



Image courtesy of www.lovepotatoes.co.uk

**JANUARY /
FEBRUARY 2014
ISSUE**

**WHAT'S
INSIDE**

Our Potato Weekend, Hints & Tips for Jan/Feb,
Weather Lore, Garden Visits to Look forward to,
Apple Book Review, Capturing Your Best Photos,
Success with Yacons, and much more...

It's blowin' a gale as I write this and that perhaps sums up the weather of late - wet, windy and, well, remarkably mild. Not your "normal" winter, but then we are getting used to extremes of this mish-mash of metrological tomfoolery. Our gardens, however, simply take it in their stride, and so we have to as well, which makes gardening, whether you simply potter or plan to the last detail, a much more interesting experience for us all.

Our connection with soil, whether practical or therapeutic, is something we should all get involved in. Simply sowing a few seeds, planting the odd potato tuber, growing something new for the first time (thanks to James Wong!) or taking a cutting from your favourite fuchsia, connects us instantly with nature. Schools are nurturing this experience widely and we know from talking to pupils and teachers the rich experience it brings along the way. So, as we begin the New Year, can we all make one simple resolution, to work the soil (or compost) this year in some way and, more importantly, share your experience with others? You'll feel a much better for that connection we promise.

Finally, be happy, healthy and productive in 2014 from all of us at the Garden Centre.



ONE POTATO, TWO POTATO, THREE POTATO.....!



"One potato, two potato, three potato, four, five potato, six potato, seven potato, more!"

We are looking forward to welcoming you to our Spud-tastic Potato Weekend (Saturday 8th & Sunday 9th February, 10am-4pm). The event is the natural kick-start to the new Grow Your Own season and we want to give you the best advice to help point you in the right direction to full productivity.

We have a great line-up of special guests including, Colin Randel (pictured left), the top potato guru from Thompson & Morgan Seeds and Jason Breed, vegetable expert from Kings Seeds together with Members of The National Vegetable Society (Buckinghamshire Branch). Also joining us will be Dave Short, Aylesbury Vale Barn Owl Project Officer, Fritz De Zutter from Moulton College demonstrating fruit

tree grafting with an opportunity to have a go yourself, Citizens Advice Bureau, Medical Detection Dogs and Breast Cancer Care, our chosen charity for 2014. Children's entertainment: Ever-popular Phil with his Magic and Balloon Sculpture and Lin, facepainting artist extraordinaire. There will be a number of our Farmers' Market stallholders attending the weekend too! Plus, the launch of our popular Schools' Challenge for 2014.

10 TASKS FOR JANUARY / FEBRUARY

CUT-BACKS Prune your summer-flowering Clematis before active growth begins. Evergreen Clematis should be pruned in the spring directly after flowering. Trim deciduous hedges before the birds start nesting. Cut back the old foliage from deciduous ornamental grasses before growth begins in earnest. They can be cut back to within 2cm (3/4in) off the ground. Take care not to cut into any emerging new growth.



ACT NOW Any jobs that do not require cementing or painting, such as building or knocking down old sheds, putting up a fence, laying out gravel paths (rolling out landscape fabric as part of the task, see picture) or creating a terrace or making a rock garden, are best carried out now, while the soil is workable and all the plants are fully dormant.

NEED A TREE? This is a last call reminder for those customers looking for larger girth bare-rooted / ball-rooted trees (pictured) from our UK grower who can supply most sizes; however,

time is running out as the season comes to the end in March. Remember non-containerised trees are generally better value as they can be appreciably cheaper to buy than the potted equivalent. A good example is the white-stemmed Birch, *Betula utilis jacquemontii*, which in a 12-litre pot and standing 1.8m tall would cost £39.99. Compare this to a ball-rooted 175/200cm tall tree which would cost £15.99, better value tree for less money. A larger 8/10cm girth bare-root tree at 2.5-3m tall with a clear stem of 175/200cm would cost £64.99. The equivalent in a pot would be around £160! Clearly, larger plants do cost more; however some savvy planning can save you pounds in the long run. Come and talk to the Team in the Plant Info Office for the best options and prices.



ESSENTIAL CHECKS If you have planted any trees or shrubs during the winter months check that they haven't been lifted by frost. Once lifted, they can rock in the wind and their roots will be slower to get established. Re-firm the plants by pressing down on the surrounding soil with your feet. You may also need to stake any tall or exposed plants to prevent further wind rock.



PROTECTION As December was been comparatively mild, you may have noticed a number of bulbs got the foolish idea that spring was near. Probably not a good idea since more cold and unpredictable weather is almost sure to arrive. You can add a little compost and a thick layer of mulch to protect the tender new growth. In the event of snow, be sure to shake or brush off the white stuff from the branches

of your evergreens and shrubs. The light fluffy snow poses no real threat, but if it should become deep, wet and frozen, the weight dramatically increases. Branches are more brittle when the plants are dormant, and the weight of the snow may snap them off. If you have a conifer hedge it is a good idea to take a long brush to tap the snow off – but make sure you don't get covered.

LAWN If, towards the end of February, the weather turns dry and mild, the lawn is firm and the grass is starting to look a little shaggy, give it a very gentle mow with the blades on the highest setting but don't be tempted if conditions are wet or frosty!



However, moss will start growing on lawns before the grass, so now is the time to start killing it with lawn sand (active ingredient Ferrous sulphate).



EARLY RISERS Start Begonia tubers into growth by placing them in small pots or trays of compost in a frost-free greenhouse or a warm, well-lit windowsill indoors. Position the Begonia tubers just below the soil surface with the indented side facing upwards. Once they've put on a good amount of growth and all risk of frost has passed they can be planted out into their final positions.

TIME TO SOW? The start of the year is an ideal opportunity to begin planning what you want from your garden over the coming months. If you are growing vegetables, now is the time to choose the varieties you want to grow, including Seed Potatoes, which are now available from the Shop. Our vegetable plug plants are available from early March onwards, but if facilities are available you can start on some earlier sowings yourself. You can get sowing in February the likes of Beetroot, Broad Beans, Carrots, Summer and Autumn Cabbages, Spring Onions, Onions, Leeks, Kales, Peas and Radish. If you have some heat available under glass, sow Celeriac, Celery, Globe Artichokes, Broccoli, Oriental vegetables suitable for cut-and-come again, Sweet and Chilli Peppers, Rocket and Tomatoes.



PRODUCTIVITY Check stored fruit and vegetables and remove any damaged or mouldy produce to avoid these spoiling the rest. Incidentally if you have some apples which are going too soft to eat or are beginning to rot, throw these out onto your lawn and you will have the pleasure of watching the blackbird or other birds feast on these with obvious pleasure. Certified seed potatoes are available now from the Garden Centre. Chit them (allow shoots to form) by placing them in a light, cool, frost-free place. If you haven't already done so, netting over the brassicas which may have been weakened by snow, will deter ravenous birds.



Ideally, try and get your bare-rooted raspberries planted by late February. Prune the canes of summer-fruited varieties to 25cm (10in) after planting, and autumn-fruited varieties such as 'Autumn Bliss' down to ground level. If the weather is kind, apply some Blood, Fish and Bone along the raspberry rows followed by a generous organic mulch of compost or well-rotted manure.



SEED SOWING TIPS It may sound obvious, but do check the instructions on the variety packet before you sow! Timings, sowing depths, minimum temperature requirements and any specific guidelines need to be adhered to. As gardeners it's often best to work with the weather, especially for those early outdoor sowings. You can certainly help the soil by

covering it using black plastic sheeting or cloches. As well as drying the soil out you'll also warm it up too, thus helping the slow-to-germinate seeds along the way later. If sowing indoors and using a windowsill select a well-lit but warm location. Starting off seed too early is never a good idea – plants get wasted and if there isn't sufficient "growing on space" plants soon become leggy.

Hold back until you are prepared to handle the volume of plants. Plants essentially need light, space and moisture. When making earlier sowings in trays or pots, choose a multi-purpose compost and add some Perlite or Vermiculite, around 10-15%, to help promote better and more uniform germination. If you opt for propagation lids and plastic domes, do remove any condensation which forms once a day. If left, this can add too much moisture to the compost and interfere with the seed germination process. Quite often adjusting the built-in vents can reduce excessive condensation which builds up naturally.

Many of our customers germinate seeds in the airing cupboard, and whip them out into the greenhouse/cool conservatory as soon as they come through. Many seeds don't need such high or constantly high temperatures once germinated - but they do need light once the seedlings have broken the surface of the compost.

As well as consulting for advice at the Garden Centre on raising plants from seed, it is well worth investing in a good reference book such as the *Royal Horticultural Society's Encyclopaedia of Gardening* (edited by Christopher Brickell and published by Dorling Kindersley) for all popular plants you are likely to come across. However, for vegetable growing we can recommend Alan Buckingham's *Allotment Month-By-Month* (Dorling Kindersley) or Dr D. G. Hessayon's *The Vegetable & Herb Expert* (Expert Books).

GO ON, TREAT YOUR PETS!



If you like to pamper your chinchillas, guinea pigs, rats, hamsters, ferrets, cats or dogs, then we have a foodie treat to suit, including a range of healthy baked bites. We also stock hedgehog, swan and duck food too! Please check them out on your next visit. Animal toy treats are also available in our Aquatic Department and by the looks of things, all to the complete satisfaction of Barton, our Medical Detection Dog, and probably thinking with that soulful expression; "Will there be any left for me?" You can keep up to date with Barton's progress and training at the following link:

<http://www.buckinghamgardencentre.co.uk/gardencentrenews.html>

OUR PLANTS OF THE MONTH



Check out our displays of bright and cheerful potted bulbs for January (pictured left the must-have Narcissi 'February Gold') followed by the wow factor provided by the enchanting Witch Hazels (pictured right Hamamelis 'Arnold Promise') in February.

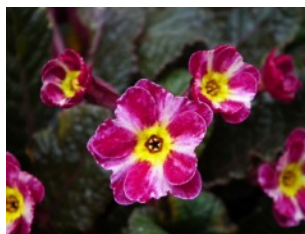


WHAT'S NEW IN-STORE



In January, come and browse amongst our range of potted spring bulbs in 9cm and one-litre pots as well as 6-Pack trays, including a range of special snowdrops.

In mid-February we are looking forward to receiving our young



bedding and baskets plug plants and this season they will be from a new grower. We will also have various special Primulas, including 'Zebra' (pictured top left), 'Castillion', 'Kennedy', 'Suzette' and new 'Dark Rosaleen' (pictured top right). We are also expecting a new range of one-litre alpines, £3.99 each or 3 for £10.00.

Elsewhere, the new Grow Your Own season begins with some interesting developments in the grafted Tomato department. We will be stocking the Suttons ever-popular range again this year, including the varieties 'Belriccio' (beefsteak), 'Cupido' (plum), 'Orangino' (orange) and 'Lizzano' (bush). Two new varieties have been added to the range - strawberry-shaped 'Tomatoberry' and cherry Tomato 'Juanita'. However, we will also be stocking limited quantities of popular varieties such as 'Supersweet', 'Shirley' and 'Sungold' as grafted plants too! This grower is also offering more Runner Bean varieties such as 'Painted Lady' and 'Scarlet Emperor'; Cucumber 'Telegraph' and the snack-sized cropper called 'Cucino' as well as Patio Potatoes and many new varieties of Chilli Peppers.

We will be stocking over 40 varieties of seed potatoes this season including the popular favourites such as 'Arran Pilot', 'International Kidney' and 'Rocket'. There will be a new first early variety, 'Ulster Sceptre' which is often referred to as a 'Cheshire Potato' because it is grown widely in that county and in the North West. It is oval to long in shape with white flesh and white skin. However, its high resistance to foliage blight, common scab and powdery scab is the main draw for the gardener.

YACONS: SUCCESS THEN A 'HAREY DISASTER'



In 2012 we grew for the first time some Ocas and then in the Jan/Feb 2013 Newsletter wrote about the results and how delicious we found them, so more were grown this year with equal success. This year in spring, Thompson and Morgan launched Yacon and we had these for sale. Naturally some of these were grown and what a success these have been as well.

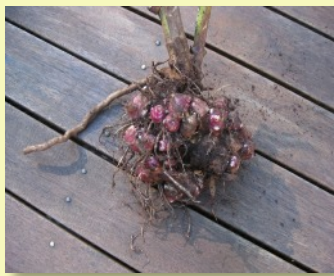
Personally I grew three plants from the 'buds' and these were started off in the greenhouse then planted out when danger of frost was over. They grew into most attractive plants some 4ft high and nearly as wide, with large greyish

leaves, and had I realized they would be so attractive, I would have dotted them into one of the borders in the ornamental garden rather than having them tucked into the corner of the vegetable garden.

They were left in until the frost had turned the leaves black, then lifted. This turned out to be a little more tricky than anticipated as the large edible tubers are very brittle and needed teasing out of my rather heavy soil. In the future they will definitely be in the flower borders as the soil is much lighter there. As you can see from the photo, they grew to a good size and each plant had a crop which would give us several meals.

After lifting came the exciting part – cooking and eating! They have proved to be very versatile. After scraping off the skin which can be a little bitter, they were used in a variety of ways – coarsely sliced and stir fried, finely sliced and eaten in salads, or cubed and tossed with the potatoes around the roast. In all cases they retained their crisp, moist texture with a slighted nutty, fresh flavour. A definite ‘thumbs-up’ new vegetable to grow.

They do need to be tossed in apple juice or lemon juice as soon as they are cut otherwise they turn a rather unattractive colour – greyish black! We also learned from Colin Randall of Thompson and Morgan, and he from Bob Sherman of Garden Organic, that if a perfect tuber is stored with other fruits for about two months it will turn blackish, shrivel and the skin will be leathery, looking quite revolting, but if then peeled the flesh inside is absolutely delicious. Something to try!



Unlike Dahlias where you propagate from the entire tuber, Yacon produce small offsets (sometimes called ‘pups’) which will eventually produce new plants the following season. You need to keep the ‘pups’ in a cool, dark place (covered in dry compost is best) and plant next season.

Having possibly got you thinking you must have a go at growing these next year this is where the ‘Harey Disaster’ must be told. Thompson and Morgan had their stock for propagation planted and they were growing well until the local population of Hares discovered their incredible sweet flavour and ate the entire crop! They are hoping to retrieve enough to grow them on for next year, so the very sad news is that there will be none for sale in 2014, but hopefully they will have them again in 2015.

BOOK REVIEW



The Apple Pruning Manual

by Roger Worraker and Malcolm Withnall

This new pruning manual by Roger Worraker and Malcolm Withnall is the first commercial manual published for over 50 years and it sets out to explain in detail the basic principles which are applicable to all growing systems, writes Pauline Brown.

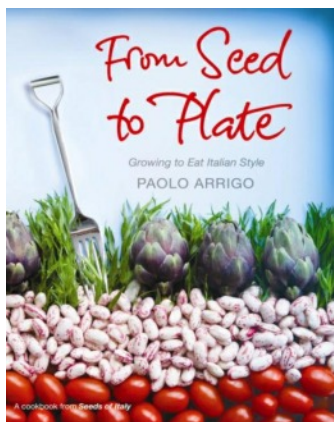
Although it addresses the needs of both the amateur and professional growers it does concentrate a little more on orchard growing methods, but these, of course, can give useful hints and knowledge to the amateur who is only growing one or two trees in their garden. It is a very well

written manual with masses of details of different principles which need applying to trees with different habits, and if you happened to want to grow one of the varieties grown commercially in this country it would be a real gem.

For the complete amateur who has never planted a tree before the book is serious reading, giving all the terminology used when tending apple trees. However, there are many good line drawings so everything makes sense. It also includes a chapter on the pruning of pear trees which could be an added bonus.

Although a small book it is absolutely packed with information and with the price of £10 plus postage and packing it is good value, but this is possibly as it has been sponsored by Sainsbury's. We have a copy of the book in the Plant Information Office if you would like to have a quick look at it. The ISBN is 978-0-9531850-1-6. We do have order forms available in the Plant Information Office or the e-mail address of the publishers is mewithnall@gmail.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

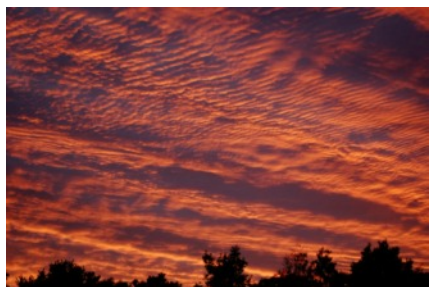


Our Farmers' Market recommences on Thursday 13th March from 10am until 2pm. We do hope you can come along and support the local traders this season. For further details and a list of stallholders, check out our Facebook page at:
[http:// www.facebook.com/BuckinghamNurseries](http://www.facebook.com/BuckinghamNurseries)

Our Gardening Talks season resumes on Wednesday 12th March with Paolo Arrigo from Seeds of Italy's talk on 'From Seed to Plate'. The Talk takes place in the Talks Room within the Restaurant from 4:30pm and lasts approx 60 mins with time for questions. To book, please contact the Customer Service Desk. Entry is free to Garden Centre Card Discount Card Holders, £3 for non-members, but there may be seats available on the day.

YOUR WEATHER SAYINGS

Last year we asked you to share your weather lore and sayings and we've a few gems to share with you. Maurice Angood writes: "Here are the two weather adages that I quote:-



"Mackerel sky and mare's tails make lofty ships to carry low sails."
(Referring to cloud formations, pictured)

"Ice in November to bear a duck, nothing after but slush and muck."

Tim Lever from Beachampton, but formerly farmed over in Lillingstone Lovell for over 30 years, has a few classics. Tim recalls: "One of my neighbours now long gone, used to give one a knowing look and say:

Oh Ah, 'tis a Tuesday moon.

This phenomenon appeared to guarantee almost anything from dust devils to floods."

However, Tim's favourites is the same as Maurice's and may ring true to many of us:

*If November ice will bear a duck, The rest of the
winter will be slush and muck*

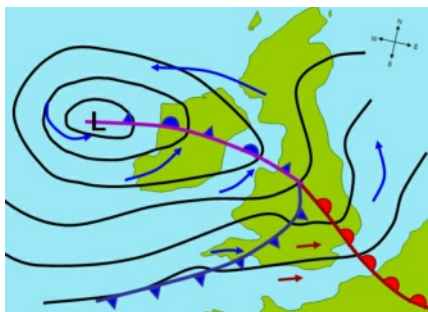
Rain before seven, Dry before eleven.

There was another saying which foretold what would follow:

Two full moons in May

perhaps "rain for a year and a day"?

Finally, Tim suggested we all could create our own weather lore sayings, and he gave us this one to get the ball rolling. If you have your own, please let us know. E-mail: **chris@hedging.co.uk**



*Cyclones at dawn, helluva storm,
Cyclones at lunch, you'll fall with a crunch,
Cyclones at tea, high time to flee,
Cyclones at night, the end of your fight!*

PICTURE THIS

It's never been easier to capture your garden in megapixels, but what is the best way of sharing your images, asks Trevor Bradley, a keen photographer from our IT department.

"Christmas is over then. What did you get? I bet in some shape or form some of you got a new camera. As well as expensive DSLRs and not so expensive compact cameras, these days phones are cameras. Or are cameras phones? It can be hard to tell. You may have seen (or even received yourself!) a phone manufactured by Nokia that has a 41 megapixels. Samsung manufacture a camera specifically marketed along the lines of "it can be a phone too". It looks like a compact camera!

So why are we talking about cameras in a Garden Centre newsletter? Well for the simple reason these new breeds of 'cameras' give everyone the opportunity to take those 'right place, right time' photos without the fear of it being a photo of dreadful quality. I'm lucky to own a DSLR camera, but it is too big and bulky to take everywhere; I just take it when I know there will be an opportunity for a great shot - National Trust or RHS gardens for example. However, I always try to carry my compact camera wherever I go. If, by chance, I do not even have that then I am confident my smartphone will take a reasonable photo. So get snapping (if that is still a term relevant to the digital age!) You might be on a walk with the dog and see a rare wildflower or walking in the local wood when you suddenly see that perfect framed shot.



So, we challenge you, this year take your camera and get that perfect shot. It doesn't matter which season. They all have their photographic merits - Winter with its perfect morning light and crisp, blue skies; Spring with bulbs and early plants sprouting new life and emerging from the Winter months; Summer with palettes of wonderful colour, and Autumn too is beautiful as the trees change colour and actually gets my vote as the best season for photography. Send us in your pictures and we will include the best on our Facebook page and a special customer gallery on our website.

And where better than the Garden Centre to take some stunning photos? Don't feel embarrassed as we are happy for you snap away if there is a plant or flower you like.

One interesting photographic challenge is to take a view of your garden throughout the year. Start now if you can. Pick a spot and mark it in your garden. Take a picture looking at a specific spot that you will remember but encompasses a reasonable amount of your planting area. Then, on the same day every month, return to the spot and take that exact same frame. Try to keep the height, position and zoom the same - so a tripod or monopod is good for this. At the end of the year you will have a fascinating story board showing how your garden changes through the seasons. It doesn't even have to be your garden. Why not try the same thing at your favourite park or public garden. I will be doing this at the Garden Centre starting in January and will post the storyboards onto our website as they progress.



Finally, some advice I recently heard from the well known wildlife photographer Andy Rouse at a recent talk that I would like to pass on to you and urge you to follow. I think this bit of advice is a great idea and something we should all do. How many photos have you taken? 100s? 1000s? And where are they? Still on your camera or phone or on your computer's hard drive? Andy, at the end of his lecture, said he was going to show us his 'Top 10' favourite photos. He said every year he picks his 10 photos that he really likes - they will not be the most technically brilliant or the ones that have won competitions or been chosen for use in books. Instead, they were simply the ones which brought a smile to his face. They sure brought a smile to mine and everyone else in the audience! So, you ask, how does this apply to me? Well his

final piece of advice to everyone at the lecture was to pick your favourite 20 photos from all the photos you have taken throughout the year and make them into a photobook. Photobooks have come a long way in recent years. The books provide amazing quality and are relatively inexpensive. Keep the books proudly on your book shelf and when friends come around you do not all have to huddle around a PC or a small phone screen. Instead, reach for your photobook and show off your favourite images in glorious colour. Great advice."

NEW HORTICULTURE CENTRE OPENS



BGC's Chris Day attended the official opening of a new purpose-built Horticulture Centre last month at Milton Keynes College to represent the Garden Centre. The facilities are fantastic with raised beds, a huge walk-in shed and glasshouse together with plans for at least three gardens, including a sensory one. There was great passion and pride from the staff and students and for good reason. The Centre has been designed specifically for students with learning difficulties or other disabilities to give them the opportunity to gain qualifications in a different area, which up until now have not

been available within the Milton Keynes area.

We sincerely wish them well and we look forward to helping with this ongoing project in the future. The Mayor of Milton Keynes, Brian White, and gardening journalist, former editor of *Gardeners' World* magazine and broadcaster Adam Pasco gave a fitting and inspirational words on the importance of our connection with growing, nature as well as being able grow our own food by engaging and harnessing all the skills that go along with it. Core values to help encourage a greater understanding of horticulture, plus the opportunity at the College for everyone to share in its fruitful productivity!



STOP PRESS

25% Off Selected Ornamental Trees, 2 for £8 Hellebores (12cm pot), normally £4.99 each. Special prices on Magnolia soulangeana, 'Susan' and 'Stellata' (3-litre), usually £18.99 now £10.99 each and Prunus 'Kojou-no-mai', 3-litre standards usually £23.99 now £18.99 and 2-litre bush £12.99, now £8.99. All offers whilst stocks last.

Buckingham Nurseries & Garden Centre

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E-Mail: enquiries@hedging.co.uk, Web: www.buckinghamgardencentre.co.uk

Follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/BuckinghamNurseries

Winter Opening Times: Mon-Sat: 8:30am-5.30pm, Sun: 10am-4pm.

GARDEN TRIPS AND VISITS 2014

Would you like to join us on a garden visit or two this year? These are the garden trips planned:

- **Buckingham Palace House & Garden Tour** (September, exact date to be confirmed). Price £60.00, Garden Club Members £55.00.
- **Highgrove Estate** (Tetbury, Gloucestershire) Date and Price to be confirmed.
- **Hampton Court Palace, Maze & Gardens** (East Molesey, Surrey) early July, exact date to be confirmed. Price £50.00 and Garden Card Members £45.00.
- **Frogmore House & The Savill Garden** (Home Park, near Windsor Castle, Berkshire and Wick Lane, Englefield, Surrey) (August, exact date to be confirmed) Price £50.00, Garden Card Members £45.00.
- **Royal Horticultural Society Gardens at Wisley** (Woking, Surrey) (Early May, exact date to be confirmed) Price £43.00, Garden Card Members £38.00.



Maze at Hampton Court



Gardens at Buckingham Palace



Highgrove



Gardens at Frogmore



Gardens at Wisley

Please register your interest at the Customer Service Desk for our planned visits and the local drive-yourself-visits featured below. Exact dates will be confirmed later and in February for Highgrove when they are formally released.

Drive-yourself visits

We have two outstanding gardens of interest, literally on our doorstep, so to keep costs down we are proposing these are both self-drive visits, arranged directly with each of the gardens for you. You will need to book as usual and then we'll provide a map and info for the day. You can then make your own way there, meeting up as a group at a specified time. A member of the Garden Centre Team will be attending as your point of contact on both of the visits.

Steane Park Gardens on Thursday 29th May, arriving by 2pm. 12 miles from Garden Centre, Approx 25 minute drive. Admission and refreshment requests are required at booking. We'll provide a map etc at booking for customers to use to locate the gardens. Admission: £5.50 per person, which includes a guided tour of the gardens as well as a brief talk on the gardens' history, is included in the price. Refreshments (which must be confirmed at booking) are an extra £5 for Cream Tea or £2 for Tea/Coffee and Biscuits. Recommended!

Thenford Garden and Arboretum Approx 15 miles from Garden Centre, approx 25 minute drive. Lord Heseltine's estate is open on a number of dates; however we'd like to catch the autumn hues on Saturday 18th October. Cost: £12 per person. Admission is by ticket only which needs to be pre-paid at the Garden Centre. Customers will need to make their own way to venue. We'll provide a map etc at booking for customers to use.