



Newsletter December 2020

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Club Night on 7th December

Kew and Keukenhof, a Floral Extravaganza

This was the title of the talk given by Stuart Slocombe on Monday 7th December. It was ground-breaking for the club because it was the first one held via Zoom. 58 members were able to link up and enjoy a very uplifting evening! Stuart had visited these gardens during the Spring of 2018, firstly the orchid festival at Kew gardens, in the Princess of Wales Conservatory, then the bulb fiesta at the Keukenhof gardens in the Netherlands. An array of beautiful photographs that Stuart had taken of the dazzling blooms were a real feast for the eyes.

The theme for the Kew orchid festival in 2018 was 'Thailand' and the centrepiece was a floating Thai palace, spectacularly covered in bright blooms. An immersive tunnel adorned with Vanda orchids allowed visitors to see these large-flowered orchids and their long trailing air roots at close hand. There were many varieties to see which are relatively straightforward to grow at home but the Vandas are very particular. They do not grow in soil, needing sunlight for their nutrition but do require constant spraying to keep them moist.

There were tens of thousands of orchids of many different colours, except blue! This is the holy grail but so far the nearest colour developed to it is a lilacy purple.

Keukenhof gardens, situated about forty minutes northwest of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, hold an annual festival showcasing the country's bulb production. Each year, there is a different theme and in 2018 this was 'the Romance of Flowers'. Seven million bulbs are planted afresh annually in imaginative and impressive displays spread over 80 acres. The gardens are only open for eight to nine weeks, whilst the displays are at their best.

The gardens are beautifully laid out with permanent plantings of a mixture of evergreen, deciduous and spring blossoming trees and shrubs which enhance the bulb plantings. An example is this river of muscari, set of with groups of orange and yellow tulips. All the flowers in the festival are of perfect quality.

Continued

Things to note

1. Our next meeting is scheduled for 4th January and will be held over Zoom. Watch out for the emails and see in your newsletter for more details.
2. Trading Hut –now closed for the Winter.
3. Show other members something XMAS related. See in newsletter for more details.
4. Free membership next year.). See in newsletter for more details.
5. Member's articles. See in newsletter for more details.
6. January photographic competition See in newsletter for more details.



Adjacent to the gardens are bulb fields where serried ranks of vast numbers of bulbs of the same variety make an equally impressive display. A windmill in the gardens where visitors can view the bulb fields from a viewing platform provides a bird's-eye view. Alternatively, the fields can be viewed from a canal boat where you can see the flowers are at eye-level.

Some tips from Stuart:

- *They went in week four of April and the tulips were at their best, although optimum times will vary from year to year.*
- *To have the maximum visiting time, go independently, although you can take a tour.*
- *Book ahead*
- *Get there early.*
- *A two-day visit will do the gardens justice and give you time to explore some of the outer areas in quieter woodland areas which are just as impressive.*
- *There is a flower-arranging area.*
- *If you see a flower you like, you can order bulbs from the shop.*

Julia Goodall

Article from a member: Kriss Turner & Helen Marengo

Sunflowers in lockdown

Having become joint Social /Fundraising secretaries in April for an organisation called Tangent, Helen Marengo and I tried to identify a range of activities during lockdown and the following months. One idea was to sell small sunflower plants at £1 each and to track their growth through the months. I had already grown some plants, but not enough to make a good profit and, at that stage, garden centres were closed. I sourced some on the internet although delivery took three weeks and so I took the time to prepare individual pots and draft an email, saying:

“Sunflowers have a way of making people smile, especially on a wet day like today. We hope that you will join us in growing giant sunflowers this year whilst fundraising for Thames Hospice. You can do so for the pure joy of seeing them reach for the sky or to join in our challenge.....”etc

The seeds finally arrived in May and I planted out 180 seeds. The following morning, Victor Meldrew’s voice could be heard coming from my mouth. “I don’t believe it!” Mice had dug up and taken every single seed. I had grown many other seeds in the greenhouse but there was something about these that made them irresistible to the rodents who had not shown themselves up to that point. I was not giving up. This time, the seeds, only took a fortnight to arrive and I started again using all sorts of protection against rodents.

Unfortunately, I could not anticipate the neighbours tree dropping a branch through the greenhouse roof, so a number of survivors were then decapitated. This really sets the scene for the story of our sunflowers. We sold them all to Tangent members, family and friends and immediately began receiving stories of their demise. Pet rabbits, wild deer, pigeons, drought, overwatering: you name it, we heard it. However, we had made £180 for Thames Valley Hospice and so we were happy to counsel our gardeners.

Each month, at our Tangent Zoom meeting we announced the top three heights. It was quite amazing that after a month we had the tallest sunflower at 177cm, however, we think that this one had received very special treatment in its early days as its lead was not maintained. In the second month, another flower reached 247cm and we thought that was probably going to be the tallest as the flowers were opening earlier than usual due to weather conditions.

However, little did we know that one friend had not been picking up her emails but had watered her three sunflowers (one for each grandchild) twice a day. In the final month, the tallest one reached a magnificent 457cm. She had to cut it down to measure it but still has some of the seed head on the bird table. She did receive a small prize; which she gave to the grandson whose flower it was.

Most Tangent members were happy to just watch the plants grow and their spirits were lifted by the beautiful flowers. This is one of many fundraising activities that the club have generously engaged in and we have now raised more than £2000 since April.

Kriss Turner & Helen Marengo

Free membership next year

Given these exceptional circumstances, the committee have agreed that membership to the club, next year, will be FREE. We committee appreciate the support members have shown throughout 2020. You have continued:

1. to purchase your supplies from the Trading Hut (over 60% of members used hut) and most paying direct to the club's bank account,
2. enter and vote in the 'Virtual Shows'
3. use the Tool Sharpening service
4. and paid your subs for 2020

Your constant support has given the committee the drive to continue their work.

TOOL SHARPENING

In early November just before the last lockdown, the trading hut held a successful and socially-distanced tool sharpening event. Chairman Dick Hawes and club member Peter North manned the grinders for a busy morning and for a small fee towards club funds, serviced and sharpened secateurs, loppers, cutters, spades etc.



In fact anything that could be sharpened, they did it! I must admit that since my secateurs have been sharpened, the job of pruning is so much easier.

Another tool sharpening event is planned for the spring which will be open to anyone, not just club members, so spread the word. The date will be announced nearer the time. Dick and Peter also offer this service to other gardening clubs, so if you know of any who would be interested, please get in touch with Dick.

Julia Goodall (Publicity Secretary)



Topical Tip – December

During the past week or two, I have taken advantage of the few fine days we have had by collecting fallen leaves and putting them in old compost bags to provide next year's leaf mould.

I ignore the oak leaves as they seem to take forever to decompose. Instead, I have lots of birch leaves and plenty of Robinia (false acacia) leaves. After putting them in the plastic bag, I tie the top and then make several holes in the side of the bag with a fork to encourage decomposition.

After 8-10 months the leaf mould is ready for use as a soil improver and it is particularly useful for mulching. Furthermore, it is free!

Finally, it has been a very difficult year for so many people – especially those of you who live on their own. I have a friend who is fond of quoting the aphorism that 'in the darkest part of the night, there is always promise of daylight.'

Indeed, with the arrival of the vaccine there is indeed light on the horizon. Let us hope that 2021 will be a better year for everybody and that we will all be able to meet and enjoy our monthly meetings together once again.

Ian Gillott (Deputy Chairman)

Members' Articles

Why not try your hand at an article for the newsletter.

We have had two great articles from members so far which demonstrates there are members chomping at the bit to be authors. It can be serious, funny or a combination. Share your tricks in gardening; your special way of dealing with garden problems. Just email it to us and we will do the rest.

XMAS Celebration

Now we are into the last month of the year, we thought it might be nice for members to show to the rest of the club "Something created for XMAS".

It might be a flowering plant; floral art; table decoration; something made from wood, wool, metal or fabric; a present, a card or even something baked. In fact anything qualifies.

We will put all your pictures on the web so everyone can enjoy them.

It will not be a competition, just a good bit of fun.

If you want to say anything about them, we will include it with the picture. If you do not want your name included, just say so when you send the picture.

You can send pictures from now up to 22nd December. Just send them to

californiagardenersclub@gmail.com

Hope you can take part and help to cheer us all up at the end of this testing year.

January Photo competition

January's table competition has been based on a photograph. To keep this going, we thought we might run a "virtual" table competition. So get your cameras out and start clicking. The subject is "Wildlife in the garden". What!!, you might say. I do not have wildlife in my garden. Oh yes you do, we say. Wildlife includes: worms, spiders, mice, birds, etc. etc.

It does not include your partner hanging out the washing.

Send your entries in on the 3rd January to midnight Wednesday 6th.

Entries will then be judged on the 7th and the winner announced on the 8th.

Entries should be sent to the club's email address

californiagardenersclub@gmail.com

Monthly talks

This is a call to all members: if you have any ideas/requests for the subjects of the monthly talks, please let us know. Either reply to this email or give Hermione a ring (number below).

Chairman: Dick Hawes 0118 979 3730	Hon. Treasurer: Peter Radband 07976 640989	Programmes: Hermione Lewis 0118 989 1671	Committee Member: Jayne Male 07967639808
Deputy Chairman: Ian Gillott 0118 9892649	Trading Hut: Stuart Slocombe 0118 9734531	Membership: Kerry Eaton 07736 022361	Co-opted Member: Marise Radband 01344 774310
Hon. Secretary: Chris Spinks 0118 978 1432	Show Secretary: Peter Turner 0118 9730424	Publicity: Julia Goodall 07814 747198	Show Secretaries: Daryl & Katie Phillips