

Amersham Gardening Association

www.amersham-gardening.org.uk

August 2025 Newsletter

Front garden awards

For most of us, the back garden is a private space, possibly overlooked by a neighbour, but open to the general public only by invitation. By contrast, the front garden is open to the public and passers by – unless, of course, you have planted a tall hedge or built a tall fence or wall, either to protect your privacy, or, more likely, to screen out traffic noise and fumes.

Amersham in Bloom makes annual awards for front gardens that enhance our town and excite the passing judges, as well as gladdening the hearts of passers by. I am not being nosy when I look into peoples' front gardens as I walk past; I enjoy most of them, and sometimes gain ideas for what I could plant. (Of course, "gardens" that are bare concrete, adorned with parts of old motor cycles and broken down cars, and sometimes even old mattresses, are rather less exciting).

Several members of AGA have received certificates from Amersham in Bloom for their front gardens this year; one has shared these photos with us – with the usual gardener's comment that "it looked much better last month".



Two more photos from our anonymous member's front garden



From the Secretary

Most of you I expect, will be glad that due to the dry conditions, we have not had the slug and snail problem this spring that we had last year. But now we have the problem of this lack of rain. My lawn is brown as I am not prepared to spend precious water on it. It does save having to cut the grass and I know it will recover eventually. Most plants seem to be struggling on but not happy.

The reports on the plant sale and holiday appeared in the May Newsletter. The date of the 2026 holiday has already been advised (June 1st – 4th, based in Shrewsbury); details and the booking form will be published in the November newsletter. The visit arrangements are already well underway.

We are pleased that the membership numbers continue to increase (we have now reached 207 members) but disappointed that no-one wants to take over as the new talks organiser(s) or join the committee. There are only 4 meetings of the committee each year and apart from those with specific jobs, not a lot to do, mainly joining in the discussions. New members with new ideas are always welcome. Without a full committee and in particular new talks organiser(s), there will be no Amersham Gardening Association.

Jean Bowling



The leaves of the quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) shake in the slightest breeze. Traditionally it was believed (by the doctrine of similars, that like cures like) that the shaking could cure fever and chills, and people would tie a lock of their hair onto the tree, saying "aspen tree, shake and shiver instead of me".



Reveley Lodge Gardens, May 29th

The house and the 2½ acre garden were bequeathed to Bushey Museum in 2003, having been previously occupied by the Chewitt family. The house is now used for classes, workshops and small theatre productions.

We had a lovely sunny day for our visit, which started with coffee / tea and freshly baked cakes from the café. Lesley, the head gardener, gave us a guided tour of the gardens. She has only worked there for four years and has many ongoing projects and plans for improvements. Apart from the head gardener, there seems to be a large team of volunteers; we saw a number involved in weeding and other tasks.



The Winter Walk will be lined with more witch hazel trees and planted with more snowdrops and bluebells. The medicinal garden had been planted by a doctor, one of the trustees.

We saw the large kitchen garden with early planting in evidence. In the summer cut flowers and vegetables are sold to visitors to raise funds to help with the running costs of the estate.

The rose garden was an enclosed 'room' filled with old roses. It was a riot of colour and heady perfume and was truly spectacular. Outside the house was an unusual solanum which had seeded itself into the almost soilless crack between the house and the path.

There was an ancient apple tree of unknown variety, which is more hollow than trunk, yet it still produces fruit; scions have been rooted to replace it when it finally succumbs.

We were shown into the Victorian conservatory and given a history of the house and family. We finished our tour with two of the rooms of the house that have been preserved in their original style.

Thérèse Havard



Grand Union Canal trip, July 17th

On Thursday 17th July we all set off for a canal cruise on the Grand Union Canal at King's Langley run by Waterways Enterprise, a friendly and efficient charity run by volunteers. One of its main aims is to make canal cruises accessible to everyone; it even has a wheelchair lift.

We had all been praying for rain for some weeks, so we were a little sad that the clouds had chosen to send showers in the morning that particular day. Luckily the boat was large and full of friends and cake, and as we chugged along under the weeping willows, drinking tea and chatting, the sun came out.



The canal follows the old path of the river Glade so it feels like an established river route, with weeping willows, dappled sunshine and birdsong. In fact in the 1700s it was at the heart of the Industrial Revolution with many paper mills, and eventually Dickinson's large paper mill just to the north, producing high quality paper, and possibly polluting the water, which looks pretty healthy today,



It was interesting to see how the landscape around the canal had evolved. Other long established industrial sites like the Ovaltine factory had been redeveloped into attractive housing. They were in several different styles, and they all had interesting well maintained gardens leading down to the canal. Proximity to the canal probably meant that watering was easy, they didn't have the browned off seedy look of many gardens this year!

The volunteer crew, strong chaps of a certain age jumped off the boat at regular intervals to open the lock gates in return for cake. As the water level was so low we occasionally grazed the bank. All was well; no

bailing out was necessary. Low water affected our route, we had hoped to go in the direction of Tring this time but instead we travelled south towards the M25.

Canal travel gives a different perspective on familiar landscape; it was particularly interesting to see the frenetic movement of the M25 contrasted with our stately progress. It was nice to have a peaceful watery afternoon tea venue, the Chilterns are a bit short on riverside tea rooms.

Thanks to Isabel for organising the outing

Jane Jenkins, photos by Colin Ross

A task that will be a pleasure

Reading *The Garden* magazine can sometimes be exhausting, especially when I come to the page of “tasks for this month”. The July issue has three pages headed “more to do this month”, with 36 tasks. One, however, would be a pleasure; it is headed “eat peaches”. It goes on to point out that peaches, apricots and nectarines need harvesting, and therefore eating, as they ripen. One of my great pleasures in summer is indeed to eat these stone fruits (and greengages and Victoria plums later on). However, we do not grow them; doubtless if we had very productive trees we might be tempted to paraphrase the opening speech of

Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* “If music be the food of love, give me excess of it, so that surfeiting the appetite may sicken and so die”. However, I pity young people who think that peaches, as bought in the supermarket and labelled “ripen at home” are those hard fruits that often go rotten before they really ripen. There was always a dispute in my family as to whether the best peaches we had eaten were in Girona or Torroella de Montgrís in Spain – in both cases they were large, and so juicy that the juice ran down our arms; I can recall washing my hands and arms in the village fountain afterwards.

Our home in my childhood in Ealing had been built on what had been an orchard, and in the relatively small back garden we had two large apple trees (James Grieve and Worcester Pearmain) and a large pear tree. None of these was really a “keeper”, although some apples were stored in the spare bedroom until December, by which time the originally crispy apples had become pappy, and, if we were honest, rather unpleasant to eat. My mother stewed and bottled apples (and some pears) that lasted through the year until the first windfalls of summer were ready to stew. I am reliably informed that on one occasion when we were in a café and I saw on the menu “stewed apples 1/6” I exclaimed “Do people **pay** for stewed apple?” We always had a bowl of fruit on the table; indeed shortly after we moved in, our rather nosy neighbour sent her daughter to visit to spy on us; she apparently returned with the report that “they have fruit on the table and there is no-one ill in the house”.



The melon pit revisited

There was a report on the BBC news website on July 17th about a clever idea from a council in Wiltshire. They are collecting the methane (a potent greenhouse gas that is a significant cause of global heating) generated by rotting matter in a landfill site, and burning it to generate electricity. They have installed greenhouses on top of the fermenting landfill, so providing heat for

crops, and pump the carbon dioxide from burning the methane into the greenhouses to encourage plant growth. Not only melons, as the Victorians grew over heaps of fermenting manure, but also avocados and other tropical and subtropical fruits will soon be available that really can be labelled “locally sourced”.

Sustainable Amersham repair shop

September 6th, 10:00 – 13:00, St Michael’s Church.
Bring along household items, jewellery electronics, etc for repair, cables for recycling.

Changes to the raffle

The raffle at our monthly meetings is a well-established part of the entertainment, as well as being a useful source of income; in the first six months of this year raffles made a profit of £486 – many thanks to Christine Prizeman and her helpers; this covers about half the cost of speakers for the same period. However, drawing the winning tickets takes up a considerable amount of time that could, and indeed should, be allowed for questions to the speaker.

There will be some changes from the September raffle:

- 1) Please do not bring along prizes – if we are honest, some of your unwanted gifts are not really enticing as raffle prizes. One member each month is tasked with buying five good prizes, to a total value of £50 (increased from the previous £30).
- 2) After the interval, the prizes will be drawn, and winning numbers will be announced at the end of the meeting – winners can collect their prizes (already allocated) as they leave the hall.

Plant sales at meetings

You **will** be tempted to buy plants and / or jam etc. Please try to bring along a carrier bag to take your plants home in – like everyone else, the plant sales team have a problem accumulating carrier bags. If you have any **paper** carrier bags, these are even more valuable for the refreshment team to pack up the recyclable paper cups for composting.

Also, for the plant sales and raffle, please try to bring along some change – £1 coins for the raffle and smaller change for plants. The treasurer will try to remember to give Christine, who runs the raffle and the plant sales team, a float of change, but you can help.

If you are paying for an outing or subscription by bank transfer

After a year's experience, the treasurer knows that all banks start the reference with the name of the account, so all you have to do is to use the name of the outing or "subs" as the reference.

Please do remember to do this – sometimes we have two or more outings being booked at the same time, and it can be very difficult to sort out what people have paid for.

Forthcoming meetings in the Drake Hall

Sue and Julie have been organising our speakers for some 8 years, and wish to relinquish the post. If you think you could take over, please see them at a meeting – they always sit at the front. The task is not unduly onerous, and they have already booked speakers for

the whole of 2026 and into the beginning of 2027, so you will have an easy entry into the job.

Without monthly indoor meetings the Association will not survive.

Remember, we do not meet in August

September 25th Anthony Powell: [Gardens of Kashmir](#)

The celebrated Mughal gardens of Kashmir owe their grandeur primarily to Emperor Jahangir who had an undaunted love for Kashmir, and his son Shah Jahan. Jahangir was responsible for the careful selection of the site and adapting it to suit the requirements of the traditional paradise gardens. Although the Mughals never deviated drastically from the original form or concept of the gardens, their biggest challenge in Kashmir was to exploit the chosen site and the abundance of water resource to its maximum potential. The sites selected were invariably at the foot of a mountain, wherever there was a source of water either in the form of streams or springs. This feature eventually resulted in terraced garden layouts. Undaunted by the challenges offered by mountainous terrain, the Mughal engineering skills and aesthetics helped in exploiting the dominating natural landscape and the available water resources to their maximum potential and achieved an unparalleled height of perfection.



This talk will give us a chance to see gardens that we can no longer visit, because the Foreign Office strongly advises against travel to Kashmir, and if you travel against FO advice, your travel insurance is invalid.

October 23rd Colin Edwards: Questions and answers

There is rarely enough time for questions after our speakers before we have to pack up and vacate the room by 10pm.

This a chance for a whole evening of questions and answers: What? How? When? Where? and perhaps even Why?

The evening will run like an edition of Gardener's Question Time. **Please submit questions in advance** to Julie Burton (julie.burton@hotmail.co.uk) or Sue Edwards (suegolfmad@gmail.com); they will then sort them to put similar questions together.

November 28th Stephen Head: Going for Gold

Dr Stephen Head worked as an academic ecologist and zoologist at Oxford University, and in universities in Jamaica and Oman. He subsequently ran large conservation charities before volunteering nearly full time to run the [Wildlife Gardening Forum](#), now a flourishing registered charity working to promote the importance to biodiversity and people of the garden environment.

This is the story of how Stephen became involved (perhaps unwillingly) in his village's entry for the Chelsea Flower Show, how they worked and how they won. Some serious thoughts, and at times a very amusing (even hilarious) talk.



Friday December 19th Christmas party

Note that this is not on our usual 4th Thursday of the month, but a week earlier, and on a Friday, because the hall is booked to another organisation on the 3rd Thursday and the 4th Thursday is too close to Xmas.

As last year, the food and drink will be provided from the Association's funds, although there may be a nominal charge to reserve a ticket. Full details will be in the November newsletter.

Fat hen is a common wild plant (*Chenopodium album*)



The leaves have a strong scent of chrysanthemum when crushed, and can be used in soup or fried as a vegetable. The name comes from the fact that the seeds were formerly used to feed hens. They can be ground into a flour for preparation of bread, cakes, and gruel; they have a flavour similar to that of buckwheat.

Also known as bacon weed, dirty dick, muck hill, or dung weed (because it commonly grows around dung heaps), goose foot (because of the shape of the leaves), and pig weed.

Seeds of two other species of *Chenopodium* are eaten in the Peruvian Andes: *C. quinoa* (quinoa, which has become a popular "health food" in western countries because of its relatively high content of protein, dietary fibre and antioxidants) and *C. pallidicaule* (canihua).

Pity the badgers?

We have been sparing with watering in this dry summer, so that there are fewer slugs and snails around the garden. While this may be good news for our garden, it is bad news for badgers, whose diet is mainly slugs and worms. The soil is just too hard to dig. Unfortunately, this means that the pots and containers we have watered provide an irresistible scent of moist soil to visiting and marauding badgers, which are capable of digging deep under our fences, and indeed just pushing their way through. We have lost quite a few potted plants that have been overturned in their search for food – the most upsetting, was the night they overturned the 18in diameter shallow planter of alpines that was on a 12in high stand. No food for the badgers, but the planter crashed down and was broken beyond repair. We hope at least some of the plants will survive their rude uprooting.



Would you visit this garden?

We will never know how many gardens that look exciting on paper are rejected by members of our indefatigable visits sub-committee when one or other of them has visited before making a booking for an outing. Just rarely, a garden visit is booked and the garden turns out to be very much less exciting or interesting than it appeared.

Similarly, on-line information about hotels can be misleading, or misinterpreted. For example, on one AGA holiday, the hotel near Bristol had a website that mentioned several acres of parkland – in fact, it was several acres of carpark land, used for people wanting off-airport parking for holidays departing from Bristol airport. The website for a hotel in Jersey showed a photograph that could be interpreted as showing gardens in front of the building. When we arrived, I had to kneel in the gutter outside to get a similar photo (see



below left). Standing up showed that there was a narrow bed of flowers on top of the wall, and the space behind was the car park (below right).

Whole towns, villages and islands may be described as “little visited” and “out of the way” tourist gems. There is usually a good reason why they are little visited – there may be little to see there. I recall one port in northern Norway where we took the first shuttle bus from the ship into town. We walked up the only street, then back down the street, through the carpark behind the supermarket, and were waiting for the second shuttle bus to arrive half an hour after our arrival, to take us back to the ship. “Out of the way tourist gems” may be more or less wholly inaccessible except for an unmade road or goat track. There may be a local bus every other day (remember Alice in Wonderland: “jam every other day; jam yesterday, jam tomorrow, but never jam today”).



This has prompted me to write about a garden as it might be described on-line:

Welcome to the gardens of The Falcons.

You approach this gem of a Chiltern garden along a private road and a wide drive. In front of the house is a gravel garden, with a circular central bed, and backed by a perennial border containing honeysuckle, budleija, peonies, berberis, lilac and clematis, as well as hellebores. Alongside the drive, the gravel garden is bordered by a mixed hedgerow and perennial planting, including tête-à-tête daffodils (in season), sea holly and marjoram (excellent for pollinators). This planting is echoed in the border alongside the road. The entrance to the gravel garden is sandwiched between the mixed hedgerow and a rosemary hedge (again splendid for pollinators).

Behind the house is a patio with bistro-style seating, where tea / coffee and home-made cakes are served in the afternoon. In spring and summer this patio is surrounded by pots and hanging baskets, some containing tender plants and others hardy perennials, shrubs and alpiners. Beside this patio is the conservatory with a selection of houseplants, including a collection of streptocarpus, pelargoniums and, in season, clivia. The conservatory also acts a bird hide, with comfortable seating and views over the bird feeding area and nest boxes, as well as eleven 100-year old lime trees that provide food and shelter for the birds.

There is a wide border with mixed shrubs (including roses, mahonia, hypericum, pieris, hydrangea and laurel) and perennials (including Solomon's seal, lilies, hellebores and poppies) in front of the lime trees. This is reached by a pathway through a tunnel of clematis, jasmine and *Akebia quinata*. To the shaded side of this tunnel is a fernery; on the sunny side, alongside the lawn, is a border of mixed annual and perennial planting. The pathway at the end of the tunnel is bordered by bamboo and Himalayan nutmeg, leading to a woodland walk behind the trees, with bluebells and wild arum in season. There is a view from the woodland walk over farmland, including wild cherry and other trees, and at the end the pathway leads past winter honeysuckle to the ornamental pond, with koi and other fish. There is a Monet style bridge across the pond, or a pathway bordered by the pond on one side and laurel and camelia bushes on the other.

This pathway, and the bridge, lead to the triangular border, home to iris foetidissima, crocosmia lucifer, centaurea, geraniums, scutellaria and autumn flowering chrysanthemums. Alongside the triangular border another pathway leads past a wide border that is home to snowdrops, wood anemones, winter aconites and

bluebells (in season), camelia and oak-leaved hydrangea. This border is backed by sycamore and lime trees, and leads past the bog garden and heavenly bamboo to the rose garden. This is a patio in front of the glasshouse, bordered on two sides by rose bushes

underplanted with sarcococca for winter scent. The rose garden leads through an arch of climbing roses past the triangular border back to the conservatory and bistro patio.

Welcome to our garden!

Only British Gas give our house the name *The Falcons*, and then only for the gas account – for the electricity supply (to the same house) they use our address as 8 Eagle Close. Confusingly, when I log on to BG I am met with a page saying “you appear to have two addresses, which one do you want to use?”

The road to our end of the Close is indeed a private road, leading to just our house and two bungalows (because of the protected trees, there is no number 2 in the Close, and only even number for some reason. The “wide drive” is in front of the house, and does indeed allow two cars to be parked, one in front of the garage and one by the front door. The border alongside the gravel garden from the road is some 15 cm wide.



The bistro-style patio has one table and two chairs – and as the photo shows, also houses the hose reel as well as various plants in pots and other containers. The conservatory is a standard 3.7 x 3m one; it does indeed contain a selection of plants and just three comfortable chairs and two foot stools. It is, however, an excellent hide for watching the garden wild-life. The eleven lime trees are planted close together (about 1½ m apart), so that the curved deep border in front is some 20 m wide, and between 1.5 and 4 m deep.)

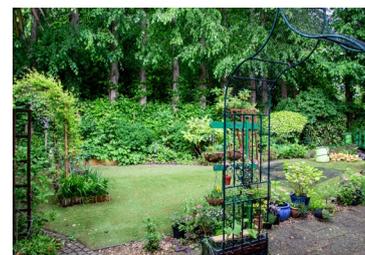


The tunnel of clematis, etc consists of just three standard arches, some 1.5 m apart, and the woodland walk is some 2 m wide and 20 m long, leading to the compost bins. Half the view over the farmland is obscured by a much over-grown laurel on the farmer’s field, and the remainder of the view is of a neglected field that is farmed at present solely for environmental rebates – ie apart from a few trees, it is subjected to rough flail mowing every couple of years. Long may this continue; it is home to deer, foxes and badgers.



The bridge across the pond is some 4 m long and only 40 cm wide (the narrow width was accidental, a mistake between imperial and metric dimensions when ordering from the website). The triangular border is some 3 x 3 x 2.5 m. The bog garden is actually the 90 gallon water tank we used to transport our koi when we moved here 21 years ago, and it sits in the middle of what was the spoil heap when we dug the pond.

The glasshouse is actually a 10 x 8ft greenhouse, but the rose garden does indeed border a patio. Originally this was our main outdoor seating area for evening drinks; now it is mainly used for an outdoor potting area, and we use either the bistro patio or a table and deck chairs on the lawn (in a good summer).



We like our garden, and you are welcome to visit (no coaches please!).

Why not try writing a similar “estate agent’s” description of your garden. It is great fun.

David Bender

Special day at Waterperry Gardens: Thursday 11th September

The RHS [Herbaceous Plant Expert Group](#) will be visiting [Waterperry Gardens](#) in Oxfordshire on Thursday 11th September and members will be giving talks to the public, followed by a Question and Answer session.

[Click here](#) for details.

The programme will be:

- 1.30 Ben Pope Gender in the Garden
- 2.15 Rosie Yeomans Late-Summer Flowering Perennials
- 3.00 Questions and Answers with members of the Herbaceous Plant Expert Group

Ben has been Head Gardener at a private garden in Sussex for nearly 20 years. He holds the RHS Master of Horticulture and lectures at the Chelsea Physic Garden for The English Gardening School and West Dean College of Art and Conservation, and regularly writes for *Gardens Illustrated* and other publications, as well as delivering talks to gardening clubs and organisations such as Gardens Masterclass and The Society of Garden Designers.

Rosie taught horticulture for many years and works freelance, writing for publications including *Gardeners' World Magazine*. She holds the RHS Master of Horticulture and is a keen allotment gardener and a National Collection Coordinator for the conservation charity Plant Heritage. Rosie is currently chairing the Forum which is assessing hardy veronicas for the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM) at Wisley.

Some silly notices I have come across



Phonetic spelling, or a novel dish?



Outside a bar in Malta, this was meant as a joke.



Not photoshop fakery, these two were side by side outside a hotel entrance just either side of the drain pipe



Did no-one in the Nestlé design department actually look at this label before it was printed?

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 | David Bender | treasurer@amersham-gardening.org.uk |
| Visits Secretary | Liz Moulton | |
| Membership Sec | Annie Jardine | membership@amersham-gardening.org.uk |
| Talks Secretary | Julie Burton and Sue Edwards | 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.