

Gleanings from the  
*Compost Heap*

Winter 2005/6



## NEW PRESIDENT FOR LDGA

At the Annual General Meeting in 2005, the Chairman of LDGA announced that she was delighted Mr John Hoyland of Pioneer Nurseries had agreed to become the Association's President.

John Hoyland lived for ten years in the Eastern Pyrenees region of France, where he also ran a nursery, before returning to the UK and settling in Letchworth. He will be well-known to many members through his articles for the Daily Telegraph's 'Gardening Supplement' and Gardens Illustrated or from visits to his well-stocked nursery in Willian, tucked behind the Three Horseshoes pub.

Pioneer Nurseries also has a very attractive and user-friendly website and the on-line catalogue is a delight as it combines excellent details about plants with a great sense of humour. Take the entry on Aconitum (Monkshood) for example: "So they have a reputation for being poisonous - many common garden plants are poisonous. If you are hungry, eat something else."

It is particularly fitting that Mr Hoyland joins us in our Centenary Year, since Pioneer Nurseries was established to supply plants for the world's first Garden City.

### Store News: Peter Faulkner

Once again we approach the start of the gardening year and new stock is being delivered. Almost all the usual varieties of potatoes will be available, apart from Ulster Chieftain (none grown in Scotland this year) and Kondor (a Dutch seed potato; imports into Scotland are banned). Three sacks of Charlotte have been ordered. Besides white onion sets, we will also have Red Baron onions, heat-treated to reduce the likelihood of bolting, and at the same price as last year.

Small packet seeds continue to be popular. New varieties include a winter lettuce suitable for greenhouse growing; a tomato good for baskets and containers; a Japanese parsley; a small fruited cucumber; a dwarf runner bean and a French gourmet Brussels sprout.

Amongst many other items, by popular request the store will also stock Twistits in thirty metre rolls, gravel trays for growbags; weed control fabric; fixers for bubble insulation for greenhouses or cold-frames; sulphur candles for fumigating greenhouses and peat-free multipurpose compost. The enclosed catalogue gives full details of stock available in the store this year.

Please note: this will probably be the last year we stock Irish Moss Peat as it will in future only be available in huge 290 litre bags.

The store could not operate without the help of

stalwart volunteers who run the till, operate the forklift, help customers with loading large items into cars, label new stock and generally keep the place organised and the Association is very grateful to all of them.

We always welcome new helpers. If you can give us one Sunday morning every five weeks on the till, or an hour or two moving stock or have experience of operating a forklift truck, we would be delighted to add you to our team. Contact Peter on 01462-680458.

One last plea to customers. Please help us to help you! Treat the store as you would any self-service shop. Use the baskets provided, collect your goods and take them to the checkout. Obviously, do not load any goods until these have been paid for. Cash and cheques are welcome but we do not accept credit or debit cards and remember you must produce your membership card to make purchases. One added advantage is that you can renew your annual subscription directly at the Store!

Pay for large items, such as bales of peat, sacks of compost or fertiliser, at the till along with your other goods, then take the receipt to the volunteer helpers who will load heavy items into your car for you.

If you are buying a large number of items, stockpile them near the till in the red baskets provided.

Please do not hold up the busy cashier with queries, but seek advice from one of the store volunteers.

### **Annual Charity Plant Sale: Laurie Cook**

The 2005 Plant Sale took place on May 28th and the bright sunshine brought out a host of gardeners, eager to snap up bargains. Despite careful planning of this event for the last Saturday in May to protect tender plants from late spring frosts, last year was difficult and some thirty boxes of tender bedding plants were lost before sale day. However, the vast majority of stock survived and the hanging baskets, preplanted window boxes, patio pots, hardy perennials, etc are always eye-catching and excellent value for money, with significant savings on similar items at garden centres.

An impressive amount of money was raised for the chosen charity, the Ernest Gardiner Day Hospital and this will be combined with sales from the Centenary Sale in 2006.

We would like to maximise the amount we can raise for this very worthy cause and so are asking for help from anyone who has spare greenhouse and cold-frame space for over wintering plants for the 2006 Centenary Sale. If you have any space available, please contact the Editor, Compost Heap at:

34 Astwick Road, Stotfold, SG5 4AU or pam@cymru.freewire.co.uk

Also, we are seeking people who would be able to help with donating plants, or plant pots or helping on the actual sale day. Again contact the Compost Heap Editor if you are able to help. Remember, that the rampant perennial problem in your garden, will be someone else's ideal ground cover plant, so pot up your spare plants now.

At the very least, turn up at the day of the sale to support the Association and get some amazing plant bargains. Details of time and venue of the 2006 Plant Sale are in the programme, enclosed with your membership pack.

### **Gardening with Wildlife: Pam Manfield**

I was going to call this article 'Gardening for Wildlife' but, as you will see as you read on, creating a balance with wild creatures helps us as gardeners as much as it encourages wildlife itself.

We are all familiar with the idea of national or local nature reserves, protecting insects, plants, birds and mammals from encroaching house building, roads and the other problems of the twenty-first century. However, did you realise that the domestic gardens of England and Wales comprise over one million acres of land? If each of us does a little to

make our own backyard more attractive to wildlife, the results can be dramatic.

People assume this is difficult, but it isn't. There are two vitally important things not to do: don't use slug pellets or chemicals. Experienced gardeners may regard this as impossible, but I grow hostas and delphiniums and lettuce successfully and I never use either slug pellets or chemicals of any kind. If you start 'delicate' plants, which slugs adore to eat, in pots they get past the tender stage when they are most attractive to slimy creatures and survive.

The more you do for wildlife, the more it helps you. We don't use slug pellets, so we don't kill off hedgehogs, or thrushes or frogs or toads. All of these keep the slugs and snails under control, so my delphiniums flourish. I do lose a few lettuces, but I happily sacrifice these for the joy of having a thrush singing its heart out at the bottom of the garden or watching a hedgehog bumble across the lawn in the early evening.

Bluetits and other birds help by eating blackfly from my broad beans and ladybirds keep the greenfly under control. Cabbage white butterflies do eat a few leaves of my broccoli but don't get a chance to do much damage before they either change to chrysalids or are eaten. (Interestingly, kale doesn't seem attractive to cabbage whites. Has anyone else noticed this?)

Since I never spray anything, I can harvest fruit and vegetables without having to worry about what chemical residue has covered them. And, as all of us know, vegetables picked minutes before they are cooked, taste totally different from produce that has travelled miles in chilled vans before sitting on a supermarket shelf for days.

Equally, there is one important thing to add to your garden if at all possible - some sort of water. I hate the term 'water feature', but include a small amount of water of any kind and you instantly maximise the attraction to birds, mammals and insects. A small bubble pond will provide a drinking area for all of them and is particularly good if you have small children and are worried about water safety.

A small half barrel is splendid. When we moved into our current garden, which has a high water table level, I discovered a newt while digging a hole to plant one of the shrubs which had moved with us. We sank a half-barrel in the same spot and within just a week had not just a happy newt but three frogs. We now have an additional, much larger pond, but the barrel still provides a haven for a number of amphibians who prefer it to the larger area.

Ponds give you the magic of watching a wasp drink, birds bathing and attract dragonflies. It's

a real joy to be buzzed at by a creature that was around at the time of the dinosaurs. Once ponds get under way they establish a natural balance and need little attention, apart from some minor water weed pulling. The fascination they provide vastly outweighs any effort involved in building one.

Geoff Hamilton's 'Practical Gardening' has a splendid section on pond building and suggests several types of pond from the very formal to a natural looking feature.

However, one word of advice - learned by bitter experience. Even digging a small pond is much harder than you think it is going to be. Either enlist a lot of friends and family and run a pond digging party, or hire a small digger. Whichever you do - enjoy your wildlife and see your garden flourish!

### **Winter Recipes**

#### **Roger's Windfall Marmalade**

2 grapefruit, 4 lemons  
2 lb/900 gms windfall apples  
5 pints/2.5 litres water  
5 lb/2.5 kg sugar

Wash the citrus fruit, pare off the rind with a vegetable peeler and cut it into fine strips. With a serrated knife, peel away all the pith from the flesh. Then chop the flesh roughly. Peel, core and chop the apples. Put apples into preserving pan with the water, citrus and flesh.

Tie the citrus pith, pips, apple peel and cores into a piece of muslin and add to the pan.

Simmer gently until the peel is tender and the mixture in the pan has reduced by half. Lift out the muslin bag and squeeze it well against the side of the pan to extract all the liquid. Add the sugar and stir until it has all dissolved.

Bring to a good rolling boil and boil rapidly until setting point is reached. Allow the marmalade to stand for 15 minutes before pouring into sterilised jars. (For a slightly sweeter marmalade, substitute one of the grapefruit for two oranges.)

#### **Parsnip Pyramids**

3 or 4 parsnips  
1 egg, 125 gms butter or cooking oil  
bread crumbs  
chopped parsley, salt and lemon juice to taste

Wash and peel the parsnips and cut them into suitable lengths and thickness. Cook until tender in plenty of boiling water to which you have added salt and a little lemon juice.

Once cooked, drain the parsnip pieces, brush them with beaten eggs and toll them in bread crumbs. Fry them in the butter/oil until nicely browned. Serve piled into a pyramid and sprinkle with

chopped parsley. Carrots, turnips and swedes are also good cooked in this way.

#### **Drunken Chestnuts**

2 lbs sweet chestnuts  
2 oz granulated sugar  
1/2 pint dry red wine

Preheat the oven to 180°C, gas mark 5. Make a slit in the rounded side of each chestnut, arrange them in a baking tray and bake for 20 to 30 minutes. When cooked remove the chestnuts from the oven and let them cool for five minutes. Remove the shell and inner skin while they are still warm.

Combine the wine and sugar in a saucepan over a low heat, stirring until the sugar has dissolved. Add the chestnuts and cook until the wine is reduced to a thick syrup (about 30 minutes). Place the mixture in a shallow dish and serve - preferably with a dessert wine.

#### **A last few words: Kathy Bee, Membership Secretary**

If you are reading this, you have already renewed your membership for another year. Thank you. Through your support the Association continues to flourish. One hundred years of history is an impressive record and we hope the Centenary events will provide a stimulating and enjoyable year for all of us. See the last page of 'Compost Heap' for details of the programme.

Now Christmas is over, many of us will already be planning the gardening year ahead. Some will be searching catalogues, deciding what to plant, others will be working out how to minimise the damage done to crops by slugs, snails and other annoyances.

One person I know always complains about the cats who visit his garden and calls them pests. However, when he was unable to get potato sacks last year my cats came to the rescue as I was able to give him some cat litter sacks. These sacks even have handles, which he admits made them very easy to move. Peter Faulkner also helped out with with large paper sacks which had previously held wild bird seed. Ingenuity can find answers to lots of problems!

Maybe you have a handy hint or recycling tip which could help someone? If so, why not let me know, so we can put it in the Compost Heap and on the web site to share with others.

It was good to meet so many members at the Annual General Meeting in November. 2006 should be an exciting year and I hope to meet many more of you at some of the events which we have planned.

Happy New Year.



## Centenary Programme 2006

Jan 19	Centenary Introduction: join us for a glass of wine and plant sale*
Feb 16	Slide show*
March 16	Learn from the experts: seed sowing & cuttings*
April 20	Tips on successful growing in the greenhouse*
May 17	RHS Lecture at Plinston Hall
May 18	How to produce professional hanging baskets & tubs*
May 27 to June 3	Annual charity plant sale
June 15	Visit to Scotsdale Nursery & Garden Centre (evening)
June 24/25	Open Gardens weekend and centenary events
July 1	Summer Show
July 20	Evening amongst second gardens
Aug 17	Expert tips on show preparation for flowers and vegetables*
Aug 23	Visit to Royal Horticultural Society HQ, Wisley
Sept 2	Autumn show
Sept 21	Professional advice on flower arrangements*
Oct 19	To be finalised
Nov 16	Annual General Meeting followed by slide show*

\* venue: The Guide HQ, 247a Icknield Way, Letchworth

\*\*\*\*\* WE ARE LOOKING FOR HELP WITH PUBLICITY FOR THE CENTENARY YEAR\*\*\*\*\*  
If you could help with producing posters for events and/or contacting the local press,  
please telephone Maureen Hersee on 01462 742475