

Hardy Times

Summer 2023

Send your articles to the Editor at:
comms.dorsethps@gmail.com



Welcome to the Summer edition of the Hardy Times.

With such a late and cold spring everything has been growing 'fast and furiously' in order to catch up – and it will catch up, that's nature for you!

Many of us have lost plants that survived previous winters, I'm hearing of losses of Hebes, Pittosporums, Cordyline etc many of these we may have previously considered to be hardy. Do please let me know if you have any unusual/interesting stories of survival or indeed unexpected plant losses from this past winter.

On the positive side, some shrubs and trees seem to have benefitted (perhaps?) from last year's hot summer and the extreme temperatures of the winter, and are now flowering better than ever. Are you experiencing this?

We now have a dedicated email address for you to send articles to... comms.dorsethps@gmail.com or you can still use the Group Secretary's email. So come on, tell us about a favourite plant, or a gardening experience – good, bad or interesting!

What do we have for you this issue?... Many thanks to all contributors... read on... Ed.

Jane's Propagation Workshop last March

What a brilliant afternoon we had with Jane learning about methods of propagation. From sowing seeds and taking cuttings, and from potting on to selling, Jane gave us a masterclass full of interesting information.

As a complete novice in comparison to Jane I learned a great deal including -

- what different types of compost there are and how they can be used for propagation
- the importance of perlite in the mix before sowing
- why you put cuttings around the edge of the pot and not in the middle – for those who don't know they tend to become soggy, and fail as a result.

Jane demonstrated how to divide plants to make numerous new ones, at this point, several of the group quietly admitted to throwing plants away rather than dividing, potting on and selling. This is

a very easy and cheap way of making new plants for others and for sale, particularly if you have the space and time to do so. It is obviously less labour intensive than raising plants from seed.

Other tips Jane shared included:-

- putting bubble wrap in the base of a small electric propagator to help heat distribution
- how and when to use fertiliser when potting on
- how to prevent root damage when potting on cuttings and seedlings
- the best places to buy seeds
- how to present plants for sale – great ideas in readiness for selling plants at meetings or at our plant fair

After a delicious cup of tea and a slice of homemade cake we left with pages of notes, enthusiasm and determination to give more plants a chance! Thank you very much Jane.

Helen McIlmurray

Ed. Jane also ran a 'Twin Scaling for Snowdrops' Workshop recently which I attended with several other members. A very pleasant and informative way to spend an afternoon - including Lemon Drizzle cake - and we all went home with plastic bags containing our snowdrop 'chips'. Now we have to wait until September to see if new bulbils have grown!

Many thanks again Jane.

Deadheading - Did you know?

We know that deadheading our plants prevents seedheads developing and so the plant tries to create more flowers. But did you know that to deadhead *Alstroemeria* it's best (and easiest) to simply pull the complete dead flower spike out from the crown of the plant. This also has the health benefit of cleaning the interior of the plant and facilitating airflow, as well as leaving your plant looking tidy. (This also works on the bigger leaved *Heuchera* where the flower spikes are quite strong.)

Two Climbing Roses to Consider

Rosa 'Mermaid'

Bred in the UK by William Paul in 1918 this heritage climber is a magnificent garden worthy plant.

She is a *R. bracteata* hybrid, her parentage endows her with vicious hooked thorns but looking beyond these,

her other attributes are what I look for when selecting a Rose.

The foliage, which is evergreen as a bonus, is large and a rich shiny dark green setting off the



beautiful single blooms which are produced continuously through the summer. The buds themselves are very appealing with their almost fuzzy felt appearance.

The flowers are fragrant, 8 - 10cms across and with their prominent golden-brown stamens (photo) are

attractive to pollinators. The blooms 'die well' as the petals fall off cleanly leaving these attractive stamens in full view.



Her growth, once established, is vigorous and branching. Ideal for any sheltered wall, she is one of the few shade tolerant climbers who will thrive on a north wall. I have found her to be responsive to pruning, producing new shoots from older wood readily and have her trained along a wall. She will also produce a large free form plant if given the space.

Rosa 'Clair Matin'

First seen at the Chateau de Miromesnil near Dieppe, this instantly went on my 'must grow' list. I have not been disappointed. Bred in France by the famous Meilland nursery in 1960 she is another climber who is not showing her age.

A medium sized climber ideal for a pillar or obelisk, she can also be grown as a freestanding shrub. Her growth habit is upright and relaxed.

Large clusters of clear pink, exquisite, almost single but slightly ruffled flowers are held on chocolate purple stems. I like the contrast between the dark coral buds and the pale pink blooms (right). The flowers are lightly scented and again attractive to pollinators. Her young foliage is bronzy in colour and a glossy dark green when mature.



For me she ticks all the boxes as a great plant for an insect friendly garden.

Gillian Taylor

Summer's here, so are the narcissus flies!

If you've ever wondered why your patch of special Narcissus, Galanthus or any other member of the **Amaryllidaceae** family looks depleted or has disappeared altogether, the large narcissus fly is one of the likely culprits.

It's a type of hairy hoverfly which looks similar to a small bumble bee and is about the size of a bluebottle (see illustration of a male and female). Unfortunately these flies are well established in the south of the country - I've 'eliminated' around two dozen of them from my garden or greenhouse already this year.

May to July seems to be their main season and if you're unfamiliar with



their identity, I hope that what I've found out about them so far will help.

They have a very distinctive flight pattern which you can tune into quite readily. Unlike bees which spend time on flowers collecting nectar and pollen, the narcissus flies flit from flower to flower quite quickly and nearly always land on a leaf or on the ground, often close to your treasured bulbs where they wait for a mate. If successful, the female will lay her eggs on the foliage and when

they hatch the larvae will eat away the centre of the bulb before it emerges as an adult the following spring.

Like other flies, they have just one pair of wings, whereas bees have two but I've not found this distinction particularly helpful, as in flight, they can look quite similar. You need to be sure what you're attempting to eliminate is not a bee and it's good to spend some time looking until you're confident of their identification.

In my borders they have been observed as quite low-flying, but the first thing I usually notice is the sound they make. Like other, hoverflies, they have a high pitched 'whine' which is much higher frequency than the buzz of a bee.

There are no effective pesticides available, even if you would want to use one and I'm not aware of anything that eats them. My most effective 'weapon' is a flat bottomed, rectangular compost scoop which I use to bat them, then they can be finished off quickly. However, they are quick and I've not been successful on every attempt. In order to protect my special bulbs I'm trying a method recommended by a nurseryman which is to put small piles of grit over the dying foliage in order to stop access. I'm not aware of its effectiveness but it's worth a try.

Helen Mount

History of our Newsletter v Hardy Times

Last year the publication and content of the Hardy Times and newsletter changed, so members may be interested to read the history of these.

When the Dorset Group was set up at the end of 1997 a newsletter was considered essential to inform members of how the Group would operate; committee, meetings, plant sales etc. The secretary wrote the first and second editions as 4 pages of A4 stapled in top left corner. The first editor soon volunteered and an A5 booklet newsletter was published over the next few years by numerous editors. The newsletters/magazines ranged widely in content, mainly reports on past meetings and events, plant articles, programme, crosswords, poems etc and the frequency from one to four editions per annum, settling mostly on twice a year until it dropped to an annual publication to advertise the coming year's programme.

In November 2002 the news-sheet 'Hardy Times' was started as a regular one sheet publication to complement the newsletter. The aim was to keep members informed of

forthcoming events, changes to the programme, reminders and other matters by distributing it at monthly meetings, in those days few members 'did' email! Where appropriate the slides shown by the lecturer were printed on the reverse side.

The newsletter continued as a 'magazine' to review past events, contained articles by members and gave the annual programme etc.

So after 20 years we have come full circle with the Newsletter and Hardy Times changing places.

For the first 5 years I produced the monthly Hardy Times, as it was my idea to do it! Then other committee members shared the task. I have kept all the Group Newsletters and have most of the 150 or so Hardy Times too, mostly digital copies.In addition, I have all the National HPS Journals from 1984 when I joined the National Society, they are now in two very heavy boxes! The Editorial by Richard Bird from the Vol 6 No 4 1984 Journal, then known as The Bulletin begins: 'At last the drought has been broken and, for once, I do not mind in the slightest being forced indoors by the rain. Lack of rain has been a general feature of all our gardens this past year; watering never seems to have the same effect as a good shower of rain. Some people were lucky (we were not alas) and had periodic thunder-storms to help top up the moisture level... gardening becomes very much a challenge in a climate as variable and as unpredictable as ours, but long may that challenge continue.

'Plus ça change'...

Elaine Lofthouse

Ed: Indeed – 'plus ça change'. Many thanks Elaine.

Box Blight vs Box Tree Caterpillar

Box Blight is a fungal infection – you may have heard Monty Don talking about dealing with it in his garden at Longmeadow. By spraying (TopBuxus), feeding and clearing the dead leaves away to assist airflow this disease can be controlled and the Buxus can recover.

The Box Tree Caterpillar, however, is a non-native pest that has worked its way across continents, through Europe and was first seen in the UK in 2007. The caterpillar eats the leaves which die and fall off.... See Sarah's article below for treatment and alternative plants.

More information can be found on the European Boxwood and Topiary Society's website here [Home – EBTS UK](#) as well as the RHS website.

Box Tree Caterpillar

Having recently relocated back to my home area of Ringwood/Bournemouth last summer after spending over 25 years working in Horticulture in London I was not so pleased to find that Box Tree Caterpillar has finally reached this neck of the woods.

I first came across this devastating pest around the time of 2015/16 at my work lecturing in horticulture and managing the grounds of the Capel Manor College campus in Gunnersbury Park, West London, where we had a garden with small parterres - low Buxus hedging, enclosing seasonal bedding. Later I became Head Gardener at the prestigious Hurlingham Club which also had similar parterres but on a much larger scale.

We were given advice by Neil Helyer from Fargro (now retired but one of Britain's leading Integrated Pest Management specialists) who told us that to keep our Buxus healthy, we would have to spray them monthly from March to October with a product called 'Dipel', accompanied by feeding with 'Top Buxus' which contains nutrient as well as a product to protect against Box Blight.

Dipel is a licenced pesticide which can only be applied by someone with their PA1/6 spraying certificate however, for amateur gardeners there is a product called 'Xentari' which contains the same bacterium and this is available from Amazon. Of course, sprays are not selective so any drift could also kill other beneficial lepidoptera (butterflies and moths).

Although Dipel is technically organic, it is a bacteria, and back then we were not keen on having to add this amount of extra spraying to our routine and so sought to eventually replace the Buxus with a less tiresome alternative. After much research we settled on *Taxus repandens* for a formal look that only need trimming once a year. (Photo below).



The Box Tree Caterpillar Lifecycle:

1. Flat, pale yellow eggs laid in fingernail-sized clusters on the underside of box tree leaves.
2. Three days later the eggs hatch into tiny, 1-2mm larvae with translucent yellow bodies and black heads.
3. Over around two weeks they grow into 3-4cm long caterpillars with bright green spiny bodies with black stripes.
4. Fully grown caterpillars – shrouded in webbing – feed until they are ready to pupate. On average this takes two weeks.
5. Box tree caterpillars pupate for two weeks before emerging as moths with a 4cm wingspan, either white with brown tips or fully brown.
6. 2 to 3 days later, female box tree moths lay their eggs. The entire lifecycle can be repeated three to four times a year.

Alternative to Box Hedging

There are many alternatives to Box hedging, indeed RHS Wisley has devoted its Walled Garden to all the plants they are trialling for best replacements to Buxus – removing those which don't meet standards and then trialling more) including Euonymus, Pittosporum, Taxus, Teucrium and many more which I urge you to visit, or checkout their website for information.

I hope you find this helpful whether you decide to keep your Buxus or replace.

Sarah Neophytou

Ed... Natural Treatments for Box Caterpillar

Nemisys now have nematodes for Fruit and Vegetables which also deal with caterpillars, but be aware this is not specific to Box Caterpillar. Do please let us know if you have any experience/feedback on these.

Ed. 2. Apparently Highgrove has ripped out their Buxus and replaced with *Teucrium lucidrys*, a low growing option requiring very little maintenance.

RHS – 'Identify Your Plant' tool

The RHS has recently launched its own 'Identify Your Plant' tool with over 35,000 plants in their database. Currently this is a trial version and they are keen that people try it out and report back. All that's needed is to upload a good clear photo of the plant in question.

Have a go... and let us know how you get on – as well as the RHS.

www.rhs.org.uk/my-account/identify-plants