

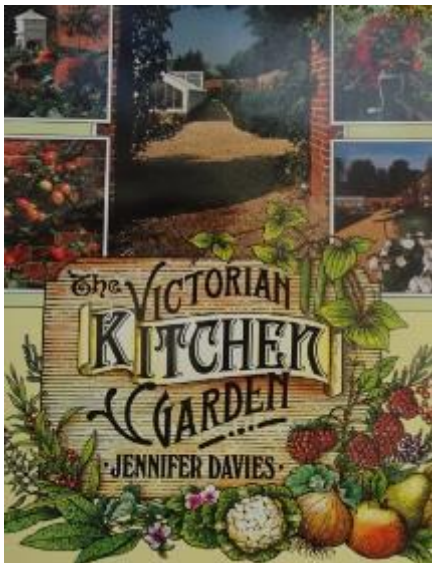


California Gardeners' Club

Newsletter June 2020

www.californiagardenersclub.co.uk

In last month's newsletter I discussed the circumstances in which I first met Harry Dodson. Harry featured in the BBC programme 'The Victorian Kitchen Garden.' In preparation for the programme, the garden was restored to somewhere near its former glory.



Harry had been appointed Head gardener at Chiltern Foliat Estate in 1947 and had brought with him many of the horticultural practices he had learned during a long career in some of the nation's top gardens before arriving at his new employment.

During the 70's and 80's, I never missed the opportunity of visiting the walled garden at Chilton Foliat. It was with Harry that I learned about blanching seakale, establishing a hotbed of stable manure in order to raise early salad crops and cultivating cardoons. One of his specialties

was growing orchids. On several occasions, he would cut a couple of stems, tie them with raffia and say 'take these home to your wife.'

When the BBC decided to help in restoring the garden, Harry was in his mid 60's. He was granted just one assistant to help him bring the Victorian garden back to life. In the early 50's he had a staff of twelve!

One of the biggest challenges in making the exercise authentic was tracing some of the varieties of vegetables which would have been grown in Victorian times. Many had disappeared from the seed catalogues.

Looking back on my time with Harry, it is easy to give the impression that he was a little bit of a 'horticultural anachronism'. Nothing could be further from the truth. He embraced the emerging F₁ hybrids and readily accepted that the new chemistry for controlling diseases on his top fruit provided vast improvements to fruit quality over the existing traditional materials such as lime sulphur.

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Things to remember

1. Our next meeting scheduled for the 6th July **is cancelled.**
2. **Trading Hut** – is now opening on a Sunday under controlled conditions. Watch out for the weekly emails.
3. **Rose & Sweet Pea competition** – See in this newsletter details about a fun competition
4. Why not **renew electronically?** See newsletter for details.
5. **Hope everyone is safe and well. However, if you know of a club member who is lonely or needs help, please let us know and we will be happy to contact them.**

When he finally retired, the owner of the Estate granted Harry the gift of the garden for his lifetime.

The book, "The Victorian Kitchen Garden," tells the story of the BBC restoration. It is written by Jennifer Davies and is widely available in second-hand editions at Amazon and World Books.

Ian Gillott,
Deputy Chairman

Rose & Sweet Pea competition

Now something everyone can have a go at and enjoy.

As you may recall, at the July meetings we have a Rose & Sweet Pea competition. As a result of all those wonderful pictures of your gardens earlier on in the lock-down, we thought it would be lovely to run the annual July Rose & Sweet Pea competition in a similar way.

You have a month in which to get the best photo you can of your rose and/or your display of Sweet Peas. So here is how it will work:

1. Send your photos to the club's email address californiagardenersclub@gmail.com, one photo of a single rose and/or of your sweet pea display before 15:00 on Sunday 5th July.
2. We will give you an entry number that is yours for the rose and/or the sweet pea categories and will appear against your photograph. One entry in each category per member.
3. We will put your photo(s) (rose named if possible but not essential), with your entry number, on our website.
4. You can ask for your photo to be replaced by another of your pictures at any time up to 15:00 on Sunday 5th July. Just quote your entry number.

On the judging day (which will be 6th July), you will be invited to look at the pictures on the website. Decide which you think is the best rose and best sweet pea noting their entry numbers.

Then email californiagardenersclub@gmail.com with those two entry numbers you think are the best entry in each section. The winners (plus runner ups) will be announced the following day for both categories.

Tomorrow, you will receive an email which will give you some guidance on how to take a good picture of flowers. The author of the guide is a member of our club and judges the photographic class in our shows. I have tried a couple of his tips and they really work. They were easy to do as well.

Have a go, have fun and enjoy the competition.

Dick
Chairman

Topical Tip – May 2020

Because of the exceptionally mild winter, aphid numbers (greenfly, blackfly etc.) are expected to be high this summer.

As many of you are aware, aphids are parthenogenetic, that is, the female does not require the services of a male to breed. (Not much fun if you are a male aphid!). Because they breed at a truly phenomenal rate, the best way to ensure aphids do not damage plants is to control them early.



A spray of SB Invigorator is a good way to ensure early control. This is a much more environmentally kind material than some of the inorganic materials frequently sold to control aphids. Many members of our feathered friends feed on these aphids so using a product which is relatively safe to wildlife is sensible.

It is worth remembering that as well as removing the sap from plants, aphids are responsible for infecting plants with a number of viruses (Hopefully not Covid-19).

Ian Gillott,
Deputy Chairman

Slug-it-to-me

Slugs have been a particular bane of my life since I got my allotment a few years ago. I am going to start with a story that comes with a health warning and those of you with a nervous disposition may want to look away now. After a year of unsuccessfully trying various methods to protect my carefully nurtured crops from being ravaged, I became desperate. My daughter-in-law was helping me on my plot one day, when I deployed my then favourite method of slug control. This involved gathering up any that I found, putting them on a hard surface and then bashing them hard with a lump of wood – both effective and therapeutic as bits went flying off in all directions. I looked up and saw that she had turned green. As she tried not to look at me she said ‘ Julia you have slug body parts on your face and a very large slug head on your cheek!’ Luckily, despite that, we are still very good friends. I realised then that there must be a better way of dealing with slugs but more on that later.

A slug is a gastropod mollusc that evolved from snails. It has no shell, a very reduced shell or an internal shell, such as sea slugs. The word gastropod comes from the greek gaster, meaning stomach and pod meaning foot. The flat bottom of the slug is called the ‘foot.’ So slugs are basically a mobile stomach which you might feel accurately sums them up.

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There are about 40 slug species found in the UK but only a small number of these are considered pest species. It has been estimated, however that they cause about £8 million in damage to agricultural crops each year.

A slug moves by rhythmic waves of muscular contractions on the underside of its foot. It simultaneously secretes a layer of mucus that it travels on which helps to prevent damage to the foot tissues, particularly as it travels over rough surfaces. For this reason, barrier controls do not always work. This mucus trail is also used as a navigation system, as slugs will follow their mucus trail to find their way back to their feeding sites or shelter.

Slugs' bodies are mostly made up of water and can desiccate easily in dry conditions. They need to generate protective mucus over their bodies in order to survive and this is why they seek out damp places to hide in order to retain body moisture. Metaldehyde bait pellets exploit their need to remain moist by desiccating them. These are extensively used in agriculture and can be used in gardens but are currently under review for a renewed ban by the UK government, due to their detrimental effect on wildlife.



You might find slug eggs when working on your garden or allotment. After mating, they lay about 30 small white eggs in a hole in the ground or beneath the cover of an object such as a log or leaves. Working over your soil in the winter exposes the eggs for birds.

Two retractable pairs of tentacles are positioned on the head. The upper pair are the optical tentacles and are also used for smell. The lower pair are used for feeling and tasting.

The mouth parts are below the tentacles and have a rasping surface which makes them excellent chompers. They are mostly generalist herbivores and will eat:

- Leaves
- Flowers
- Fruits
- Mushrooms
- Lichens
- Decaying plant material

As well as herbivores, the UK is also home to a number of carnivorous slug species, some of which eat carrion and some actively hunt other slugs and snails. These tend to be the larger ones. Some slugs will live in compost heaps and help with the decomposition process as they eat the decaying matter. Most slugs are generalists, eating a broad spectrum of organic matter and they do play an important part in the ecosystem.

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Leopard slugs (*Limax maximus*) with their distinctive patterns of spots and stripes, are gardeners' friends. It is true that they do like a nibble of our plants but they eat other detrimental slugs and their eggs, as well as decaying plant matter, so overall they are a beneficial presence in our gardens.

Picture by Michal Mañas - Own work, CC BY 2.5,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7984616>

In fact, most slugs are harmless but a few are a serious pest to agriculture and horticulture. The grey field slug (*Deroceras reticulatum*) is the most commonly cited pest species in the UK and one of the most serious global plant pests.



Grey field slug

They can reach huge numbers on cultivated land, causing huge problems for commercial growers. Confusingly, their colour can range from bright white to almost entirely black but they can be identified by their milky mucus and a blotchy appearance.

More on slugs in the next newsletter, including ways we can try to get rid of them.

Good luck and happy gardening!

Julia

Membership

Did you know you can renew electronically?

Just transfer your £5 (£10 for a couple) to the clubs account giving your surname and initials as the reference. Your membership card will then be waiting for you at the next meeting.

Clubs account number is – 71301608 & sort code – 404709

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
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	Ass Show Secretaries: Daryl & Katie Phillips