

Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

May 2026 Newsletter

Plant sale May 2nd

We were spared the cold wind that had been a feature of the preceeding week, and it was a bright, sunny and reasonably warm day for our annual plant sale in the forecourt of St Michael's Church. It was perhaps a bit early for much to be in flower, but, picking up a suggestion from Ken last year, Susan and Jill had printed some pictures of plants in flower so that people could see what they were buying. Another innovation was the use of high-vis orange jackets so that customers could distinguish those selling the plants from fellow customers.

Bank holiday Saturday was probably not the best time to hold the sale – there were fewer people about, so takings and profit were lower than last year. The card reader took £532 (less commission of £8.99), and cash takings were £448. Allowing for the purchase of plants from a wholesale nursery (£250) and a number of other expenses, some yet to be refunded at the time of writing, we made a profit of somewhat under £680 – a useful contribution to the Association's funds. In addition, the plant sale is useful publicity, and allowed a number of members to stop and chat to each other, whether they were buying or not (although almost did indeed buy plants).

Thanks to Susan Jeffery for organising the event, and to all members who worked to set up, sell plants and clear up afterwards. Special thanks to Mo Zaki, Alan Jarvis and Ken Bodman for shifting tables (among other tasks).

Unsold plants will be kept for our stall at the Chesham Bois fete on June 13th.



Welcome to three new members of the committee

Sue Lynch and Ann Turley have taken over from Sue Edwards and Julie Burton as speaker organisers. Amanda Green has taken over from David Bender as treasurer.

And a vacancy: Jean Bowling has been secretary for many years, and now wishes to hand over to some-one else. The task is not unduly onerous (4 committee meetings a year and the AGM), as well as booking venues for committee meetings. If you are interested, please talk to Jean at a meeting.

Snowdrops visit Feb 19th

We had a most enjoyable visit to Touchwood House in Great Missenden to see the snowdrops. We were warmly welcomed by Katharine Hersee, who gave us a short presentation about the different varieties of snowdrop before we toured the garden. We were then able to appreciate the differences between the wonderful selection of the many clumps of snowdrops growing in the lawn and the woodland walk.

During the presentation, Katharine told us about the snowdrop fairs where the bulbs were priced from a modest few pounds to the rarer ones that sold for several hundred pounds. On eBay a newly developed bulb had sold for £1,850!

We finished our visit in Katharine's kitchen where we enjoyed a hot drink and a selection of home-made cakes.

Therese Havard



On photographing snowdrops



You can only appreciate the different types of snowdrop by getting down close to them – unless, as above, someone lifts a single bloom for you to see. Otherwise, beautiful though they might be, from above they mostly look very much alike, impressive though they are en masse in a woodland setting.

Of course, you could lie down on the ground, but this is not recommended in February, and may not be possible in many gardens. Where special specimen plants are grown in pots, it is, of course, easy to get the flowers to eye (or camera) level.

This photograph was taken at eye level in the open air museum in Ålesund, in Norway. The church and graveyard are on a small hill, and the footpath is below the level of the graveyard, so that the snowdrops are indeed visible at eye level, and the delicate markings can be seen and appreciated.

Mystery object?

It is interesting to speculate about this red and white cone, and its purpose. Obviously the white lines are intended to mark the boundary of a planting area, like the edges of a raised bed, to prevent it spreading into the surrounding area.

The question is whether the cone is a propagator for a plant below (like a rhubarb forcing vessel), or whether it is the cone itself that is growing from the disturbed soil in the white painted area, in which case we should see many more of them growing on our roadsides.

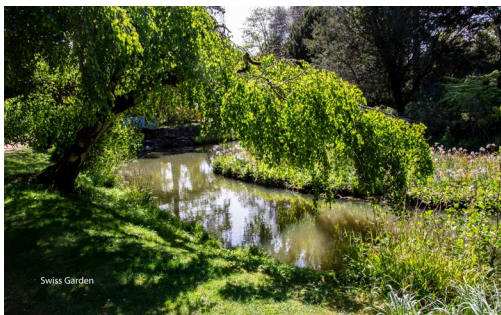
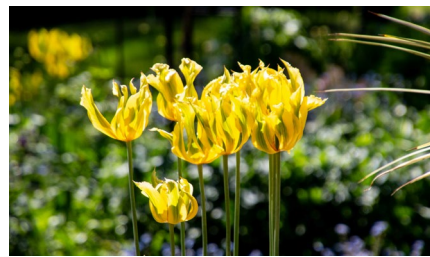


Outing to Kathy Brown's garden and Swiss Garden, April 29th

On April 29th a group of members went to Bedfordshire, to visit Kathy Brown's garden and Shuttleworth's Swiss Garden.

We arrived at Kathy Brown's garden in lovely sunshine and were delighted to be greeted by a kaleidoscope of colour. Her garden is described as 'painting with nature'. Acid yellow euphorbias were dotted everywhere, with a vivid blue ceanothus, vibrant purple lilac trees, and pink cherry blossoms amongst the mix. A walk past tree peonies and snowy white stemmed birch led us to her home, where we enjoyed a variety of unusual, but delicious, home-made cakes and hot drinks. Kathy then took time to enlighten us about her peonies, and the difference between herbaceous and tree peonies, and how eventually someone managed to create an intersectional peony.

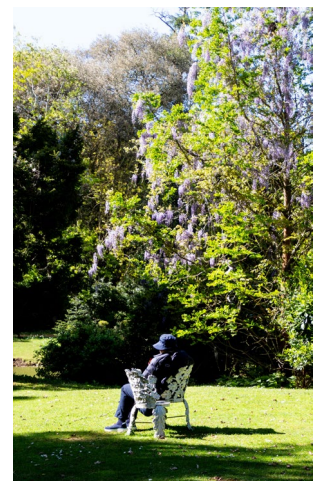
Before leaving, she took us to her living fossil garden where we were shown some unusual and rare prehistoric trees.



We then travelled to Shuttleworth's Swiss Garden, where we were met by Luke and Mike who were very friendly and helpful. The Swiss Garden is a large parkland area. A meandering woodland walk weaves its way through the trees, passing yellow azaleas. There were little features cropping up unexpectedly, statues, small buildings including a tiny chapel, a Swiss cottage and an unusual cave-like grotto and fernery. It continues past various ponds full of wild-life and we could hear the sound of peacocks, which seemed to be hiding. There were many trees including a majestic *Wellingtonia* and cedar of Lebanon.

We were lucky to have the added attraction of the adjacent airfield and hangars housing vintage aircraft. The day coincided with a special training day for pilots, so there was lots to see and entertain us.

Dianne Bellass



See more photos from this outing at

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/127260098@N04/albums/72177720333527333>

Stating the obvious!

I forget which magazine recently had an article to encourage people to grow fruit and vegetables, but it started with the rather obvious sentence “**Grow what you like to eat**”. Certainly, I would have thought that there is little point in growing fruit and vegetables that no-one in the house is going to eat!

Forthcoming meetings in the Drake Hall at 8pm

May 28th Helen Picton: [Old Court Nurseries](#) and the Picton Garden

“We are a small family run plant nursery and garden nestled on the lower slopes of the Malvern Hills in Herefordshire. Old Court Nurseries have been specialist breeders and growers of michaelmas daisies since 1906. Today we hold not only the Plant Heritage National Plant Collection of michaelmas daisies with more than 430 varieties but also of polypodiums and *Bistorta amplexicaulis*. All three collections are displayed in the 1.5 acre Picton Garden along with large displays of galanthus, heritage narcissus, tender succulents and more.



“Many of the plants seen in the garden can be purchased from the nursery. We are proud to propagate almost everything ourselves and all our plants are grown using the peat free Melcourt Sylvamix growing medium.”

The [Picton Garden](#) was originally laid out by Paul & Meriel Picton in the early 1980s on part of the Old Court Nurseries site. To start with the garden was there to house the National Plant Collection of michaelmas daisies but over the years has expanded and is now 1.5 acres full of plants for all seasons of the year, beautifully curated by Ross and Helen Barbour. There is much emphasis placed on creating a beautiful but relatable space with a huge variety of plants while still maintaining a healthy ecosystem. The garden is an insecticide- and molluscicide-free area.

June 25th Timothy Walker: What have plants ever done for us?

This talk looks at humankind's dependence on plants for everything from food to film and from painkillers to paint. It also examines the ways in which our exploitation of plants could keep up with demand from an increasing global population and what we as individuals can do to help future generations.

Timothy [writes](#): “I was born and brought up in South Buckinghamshire. I read Botany at University College Oxford. After graduation, I worked for two years as a trainee at the University of Oxford Botanic Garden. I then took a National Certificate in Horticulture at Askham Bryan College in York. This was followed by a one-year traineeship at the Savill Garden Windsor, and 15-months as a diploma student at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. In 1995 I was awarded a Master of Horticulture by the Royal Horticultural Society of London.

From January 1986 to July 2014 I worked at the University of Oxford Botanic Garden & Harcourt Arboretum, firstly as General Foreman, then as *Horti Praefectus* (from 1988) and finally as Director (from 2002). Between 1992 and 2000 the OBGHA won 4 gold medals at the Chelsea Flower Show London. In 2009 the Botanic Garden was one of seven Oxford collections to be awarded a Queen's Anniversary Prize for providing imaginative educational programmes for adults, students, children and the general public, thereby breathing new life into education for people of all ages and enriching their lives.

*What have
plants ever done
for us?*



July 23rd Andrew Halkworth: Tendercare

[Tendercare](#) was founded by Andrew and Angela Halksworth in 1989 to provide larger plants for garden designers and landscape architects. It has two sites, at Denham in Uxbridge, Middlesex, and at Hall Barn in Buckinghamshire. The company grows more than 100,000 mature and specimen trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants and also has a consultancy, design and planting service.

Andrew writes "Because of our unprecedented product range, chances are you'll fall in love with more than just one plant. Luckily for you, we also offer design and garden installation services to help you make the most of your outdoor space. Why add just one plant when we can help you turn your whole garden into an oasis of green. We are there for you from the start and can't wait to be part of your project."



We do not meet in August

September 24th Lily Blyth: [Horatio's Garden](#)



Horatio's Garden is named after Horatio Chapple, a schoolboy who wanted to be a doctor. Tragically, his life was cut short in 2011 at just 17, when his camp was attacked by a polar bear whilst on an expedition to Svalbard. There followed an outpouring of love and goodwill, with donations flooding in for his garden to be created.

People with spinal injuries need gardens like these. At Horatio's Garden we know that people with spinal injuries need natural beauty to support their recovery. This is why we build and look after extraordinary gardens in the heart of NHS spinal injury centres.

We know how critical it is to have an incredible garden right outside your hospital ward. We build and look after extraordinary, hardworking gardens with garden rooms to support this time. The gardens offer a vital place for reflection and adjustment, privacy and solace, joy and companionship. Our head gardeners offer gardening workshops to grow and cultivate plants and we organise a programme of events. Our evidence shows the gardens support better sleep, vitamin D levels, improved relationships, mental health, distraction from pain and reduced stress.

We have now opened gardens in eight of the 11 NHS spinal injury centres in the UK. Our vision is for everyone with a spinal injury to have a Horatio's Garden as part of their rehabilitation care.



An unfortunate headline in the February 2026 issue of *The Garden*!

"Rare mole fortress unearthed at RHS Garden Bridgewater"

One hopes it was not really unearthed. A mole fortress is very different from the more common mole hill, which is just the spoil from the mole's excavation of its tunnels. A mole fortress consists of two levels of tunnels, one above and one below the level of flooding in damp areas, and then, branching out from the upper level, a

nest and a worm store. Moles eat 6 large earthworms a day, and it seems that they bite the ends off surplus worms to paralyse them and store them in the walls of tunnels and fortresses. The fortresses discovered (not unearthed!) in the Worsley Welcome Garden at Bridgewater are more than 1.6 m across

Zoltan the sharpener

Zoltan comes from Hungary but has lived in Cornwall for many years. He is a mobile knife and tool sharpener. He trained professionally in 2012 and now has an international reputation. Usually he only tours the agricultural shows in the West Country, but Chalfont St Peter Gardening Club occasionally persuade him to come and visit.

Anyone is welcome to bring their tools to be sharpened on **Friday, Saturday and Sunday 29th to 31st May** at

The Garden Hut Chalfont St Peter. [This is behind Chalfont St Peter Community Centre. You go up the A413, round the roundabout, start back towards Amersham but turn left by the ambulances.]

I can personally vouch for him and will certainly be taking some tools along. You can either wait or leave items in a well labelled box to collect later. [AGA, your name, contact phone number, list of tools]

Susan Jeffery

For prices for various tools see the February newsletter follow the link at <https://www.amersham-gardening.org.uk/newsletter.html>

Holiday Watering

Just recently a friend asked me "How do I look after my plants when I am away on holiday?"

My reply was a very glib "You hope you have a kind neighbour who will pop round and do a bit of watering for you, else you go away in March or October to avoid the growing season" and that was that. Later I thought "that was not very helpful or kind", so here is my accumulated wisdom of tips for keeping plants going while you are away.

Plants that are still fairly small and in little pots under cover. Presumably these are in trays that will hold water. Do not flood the tray with water and assume that will suffice, you will only rot the roots. Wool will hold an enormous amount of water, so if you can get it, soak an old jumper and put that in the tray then stand the pots on it. Next best, a wet towel and finally a wad of newspaper. I do not recommend putting polybags over the plants they just sweat and rot. Rig up some sort of shading, especially if the plants are in a greenhouse. Garden fleece or net curtains will do fine. Now if you don't have a greenhouse or water holding trays you can always resort to the kitchen sink or the bath. Again don't stand the plants directly in water but on a damp surface as before. Oh and look at the pots, I have noticed some pots have a rim around the base that holds the pot up by a quarter of an inch, you need totally flat bottomed pots so the soil is in contact with the damp wool, towel, paper etc.

For larger pots you can use the wick method. This is rather fiddly but will work. You need a "tank" of some sort of wicks. Shoe laces are brilliant, but string plaited so that it is a bit thicker will do, or you can buy capillary wick cord from Amazon. Ideally put your water source a bit higher up than the surface of the soil in your pots. Water flows better downhill but will rise by capillary action if necessary. Soak your wick, then bury one end in the soil of your pot and drape the other end in the



tank. Again shade if possible. You can use this method for all your outdoor pots having first collected them together in a shady area and scaling up the size of your wicks (an old towel cut into strips maybe) and the size of your water reserve.

Of course if you think well ahead you can work water retaining gel into your planting medium. It is quite pricy but you only need the tiniest amount as it swells enormously – great for hanging baskets.

I always pop a saucer into the bottom of my baskets so there is a reservoir down there and I have been known to cut up a sponge scouring pad and bury that around the basket to hang on to some moisture. Having opened your pack of water retaining gel, find a moisture proof container to keep it in as it is hygroscopic. Just a peg on the packet is not good enough, the gel will absorb moisture from the air and swell into an unusable mass.

Then of course there are watering spikes. Again you need to think ahead as these need small bottles to put into the spike. You fill the bottle, upturn it into the spike, set the dripping speed then push the spike into the ground or the pot. I have lots of these but never seem to have much success. I don't get the drip speed right.

The greatest luxury is seep hose or a fully automatic system, but if you have got that far you don't need the other tips and tricks.

Good luck!
Susan Jeffery

A plant that plays “cuckoo” with ants

[Plantwatch](#) *The Guardian*, March 18th 2026



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apodolirion#/media/File:Apodolirion_buchananii_58060038.jpg

Plants are superb at enticing animals to pollinate their flowers or carry off their seeds. But one plant co-opts an astonishing combination of fire, bees and ants to mastermind its reproduction.

The South African Natal crocus, *Apodolirion buchananii*, has a gloriously bright white flower that emerges from the ground before its leaves appear in early spring. But the flower only blooms shortly after fire breaks out naturally in its native grasslands, leaving it standing like a beacon among the blackened grass to help lure bee pollinators, with an irresistible sweet scent that wafts through the air.

After the flower is pollinated, the developing fruits remain underground for six months until they are mature, protected until the seeds are ripe and ready to be dispersed by ants.

But the biggest surprise was the discovery that the seeds attract ants by hoodwinking them with a scent that mimics ant larvae. The ants are fooled into collecting the seeds thinking they are rescuing their own offspring, carrying the seeds off to their nest where they look after them.

Presumably the ants have something of a shock when the “larvae” eventually germinate into seedlings.



Outings to book now

If you cannot print out the enclosed booking form(s), just write to or email the organiser of each outing with the relevant information.

Red Kites on Tuesday June 30th

On Tuesday 30th June a visit has been arranged for us to [Red Kites](#), a beautiful garden at Bledlow Ridge. This Chiltern hillside garden of 1½ acres is planted for year-round interest and has superb views. Lovingly and beautifully maintained, there are several different areas to relax in, each with its own character. Wildflower orchard, mixed borders, pond, vegetables, woodland area and a lovely hidden garden. Many climbers used in the garden change significantly through the seasons.

This will be a self-drive visit. Please try to car share.

Red Kites, 46 Haw Lane, Bledlow Ridge, Buckinghamshire, HP14 4JJ

Off A4010, halfway between Princes Risborough & West Wycombe.

At Hearing Dogs sign in Saunderton, turn into Haw Lane, then go ¾m up the hill, the garden is on the left.

The cost is £10 per person including tea and cake.

Use the reference RK-your surname if you are paying by bank transfer

As this is a "hillside" garden please be aware it is not suitable for those who have difficulty walking on slopes as they are everywhere. The patio by the house has wonderful views and tea and cake can be enjoyed looking out over the garden while the rest of the party explore further.

Broughton Grange Gardens & Upton House NT on Tuesday July 14th

Broughton Grange Gardens, Wykham Lane, Broughton, Oxfordshire OX15 5DS

The 25 acres of garden that surround the manor of Broughton Grange have been developing into a stunning private garden by the present owners since 1992. In 2000 [Tom Stuart-Smith](#) was engaged to create an exciting new walled garden within the more traditional gardens. It is a world renowned design over

three terraces. Unfortunately the sloping nature of the terrain makes it difficult for wheelchairs but there are still many other beautiful areas of interest to see:

For more information see
<https://www.broughtongrange.com>.

Upton House and Gardens, Edge Hill, Banbury, Warwickshire OX15 6HT

There have been several houses built on this site since the first Tudor manor house in 1483. Successive owners have left their mark, but none more than Walter Samuel, 2nd Viscount Bearsted in the Art Deco period of the 1920s. He adapted the 1695 house to accommodate his growing art collection. It is now a treasure house to outstanding examples of 18th century

European porcelain and internationally important works by artists such as Bruegel, Bosch, Hogarth and Stubbs. The gardens surround the main house and a series of terraces and herbaceous borders stretch downhill to the mirror pool and an interesting 1930s water garden designed by one of the earliest woman garden designers, [Kitty Lloyd Jones](#).

For more information see
<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/warwickshire/upton-house-and-gardens>.

The cost is £42 per person or £59.10 for non-members of the National Trust.
Use the reference BGG-your surname if you are paying by bank transfer

Self drive outing to Waltham Place on Thursday August 13th

Waltham Place in Berkshire is a fine example of what can be achieved through sustainable horticulture and agricultural practises. The gardens offer a unique vision of a garden steeped in history yet redesigned with the future in mind. It features a series of walled gardens (the potager, the square garden, the butterfly garden, the Japanese garden and more), the oldest dating from the 17th century, an English landscape garden and a huge double border. In the May 2026 edition of *Gardeners' World* Monty Don highlighted must-see British gardens and nominated Waltham Place as one

of three in the South-east. It featured in episode 4 of *Monty Don's British Gardens* (BBC 2, 2025) as a pioneering example of biodynamic gardening, naturalization, and rewilding.

The philosophy at Waltham Place is based on a belief that the farm and surrounding gardens, woodlands, lake and fields should be managed in a holistic way where wildlife is valued and protected. Visitors are encouraged to understand the links between plants and animals and the health of this vibrant landscape.

Directions:

Waltham Place, Church Hill, White Waltham, Berks. SL6 3JH
Aim to arrive by 10:30

From the M40: Leave at Junction 4, High Wycombe and follow the A404 (Marlow, Reading, M4). Take the Maidenhead (A4) exit and follow signs for White Waltham. After passing a light airfield on the right you will enter the village of White Waltham.

Take the left turn signposted Windsor, Paley Street and St Mary's Church. Drive past St Mary's Church and proceed up the hill. Please use the entrance on the left beside the red postbox.

Find out more at www.walthamplace.com.

The cost is £34 per person.

Use the reference WP-your surname if you are paying by bank transfer.

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: 01494 784913, email libbym6740@gmail.com

As ever, it will be much appreciated if some members could arrive about 7 pm to help put out chairs and tables; they do not put themselves out! Carol Barratt has a rota, so again you do not have to do it every month.

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; Blue Diamond (formerly Van Hage) garden centre; Little Chalfont Library; Amersham Library; Chesham Library; Coleshill Village Hall, Tesco Amersham, Amersham Old Town

Committee and Contact Details

President	Tim Hillier	president@amersham-gardening.org.uk
Vice-President	Susan Jeffery	
Chairman	Colin Ross	chairman@amersham-gardening.org.uk
Secretary	Jean Bowling	secretary@amersham-gardening.org.uk
Treasurer	Amanda Green	treasurer@amersham-gardening.org.uk
Visits Secretary	Liz Moulton	
Membership Sec	Annie Jardine	membership@amersham-gardening.org.uk
Talks Secretaries	Sue Lynch and Ann Turley	speakersec@amersham-gardening.org.uk
Archivist	Carol Barratt	
Web Coordinator	David Bender	webmaster@amersham-gardening.org.uk
Committee Members	Frances Billington; Joan Clark; Carol Daw; Jill Harris; Irene Glyn-Jones;	
Newsletter Editor	David Bender	newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk

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>

Photos from outings

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

Click the button on the top right of the screen for a slide show; you can scroll through the pictures using the > and < arrows on the right and left of the screen

Half price entry to RHS gardens

We are affiliated to the RHS, and one of the benefits is a card allowing two AGA members at a time to visit one of the RHS gardens at half price. If you want to borrow the card, please contact Jean Bowling (secretary@amersham-gardening.org.uk)

We are not psychic

If you change your email address (or indeed your postal address) please email membership@amersham-gardening.org.uk and / or newsletter@amersham-gardening.org.uk, so that we can keep the records up to date and make sure you receive the newsletter and booking forms for outings.

[Click here](#) for a list of all the NGS gardens in Buckinghamshire