sports Club. The scent of the flowers in the hall was absolutely lovely, and **Vicki Holmes** got an ovation when she appeared with her beautiful arrangement. Everyone enjoyed looking at the flowers, and the coffee and cakes went down well! Thank you to the cake makers and to everyone who brought plants for the Show and the plant sale, and to everyone who so generously bought them.

Your membership includes affiliation with the **Tendershoots online gardening club**. They offer gardening talks and events during the winter months. Recently, talks have included such topics as Peonies and Snowdrops. Some talks are recorded so that you can listen to them any time. If you would like to access their website, please email **Kim Shrosbree**, [kimshros@gmail.com](mailto:kimshros@gmail.com) and she will add you to our membership.

Their talk on 26<sup>th</sup> March was by **Matthew Holt** from **Holt Hall Apiary**, and was '**A Year in the life of a Bee Farmer**.' He lived on his family farm and there was plenty of space, so he bought two hives, aged 21, as he was interested in bees, although he was busy doing a university degree in accountancy at the time. He was banned from the utility room after his first honey extraction as he managed to spread stickiness over every surface. Luckily there was a spare milking shed that he could use, and the next year he had fourteen hives. Now he has a hundred and fifty. Over winter he keeps them four to a pallet at the edge of a field. They are warmer together and it saves tramping through mud.

The business has grown quickly, and he processes honey for other bee keepers now and employs two people. This January he had an order for 100,000 jars. This nearly finished him off!

**October** is really the start of winter and the honey has been harvested. Weaker colonies need extra food, two litres a night of sugar syrup and water may be drunk. He has to buy two tons of sugar a year for this. He was asked if he could just leave some honey to feed them, but it can ferment and make them ill, so the sugar syrup is safer.

In **November** bees start to cluster, [like penguins] and move around the hive, and have flights out if it is mild. His new insulated hives keep them warm, although guards to keep mice out are necessary.

In December he checks the weight of the hives, by lifting them slightly, and offers extra food if they seem light. This is a good time to make new frames, and fix the edges together with thin beeswax sheets to set the bees on a neat pattern or they may make random shapes. In **January** all the hives are opened to check for varroa mites who would eat the larvae and carry viruses. He mixes a little oxalic acid with the sugar syrup to kill off mites at this time. It really needs a cold snap now for this to work.

In **February** spring flowering bulbs and hellebores are producing pollen, and the Queen starts laying eggs and more food is needed. In an emergency Matthew buys bakers fondant in blocks.

In **March** things are in full swing, the hives are moved, with the door shut, on a trailer to wherever a crop is flowering. Farmers are always very pleased to have a bee-hive at the edge of their fields as it improves the yield of the crop. The Queen is busy laying eggs now, up to 2000 a day, more than her body weight. She will start laying in the middle of the frame and work out to the edges. Male eggs are a higher shape than the females. Over the winter males are not needed, so she doesn't produce them. You won't see drones in the garden, their job is to fly high and mate with Queens from other hives.

In **May** the hives need checking every week and maybe have an umbrella placed over the top if its raining. Various diseases need to be watched for, and oil-seed rape honey needs extra stirring as it is inclined to granulate.

**June** is peak time with the Queen laying and bees out collecting nectar. Colonies may swarm if they run out of room. If you have a swarm, contact the **British Bee-keeping Association** who will collect them.

**August** means an hours trip to Sheffield for the heather moorland and particularly flavourful honey.

Everyone is on alert for signs of the Asian Hornet, fifty nests have been found and destroyed in Sussex. Its main food is honey bees. Much bigger than a bee, one yellow stripe on a dark body and pretty yellow stockings. Send a photo to the **Asian Hornet watch app** and they will notify DEFRA. Cheap honey in supermarkets can have sugar added, it will say on the label. Better to buy from a local producer.

*A lovely talk, didn't know so much was involved!*

On the 25<sup>th</sup> March **Sue Glover** organised a trip to **Vann** near Hambledon. It is a beautiful timber framed house dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with plenty of room for several generations of the family to live together. The garden was wonderful, with tiny violets and primroses growing everywhere even in the cracks between the paving stones. We were all looking where we trod so we didn't crush things. It was a lovely sunny day and tulips and daffodils were blooming early. There was a **Gertrude Jekyll water garden** with exotic planting in the valley below the pond dam. Many visitors come from abroad to see this. This doesn't showcase her painterly use of colour, but rather her subtle integration of the garden into the surrounding landscape. Lots of the plants are descendants of the ones she supplied. We all had a lovely time exploring, and enjoyed a talk from **Emily** about the house and garden while the coffee and home-made biscuits were very welcome.

**Audrey Simpson** has very kindly passed a stash of newsletters on to me for safe-keeping and it has been so lovely re-reading gems from the past. Back in 2000 one of our readers, **Elisabeth Geake**, sent in a very interesting article from the **Electronics Times**. Apparently researchers at Bristol University were working on an autonomous robot which seeks out slugs. Called Slugbot, it uses an image sensor under red light to find them at night, then it removes them with a carbon fibre arm and drops them into an internal container. Once back at base they are all popped into a fermentation chamber where bacteria convert the slugs into gas which is used to fuel Slugbot's batteries. Wonder why we have never heard anything about it since!

**Norman Fisher** was also interested in slugs back in 1996: 'One hears much of the activities of the geneticists these days, particularly in the areas of disease and food eg. tomatoes that keep longer and stay firm. But what I would like is for them to turn their attention to slugs. Imagine slugs equipped with a dominant gene to give them a craving, not for hostas, dahlias and delphiniums, but for grass. Not only could we grow plants and seedlings with no fear of decimation but with a bit of luck we would not even have to mow the lawn! The face of gardening would be transformed. Such a benefactor would be worth at least a knighthood from a grateful nation.'

Sad news, Joe McMeechan has died. He was such a help with setting up at the Shows (as of course is Helen) and such a lovely man.

Bookham Open Gardens on Sunday 23rd June, full details on [www.bookhamopengardens.co.uk](http://www.bookhamopengardens.co.uk) Kingswood, Walton & Tadworth Horticultural Society Open Gardens, 'A Gardeners Delight' from 2 -6, on Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd June. [kwths@btinternet.com](mailto:kwths@btinternet.com)

Suddenly realise I have been writing to you since May 2006. If you have been secretly wishing I would stop and let someone else, [you?] have a go, please say. I don't want to hog the best job!

Small Ad.: **Von Haus collapsible heavy duty garden cart/trolley**, with brakes, wipe clean lining and cover. Only used once. Price £40. Enquiries 01372 721937.

*Best wishes Margaret*