

# The Notice Board

## What's on locally

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**Hill House** farm, Knighton will be open on May 16th. Admission £3

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**South West Shropshire Gardening Club** meet on May 26th at Lydbury North village hall, 7.30pm. This month Jessica Pannet will talk on hostas

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**Bridge Cottage**, Burringtn herefordshire. Open on May 16th, 2-5.30pm. Admission £3.50

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**Upper Teme Valley Gardens** will be open on May 30th, 2-6pm. Admission by programme, £3.

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**Llanfair Waterdine** Church coffee morning with large plant stall is on Monday May 31st at 11am

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**Milebrook Hotel**, Knighton, on May 31st, 2pm onwards: cream teas in the garden

## June 22nd visit to two Herefordshire gardens

We are off to Herefordshire this June to visit two gardens: Sir Roy Strong's renowned garden at Much Birch and How Caple Court, an Edwardian garden with formal and natural planting.

Members will be able to see both gardens, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Places are likely to be limited and in demand, so don't forget to sign up at this meeting to reserve your place!




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**'But I must gather knots of flowers,  
And buds and garlands gay,  
For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother,  
I'm to be Queen o' the May.'**

## Meeting report: April 2010

After a general introduction to the buttercup family (ranunculaceae), of which the hellebore is a member, Michael Leech, our very knowledgeable and entertaining guest speaker, arrived at his chosen topic, the hellebore itself, and went on to describe in some detail the characteristics, cultivation, and hybridisation of several of these 20 species of hardy, evergreen and deciduous perennials. Mentioned specifically were *helleborus foetidus* (Italian version), *argutifolius* (Corsicus), *niger* (Christmas Rose), *orientalis* (Lenten Rose), *lividus* and *odorus* – all illustrated by slides taken at Ashwood's Nursery, the garden of Helen Ballard, who was known for her collection of hellebores, Wisley, and Christopher Lloyd's garden at Great Dixter. As a general rule, Michael reminded us, hellebores are not fond of cold, damp English weather, need deep, well-drained soil and partial shade, and resent any disturbance once planted. Hybrids tend to be less hardy and have a less fertile yield of seeds. Aphids and leaf spot are the hellebore's worst enemies but a high pressure hose will sort out the aphids. Michael, retired botanist, horticulturalist and entomologist, certainly gave us value for money; but it's the asides in the form of gardening gossip, anecdotes, and incidental allusions which one tends to remember best: the prickly grower, Helen Ballard, the cow that was autopsied, the hellebore from Northern Spain that stowed away amongst some Spanish snowdrops, Goering and his hollow tooth.... Michael had brought plants for sale and recommended a book on hellebores – not the most up-to-date authority but one he obviously considers a good friend: *Hellebores* by Brian Mathew (1989).



### Upper Teme Valley Open Gardens 2010

As you will all know by now, the Club is supporting the Knighton and District Tourism Group by organising the Open Gardens part of a gardeners' week-end this late May Bank Holiday, May 30th and 31st. Seven gardens plus the Knucklas allotments will be open from 2pm to 6pm, and the gate profits will go to the Knighton First Responders. Money taken at the plant stall and teas will go to the Club, so please remember that we will need some cakes for the teas (a list will be on the table at this meeting) and also some plants to sell. May is a great time for a plant stall as we are all still planting up our gardens for the summer, and replacing plants we have lost this Winter. So if you have sown too many seeds, be they annuals or perennials, please let the Gardeners' Club have the spares. We can offer a "nursery" service if you can get them to one of the committee members before Sunday May 30th, or you can deliver them on the day itself to Brooklyn, Knucklas. We could also collect if necessary. Please remember that plants sell better if they are named and labelled, and if possible have a picture if they are not in flower. We will have some reference books to hand for those that can't be labelled in this way. And of course we should like to see as many fellow Gardeners' Club members as possible travelling up and down the valley on the 30th - just follow the yellow signs. Programmes, which are the entrance ticket, are only £3, from Beguilty Post Office, the Bookshop in Knighton or the Tower House Gallery.

On the Sunday evening there will be a concert by young performers at St Edwards Church Hall at 7pm. Tickets are £6.

On Monday May 31st, there are two other events for you to enjoy. The morning sees a garden book sale and a French flea Market at Aardvark books, Brampton Bryan, and the afternoon, from 2pm, sees the gardens at the Milebrook Hotel open, with cream teas and, hopefully, music in the garden. Entrance will be around the £5 mark (not yet finalised as we go to press).

## In search of “Heavenly Blue” .....Audrey Fox

I enjoyed reading of Josephine’s memories and thought that when next I was on the computer I would see if I could find a nursery who stocked the lilac she was looking for.

Upon entering Heavenly Blue into the computer I was presented with many different plants all called by this name. As mentioned last month Caryopteris was there and also Ipomoea, Lithodora, Lithospermum, Salvia, Penstomen and Veronica and no doubt many more. So to narrow the search I tried Syringa Vulgaris Heavenly Blue and this time came up with an entry from a book called Lilacs, A Gardener’s Encyclopedia by John L. Fiala which states that Heavenly Blue was introduced by Mary E Blacklock of Rowancroft Gardens, Canada, in 1943. It was a single flower – very good, of great merit and beauty and very difficult to find.

As there does not appear to be any commercial nurseries growing this lilac at the moment, I contacted one of the National Collection holders, Mr. C. Chapman at Norman’s Farm in Suffolk, to ask if he knew the variety and where I could obtain it. He confirmed that he grows Heavenly Blue in his collection of over 450 varieties. He also thinks that he has a plant available which Josephine can have; if not he has promised to propagate more in January. He has promised to get back to me shortly; at the moment he is busy preparing for the lilac flowering season, when his garden is open to the public by appointment.

**Editor’s comment:** it looks as if Josephine is going to get her lilac after all, so many thanks to Audrey for carrying out the research. Does anyone else have a plant that they have lost and would like to grow again? If so, the Teme Valley Gardeners’ Club detectives will go looking for it!

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*Get well soon!*

### **Audrey Fox**

Members will be sorry to hear that Audrey has had to go into hospital unexpectedly recently. She is now recovering well, and we send her our very warmest wishes for a very speedy return to the garden and to the club.

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“My favourite flower” will reappear next month. Why not write about **your** favourite for fellow members to enjoy?  
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## The May garden: tasks and ideas

With the recent rain and more sunshine, Spring at last seems to have sprung, and of course the weeds are growing as fast as the plants we actually want in our gardens. Getting on top of the weeding at this time of the year, whilst not the most exciting of tasks (although it can be soothing) lays really good foundations for the rest of the season, and means that you can often find room for more plants, or find seedlings that have sown themselves very helpfully near a prized plant. These can be potted up in the same way as seeds you have sown, once a true pair of leaves is showing. Try and give them the same sort of conditions that they had by the parent plant and all should be well.

Many of you will have seen that some rather battered shrubs are in fact alive and not dead as you had feared. The ceanothus that many

of us thought had perished is in fact re-growing well and may yet make a decent shrub for this year. Perennials have often done better than the shrubs in my garden, and the green shoots of the agapanthus can be seen just coming though. Agapanthus in pots may well have had frozen roots for some weeks and so they may not have survived. Give them a few more weeks before despairing however, and you may be rewarded..

Vegetable production in terms of seedlings and outdoor sowing should be in full production now. Don't forget to harden seedlings off well before putting them into the garden, and if you are planting sweetcorn this year, it would be as well to wait for later on in the month as they hate any check to their growth.

Finally, keep sowing hardy seeds even if you are a little

## A few tips and (non facial) wrinkles!

- I read somewhere, not sure where now, that you can nip the tops of basil plants and root the cuttings in water just as you can with mint. Tried this, and after a couple of weeks, lo and behold, plenty of rooted cuttings. This will save you buying more plants from the shops, and is easier than sowing basil, which will not germinate easily for some people.
- If you want to clear couch grass from your vegetable plot, try planting turnip seed. The two plants don't mix and the couch will wither back and die. Even if you have cleared the grass it may come back if you have not removed every single root. So to keep it at bay give this a try and let me know if it works for you!
- Water butts attract midges and some mosquitoes. To avoid this happening float some olive oil on the top. Just enough to cover the surface with a very thin coating. After a week or two skim it off and replace with fresh oil. It may look a mess but it will not affect the water quality and it will stop them from laying any eggs. Must be olive oil to work.

## *Plant Profile: Lilac (syringa)*

There are about 25 species of lilacs in cultivation, from *julianae* via *lanciniata* to *yunannensis*. A shrub or tree for every size of garden in fact.

Most of these lilacs are based on *Syringa vulgaris* from eastern Europe, although the natural geographical range of lilacs is from south-eastern Europe, Asia, the western Himalayas and the mountains of China, where there is the greatest diversity of species.

In the wild lilacs prefer well-drained soils on the edges of woodlands or open forests, but many grow well in fertile, humus rich, well-drained soil in full sun. Regular pruning will avoid the rather gaunt shapes that unpruned lilacs can be prone to, and keeps their growth within bounds. Lilacs are also good hosts to climbing plants such as clematis. Ideally plant a little way away from the hungry lilac roots.

Apart from *Syringa vulgaris*, the common lilac which is the one many of us have in our gardens, many lilac species are very desirable shrubs, with an elegance and charm missing from more glamorous varieties of common lilac. They often make compact, shapely bushes suitable for smaller gardens without excessive pruning. 'Palibin', formerly called *S. palibiana* or *S. patula*, is one of the loveliest, comparatively slow-growing and not reaching full size for ten years or more, with sweetly-scented flowers. Very suitable for a small garden.

Of the larger lilacs, Charles Joly is a dark, double purple, whilst Madame Lemoine is a reliable double white, sometimes spoiled by the unreliable May weather. Katherine Havemeyer is a more lavender-shaded double, and for a rather more unusual variety, Sensation is well worth trying as it has a tiny white line (picotee) around the individual flowers, which are mostly single. This variety is quite a deep lilac in colour and is strongly scented, as are most lilacs.