

# NEWSLETTER

## JULY/AUGUST 2013



### James grows a new audience

I think it's pretty fair to say James Wong was a big hit at our Summer Festival of Fun! Many of you said on the day and subsequently what an engaging, thought-provoking and articulate speaker James is. However, for many, it is his sheer enthusiasm of the subject and his rather "geeky" (his words!) explanations which make his presentations fun and informative. What he did do effectively was to stand back at a subject we know, growing food, and take a sideways, and forward thinking view of how other less conventional crops need to be considered and put into the mix. He made you think and the message was clear: experiment with crops and opt for those which are easier to grow and opt to grow the things you cannot find in the supermarket. We were pleased James mentioned Yacon and Oca as good crops to grow, as we have been selling the Oca (*Oxalis tuberosa*) for two years now and Yacon (*Smallanthus sonchifolius*) for the first time this year! So, what's the next big thing? Well, you'll need to read his fascinating book, *Homegrown Revolution*, to find out. Copies are available in the Shop, priced £20.



Our special thanks to those who joined us over the weekend, including Brackley Hogwatch, Caked in Bread, Gemma Martin from the Buckingham Scouts Association, Fleur Fields Vineyard, Bradshaws Ice Cream, Phil Banks (Magician) and Lin Banks (Face painting). We are pleased to announce Puzzle Centre (pictured Sue Copper-Evans) raised £280 through the Garden Centre Treasure Hunt. All prize winners have been informed and special congratulations to J. Berry from Bicester, who won a pair of First Class Tickets courtesy of Virgin Trains.



More pictures from the Weekend can be found at the following link [www.buckinghamgardencentre.co.uk/eventsgallery.html](http://www.buckinghamgardencentre.co.uk/eventsgallery.html)

Is gardening too repetitive? I ask this because our guest last month, James Wong said you only have to buy 52 weekly or 12 monthly gardening magazines for a year, don't throw them away but store them and then refer to them again at the same time the following year. Oh dear, is gardening that cyclic? Yes, as gardeners, keen or fair-weather, we need prompts to remind us what needs to be done, what seeds to sow, when to prune, when to take cuttings, etc. But wait a minute. Those gardening column inches, just like our newsletter, tell us much more, like what new plants are available, events to visit (like our Apple and Chilli Weekend in September!), latest seed varieties and gardening products which have been recently introduced, and what the latest trends, fashions or fad are likely to be. Printed or online, we listen to opinions from the likes of Monty, Alan, Carol and James, to create some healthy debate, and that's something we can all engage in. So, let's have your thoughts on sheds, home-remedy slug control, growing crops out of season and makeover programmes (sorry *Love Your Garden*), now that should get the ball-rolling.



We look forward to seeing you soon. **Chris**

## Shed life - What's in your shed?

We Brits have always loved our sheds. But there's more to sheds than potting, says BGC's Chris Day.

What do you use your shed for? Well, since Shed Week was launched a few years ago there's been a whole host of uses and looks to our popular wooden structure. As the popularity of sheds has increased so we've seen some really whacky designs. According to the top "sheddie" (well what do you call someone who loves their shed!), Andrew Wilcox, who organises a Shed of the Year competition, his website, [www.readersheds.co.uk](http://www.readersheds.co.uk) has "gone mad" as the popularity of sheds has increased. However there are plenty of people who are currently 'shed free' and who will be dipping into shed buying for the first time, especially if they are buying a new home and need a place to store their gardening and leisure gear.



If you are thinking about investing in a shed here are few useful pointers. Building a shed? First consider size, design and planning permission. Choose something that fits into the garden. You don't want it too small, so you're crowded for space – but you don't want it too big so that it dominates the garden. Another consideration, do you want a traditional shed, or something modern? Do you want a flat roof, or a living roof which has plants on it? How about a veranda or a separate section for storage of garden implements or the bikes? There are so many decisions to be made before making your purchase.

Once you've decided and it's in position, the next consideration is fitting out the interior. This will depend on how you intend to use your shed. If you have electricity, lighting and sockets for in-shed entertainment (radio, TV, fridge, kettle and internet) can be incorporated. Shelving, hooks, storage units or a chair or two, a table or a Workmate for practical DIY pursuits can be installed. You may even overwinter pets, so make sure the structure is well insulated in the area they are being kept. Some sheds, often sold as chalets, make ideal home offices or perhaps double up as a gym, or for housing a hot tub spa. Flooring and accessories will need to be considered.

### Blending in

The recent trend for green roofs has helped change perceptions of the garden shed. Covering a roof with low-maintenance plants benefits wildlife, increases biodiversity and keeps sheds cooler in summer and warmer in winter. Green roofs can also disguise the structure, especially when viewed from above. Sedums or turf are ideal because of their shallow rooting needs. Remember turf on a felted roof will greatly shorten its lifespan, so we wouldn't advise it. However, that said, there is plenty of specialist advice available for building purpose built green roofs.



If you want to make your shed seem less obtrusive, stain it a dark colour and it will recede into the background. Planting or trellis screens can be used to create a 'false boundary', beyond which the shed and other items can be hidden. If you have a long wall of wood to disguise then you could cover it with a Verti-Garden Living Wall, similar to what we have done at the front of the main shop.

The security of a shed should be given careful thought. The more sophisticated the use, the more valuable the contents are likely to become, so take adequate precautions, and check the cover on your home insurance. Most household insurance will not cover equipment stored in a garden shed, as most locks are easily broken or removed by thieves. It is wise not to store good quality tools or expensive equipment in the shed, especially if there is easy access to the garden.

If you are looking to buy a new shed or replacing an existing one, do check out our display models, located opposite our Poultry Centre, manufactured individually to conventional or bespoke design by a local Buckingham manufacturer, D&A Sheds.

## Slug watch

“What are the best safe control options to keep slug and snail numbers down?” must be one of the most asked questions, says Chris Day. Organic methods are aimed at controlling numbers, and limiting the damage caused, rather than eradicating all slugs and snails. Protection of vulnerable plants is the key for organic gardeners. There are many ways to reduce the numbers of these resilient and destructive pests. Try and clear an area before planting, or at least provide other things for the slugs to eat.

Key factors in successful control are not to rely on only one method and to accept that some damage is inevitable. The canny gardener (and we all should be) should be prepared to re-sow or keep back some extra module grown plants to replace losses and to learn with which plants and under what circumstances losses occur, taking action to avoid a repeat. Slugs and snails feed particularly on seedlings and young soft growth, plants under stress, and leaves that are high in nitrogen especially when 'overfed'.

So, what are the options? Let's start with the most unpleasant (but in some ways the most rewarding!) – hand picking. This simply involves inspecting vulnerable plants regularly and removing any pests that are seen. Wearing rubber gloves can make this job a little less unpleasant. As slugs and snails feed after dark, this is the best time to don your miner's hat, take a pair of scissors and search and destroy! Or for the less squeamish, collect in a bucket and move them to a suitable natural habitat away from your land, not lobbed over the neighbour's fence!

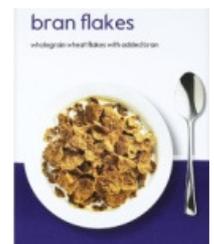
Use roof tiles or half grapefruit skins. Place on the soil near vulnerable plants to provide a shelter for the slugs and snails in the day. Inspect frequently and remove any pests found in residence. This method can be used to clear an area before planting by providing lettuce or other suitable leaves rather than slug pellets as bait under the traps.

A ring of comfrey leaves placed around vulnerable seedlings or young plants will lure slugs to feed on the wilting leaves. Check daily for slugs and despatch by your preferred method.

There are various barriers you can apply around your plants:-

- Bottle cloches for your vulnerable veggies; cut the bottom off a clear plastic bottle and firm it into the soil around a vulnerable seedling/plant.
- Likewise, slug collars - plastic rings with a lip to make crossing it difficult - placed around individual plants.
- Simply squeeze Doff Organic Slug Defence Gel around plants you wish to keep clear from slugs. A 1-litre bottle (£3.99) provides 50m worth of liquid barrier.
- Vitax Slug Gone wool pellets can be easily applied as a 10cm (4in) wide band around your vulnerable plants.
- Applied on a regular basis, Grit or Granules are natural mineral products that either form a sharp, gritty repellent barrier or that suck the moisture from the slime that slugs and snails exude as they move. Fito Slug Stoppa Granules is a popular product we sell.
- Copper tape/rings. Copper gives a natural electric charge that helps repel the pest. Fito Slug Stoppa Tape is useful around pots and legs of greenhouse staging.

My preferred method is Bran Flakes. The slugs like to eat the bran; it swells inside them, reducing their appetite for your precious plants. If they eat too many the slugs explode! However, your local bird population will benefit from the high fibre content too!



## Safe pellets and native killers

There are pellets based on ferric phosphate which are approved by the Soil Association, the product to look out for is Growing Success Advanced Slug Killer. New and proving popular this season in the Shop, is a product based on calcium chloride, Grazers G2 Formula. As well as being effective against damage from slug and snails, it also helps strengthen and stimulates plant growth because of the calcium chloride it contains.

Finally, biological control for slugs is dependent on using a microscopic nematode, *Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita*. This is a native species which can be found naturally in the soil. Modern technology makes



it possible to breed the nematodes so they can be applied to the soil in large enough quantities to reduce slug populations significantly. The nematodes come in a pack of moist clay. This is mixed with water and applied to the soil with a watering can. Slugs will be controlled for up to 6 weeks, after which re-application may be necessary. Although not cheap, if used properly and in conjunction with some of the suggestions here, it does give a good level of control to reduce high slug populations. For more information, we have a useful leaflet produced by Agralan, which clearly explains the process of introducing these nematodes into your garden.

## New potatoes for Christmas!

Growing and harvesting some tasty 'new potatoes' for Christmas and into the New Year is pretty unbeatable. Well, you can be growing a specially selected range of varieties for planting through late July and into August. Varieties available include 'Casablanca' (first early), 'Catriona' (second early), 'Charlotte' (second early), 'Maris Peer' (second early) and 'Red Duke of York' (first early). Packs of 9 tubers cost just £2.99.



Chit them for a week or so prior to planting as the timing is crucial and you will need to aim to get them planted by the middle of September at the latest. The best way of growing these potatoes is in bags which should be at least 12in (30cm) deep and wide, with drainage holes. Use a good quality multi-purpose compost to which add 10ml of potato fertiliser or Vitax Q4. Half fill the bag with this and set the tuber(s) and cover with 5cm (2in) of compost. As the foliage develops, earth up by adding a little more compost and continue until the bag is full to within 2in (5cm) of the top. Keep well-watered and feed weekly with a general-purpose liquid fertiliser such as Tomorite. Ensure the bags are kept frost-free as the season progresses, as potato foliage would be damaged by frost. The foliage will yellow and die down in late autumn and can then be removed and composted. Tubers can be left in their bags in compost (kept fairly dry) until needed at Christmas. The advantages to bag-growing are two-fold. Firstly, the potato skins will be unmarked and look attractive. Secondly the whole bag can be moved into a greenhouse if the weather should get really bad! If you do give this a go, please let us know how you get on, and we'll feature your results in a future edition of the newsletter!

## Our new look website - [www.buckinghamgardencentre.co.uk](http://www.buckinghamgardencentre.co.uk)

We have been very busy at the Garden Centre over the past few weeks to bring our customers a brand new website, writes our IT expert, Trevor Bradley. The website was launched at the beginning of June and currently has a lot of information about the Garden Centre, what we sell; special offers and news of upcoming events and Garden Talks. We have included help videos and a monthly tips section. We have a question and answer page and also a form where you can ask our experts any question you have about any aspect of gardening.



Over the next few months we will be adding even more content which will include a special area that will only be accessible to our Garden Club members. And finally, look out for our online shop which will be launched on the site very soon! On the shopping site, you will be able to browse products we sell here at the Garden Centre and either have them delivered (delivery charges apply) or you can Reserve and Collect from the Garden Centre. If you have any suggestions or ideas you would like to see on the website, please do let us know!

## **Marrow and Potato update**

Back in February, at our Potato Weekend, we launched two challenges for our customers. Time is moving on and it will soon be nearing the time to harvest the crops. However, before the big weigh-in on the Saturday afternoon of our Apple & Chilli Weekend (21st & 22nd September), there's still plenty of time to ensure a good, weighty crop is achieved. The key for both the marrows and potatoes is regular and specific feeding as well as ensuring good, healthy growth. A weekly feeding regime needs to be adhered to from early July. As well as providing feed, ensure moisture is plentiful too, so always make sure the plants are never allowed to become dry, as this stress could cause mildew and even contribute to blight.



In preparation for the weigh-in we would ask you to bring along your potatoes in their pots so we can officially weigh them at the Garden Centre. You might need to use a trolley (please ask and one of the Team will be able to assist you) to bring them to the Weigh Station. You don't need to bring the entire plant of your marrow, just the marrow itself. We will label the exhibits as they come in to avoid any mix ups. You can bring your entries from Monday 16th September (9am-5pm) and up to 12 noon on the morning of Saturday 21<sup>st</sup>. The judging will take place from 1pm with an announcement made later in the afternoon. There will be four prizes one each for the heaviest pot of potatoes, the heaviest marrow, the longest marrow and the weirdest looking marrow. The prize for each of the four categories is a £10 Garden Centre voucher together with a 12-month Garden Club Membership as well (worth £10). All prizes will be awarded on merit and the judges' decision will be final.

## **5 Minutes with James Wong**

Globetrotting James Wong is currently working on a new programme for CNN looking at the world's most expensive food ingredients. However, between his 60-odd Garden Centre Homegrown Revolutions talks this year and his filming commitments for BBC's *Countryfile*, BGC's Chris Day managed to ask him some questions on your behalf...



**How would you describe your garden?** Well, it's my experiment station really! It's a place where the rules are broken and, more importantly, it is very much a fun place to grow fun things in.

**Your favourite ornamental plant...** Oh, this is such a mean question! But it has to be *Gardenia jasminoides* 'Kleim's Hardy'. This is such a versatile plant – looks good, beautifully fragrant, hardy and edible. The flowers' flavour is similar to elderflower so are perfect for teas and cordials.

**And edible plant...** Much easier, it is the Chilean guava (*Myrtus ugni*) with its evergreen box-like foliage and scented lily-of-the-valley like powdery pink flowers. Fruits are dark pink to red and look like blueberries with a wild strawberry taste. In this area it might be worth fleecing over the plants on really cold nights.

**Favourite gardening activity....** Goodness, it has to be harvesting! There's so much written about the "doing" side of growing, but this is the pleasurable part of the process, seldom given the importance it deserves, so enjoy it!

**What do you love about your job?** I'm so lucky. I get to do my hobby all the time, whether it is writing, growing or presenting, it simply doesn't feel like work!

**Do you have a gardening tip you would like to share with us?** This is very experimental but using aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) around your blight susceptible plants (3-4 tablets inserted close to the plants roots) or by mixing one aspirin tablet and dissolving it in 1-litre of water and apply this as a spray once a week can do positive things. Nothing is proven, however, aspirin, or salicylic acid, is derived from the willow family (*Salix*). There is also a suggestion that it can stimulate growth in plants as well.

**If you could have one superpower what would it be?** Oh, Greenfingers of course! You know I really struggle to grow really simple things, like peach trees! You have to try and have a go, simply a geeky approach to growing isn't sufficient for many plants (laughs)! You need to understand the plant much more.



**Who would you like to design a garden for?** Heston Blumenthal. Why? I love his experimental style. I'd like to create a Willy Wong-A (laughs) type garden to blend with Heston style in food presentation. It would be definitely an edible garden in the widest sense of the word!

**Facebook or Twitter?** Twitter every time - it's like having your own online tailored magazine with all the best bits!

**What was it like eating nettles on the recent A-Z of Gardening TV series?** Hmmm, they sting your fingers and lips but not your mouth. Suffice to say after filming I couldn't use my mobile phone on my way home!

**What in your opinion should everyone have in their gardens at home?** Everyone should grow popping corn shoots. You buy it in the supermarket (as regular popping corn), soak the seeds and grow them like cress on a tray, in a warm dark place for 5-7 days. The shoots look like canary feathers, bright yellow and you harvest at 5-10cm high. The sweetness can be intense. Popular in the US, but set to become popular in the UK – you heard it here first!

**What in your opinion is the future of gardening in the UK?** Well, for starters gardening needs to be less "How To", fewer rules, but more asking the question, "Why?" We need to move away with the traditional and become more proactive, this is becoming easier with social media, but goodness, let's get away from the "How to dig a hole" culture and let's just get on with it.

## **Choosing the right compost**

The key to healthy plants, bountiful crops and brilliant blooms is choosing the right compost. J. Arthur Bower was making compost and the production of his "brand" of compost was taken on by Lindsay & Kesteven Fertilisers in 1961. Lindsay & Kesteven is now under the umbrella of William Sinclair Holdings and the compost can still be trusted to deliver excellent results.

The Multi-Purpose Compost is ideal for potting young and established plants and can also be used for seeds and cuttings. The compost contains all essential plant nutrients and trace elements to feed plants for the first four to six weeks after planting. It also contains added organic matter from sustainable natural resources. The slightly coarse texture is perfect for potting up plants as it promotes healthy root growth and resists compaction. It also boosts nutrition and holds moisture whilst ensuring good drainage.

The compost is the result of years of continuous research and development by some of horticulture's leading specialists and has been independently tested by leading horticultural institutes to ensure it provides and supports excellent plant growth across a wide range of plants.

Some plants respond best to special conditions and for these J. Arthur Bower's produce a range of specialist composts for optimum results. The Seed & Cutting compost is very fine textured, with added sand and lower nutrients to suit even the smallest seeds whilst the Tub & Basket Compost has an extra water retaining agent to hold more moisture as baskets and containers are particularly prone to drying out.

The Ericaceous Compost is formulated with the correct pH balance for lime-hating plants like Azaleas, Camellias and Rhododendrons and the Rose, Tree and Shrub Compost has a more open texture to promote strong root development and includes food to feed the plant for a whole year.

So whether you want a compost for all-round use or one to suit a particular type of plant you can be



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find what  
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stock.



## WHAT'S ON

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> July, Farmers' Market, 10am – early afternoon** at the Garden Centre. See website for the details of those stallholders joining us.

**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> August, 10am-4pm. Willow Weaving Workshop.** Venue: Buckingham Garden Centre. Learn the basics of working with dried willow, creating simple structures and sculptures with the help of the artist Gina Martin. Gina is an environmental artist who graduated from the Royal College of Art and has been using willow for many years. You will learn where to source the willow, how to store and soak it and have a hands on experience with this very versatile material. Explore and discover the art of creating shape and sculpture using natural willow and have a go at a new craft with a hands-on workshop.

Cost £26, including a welcome drink. To book, visit the Customer Service Desk or call on 01280 822133. Places are limited to 22 so book early to avoid disappointment!

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> August, Farmers' Market, 10am – early afternoon** at the Garden Centre. See website for the details of those stallholders joining us.

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> September, 4:30-5:30pm. Gardening talk: Bulbs For All Reasons.** BGC's Chris Day explains how to get the best from your spring bulbs throughout the borders, pots and difficult locations. Venue: Talks Room, Gardener's Retreat Restaurant. Entry is free to Garden Card Discount Holders, £3 for non-members.

**Apple & Chilli Festival Weekend, 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 10am-4pm both days.** Our annual apple event with a tangy twist this year – chillis! More details to follow.

## 10 TASKS FOR JULY & AUGUST

**KEEP sowing** the likes of salad crops such as Beetroot, Lettuce, Radish and Spring Onions. The secret is continuity with these crops so sowing "little and often" needs to be the rule. Set young veg plugs of winter Kale, Brussels sprouts, Peas, late Cauliflower and Leeks. There's still time to plant outdoor Tomatoes, Ridge Cucumbers, Marrows, Courgettes and Pumpkins. Do offer them a sheltered site and the soil needs to be prepared well. Work in plenty of organic matter as well as some fertiliser such as Blood, Fish & Bone (if you are organic) or Vitax Q4 (for non-organic gardeners).



**CHRISTMAS!** Hyacinths, 'Paperwhite' Daffodils and Freesias, can be planted in bowls now to achieve flowers for Christmas. Once they have put on 2.5cm (1in) of growth, put into a cool room, only to be brought into a warm room in time to flower for the festive period. Bulbs sold as 'prepared' can be forced by placing the planted bowls in a cold, dark place for a few months, then bringing them straight inside to flower.

**FRUIT** Continue cutting out old fruited canes on Raspberries. Lift and pot up rooted Strawberry runners: it isn't too late to peg down a further batch. Summer prune sideshoots on restricted fruit trees (such as espaliers and fans) to three to four leaves to form fruiting spurs. If necessary, prune Nectarines, Apricots and Peaches after they have fruited, and prune Plums, Gages and Damsons immediately after harvest.

**FEEDING REGIME** Plant feeding still needs to be carried out, especially on the likes of newly established perennials, fruit trees and soft fruits and perennials. Again, Blood, Fish & Bone or Vitax Q4 will be fine to apply, if the weather is dry, do water well in after applying. Don't underestimate the value of foliar feeding to boost growth, especially useful for correcting trace element deficiencies as well as supplementary feeding. Foliar feeding should not be carried out in bright sunlight, as the foliage could be scorched."

**MANY** plants benefit from the 'Chelsea chop', which is running a few weeks behind as we usually carry this out in the third week of May. The 'Chelsea chop' is basically a pruning method by which you limit the size and control the flowering season (by delaying it) of many perennials including *Anthemis tinctoria*, *Echinacea purpurea*, *Helenium*, *Phlox paniculata*, *Solidago* and *Sedum*. If you have several clumps of one plant; try cutting back a few, but leaving others. This will prolong the overall flowering time.

**CONTAINERS** planted with summer colour can now be safely positioned in their final locations for the summer. Just a couple of things... if you plant your containers to be viewed at all angles, do make sure the container is turned by 180 degrees (a half turn) each week to ensure balanced and even growth. Be prepared to remove any spent flowers by regular deadheading the plants at least once a week as you want the plants to divert their energy into new replacement blooms rather than setting seeds.

**MOW** lawns lightly and frequently so that short grass clippings can remain on the lawn during hot summers to act as a moisture-retentive mulch. Excess thatch (lawn trimmings and debris build-up) can be raked (scarified) out during autumn maintenance in September and October. Lawns on thin soils may benefit from a high phosphate feed. This will help strengthen the roots for winter, rather than encouraging lush top growth that could suffer in the cold and weaken the grass.

**PROP TIME** Pinks and Carnations can be propagated by layering. Propagate Irises by dividing the rhizomes. Propagate perennials by dividing once they have finished flowering, but only in areas with some rain and duller weather, to avoid drying out problems. Take cuttings of tender perennials such as *Pelargonium* and *Osteospermum*, as soon as possible. A greenhouse, cool conservatory or a light windowsill are ideal to bring them on until they are established. Rock garden plants, such as *Helianthemum*, *Aubrieta* and *Dianthus* can be propagated from cuttings at this time of year.



**QUICK FIXES** Prune *Wisteria*. Deadhead flowers, especially perennials and bedding, to ensure continued colour. Watering! Particularly containers, and new plants - preferably with grey recycled water or stored rainwater. Collect seed from favourite plants. Top up ponds and water features. Feed the soil with green manures such as Buckwheat and Fenugreek.

**FINALLY** for all greenhouse gardeners... Water plants in early morning or late evening to avoid the risk of leaf scorch on hot days. Damp down greenhouses on hot days (pictured). Air circulation is crucial even on cloudy overcast days so make sure the vents and door are open to keep the air flowing. Cuttings can be taken and grown on in the glasshouse. Take half-ripe cuttings of shrubs.



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