

Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

May 2020 Newsletter

From the Secretary

I had intended to remind members that we hold a Plant Sale in May and it would be a good time to buy your summer bedding. Of course the Plant Sale is now cancelled. There are garden centres and nurseries that will deliver plants, and some supermarkets have plants for sale. At the moment my pots of violas are looking great and geraniums have survived from last year so I hope they will last until I decide what to do. Hopefully everyone is able to get into their gardens, there is usually something to do that maybe is not essential but

would be better done. My shrubs have been tidied up and my lawn edges redefined and certainly my garden is looking better.

We do not know when meetings will recommence but hope to begin again in September, we do not usually have a meeting in August. Meanwhile I hope you all keep well.

Jean Bowling

From the Editor

Normally this issue of the newsletter would contain information about outings planned for late summer and early autumn, as well as forthcoming indoor meetings. However, given the uncertainty about when we will return to normal life and be allowed to gather, it seems sensible to leave that until later – we can always send out information about outings and indoor meetings

(when they resume) later in the summer. There will be another newsletter in August, although, like this issue, it may be rather thinner than usual, because there will not be any reports on outings and the holiday.

David Bender

Some disappointments in the garden

At the RHS Wisley autumn show last year we were attracted by *Allium mohican*, and bought three bulbs for £10. We kept them warm and dry until the instructions said to plant them, and had no problem making sure they were well watered through the winter. Two have come up, with no sign of the third. It is too early to say whether or not they will flower as well as on Warmenhoven's stand at Wisley.

no flowers. So, in the autumn we bought another dozen bulbs to put in various parts of the garden. Three have flowered, but the rest show no intention of flowering. Perhaps next year?

For some years we have had two *Fritillaria imperialis*, and until the year before last they have flowered well. For the last two years, they have produced leaves but

We also bought a couple of packs of *Fritillaria meleagris* bulbs for a border where we cleared some of the *Crocsmia lucifer* (we planted the removed corms elsewhere). I know where I planted the fritillaries – it is the empty space between the new daffodils and the now rather rampant centauria.

... and migrating plants

We are used to new plants appearing in odd places in the garden. These are largely gifts from birds, and sometimes squirrels; brambles and hawthorn are unwelcome, but we do have quite an attractive hazel bush in the front shrubbery. However, we also have some plants that have migrated. I know that I would never have planted a single tulip there, or a single

daffodil there. We have some well-naturalised cyclamen in the front garden, where we planted them under the lilac. We did not plant any on the other side of the road, where they have become established and flowered well. Presumably we can blame squirrels for the migrating bulbs, and perhaps field mice or voles for the cyclamen – they are said to love the seeds.

WhatsApp Group

When the coronavirus reached the UK none of us could have known just what an impact it would have on us all. Our lives were changed so quickly that for many 'self-isolating' quickly led to a feeling of 'isolation.' Alternative methods of keeping in touch developed rapidly and I set up the Amersham Gardeners WhatsApp messaging group at the end of March.

This proved very popular and soon expanded to include 23 participants. Over 500 messages were posted in the first six weeks. It has been interesting to see how it has served as a platform for sharing information and pictures. I'm sure it has helped us to feel that we are all in this together.



These are some of the comments from members:

"Inspiration and a shared love of gardening."

"Have enjoyed seeing the wonderful plants and shrubs in members gardens, it gives us ideas."

"Lots of sharing our love of plants and life so we are not alone during these tough times even if we are."

"This group has been the best question & answer forum. I have learnt, seen beautiful photos, most of all shared our common bond. The Love of our Glorious Gardens, our safe place."

"Enjoyed being in touch with fellow gardeners, viewing lovely plants in gardens & some feeling of normality in these strange times."

"A welcomed social link with people who have an appreciation of the environment and the role of gardening in it. A chance to enjoy photos of gardens and what is growing, and share information and plants. A real boost to morale."

"A lovely connection with friendly gardeners sharing things together."

"A most enjoyable way to stay in touch with some long-standing friends and make new ones. Lovely photos - we could make an album, and wonderful video clips, some excruciatingly funny, others awe inspiring."

"A very uplifting and informative group. Staying in touch has been most important and reassuring."

"I think the group is similar to Gardeners Question Time but with the added advantage of photos,"



If you would like to join the group then please send an email with your mobile phone number to keithhoff@hotmail.com

Keith Hoffmeister.

Is glyphosate safe?

Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide that kills almost all plants by stopping production of a key enzyme in the shikimic acid metabolic pathway that leads to the formation of the aromatic amino acids phenylalanine, tyrosine and tryptophan. Human beings (and indeed most animals) cannot make these three essential amino acids, but are reliant on dietary proteins to supply them. It was first registered for use in 1974 and is one of the most widely used herbicides, with more than 750 glyphosate based products on the market world-wide. An estimated 6.1 million tonnes of glyphosate-based weedkillers were sprayed across gardens and fields worldwide between 2005 and 2014.

Some glyphosate-based products also contain 2,4-D (2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid), which has a different mechanism of action, acting as an analogue of the plant growth hormone auxin. At high doses, auxin causes plants to grow uncontrollably and then die. At lower doses we use synthetic auxins as rooting compounds for cuttings. 2,4-D kills broad-leaved plants but not grasses, so is commonly used to control weeds in lawns. It has been in use since 1945 and is the active ingredient in some 1500 products.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organisation has classified both glyphosate and 2,4-D as possible human carcinogens, although other agencies in USA, UK, the EU and elsewhere have not. These agencies looked at cancer rates in human beings and studies where laboratory animals were fed high doses of glyphosate and determined that glyphosate is not likely to be carcinogenic.

Although some 20 countries world-wide, and some cities in the USA have banned or restricted the use of glyphosate, within the European Union there has been a moratorium, and it continues to be available until December 2022, subject to each glyphosate-containing product being authorised by national authorities following an evaluation of its safety.

Some batches of 2,4-D contain relatively large amounts of the known toxin dioxin. There have been a number of industrial accidents involving the release of large amounts of dioxin, including a release from a tank in Seveso in Italy in 1976. It was also involved in the deliberate poisoning of Victor Yushchenko, then presidential candidate of Ukraine, in 2004. Dioxins have no common uses, and mostly exist as by-products of industrial processes such as bleaching paper pulp and incineration of waste. The production and use of dioxins was banned by the Stockholm Convention in 2001.

In March 2020 two organisations filed a lawsuit in California challenging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's approval of glyphosate, arguing that approval is unsafe, unhealthy, and unlawful, and that the EPA ignored warnings from experts who cautioned about the serious health and environmental

harms of its continued use. The case claims that glyphosate is eradicating habitats for pollinators, and disrupts soil microbes that are essential to ensuring plant health and disease resistance. Since many micro-organisms synthesise the aromatic amino acids by the shikimic acid pathway, accumulation of glyphosate in soil and water will indeed disrupt soil microbiology, killing not only bacteria but also the mycorrhizal fungi that support plant growth, and micro-organisms that break down organic matter in soil to improve fertility.

Early studies suggested that glyphosate was rapidly inactivated on contact with the soil. However, there is now evidence that it persists in the soil, and a number of studies have shown its presence in foods. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has set maximum amounts of glyphosate allowed in foods, and has determined that present levels are not expected to pose any threat to human or animal health.

The problem of determining the safety of glyphosate is that most of the laboratory research has been conducted by companies manufacturing it (and especially Monsanto, now owned by Bayer), and the numerous court cases in the USA claiming compensation for cancer victims exposed to it have claimed that Monsanto withheld adverse research results and failed to warn users of the possible dangers. At least one such case against Bayer / Monsanto has been settled in favour of the petitioner, and settlement is expected in other cases, but has been delayed by the outbreak of coronavirus.

Perhaps more importantly, the evidence of harm to human beings from use of glyphosate has come from people exposed to products containing not only the active ingredient but also a number of other compounds that are not declared on the label, and indeed are kept as closely guarded secrets by the herbicide manufacturers (rather like the secret recipes for Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola) to prevent competitors from using them to improve the efficacy of the products.

So, the jury is still out on glyphosate, but it certainly makes sense to avoid skin contact and breathing in the spray if you use it.



The power of wind

A couple of days before storm Ciara struck in February, our neighbour's fence began to sway alarmingly towards our border across the road in front of the house. In order to protect our shrubs and hellibores, including a *Chaenomeles japonica* trained up the fence, we

Over the next couple of days, this section of the fence was blown backwards and forwards, then the morning after the worst of the storm had passed we woke up to see that the whole section of the fence had blown over – fortunately, as a result of a freak blast of wind, backwards into the neighbour's garden, and not onto our border. We could now retrieve our fence post and spike, in the hope of using them to support a section of our fence elsewhere. The post was fine, but the steel spike was unusable – as shown below, it had been bent by the pressure of the wind-blown fence panel against the post.

unpinned the *Chaenomeles* from the fence, drove a steel fence spike into the ground against the fence and put in a 4x4 inch fence post to support the fence. It was difficult to hold the fence panel away from the post while fitting it, such was the force of the wind.



The good news is that the storm damage finally led to our neighbour having all of his old and swaying fence removed and replaced – we had been waiting for him to do something about it since September.

Kenneth Bodman

... and the power of tiny claws

Many years ago I read Hendrik Willem van Loon's *The Story of Mankind* (published in 1921). It opens as follows: "High up in the far far north, there stands a rock, One hundred miles high and one hundred miles wide.

Once every thousand years a little bird comes to this rock to sharpen its beak. When the rock has thus been worn away, then a single day of eternity will have gone by".

I was reminded of this when I looked at one of our bird feeders. Over the last 15 years the dead branch of the tree that supports it, and the small bird table above it, have been subjected to significant damage from the claws of squirrels desperate to get to the nuts in the so-called squirrel-proof bird feeder.

David Bender



I ache - with good reason



Our front lawn was a disgrace, with more moss and weeds than grass. Indeed, at one point we semi-seriously considered killing the remaining grass to create a Japanese style moss lawn. Instead, last year we invested in Mobacter moss killer, which claims to kill moss, then use bacteria to break it down to permit healthy growth of grass. It killed the moss, but reseeding did no good, and by this spring we were still ashamed of what we presented to the world as our front garden.

So, we decided to create an 18 inch wide border along the roadside, edge this and the borders to the back and sides, and replace the grass with a weed proof membrane and gravel. The first company we asked for a quote assumed, despite being told otherwise, that we wanted to park a car on the area – this would be difficult with an 18 inch border of plants along the roadside. They came up with an estimate of £6000 to dig down, put in hardcore, membrane and then gravel, which we politely declined.

At the same time Anthony was replacing fencing and doing some serious landscaping in the garden opposite. We got to know him quite well – after all, he had to get our permission to work at the back of our shrubbery to install the fencing. We were impressed with the way he worked, and asked him for a quote to gravel our lawn.

A week or so later we reminded him. He has not been seen for the last six weeks – and there is still a full skip in the remaining gap of the neighbour's fence, and a gap in the fence near the house that has not yet been filled.

So, after the first couple of weeks in lockdown, we bit the bullet, ordered edging strip and weed proof membrane and set to work ourselves. The turf (I use word term loosely) that we cut out to make the front border mainly went at the back of the shrubbery on the other side of the road, where Anthony had trodden the soil down erecting the new fence – upside down, of course, so that the grass and weeds would rot down. Then down went the 30m of edging, and the membrane, both held in place by plastic pegs hammered into the ground.

Now was the time for pebbles. I ordered 5 bags of small Scottish cobbles, which arrived earlier than expected, and filled only a small fraction of the space. OK, time to order a lot more. Only a day after they arrived, the same company's website now said "no longer available". Most of the other companies selling pebbles, cobbles, etc, had similar notices on their websites. Finally a company could supply 20mm golden gravel – very different from the Scottish cobbles, but OK, I just raked the cobbles into a 10 inch wide strip along the whole of the front edge, and slightly up the edges to form a crescent shape, so that it would look a little bit like surf breaking between the border and the golden gravel. The golden gravel was only available in 50 x 20kg bags on a pallet, not as single bags, and I knew from experience with the cobbles that 50 bags would not be enough, so I ordered two pallets. That is why I ache. We shifted two tonnes of gravel over two afternoons, creating our gravel bed.

Meanwhile, if anyone would like a 10m roll of 3m wide weed proof membrane, we have one in the shed – I over-ordered.

David Bender



Some requests for help

We always need people to meet and greet members and visitors at our meetings.

If you can help, please contact Felicity Vickery Tel: 01494 726284, email felicityvickery@yahoo.co.uk

We need people to help with the tea and coffee at our meetings. There is a rota so you are not expected to help at every meeting.

If you can help, please contact Liz Moulton Tel: 014494 784913, email libbym6740@gmail.com

Please remember the raffle at each meeting. The profit on the raffles makes a very useful contribution to our expenses; subscriptions alone do not cover the cost of meetings and speakers.

Publicity. If you know where you could put a publicity poster please contact david.bender@btinternet.com

At present we have posters in the following places:

White Hill Centre, Chesham
Robertson's butcher, Chenies parade
Van Hage garden centre
Little Chalfont Library
Amersham Library

Amersham Community Centre
Amersham Council Offices
Amersham Station
Coleshill Village Hall
South Heath Garden Centre

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Discounts for members – remember to take your membership card to claim your discount

[South Heath Garden Centre](#), Meadow Lane, South Heath, Great Missenden, HP16 9SH, offer a 10% discount on some items.

Gardening and outdoor ropes, buy online from <http://www.buyrope.co.uk>, and use the code Amersham10 at checkout for a 10% discount.

Past newsletters

There is an archive of past newsletters from May 2014 to the current issue on our website at

<http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/newsletter.html>

Local events

If you know of local garden events, open gardens, etc, please email newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk to let us know as early as possible, so that information can go out in the newsletter and on the website

Photos from outings

You can see lots of photos from our outings at <http://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/outings.html>