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# Battisford & District Gardening Club

## February 2014: Compost!

By Sandra Henson

Our first meeting of 2014 saw an excellent turnout of 56 members for a talk by David Coop of Westland Horticulture on... COMPOST.

David surprised everyone by starting with a short quiz. Some of his questions were 'tricky' and gave rise to a lot of discussion. Jackie Collings miraculously had all ten correct answers for which David presented her with a prize.

He then gave an illustrated presentation about Growing Media and how commercial producers strive to give gardeners "what they want". On the other side he pointed out that some of us need to be more bothered about the results we get from the composts we buy as there are some available in which nothing will grow. He suggested a few questions we should ask: Is the product consistent? Are we getting different results each time? Does it smell? Is it heavy and solid?

Most of us are not fully aware of the components of compost. David listed sand, loam, peat, lime, fertiliser, grit, bark and, increasingly, 'green waste'. The skill is to get the correct amount of the correct ingredients into each bag! David acknowledged that the use of peat can be controversial, but suggested that if collected correctly and responsibly then bogs will recover. His favourite ingredient is Irish sphagnum moss peat because it is more absorbent, lightweight and consistent whereas peats from Somerset and the Baltic States are heavier and inconsistent. David said that in the future we will have to use less peat, so Westland have come up with "WEST+" produced using a mixture of peat and shredded wood chips from the Cypress Spruce - the latter being sustainable, consistent and non-toxic. The resulting compost is very fibrous which 'allows roots to explore' and also gives good drainage - an important consideration given that over watering is one of the main reasons for plants dying. David confessed that the ratio of peat to wood products is still an issue and agreed with members that wood takes nitrogen out of the soil. To counter this, they add extra nitrogen.

David discussed the use of green waste which may give good nutrients but can also include contaminants including weed seeds, small pieces of plastic and even glass. For these reasons, Westland does not use green waste in its products.



Dave Coop proves once and for all that 'Feel my compost' is an effective chat-up line.

We were urged to be more conscious of the contents when buying 'multi-purpose compost' because no two products are the same. David extolled the virtues of using slow release fertilisers and suggested adding them to any compost we buy which doesn't have them. He suggested we could remember the purposes of 'NPK' by: "*Shoots, Roots, Flowers and Fruits*". That is, nitrogen for foliage, phosphorus for root development and potassium for flowers and fruits.

In an interesting diversion, David showed a picture of a Victorian gentleman. Mike Warren recognised it as being John Innes the wealthy philanthropist who left a large sum of money to promote 'the science of gardening'. We now have the John Innes Centre in Norwich (see [www.jic.ac.uk](http://www.jic.ac.uk) for a short history).

In the Q & A session, Debbie McDowall and Barbara Downey found out that whilst most lawn feeds would be safe for their tortoises, anything which 'weeds and feeds' should be avoided!

We all left this very informative talk, pondering our compost, and agreeing that, as usual in life, we probably get what we pay for!

Sandra

## To peat, or not to peat? That is the question...

David Coop was very open and measured in his handling of the controversial issue of peat as a growing medium but I wasn't entirely sure about the wider picture so did some research. First, I found that, for once, we can't really blame big business - we amateur gardeners are by far the biggest consumers of peat (2.2 million metres<sup>3</sup> in 2012). Second, whilst David was right to say that the *proportion* of peat in our composts has fallen over the past 10 years, the *absolute amount of peat used* has risen simply because we are buying much, much more compost!

Third, as reported by Sandra, David suggested that peat bogs will recover over time. In the cases where this is true, recovery still takes decades, but in many cases degradation is so severe that without extensive work on the hydrology, peat will never reform. Finally, the fact that peat extraction releases trapped carbon into the atmosphere is an important issue to be considered.

So what should we do? Well the RHS is unequivocal: "*the commercial extraction of peat... is environmentally unsustainable.*" They have acted accordingly and now peat accounts for less than 0.7% of all growing media and soil conditioners used by the RHS. You can read the Society's policy on their website [www.rhs.org.uk/](http://www.rhs.org.uk/).

George Bethell

## March: The sweet smell of success!

By Jackie Collings

It was a delight to listen to a true expert at the March Meeting. Matthew Tanton Brown, from Place for Plants at East Bergholt, was talking about "The Fragrant Garden Throughout the Year." Matthew had brought along a large selection of shrubs with varying degrees of perfume. It was obvious that he knew and loved every one! He gave us a wealth of information as he worked his way through the seasons. For each specimen he explained where to plant, what soil to use, its ultimate height, plus many other helpful tips. One thing I learnt was to dig a *square* hole when planting something from a *round* flower pot. Apparently this encourages the roots to spread out instead of going round and round in circles.

Matthew's talk was interspersed with amusing anecdotes, including a tale of his aunt's mad Labrador! He also kindly donated one of the shrubs for the raffle and I'm sure he has whetted our appetites for the Club's visit to Place for Plants on the 12<sup>th</sup> May.



Our March speaker, Matthew Tanton Brown, with a splendid collection of aromatic shrubs. Details of the May trip to 'Place for Plants' can be found on the back page.

Jackie

## April: A life editorial...

By George Bethell

Forty-two members were at the Club's April meeting where our speaker, Geoff Hodge, talked about 'The Life and Times of a Gardening Editor'. He described his journey from being a trainee manager of a garden centre to a prolific freelance author through a series of anecdotes. Along the way we learned, amongst other things, that: (a) Carol Klein is not good when it comes to editorial deadlines; (b) it is illegal to use washing up liquid as a pesticide; and (c) the 'free' packet of seeds on the cover of a gardening magazine costs the publisher less than 7p! We also saw that an editor's life includes being wined and dined at flower shows around the country where they get to rub shoulders with the *glitterati* of the gardening media.

Geoff kindly donated several prizes to the evening's raffle which were greatly appreciated.

George



Maureen Cooper -winner of the raffle's much coveted first prize - seen here with Geoff Hodge.



Do you know your onions? (Answers on the back page.)

1: With which sport is Englishman Graham Onions associated?  
A cricket B cycling C golf

2: 'Black onion seeds' are an important ingredient in many Indian dishes. By what other name are they known?  
A jeera B dalchini C kalonji

3: Who sang with Marvin Gaye on the 1969 hit 'The Onion Song'?

A Martha Reeves B Tammi Terrell C Gladys Knight

4: In which county would you find the market town of Leek?

A Lancashire B Lincolnshire C Staffordshire

5: The botanical name for wild garlic is *Allium ursinum*. Which animal is associated with the plant's species name?

A bear B horse C rabbit

6: Which of the following poets wrote 'The Lady of Shalott'?

A Lord Byron  
B Percy Bysshe Shelley  
C Alfred Lord Tennyson

(\* My apologies! Ed.)

## Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose...

With 2014 flying by and the annual show almost upon us, Bill Baldry thought it a good moment to reflect on times past and, with the help of Jackie Collings and Helen Read, he has managed to piece together some fascinating glimpses into the Club's history. As you will see, the evidence is somewhat fragmented so if you can add anything to the story, please let Bill know so he can continue to build the 'archive'.

The genesis of the Club is not entirely clear - Jackie thinks that the Battsford and District Horticultural Society started in about 1977 and we do have trophies engraved from 1979. However, Helen recalls that there was a horticultural society in existence when she moved to the village in 1976. That would be consistent with the picture opposite which, according to the East Anglian Daily Times, shows prize winners at the 'Battsford Flower Show... in August 1973' - a date commensurate with John Peel's dungarees!

Certainly BDHS was very active in 1977 when its annual (or was it biennial?) flower show was held in the Community Centre and when, in December, it held its first 'annual dinner' at The Cedars. They were clearly far more sophisticated then as evidenced by a contemporary press cutting about the dinner which informs us that 'On arrival, visitors were greeted by members of the Committee and offered a glass of sherry.'

Following the dinner, the Chairman, Len Le Grice, gave a speech in which he outlined the highlights of the year - the Flower and Vegetable Show and a trip to the Spalding Flower Festival - and thanked the members of the committee including Winnie Rolfe (Secretary) and Gwen Le Grice (Treasurer). After speeches and the presentation of awards, the guests 'enjoyed dancing to a disco'. Happy days...

The absolute highlight of the evening - according to Jackie Collings - was the presentation of the Society's 'best-kept garden award' to... Mr and Mrs Stuart Collings!



Left: Jackie and Stuart Collings receive the BDHS prize for the village's best-kept garden of 1977 from judge Mr Ernie Hill. On the left is the society's Chairman Mr Len Le Grice.

Right: The Certificate - clearly produced at great expense using a variety of coloured felt-tipped pens! Jackie reports that the judges visited unannounced on three occasions during the year. A tradition worth reviving?



Prize winners Mr Rampley and Phyllis Finbow at the 1973 'Battsford Flower Show' with 'Miss Great Finborough' and the late John Peel.

We are not sure when our forerunner the BDHS closed but it was still going strong in August 1983 as evidenced by a piece in the Stowmarket Chronicle. However, then as now, they had to contend with the elements: 'Poor spring weather may have hit the number of entries at the Battsford and District Horticultural Society show at the weekend. The number of entries, 250, was less than last year. However, standards were high at the Battsford Community Centre.' The account lists all the prize winners including Mr T Finbrow who amassed most points (35) in the flower and vegetable classes. Further down we find that the trophy for best floral arrangement went to our own Mrs H Read who was also victorious in the sausage roll and coconut tarts sections. Sadly her Victoria sandwich was pushed into second place by the superior specimen produced by Mrs Le Grice. Never mind Helen - you can redeem your reputation in 2014!

Editor's note: The title given to this piece is not entirely appropriate because some things simply do not stay the same. For example, raffle prizes at the annual dinner of 1977 included not only the familiar wine and chocolates, but also cigarettes and cigars! And the 1983 show schedule included a class for baking a fruit cake - restricted to 'Men Only'. Would this be legal in 2014?

### BATTISFORD AND DISTRICT HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

*Best Kept Garden*

COMPETITION

1st PRIZE

AWARDED TO: *R. & M. Collings*

1977

SIGNED:

*W. Rolfe* *E. Hill*

## Battisford Garden Gang ordered to do Community Service



Spring has sprung and, as you can see from the picture above, Battisford's own 'Garden Gang' had good weather for a pre-Easter tidy and planting session at the Punch Bowl.

Bill will soon be looking for volunteers to sign up for the weekly weeding and watering rota that keeps the Punch Bowl's hanging baskets and planters alive and looking good. **If you can help, please let him know.**

Last but not least, Many thanks go to John Budd for the excellent work that he does with the Inn's grass areas.

*Jim Henson, Bill Baldry, Denis Wicking and Linda Clark relax after (so they say) a hard morning's work at the Punch Bowl.*

*Support your local community inn - details of opening times, menus and events are on the Inn's website at: <http://www.punchbowlbattisford.co.uk/>*

### Coming events...

#### Monday 12th May: Visit to 'Place for Plants'

As a follow up to Matthew Tanton Brown's highly successful talk in March, the May event will be a trip to 'Place for Plants' East Bergholt. Meet at Battisford at 6:15pm or there at 7:00pm. Note that this is the second Monday of the month.

Plants for Plants has asked us to stress that 'the paths are uneven and can be slippery particularly after rain. Stout outdoor shoes are essential'.

Directions: From the A12 take the B1070 signed East Bergholt, pass two pubs on your right, the High School on your left and leave the 30mph zone. Continue for another half mile until you re-enter a 30mph zone on the far side of the village, Place for Plants is on the left. Do not go into the village itself. (Post code is CO7 6UP.)

#### Monday 2nd June: Visit to Hullwood Barn, Shelley

Another follow up - this time to Sarah Cook's acclaimed presentation to the club last year. This trip is a chance to see her national collection of 'Cedric Morris Irises' in all its glory. Meet at Battisford at 6:30pm or there at 7:00pm

Directions: From Hadleigh take the A1071 Sudbury Road; turn left signposted Polstead and then second left signposted Shelley. Hullwood Barn is the first building on the left. (Address is 'Bolton Lane' and post code is IP7 5RE.)

#### Sunday 29th June: Club BBQ from 3:00pm

An annual favourite, this year the Club BBQ will be at Old Stoke Farmhouse. Straight Road, Battisford - courtesy of Gwynneth and John Hogger. The BBQ will host the Summer Raffle Draw and give you a chance to hand in your Show entry forms!

BDGC members go free - 'plus ones' £3. If you haven't already done so, please let Bill or Daphne know if you're planning to be at the BBQ as we need an idea as to likely numbers.

## More coming events...

### Saturday 5th July: Annual Show and Combs Fete

Message from the Chairman:

"I hope that you will be able to find some classes to enter at the Show so that we can once again provide a colourful and interesting exhibition for all the Fete visitors. Please encourage non-BDGC neighbours to have a go as well - remember it's meant to be for fun. The show schedule is available from the website - look for the 'Show 2014' link. Copies are also available from me. Closing date for entries - Thursday 3rd July.

We have been asked to run the cake stall at the Fete (in aid of Fete funds) so, if possible, could you please make some cakes and/or savouries (large or small) to sell on the day. The stall will be inside the main marquee. We will also need a rota of helpers to run the stall for a time during the afternoon.

Finally, thanks to a generous donation by Tom Watkins we will have a soap stall (in aid of Club funds)." Bill

### Friday 11th July: RHS Hampton Court Show

26 Members are off to the Hampton Court Flower Show . A reminder to those that haven't yet paid in full that their balance is due to Bill by mid-May. There is a reserve list.

## Other Events and Activities

### Tuesday 13th May: Bacton and Wyverstone Quiz

The Club has been invited to send one or more teams to the Bacton and Wyverstone Horticultural Society's quiz evening. If you want to join a BDGC team, please let Bill know as soon as possible. As one of our 'representatives' your £3 entry fee will be covered from club funds!

### Saturday 7th June: Combs Barn Dance

In association with the Combs Fete, there will be a Barn Dance at Fenn's Farm Barn, Bildeston Road, Combs. Live music by Jasper Ceilidh band. Starts 7:30pm. Bar and BBQ. Tickets £5 from Adela (01449 613255) or Jill (01449 613489).

### Sunday 15th June: Hidden Gardens of Bury (11 to 5)

Thirty-five of the gardens which are usually hidden behind the medieval walls of homes and businesses of this historic market town will be open to visitors for one day only. Many owners will be offering teas and refreshments and/or have plants and produce for sale. The event is held in aid of St Nicholas Hospice Care. Tickets can be bought after Easter from the Tourist Information Centre in Bury St Edmunds or on the day at Angel Hill, Bury. Further details from [buryhiddengardens@gmail.com](mailto:buryhiddengardens@gmail.com) .

### Friday 4th July: A Musical Evening

Another Combs Fete event - a unique concert with Wattisham Military Wives Choir combining with the East Anglia's Children's Hospices' (EACH) Treehouse Choir for the very first time for an evening of musical entertainment. The event starts at 7:30pm. Further information and tickets from Adela (01449 613255) or Jill (01449 613489).

### Wednesday 30th July: Sandringham Flower Show

We've been invited to join Bacton and Wyverstone HS on a coach trip to the Sandringham Flower Show. Tickets are £22. If interested, please let Bill Baldry know as soon as possible.

### Monday 4th August: Visit to T&M

A BDGC exclusive offers members a rare chance to visit Thompson and Morgan's Trial and Development Centre. Paul Hansord and plant breeder Charles Valin will be on hand to tell us of their work there.

Details of the venue will be revealed on a 'need to know' basis so if you are interested, either e-mail Bill for directions at [wbaldry@btinternet.com](mailto:wbaldry@btinternet.com) or meet at the Community Centre at 6:15pm for directions and car-share.

### Monday 1st September: Speaker Mike Warren

Our very own Mike Warren will talk on 'Climbers, Creepers and Crawlers'. 7:30 pm at the Battsford Community Centre.

In a new departure for the Club we will have a small competition on the evening. You are invited to bring along a basket/tray (max size 18" x 12") of garden produce to showcase the results of your summer's work.

### Monday 6th October: AGM

The Club's AGM will be held at the Battsford Community Centre from 7:30pm. Our speaker for the evening will be local author and former Naval Officer, Chris Todhunter.

## BDGC Summer Raffle

Tickets are now available for the Club's Summer Raffle - profits from which will go to the Club, the East Anglian Air Ambulance and the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. The draw will take place at the Club BBQ on Sunday 29th June.

First prize is £100 worth of Thompson & Morgan vouchers. Second prize is an Alan Titchmarsh picnic set. There are *fifty* other prizes to be won - full details at [www.battsfordgardeningclub.org.uk](http://www.battsfordgardeningclub.org.uk).

Please try to sell as many tickets as possible and **please make sure that all sold tickets and monies are handed in to Debbie, Bill or any committee member before 29 June if you are not planning to attend the club BBQ. Thank you.**

Denis Wicking is the promoter for the club and he can be contacted with any queries, *and for more raffle ticket books*, on 01449 770980 or [denis.wicking@wicking.me](mailto:denis.wicking@wicking.me) .

### Finally...

#### Would you like to contribute to the Newsletter?

Would you be willing to write a few paragraphs on a club meeting or a visit? Could you take photographs of events suitable for publication? If so, please let me know via [bethell.george@gmail.com](mailto:bethell.george@gmail.com) or in person.

#### Photos of Club Events

If you would like a high definition digital copy of any of the photos featured in this newsletter, please let me know and I'll see what I can do. George

#### Brain Teasels Answers

1: A  
2: C  
3: B  
4: C  
5: A  
6: C