



HPS

HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

Gardening with hardy perennials

Dorset Group *Hardy Times*

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Email dorsethps@gmail.com

www.dorsethps.org.uk

Editor: Diana Guy

Welcome to the April Hardy Times. We are planning a Summer Special to keep us all up to speed with events and would like you to send items about good gardens and garden centres that you have visited. Please send items to me at:- Diana.kitemoor@btinternet.com.

Forthcoming Events

Val Bourne is talking on 'The Living Jigsaw' on Saturday April 23rd at Colehill Village Hall. Gates open at 1.45pm for the 2 30 talk.

Val gardens without chemicals in a windswept Cotswold garden, and is passionate about nature and plants. She has written 9 books, writes regularly for the Telegraph and has won multiple awards including Journalist of the Year from the Garden Media Guild.

Please note: Val has requested that her talk goes straight through without a break, so tea will only be served before the talk starts.

Please socialise outside where you will find the plants stall etc.

Help to put away chairs appreciated.

Plant Sale. Saturday 7th May at Colehill Village Hall 2 30 to 4 30pm. Adm. £1. Cash only. Refreshments

If you'd like to donate plants **please drop them off at the gate to the Village Hall at 2pm** on the day of the sale so we have time to sort and price them before we open the gates at 2.30. (It would be helpful if plants were labelled).

If you would like to have a table (£10) to sell your own plants then contact

Liz on lizunderwood@gmx.co.uk or

Helen on h.mcillmurray@btinternet.com

Open Days at Manor Farm

As always, we are running the plant sales tables at these popular NGS days, here are the dates for the summer: **Sunday May 29th, Sunday June 12th, Sunday July 7th, and Sunday 7th August.**

Teas in aid of Dorset Lupus Groups.

Day Trips and Holiday

Don't forget we have the **Malverleys/Haughton Lodge** day trip on July 26th, and **Sussex Prairies/Borde Hill** day trip on September 8th.

Also consider our 4 day holiday to **Suffolk** from Sunday 19th June, returning Wednesday 23rd June. For more information check our website and/or email Judy on judyspratley@outlook.com

Celebrity Speaker on Saturday 26th November

Nick Bailey talking about '365 Days of Colour'. Tickets at £6 each for members will be available from the next meeting. Depending on how the sales go we may open these up to non-members later.

Congratulations

To Jane Norris who raised £402 for Air Ambulance at her Snowdrop events. Her garden is packed with snowdrops, many rare & unusual, all beauty-fully documented. We are in awe of her knowledge !She would wish us to thank her helpers.

Pelargoniums

Our March speaker, Heather Goddard Key from Fibrex nurseries gave us a very informative, interesting and hands on talk about Pelargoniums. No slides, she just used plants to illustrate her subject, a refreshing change. She explained the long history of the breeding and hybridisation programmes which have taken place over the centuries, especially by the Victorians which has resulted in the myriad of different Pelargoniums that are available for us to purchase now.

For those of you who weren't able to come to her talk, here are some handy hints and tips that she shared with us.

The nursery takes approximately 200,000 cuttings per year, so they are the real experts.

Propagation

Cuttings should be 1.5 to 2 inches tall and have only one leaf. Use plastic pots John Innes No1 or seed compost which should be soaked prior to insertion of the cutting. Never put just 1 cutting into a pot, they like company!

Inspect the pot after 5 days and only water if the compost is dry around the cuttings. No liquid feed is

needed for at least 3 or 4 weeks. Keep them warm but not in direct sunlight and continue to water them only when they look like they need it. When they put on new growth, move them on into pots of John Innes No2 or your own mix, at least 10% grit.

General cultivation

Heather recommends Melcourt Sylvagrow compost and a weekly high potash liquid, (tomato feed NOT granular feed), from March to September.

Overwintering

Cut the plants back by half, remove all the leaves in the autumn and stop watering. The Pelargonium and Geranium Society have videos on YouTube all about what to do with your plants in the autumn.

Interesting pelargonium facts

They were introduced to Europe in the late 1580s and are not solely from South Africa, there are a few Australian Pelargoniums. The Tasmanian Pelargoniums are reliably hardy to -2. Regal Pelargoniums like part shade.

There are yellow Pelargoniums, the recently introduced Zonartics feature pale colours.

They do not like peat, they are alkaline lovers.

Scented leaved Pelargoniums are edible and can be used for a variety of culinary uses.

They make very good cut flowers, especially the long stemmed Zonartic types.

Fibrex held the National Collection of Pelargoniums for 34 years. It has now been split between the 5 RHS gardens, so next time you visit Wisley or Rosemoor, they should be on display there.

Editors Note: I was interested to read the scented leaved pelargoniums are recommended as cut



flowers. A friend who grows flowers for cutting grows *Pelargonium 'Attar of Roses'* (left) she describes it as 'virtually hardy'. She grows a long row of them and leaves most of them out all winter, taking just a few dozen cutting in case.

If you wish to start with an easy one, try this one.

Plants of the Month

Biennials

I grow a wide range of biennials and find that on the whole, people do not use them as much as I do. I am heavily influenced by how they are used at Great Dixter, and I love the way they plug the gaps between bulbs and summer annuals, such as cosmos. Following the five years I have been at Dolphins, I now have self-sustaining colonies of forget me nots, *Delphinium requenii*, foxgloves and



seven different named honesty, most coming true to seed. I have identified the following: *L. Munstead Purple*, *L. 'Rosemary Verey'* (above) *L. 'Chedglow*', (the last two have deep purple leaves), *L. 'Somerset Marble*', *L. 'Corfu Blue*', *L. 'Alba*', *L. 'Alba variegata'* and a number of crosses in various shades. They just pop up.

Please note: Only move honesty as very young plants, once the long, tuberous tap root has developed they will not transplant well.

The Name Lunaria relating to the moon, goes back to the days of the 'Doctrine of Signatories', when illnesses were treated with plants that resembled the disease. Madness was connected with the moon and as the seed pods looked like the moon the name stuck, also the word 'lunatic'.

The transparency of the pods gave the plant the common name of 'Honesty'.

I have just seen a pot of *Echium webbii*, (normally grown as a biennial) for sale at £60(!!!) and it is not unusual see digitalis on sale upwards of £10, all destined to die after flowering.

Well, I await with interest to assess the digitalis I have which I transplanted to their final growing position when they were large enough' Dozens of gorgeous plants, all free.

A useful thing to remember is that the month that you see most biennials flower (now) is the time for you to sow the seed for next year.

Jobs for the month

Time now to harden off a whole range of plants including Dahlias, but they must be protected even from light frost. It is either a case of 'in and out, in and out', or use a sturdy coldframe, preferable with wooden sides and a warm polycarbonate window. Never underestimate the effectiveness of three or four layers of thick fleece protecting your precious plants overnight.

April still gives you time to sow tomatoes, courgettes, cucumbers etc, & May is still fine for quick growing annuals such as zinnias & cosmos. Sow runner and climbing beans inside or under glass or directly at the base of the poles.

Empty and clean your greenhouse, you will be amazed at how this raises the light levels, perversely you may need to paint on shading or suspend fleece to reduce the harshness of strong sunlight. When it is clean plant it up with tomatoes, cucumbers, melons and other tender vegetables and fruit.

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