



NEWSLETTER MAY/JUNE 2013

MEET JAMES WONG Saturday 22nd June, 10am-4pm

New event 22nd & 23rd June "Our Summer Festival of Fun: Flowers, Foliage, Food and Family Fun"

Start spreadin' the news.... As part of "Our Summer Festival of Fun" we are delighted to announce James Wong, the Kew-trained botanist, BBC science presenter and obsessive foodie grower will be at the Garden Centre on Saturday 22nd June to promote his unique take on the future of Grow Your Own as well as a book signing and to chat to customers.

The line-up also includes... James Wong (Saturday only), Phil Banks (magician), Lin (face painter), local food stalls, Buckingham Brewery, Chrissie's Owls, Hold A Chick!, Weber Pizza Oven Demonstrations and tastings, local wines, Puzzle Centre Charity Raffle and much, much more...



WHAT'S INSIDE: Cooking with Dahlias?... Growing Oca and Yacóns... Chips from Potatoes... 5 Minutes with Jackie Nash... Bees Update... Growing in Eggshells... 10 Tips for May & June... 100th RHS Chelsea Flower Show... What's On... Garden Card Changes... James Wong's Homegrown Revolution Seeds.



Let's get cracking... You really couldn't make up the script for our current weather patterns. Nothing, but nothing causes us gardeners to feel deflated when the weather doesn't play ball. However, as we've seen in recent weeks, the soil has warmed, the sun has been shining and plants, seeds and bulbs are most definitely growing.

That's the thing, despite everything, nature fights back, and that's what we will be doing this season at the Garden Centre. Colouring your world, giving you the advice and confidence you need to grow great things as well as making it productive and relaxing, yet above everything else, enjoying it along the way! So, let's celebrate our gardens - whatever the weather - with our new event over the weekend of 22nd/23rd June.

As you will have read, top gardener and all round good egg James Wong will be joining us on the Saturday, so come along and say 'Hello'.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

Chris

Dahlias – a Multi-purpose plant!

After announcing our special guest in June, here's a relatively seamless link to our first article! If you refer to James Wong's fascinating book 'Homegrown Revolution' I quote "...Dahlias were originally brought to our shores as a prized edible crop, while runner beans were ironically first introduced as an ornamental plant.

It seems like we just got our horticultural wires crossed. Cultivated for hundreds of years by the Aztecs, and still popular in Mexico today, dahlia's sweet, starchy tubers are delicious as crisps, chips and roasties – and even in ice cream!"



James recommends growing the large flowering 'cactus' types, as these tend to produce the biggest tubers, with the added bonus of having enormous flowers. Sadly to get the biggest tubers you need to pick the flower buds off but, even failing to do this, you will still get cookable sized tubers.



Unfortunately they have been bred for the flowers rather than the flavour of the roots, so the flavour of different varieties is very much hit and miss. If you have a 'good' one the flavour is described as having a delicious subtle Jerusalem Artichoke sweetness with nuances of Celeriac and Carrot, however a 'bad' one may be rather watery and bland with a slight bitter edge!

If you have difficulty in storing your Dahlia tubers over winter at least here is a solution – don't try, just eat them and

hope they happen to be a variety with a good flavour. Of course, if you grow some Yacóns, which are closely related to the flowering Dahlias, you are sure to get some tasty results, but they will be lacking the stunning flowers. Both Yacóns and Dahlias are available from the Garden Centre at the moment.



If you happen to be a plumber you may know of the Dahlia's other historic use, as they were grown for their hollow woody stems which were dried, then used as water pipes or water conduits. If only they had known, or perhaps they did, they could also enjoy the flowers and eat the tubers – a truly multi-use plant!

Getting going with Oca

Last year at our Potato Weekend we offered for sale for the first time Oca (*Oxalis tuberosa*), having been assured by Thompson & Morgan that they would be a great success. We grew them ourselves in many different conditions, and possibly because of the atrocious growing conditions last year, the most prolific crop was obtained from one grown in a large pot. We all agreed that they were delicious, very different from any other tuber we had grown, and well worth continuing to sell and grow.

Oca, although of the Oxalis family does not spread, but it is quite attractive so can be grown in ornamental pots or even in a flower bed if you do not have room in the vegetable plot. For optimum production of tubers, the plants, if put in the ground, should be planted 90cm (36in) apart. Full growing instructions are available or will be sent with the tubers, but the only thing to bear in mind is that they prefer a well-drained soil and need to be kept well watered from September onwards when the tubers start to swell.

When you do get to eat the tubers, they can be eaten raw in salads as can some of the leaves during the growing season, or they can be boiled, baked, grilled or even fried. So if you do not know this vegetable we would suggest you give them a try. We certainly will be growing a larger number this year as we know we will enjoy them!

Oca tubers are available for sale in the Garden Centre, or can be despatched by Mail Order and at a cost of £4.99 for five. You'll need to be quick as stock is limited.

Yacóns for all

Another introduction from Thompson and Morgan which we will be growing on their recommendation this year are the Yacóns (*Smallanthus sonchifolius*), also known as Aka, Peruvian Ground Apple or Bolivian Sunroot.

Well, with all those names it must be good! The common names give a clue to the origin of this unusual root vegetable: it comes from the Northern and Central Andes of South America where it has been grown and eaten for centuries. As late as the



21st century it was hardly known outside its limited native range, then its anti-hyperglycemic properties (counteracting high levels of glucose in the blood) became known and it is likely to become more and more popular.

It is closely related to Sunflowers and Jerusalem Artichokes and its growth habit is very similar, that is it grows to about two metres tall with a spread of nearly a metre, so possibly good to fill in gaps at the rear of a sunny flower border, or in the vegetable garden as a companion plant with Spinach, French Beans, Courgettes, Radish etc. planted between the plants to utilise space and the Yacón will provide shade. It is a showy plant and does produce yellow flowers at the end of the growing season but these are rather inconspicuous.

The tubers should be planted out after the danger of frosts have passed, and they will grow steadily until September when the growth will be rapid. They should then be left in the ground until the first frosts, when the leaves will blacken and the tubers take on a much sweeter flavour. They should then be lifted and the tubers, which can weigh up to one kg, should be washed and gently scraped (no need to peel) then sliced and eaten raw, sliced like Winter Radish or used in stir fries like Water Chestnuts. They are said to be absolutely delicious and if stored for over a fortnight after lifting are even sweeter. After storage in paper sacks or hessian sacks in a cool place, the skin will turn a darker brown and thicken, then they will need peeling before eating.

They are low in calories and vitally their sugars are suitable for diabetics, hence the fact that the juice is extracted from them to make a delicious syrup suitable for everyone including diabetics.

Also a few fresh leaves can be picked from each plant during the growing season and these can be dried then crumbled up to make a tasty green tea which has a fresh hay aroma. The dried leaves will keep well if stored in an airtight container.

Yacón tubers are available for sale in the Garden Centre, or can be despatched by Mail Order and cost £7.99 for 4. Photos of Yacón and Dahlia kitchen-ready tubers courtesy of www.groweat.blogspot.co.uk

Healthy eating starts here!

Do you and your family enjoy a bag of crisps but you worry about all the fat and salt they contain? Well, Mastrad have come up with an ingenious solution which really works, making it possible to easily cook your own 'healthy' snacks. Their Microwave Crisp Maker (chip maker as they call it!) means you can slice up a potato finely with the mandolin, put the slices on the silicone trays, pop in to your microwave for less than 3 minutes, and, hey presto, you will have fat free potato crisps to which you can add a little salt if you wish, or herbs, pepper or any other flavour. You will be amazed how many crisps you get from just one potato, so when you compare the cost and



advantages of making your own snacks you will wish Mastrad had introduced this earlier.



They have also produced a book containing many great ideas for dips, hors d'œuvres, soups and salads, entrées and sweets, using crisps made from potatoes, pears, apples and other things. A great accompaniment to the Crisp Maker.

These are all available from the Garden Centre Shop or can be supplied by our Mail Order Service. "Mastrad Top Chips" for a large microwave oven - £24.99, or small microwave oven £22.99. Recipe Book "Chips" - £6.99.

Five minutes with Jackie Nash

You've recently retired from The Garden Centre after over 30 years service, what are your thoughts about those years?

I've loved working with a great group of people, who have a passion for plants. It has been interesting to see the development of the Garden Centre over the years.

You have seen many changes over the past three decades so is there anything that stands out as major milestone you would like to share with us?

The opening of a Garden Room Café (The Gardener's Retreat), allowing customers to meet friends and chill out with cake and tea.



Where do you live and perhaps describe your garden?

Tingewick. My garden is mixed borders mainly herbaceous and bulbs with shrubs and clematis trained up; together with several alpine troughs.

We know this is going to be a difficult one, but if you were stranded on that castaway island, which plant would you like to take with you?

Saxifraga 'Tumbling Waters'; A truly magnificent plant; a small, mat-forming, evergreen perennial with silver-green, strap-shaped leaves arranged in rosettes. In spring, it bears tiny white flowers in large panicles on relatively tall, arching stems.



And your favourite edible plant(s)? Plums – 'Victoria' or 'Persnore Egg'.

What's your favourite gardening activity? Weeding and then potting up the garden plant seedlings.

And least favourite?

Mowing the lawn, in my eyes grasses should be Hakonechloa, Stipa etc!

What tips would like to give to someone thinking about coming into horticulture in 2013?

Horticulture provides jobs for various skills. The expert hands-on craft of the gardener ranges from botanic gardens to commercial nurseries. Garden centres provide the challenge of buying, creativity of merchandising, the organisation and foresight of management.

We know you're very passionate about social history, so what plans do you have to develop this in your retirement?

Tingewick has a Historical Society and I have been the keeper of their records for some years. I'd like to make them more easily accessible to the public. I'm also hoping to look further into my family tree.



If you could have one Super Power what would it be?

Travel back in time and meet the ancestors.

Facebook or Twitter? Pen & ink!

Finally, 33 years is an amazing length of service, what are you going to miss about Buckingham Garden Centre?

The Plants Team; the wild birds and the magnificent sunsets.

Bee update

Firstly news of the Garden Centre bees. Very sadly, when we came to inspect our two hives a couple of weeks ago, we found one was full of dead bees, writes Pauline Brown. A post-mortem has not yet been carried out but we are pretty certain they died of starvation even though there was a plentiful supply of food for them. We understand that when the weather is very cold they keep in their tight ball to retain warmth and will not venture through the cold air in the hive to reach food. We must make sure the food is even nearer to them in the future and not be worried about disturbing them to do this. However the good news is our other hive is still thriving, but with the cold weather and lack of flowers means the bees are huddled in for warmth. In this hive we were able to get the food really near the bees so we hope they keep feeding and will emerge when the sun shines. At a meeting of local beekeepers earlier this spring it is obvious that a lot of bee keepers have lost bees this winter so good swarm control, and introducing new swarms will be the order of the bee keeping year ahead.



For the average gardener putting a hive of honey bees in their garden would not be practical, but it is well worth considering encouraging bumblebees by various means even if they will not provide you will honey.

The humble bumblebee is in fact an even better pollinator than the honey bee, as its large 'furry' body traps more pollen than the smaller honey bee. It is a very fast worker visiting about twice as many flowers as a honey bee in



the same length of time and as it tends to go from one variety of flower to another with quite a random pattern this can be very good for cross pollination. Another point in their favour is that they are able to carry large loads of pollen so they do not need to return to their nests so often. Also they are active at lower temperatures than honey bees so one sees

them out foraging very early in the year, and I always think the sound of them buzzing around as a sure sign that spring will soon be on its way.



They also continue to forage even in windy weather or when the weather turns to drizzle and honey bees stay in their hives. All in all they do need encouraging into our gardens. Incidentally, if you are worried about the possibility of getting stung, bumblebees are very placid and unless they feel threatened they do not sting, and if you do get stung, because their sting does not have barbs on like honey bees, it is much less of a problem.

Naturally bumblebees nest in discarded rodent holes, between stones and twigs, hollow trees, dense tussocks of grass and even in the compost heap. However, if you have a really tidy garden you may not have suitable nesting sites for them but they are always very happy to take up residence in man-made bumble bee nesting boxes of which there is always a good choice in the shop.

However, even if you do put a suitable nesting box in your garden you may not attract an 'inmate', but should this be the case you can purchase live bees and introduce these to your garden. Two companies who will supply by Mail Order are Koppert of Holland (www.koppert.com) whose English agent's telephone number is 01440 704 488, or Watkins and Doncaster whose number is 0333 800 3133. I believe they are not cheap, but once you have them you should never lose them and what an asset they will be if you grow fruit!

Topical Green Tip

We gardeners all know that composted egg shells are great for the garden once one has learnt to scrunch them up before adding to the compost heap, but another idea was given to me to get them into the ground whilst saving a little money on degradable pots at the same time. When you have broken the shell and used the egg, put the two halves of the shell back into the egg box for support, prick a small hole in the bottom, fill them with compost and sow seeds into them. When the seeds have germinated and rooted in well they can be planted out in the shell, and this will disintegrate as the plant grows. I have not tried this yet but will have a go once the weather warms up and masses of seeds need sowing.



10 Tasks for May and June

FRUIT Top fruits such as Apples and Pears may require their fruit clusters thinning to help the development of each fruit. The phenomenon called 'June drop' is the natural shedding in early summer of a proportion of the immature fruits of Apple, Pear, Plum and Cherry. Any planned fruit thinning should be carried out immediately after June drop. Apply Sulphate of Potash (35g/m²) around the base of all fruit trees to help encourage the formation of young fruits, and repeat in early July to help form the flower buds for next year's crops. Continue to tie-in shoots of fan-trained and espalier fruit to keep them tidy and productive.



ESTABLISHING NEW STOCK Now the weather is improving, it's a good time to take stock and plant out a few newbies into beds and borders. Do look out for this year's Rose of the Year, the well-named variety 'You're Beautiful'. It's a floribunda rose bred by Gareth Fryer and has already collected major awards including the prestigious Gold Standard®.

The flowers are sugar-pink, well formed and are richly perfumed, repeat flowering over rich foliage. Its compact habit means it grows 1m (3ft) high and spread, so perfect in mixed borders as well as rose beds. Prepare the planting hole to a good spades depth and width incorporating some planting compost and blood, fish and bone into the hole. Sprinkle some Rootgrow into the prepared hole before placing the plant in, as it benefits from the friendly-fungi directly around its roots.

VEG PLOT Continuity is the key to good vegetable production - short rows of Lettuce, Spring Onions, Radish etc. sown 'little and often' will reap dividends in fresh produce as the summer moves on. Establish those tender vegetables - Tomatoes, Ridge Cucumbers, Pumpkins and Sweetcorn amongst others now the fear of late frosts has nearly passed. Make sure you improve the soil well for these crops - incorporate some good compost from the bin or heap, well-rotted manure or planting compost to help conserve moisture and provide valuable nutrients. Remember we stock cell grown veg plugs, 12-packs, £3.49 each or 3 for £10 and the Gardener's Kitchen range, 6-packs at £1.99 each or any 3 for £5.

CHECK your hanging basket chains! It may sound stupid but rusty worn chains can create a major hazard as the container may decide to topple onto your postman's head! Replacement chains are available from our basket display under the Seasonal Tunnel, where you'll also find a great range of open and solid rustic baskets to choose from. We also have a great choice of upright (Fuchsias, Pelargoniums), filler (Petunias and Verbena) and trailing plants (Lobelia, Nepeta, pictured) for all summer containers, so there should be no excuses for not having imaginative displays. However, do come and ask at 'The Potting Bench' if you need some advice on plant specifics or colour theming.



TIE IN your climbers before they become intertwined and messy. Remove any dead, damaged or diseased stems in the first instance and then thin out if there are too many overcrowded shoots - generally 5-7 stems from the base are sufficient for most climbers. Tie in with raffia or Haxnick's Soft-Tie, but not too tightly.

Annual climbers such as Sweet Peas, Cobea Scandens (Cup & Saucer Vine) and Nasturtiums can also be planted now. Set them at the base of plastic support

netting, or plant them 3in (8cm) apart around wigwam of recycled branches (pictured) or obelisk structures. Sweet Peas produce tendrils which quickly wrap around any support, including any woody stems close by, so again keep a watchful eye and guide them where necessary!



BORDER PATROL Hoe borders to prevent annual and perennial weeds from spreading and seeding themselves. Tackle Bindweed when it appears in a border. Perennials that are showing new shoots from the crown can still be propagated via basal stem cuttings.

MANY of you purchased and made a donation for a Potato tuber for The Puzzle Centre back in February – thank you. Hopefully you will have now chitted the Potato and be thinking about planting it in a suitable pot. You need a pot at least 18in (45cm) in diameter and start by planting them on a few centimetres of compost in the bottom of the pot, adding compost (effectively earthing-up, pictured) as the Potatoes develop. Start feeding with Tomato feed after 6 weeks from planting and do this every 7-10 days every week until harvesting.



As for Marrows, these need to be protected from the frost throughout May, simply pop over a cloche if frosts are forecast. Again, like Potatoes, as soon as the flowers develop commence feeding with Tomato fertiliser every 2 weeks throughout the summer. Remember the weigh-in for both the Potatoes and Marrows is on Saturday 21st September as part of our Apple & Chilli Festival.

PLANNING FOR 2014 If you want to grow your own spring bedding for next year, many (including Wallflowers, Pansies, Sweet William and *Bellis perennis*) need to be sown between May and July in order to flower next spring. *Polyanthus Primulas* are best sown only when temperatures are reliably warm, as they need a constant temperature of around 15°C (60°F). A sheltered cold frame in June or July provides the right environment.

TROUBLESHOOTING Hellebores can develop hellebore leaf spot on old leaves. Use Bayer Garden Systhane Fungus Fighter or Fungus Clear. Inspect Lilies for the Scarlet Lily Beetle (pictured) whose larvae can strip plants in days. Continue to protect Lilies, Delphiniums, Hostas and other susceptible plants from Slugs and Snails. Regularly inspect plants, and also the structures of the greenhouse and conservatory, for glasshouse Red Spider Mite, Whitefly, Thrips and other pests. Careful attention to the undersides of the leaves and to each plant in turn, can spot early infestations that would otherwise be missed. Control with approved insecticides and biological controls, and hang yellow sticky traps to help monitor numbers of flying pests.



QUICK REMINDERS Hoe through your borders regularly to keep down weeds. Pinch out sideshoots on tomatoes. Cut lawns at least once a week. Shade greenhouses to keep them cool and to prevent scorch. Deadhead Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Laurels and Pieris. This re-routes the energy that would have been used to make seedpods to new growth and next year's flower buds. Stake tall or floppy plants.

Picking the best-ever plants!

2013 is the 100th year since The Royal Horticultural Society first held their flower show on the site at The Royal Hospital, Chelsea. Gardening has certainly moved on, however, it's the plants that generally denote the significant decades. If you were putting together a number of gardens with the specific plants of that era, you would have quite a task choosing the best ones. Well, that's what the Royal Horticultural Society is going to try and decide for the major exhibit. However, garden writer and broadcaster Peter Seabrook is going to agonise over much more as he stage manages the four unique gardens, assisted and created by school children from around the UK. Schools will grow flowers and vegetables in all manner of containers so that they can be displayed in the correct time zone set throughout the centenary.



One will be dated the founding year of 1913 - the second around the war years of 1940's - the third in the 1970's - and the final a modern garden of 2013. Look out for these rather special gardens together with gardens promoting a greener, brighter future by highlighting sustainable living and ways to preserve Britain's horticultural heritage. The BBC television coverage of the Chelsea Flower Show commences from Sunday 19th May and throughout the week.

STOP PRESS: We still have a few places left for our Highgrove Gardens Visit on 29th May 2013 available. Tickets cost £55, which includes travel and entrance. Please call 01280 822133 for details.

Garden Centre Wednesday Talks

Wednesday 8th May, we welcome Barry Smith, Head Gardener of Stowe Landscape Gardens: The Garden Restoration and The Ongoing Story.

Wednesday 12th June, popular and entertaining speaker Howard Drury returns with a talk on "Managing wet soils amidst a potential drought: What to Grow, How to Cope, and How to Manage Your Soil"

Wednesday 19th July, Barry Oxley from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds looks at the relationship of birds within our gardens.

All talks run from 4:30-5:30pm in our Talks Room within the Restaurant. To book, contact our Customer Service Desk. The talks are free to Garden Club Card holders, £3 for guests.

You can also catch BGC's Chris Day at A Gardeners' Question Time on Thursday 27th June between 6-8pm at Kingsbridge, Steeple Claydon in aid of the Art Fund. For further details see www.tinyurl.com/artfund13



Buckingham Garden Centre's Chosen charity, 'The Puzzle Centre', is holding "An Evening of Music & Poetry" at 7pm, Sat. 11th May at The Radcliffe Centre, Buckingham with Sally Mellor, concert pianist and Francesca Murray, actor and garden designer. Tickets and more information from Jane Steel on 01296 730350.

ADVANCE NOTICE: Willow Weaving Class, Wednesday 14th August, 10am-4pm with Gina Martin, Environment artist. Explore and discover the art of creating shape and sculpture using natural willow. A great opportunity to have a go at a new craft with a hands-on workshop. Cost £26, including a welcome drink. To book, call on 01280 822133 or visit our Customer Service Desk.



Our Garden Discount Card is changing...

Buckingham Garden Centre prides itself on offering the best choice, quality and selection of plants and products. To help everyone even more to enjoy a colourful and productive garden we are pleased to offer to all our customers our Garden Centre Discount Card providing these benefits;

- Save 10% on plants, pond plants, seeds and bulbs purchased on Wednesday and 5% discount at other times. Members will also gain additional discounts on many plant-related in-store offers. (The Card must be presented at point of purchase to gain discount.)
- Invitations to promotional weekends, talks, garden visits and demonstrations.
- Bi-monthly Garden Centre Newsletter packed with topical gardening advice, news and views and details of offers.
- Free tea/filter coffee on Wednesdays 9:30-11.30am.

Our Garden Discount Card is moving to an annual subscription of £10 (or £5 for members of local gardening clubs). Renewals will be sent out one month before expiry.

Please note existing Garden Discount Cardholders Cards will be valid to 30th June 2014. Thereafter an annual subscription is payable. Full list of Gardening Clubs that are eligible for discounted membership and full terms and conditions are available from our Customer Service desk.

Buckingham Nurseries & Garden Centre

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SUMMER OPENING HOURS Mon.-Sat: 8:30am-6:00pm, Sun: 10am-4pm.

James Wong's Homegrown Revolution

Suttons Seeds have developed this **exciting and exclusive** new range in partnership with James Wong, the enthusiastic ethnobotanist renowned for thinking outside the box when it comes to what flowers, fruit and veg are edible. From edible daisies that 'electrocute' your taste buds, to winter greens that will make your mouth literally light up, James shows us all that there is so much more to 'growing your own' than carrots, potatoes and cabbage!

This exciting new seed range has been designed by Suttons Seeds and James Wong to challenge conventional thinking when it comes to growing produce at home. The chosen varieties are unusual yet easy to grow - even in the UK climate, and include a selection of 30 vegetables, flowers and herbs that are tasty, unusual and beautiful such as; Electric Daisies, Dahlia Yams, Wintergreens and the top selling Cucamelon. All varieties have been trialled and tested by James in his tiny suburban garden and are genuinely easy-to-grow.

In his new Homegrown Revolution book, James shows us a completely new way of looking at fruit and vegetables to grow and eat. It is packed with information about the varieties, their history and lots of tasty recipes that you can make at home with the crops that you grow!

You will learn how to harvest home-grown Quinoa, pop your very own popcorn or plant a mixture for a novel cocktail on your patio (the Saffron Gin is sensational!). This inspiring new book is great fun and full of plant wisdom. TV presenter and two times RHS medal winner, James Wong, shows that there's so much more for you to grow than potatoes and sprouts in your garden or on your allotment.

James's philosophy - *"It's not about growing unconventional crops for the sake of it. It's about achieving delicious, high-yielding foods that are expensive to buy, yet easy to grow."*

Each seed packet includes information on the history of each variety, how it can be used in everyday cooking and comes complete with a unique recipe, written and tested by James himself! Packets cost just £1.85, why not try a couple!



Suttons 'James Wong Homegrown Revolution' seed range and books are available to purchase at Buckingham Garden Centre today!