

# Newsletter July 2009



## Geoff's Dream Gardens

When the late Geoff Hamilton created his gardens at Barnsdale, little did he know what a horticultural legacy he would leave behind. Yet, as you walk around the numerous gardens, you certainly sense that the wonderful spirit of Geoff lives on. The gardens he created in front of millions of viewers of *Gardeners' World* and his hugely popular spin-off series have matured and retain the flavour of his passion and thoughtfulness. They certainly are not a shrine to the two-day makeover, which dominated our TV screens a few years ago.

His son, Nick Hamilton together with his wife Sue, run Barnsdale as a burgeoning business, yet the gardens are evolving as they both inject the Hamilton feel to this major tourist attraction, set in the rural delight of Rutland, close to the famous Rutland Water.

Our visit, back in June, involved a group of 65 keen and enthused customers, a double decker coach and an appetite to learn more about this great garden. A maze of gardens, some 38 of them, weave up and down the rectangular plot covering 8 acres. Formal gardens, woodland walks, themed gardens, productive gardens and off the telly gardens, all kept you guessing what was around the next corner. Yes, I suspect we all got slightly lost, but did we care? It seemed the biggest concern was that you didn't want to miss a thing, as all the gardens held something special.



Barnsdale Gardens

Most famously his paradise gardens, cottage gardens and productive gardens turned out to be everyone's favourites, possibly because they have now 'grown up', and even so, looked far too small to be on the telly!

A few whinges, yes! The weather could have been kinder and some of the key spectacular looking plants were missing those all-important plant identification labels. I hear that people do take labels for mementos, hence the unnamed plants and puzzled looks! So inconsiderate don't you think! A few things were a tad overgrown and perhaps needed removing, but hey these gardens are real.

There were plenty of highlights. These gardens are not your pristine shop window-dressing of Chelsea or Hampton Court Palace Show, but rather living, working and breathing gardens, so in places they were a little rough around the edges, and this is why these gardens simply work. You can see the odd weed, the unplanned colour clashes (and there were a few) or the odd empty gap where something hadn't quite made it! These 'reality gardens' allow you to get a much wider understanding of so many garden styles, all in one place, allowing you to steal ideas and take them home to try yourself, and, most satisfying, you know they work!

The mixed borders emulate most people's gardens, working in conifers with perennials, shrubs and groundcover for a colourful and practical garden. This is no mean feat. I liked this style (it's called the Versailles Garden when you look at the garden plan) together with the Gentleman's Garden, Artisan's Garden, Stream and Bog Garden and the Rose Garden, all dreamy yet real and achievable, especially if you like a spot of DIY, one of Geoff's trademarks.

Quite often a garden is simply work in progress, it never stands still and is ever evolving. This ethos is alive and growing and is all set within the beech and yew hedges that sub-divide the destination gardener's retreat that is Barnsdale.

Our day finished with a slide presentation by Geoff's son Nick, who entertained us with 'Barnsdale: The Television Years', looking at how Geoff created the gardens for the small screen and developed his unique style of presentation. His practical hands-on experience, down-to-earth approach and desire to share his failures with his audience as well as his successes, combined with a gentle humour were some of the keys to his success. One thing which certainly came through was that he was a committed and early, informed advocate of the organic approach to gardening, helping to dispel the rather widely held belief that organic gardening was slightly odd and 'cranky.' How times have changed! 'A reassuring good visit' was the opinion echoed by a great many of you on our return, even though there were a few niggles about weeds in some gardens and the lack of identification labels – and I don't think nostalgia-loving gardens of such diversity come along too often. This is definitely a garden not to be missed.

Visit the Barnsdale Gardens website - [www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk](http://www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk)

### **We're all growing now!**

The BBC's Dig In (Grow Your Own Grub) campaign (giving away free seeds and offering practical veg growing advice) helping the UK's gardeners to 'Grow Your Own' has hit a snag in that its been too successful according to sources. It was launched back in March, and starter packs of seeds were sent out by the thousands. In fact too many people subscribed (it was free after all) and many didn't receive their seeds until May, rather late when you have tomatoes to sow! It's a shame too, that the BBC has left gardeners high and dry with depleted gardening coverage over the last month or so with no gardening through the Wimbledon fortnight – perhaps the BBC need to understand that gardening is a seasonal activity and you cannot start and stop it to make way for sports!



At the Garden Centre we have been aware of the upsurge in cropping plants over the past few years so it comes as no surprise that sales of veg plug plants and potted fruit are scaling new heights. You can buy mature veg now in bigger pots, tomatoes in fruit and lovely Basil Bowls at £3.99! If you have just started growing crops (you are most welcome and in good company), please do

ask for advice to keep you on track this season. What's crucial is keeping the productivity going, making sure gaps are filled with new plants such as leeks, Brussels sprouts and winter greens or a further sowing of salad seeds.

Our model vegetable plots (see picture) are now set up and this year we are highlighting the virtues of raised beds with a range of wooden products to suit all pockets - 1.8m x 0.9m £25.99; 1.2m x 1.2m £48.99 and 2.4m x 1.2m £82.99 - please do come and have a look: we've a herb display and potted fruit garden set up as well.

What is exciting as a result of the GYO frenzy is the number of new gardeners joining the fold. The good weather has been crucial in getting us out into our gardens (remember the last two summers?). The trick we gardeners need to perform and can, is to tame the garden and keep the work down to the minimum, yet still reap the rewards. How about trying these for starters...

...Plantings can be much easier to look after if you plan them carefully. Evergreens are generally easier to look after than deciduous plants (less pruning and sweeping up of leaves). Shrub borders and ground-covering perennials are the easiest options but it is vital that you choose plants that are appropriate for the location and soil conditions, so that they thrive when left largely to their own devices. To this end, you also need to choose plants that are not too invasive or too fast-growing ...

...You can turn a portion of your garden into either rough grass or a semi-wild area, which will not only benefit nature but will ease the work in a larger garden. If you have only a very small area, such as a patio, you will need to find ways to make container planting less time-consuming by choosing plants that require less watering, as watering containers can take a lot of time.

...Ask the right questions. When you visit us, do have a clear idea of what the problem is, as once we've understood the problem we'll be half way to solving it.

## **Make your garden a beeline**

There have been a number of newspaper stories circulating suggesting that gardeners and garden centres are not doing enough to help encourage and support the humble bumble bee. Here at Buckingham we've always stocked a wide and diverse ranges of plants: our Mixed Native Hedge line is a classic insect 'motel' for plenty of wildlife species. However, bees do require specific food plants.

So, to put the record straight, here's our round-up of 15 bee plants for establishing this season: -



**A Beekeeper's Garden pleased the crowds at this summer's RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show**

**Trees:** \* Betula (birch) \* Fagus (beech) \* Malus (crab apple) \* Quercus (oak) \* Sorbus aria (whitebeam)

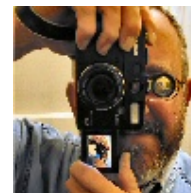
**Shrubs:** \* Ceanothus \* Cotoneaster \* Fuchsia \* Lavandula (Lavender) \* Potentilla

**Perennials:** \* Aster (Michaelmas Daisy) \* Digitalis (Foxglove) \* Penstemon \* Sedum \* Verbascum.

## **Pretty As A Picture**

**Book now for our Garden Talk Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> August 10.30am-12.30pm. Photographic workshop with John Credland**

Following John's talk last year we thought it would be useful to continue the story and look at the next stage of the photographic process – looking at what happens to your pictures once they are recorded to the memory card. John will show us how the process of digital management and manipulation can be carried out on a laptop and see the results printed.



Numbers are limited to just 20. The talk is free to Garden Club Members, £2 for non Garden Club members. At these talks and on outings, those attending are always given the opportunity to support Greenfinger's Charity, the charity Buckingham Garden Centre is supporting this year, as money donated to Greenfinger's is used to create magical gardens for children's hospices.

## **Garden Visit to Kathy Brown's Manor House Gardens**

Book now! Garden Visit to Kathy Brown's Manor House Gardens, Stevington, Bedfordshire on Wednesday September 9th.

It's a leisurely afternoon trip, departing from Buckingham Garden Centre at 12 noon and returning by around 5.30pm. The cost including coach, admission and guided tour (45 minutes) is £17 for Garden Club members or £20 for non-members. The gardens have good numbers of seats so you can bring along a picnic. Seats on the coach are limited so early booking is advisable.



**About the Manor Gardens:** A real gem of a garden - covering four and a half acres - best described as a modern country garden which includes formal borders, terrace and French parterres, a cottage garden, grasses and bamboo garden, edible flower garden, an orchard as well as a wonderful display of creative planted containers, plus much more. The garden also contains a wide range of works of art (echoing works by

Hepworth, Hokusai and Monet) within the conceptual art gardens. It is a truly inspirational garden that is teeming with ideas, colour, texture and passion. The owner of the Garden, Kathy Brown is a well-known gardening author and garden designer and she will be escorting the garden tours personally.

## Quackers at "Duckingham"!

Following the success of our Poultry Centre, that has been up and running for three months now, we have decided to branch out to include Ducks and other waterfowl.



The waterfowl enclosure comes complete with a shed, a large secure outdoor run and fully functioning pond that can be emptied daily to keep it clean. We thought that because of our location in the Vale of Aylesbury the first arrivals should be Aylesbury Ducks. We acquired thirteen three week old ducklings, and as weeks have gone by we have watched them grow at a staggering rate. There are now eight of the original ducklings left: - four boys and four girls. To go with the

ducklings we also have Indian Runner ducks, Call ducks and fully-grown Aylesburys. We welcome your suggestions and if there are any ducks that you would like to see please tell us.

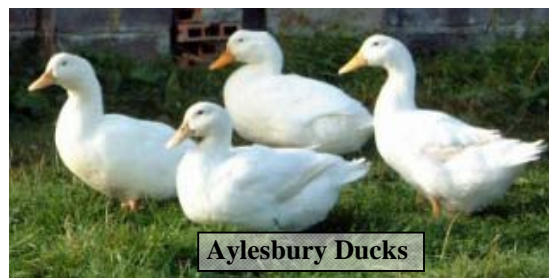
Almost all breeds of common domestic duck can trace their ancestry back to the wild Mallard duck. The exception to this rule is the Muscovy duck (picture right). These ducks like to roost in trees at night and were originally from Central and South America. Most domestic ducks were used to produce either meat or eggs but some breeds had uses other than these. Call ducks, for example, were used by hunters to lure in wild waterfowl. They have a particularly loud quack which can travel over long distances and this would entice the wild birds to the waiting gun. Indian Runner ducks have a very ancient past: hieroglyphics have been found depicting them in Javan temples. It was thought that they were used as a herding duck to control other livestock.

If you are tempted by the idea of keeping your own ducks firstly you will need to decide what you want from them. Ornamental fowl are many and varied. They range from the very popular Call duck, to the exotic looking Mandarin (picture right) and Carolina ducks. These birds are closer in ancestry to wild birds and their behaviour reflects this. Ornamental fowl generally have a seasonal laying cycle similar to wild birds, laying a clutch of eggs in the spring and then sitting on these eggs until they hatch. Due to this you cannot expect these birds to provide you with eggs to eat, they will be purely an interesting and ornamental addition to your garden.



If egg production is what you are looking for in your ducks there are quite a few to choose from. The Khaki Campbell, Indian Runner, Muscovy, Appleyard and the white commercial Aylesbury hybrid are all great layers. Duck eggs are richer and larger than hens' eggs which makes them wonderful for baking. These ducks generally do not lay in the coldest months but during spring, summer and early autumn can lay as many eggs as a hybrid hen.

Ducks for meat production may not be what you would like from your back garden ducks but there are some breeds that have been specifically bred for this purpose. The most famous of these is the Aylesbury duck which became popular due to its white feathers and large body weight. True Aylesburys are really rather rare today as commercial white feathered hybrids have overtaken this traditional breed in popularity. Other ducks bred for their meat are the Pekin duck, popular in Chinese cookery, and the French bred Rouen.



Now is a good time to talk through the practicalities of keeping ducks, be that in a paddock or just in the back garden. Any small garden (20ft x 20ft) can house a couple of small ducks, but for larger breeds of duck a larger space is required (36ft x 36ft).

Ducks are versatile and full of character. They are also rather partial to those common garden pests, slugs and snails. Ducks are generally disease resistant and easy to look after and long as you have the right amount of space and they have access to water of some form. The ideal situation for ducks would be a section of a stream or river where the water is constantly running thus, keeping the water fresh and clean. Obviously this is not going to be possible for the majority of owners, so alternative options are a solid children's paddling pool, an old bath can make a good pool or a solid formed pond liner, but whatever is used must be cleaned frequently and the water changed regularly.

Ducks can be quite talkative, especially the females, so consult any neighbours you may have before installing them in your garden. Some breeds of duck are noisier than others, the aptly named Call duck (picture right) is one of the noisiest ducks to keep but if you have understanding neighbours they can make the perfect pet duck for a small garden. Quieter breeds are the Muscovy and Khaki Campbell but if in doubt, and you do not require your ducks to lay eggs, you can keep a group of bachelor males together as the noise they produce is a lot more muted than the females.



Feeding your ducks is relatively easy if they are of a laying strain as chickens' layer pellets are a good complete diet. If you have opted for an ornamental breed they can have a diet of corn or wheat.

In about a fortnight's time there will be yet another arrival in the Poultry Centre and that will be Bantams. We do have a couple of Bantam cockerels in with the hens already, but we will be putting in some new runs which will be specially designed for the Bantams. An exciting time with all these new arrivals.

If you have not visited the Garden Centre recently then do come and see our new additions. If you are interested in keeping ducks or have any questions please feel free to contact me via email- [laura@buckingham-nurseries.co.uk](mailto:laura@buckingham-nurseries.co.uk) or pop in and see me.

Laura Donovan - Poultry Manager

## Looking for a new Job?

When you are visiting the Garden Centre does the thought ever go through your mind that it would be a pleasant place to work? Certainly the staff here enjoy their roles even if sometimes they are up to their ankles in mud or being soaked by the rain as they can always think about the pleasant sunny weather that we do sometimes have! We have vacancies occurring sporadically throughout the year and these are posted on our web site, [www.hedging.co.uk/jobs.html](http://www.hedging.co.uk/jobs.html) and also details will be on the notice board in the shop. We have two vacancies at the moment, one in the restaurant and the other in the shop, so if you think you may be interested do have a look for the details.

## Garden Furniture

With the better weather this year sales of garden furniture have been far higher but we do still have a good range of different styles to choose from so if you are considering treating your family to a new set it would be an idea to come and have a browse around. One traditional teak set which is very good value is the four seater 'Henley' set. This comprises of four foldable chairs with cushions, a round table, parasol and base, all for £499.99. If you need a larger set we have one only left of the same set but a six seater and this is at the bargain price of £799.99. This is because it is the show model but to get a reduction from £1,499 for the thought that the chairs have been sat on a few times before by our customers is truly worthwhile!

## 10 tasks for July

**NOW** is an ideal time to get out and about and visit gardens to gain inspiration for your own plot. Check out The National Gardens Scheme to discover local gardens which open to the public and raise money for charity. Pick up one of the free NGS booklets for the local area from the Customer Service Desk (Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Gardens still available plus a few only of Northamptonshire), or go on-line at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk) to find out more.

**PREVENTION** is often better than cure especially when it comes to the dreaded blight. You can spray tomatoes and potatoes with Dithane fungicide from this month onwards and repeat at 10-14 day intervals until late summer. Always follow the instructions carefully when handling chemicals. You can also register with a website called [www.Blightwatch.co.uk](http://www.Blightwatch.co.uk) and by providing your postcode you will receive updates as to where blight is being reported. It is a free service and especially useful if you have an allotment or are growing large amounts of susceptible crops in your garden.

**ENCOURAGE** a second flush on roses by pruning back stems as the flowers fade. Many modern English roses, Hybrid Tea and Cluster-Flowered (formerly known as floribunda) roses will repeat-bloom and give you another good display. Balance the prune back with a sprinkling of Toprose or Vitax Q4 to help encourage strong, healthy, flowering stems.

**KEEP** those beds, pots and plots cropping as vegetable lifting leaves valuable spaces to fill. There are plenty of crops you can continue to sow – lettuce, radish, spring onions, beetroot, spring cabbage and peas as well as establishing winter brassicas such as savoy cabbage as well as leeks. Make sure that weeds

are kept in check by running the Dutch hoe along the rows. Net fruit and brassicas from birds and cabbage white butterflies if caterpillars are a problem.

**DRY** weather this spring and summer means extra pressure on watering. Water your plants wisely: avoid the 'little and often routine' as this often does more harm than good. A thorough soaking once or twice a week is far better. Trap valuable moisture by applying a mulch at least 10cm deep to help reduce water evaporation from the soil. It's always best to water in the evening or at night to reduce the effect of scorching of foliage and flowers and to reduce water loss from evaporation. If you have an irrigation system, invest in a timer so you can water during the night.

**HELP** your plants along by giving them a feed to boost flowers and crops. Use a high potash feed such as Tomorite, Doff Tomato Feed or Phostrogen, and apply every 7-10 days around the plant. Never feed dry plants, always give them a good drink prior to feeding.

**CHECK** over variegated plants such as berberis, euonymus, elaeagnus, fuchsia, hebe and weigela and remove any stems that have reverted to green shoots. If left, these can seriously spoil the overall appearance of the plant. The same applies to developing 'suckers' at the base of ornamental trees, fruit trees and roses; these can quickly take hold if unchecked. Ideally pull or tug the sucker rather than cutting it with secateurs which often encourages the suckers to grow back with renewed vigour.

**GIVE** your houseplants an outdoor holiday over the next 2-3 months. Cooler conditions for palms, ficus and ferns will help encourage much stronger growth, and will also deter red spider mite which occurs in very dry indoor rooms. Give foliage plants some shade to stop the leaves from scorching and make sure the plants are kept moist and fed throughout their outdoor adventure!

**ASK** a neighbour or friend to do minimal maintenance on your garden whilst you are away on holiday. Even if you have a sprinkler, irrigation, pond pump and filter and timer, it's a good idea to have someone make sure it's all working correctly as well as lightly deadheading and trimming to keep your garden neat and tidy. Remember an unkempt garden and flyers showing in the letterbox are a sign that nobody's home... a sure signal to thieves.

**BULK** up popular shrubs such as buddleja, hebe, honeysuckle, hydrangea, hardy fuchsias, rosemary and spiraea by taking semi-ripe cuttings over the next few weeks. Cuttings need to be around 2-3in (5-8cm) long and 4-5 of them will comfortably fit around a 5in (13cm) pot. Use gritty compost: John Innes Seed and Cutting Compost, plus 10% horticultural grit is a good mix. Water the cuttings in. Cover the pot with a stout milky-white polythene bag which will support itself, or milky-white polythene supported with canes or wire. Remove for a short while daily to reduce condensation. Rooting should take 4-5 weeks, depending on the species. Pot the cuttings into 9cm pots until they are large enough to plant out in the garden.

## **BUCKINGHAM NURSERIES AND GARDEN CENTRE**

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### **SUMMER OPENING HOURS**

Monday-Saturday: 8:30am to 6.00pm, Sunday: 10:00am to 4:00pm (open 9:45am for viewing)