

SUFFOLK GROUP JOURNAL

Spring 2023



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Layout: Tuddenham Press

Cover design: Sally Geeve. www.sallygeeve.com

The cover photo is of Berberis Georgii taken by Neil Bradfield in his garden at Polstead.

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

MAGGIE THORPE

Inevitably there are changes to our Committee, some leave and new people take their places. The sad loss is our lovely Publicity Officer, Nick Stanley, who died this month. We shall miss his happy disposition; he was always so willing to help in so many ways.

As you know, Anne Tweddle retired as Propagation Officer and we are delighted to welcome Jude Law in her place. Jude will be rounding up the members of our team of propagators and she will welcome offers of cuttings from your gardens, anything you think is fairly rare or unusual she would be so pleased to have. Her details can be found in the Committee list on the inside back page. And please let us know if you are aware of any other gardens where you think there are some rarities. All we need is permission to enter and take cuttings at the right time.

We ended last year with the AGM and an absolutely great talk on conifers by Fay Jones. She brought along a basketful of well labelled material to help with identification. Members enjoyed question time followed by tea and cake by the wonderful ladies from the W.I.

This summer we look forward to being able to have a garden party in a member's garden as we did before Covid struck. Neil Bradfield, our Vice Chairman, has offered us a very special visit to his garden on Sunday 18th June where we will be able to enjoy wine and strawberries amongst the roses. This will also be an opportunity to celebrate the 45th Anniversary of Plant Heritage.

Sarah Cook and Jim Marshall are having an Open Day in their garden on Saturday 20th May where you will have the wonderful opportunity of seeing three Collections of iris bred by Sir Michael Foster, W.R. Dykes, Long, Chadburn and Sir Cedric Morris.

For full details of these events, please see page 7.

**Contributions for the Autumn Suffolk Group
Journal wanted by 21st August 2023.
Please send to rosieansell@aol.com**

TREASURER'S REPORT

PAT STANLEY

We had a very successful 2022, raising funds from our two Plant Fairs at Helmingham, and the very popular talk given to us by Fergus Garrett on Great Dixter. This enabled us to make a donation to Plant Heritage Central Office of £12,000 at the end of our financial year.

We have a healthy bank balance to begin the new year and look forward to running a full programme of activities to enjoy and enable our fund raising efforts.

Once again thanks are due to the Committee and all volunteers who gave their time and enthusiasm at our events.

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome four new members to the Suffolk Group and look forward to meeting them at our events.

Mrs Pat Williams - Stowmarket

Mrs Susan and Mr Ivan Abel - Kessingland.

Ms Elizabeth Pigott, Mendlesham Green

EVENTS – ZOOM TALKS

Thursday 9th February 2023, 6.30pm, Charming *Camassia* by Stella Exley, Hare Spring Cottage Plants. £5 open to all.

Thursday 23rd February 2023, 6.30pm, Eye Love Roses; my journey growing roses, by Daniel Myhill, National Collection Holder of *Rosa persica*. £5 open to all.

Book on the Plant Heritage website

OPENINGS

From Wednesday 1 February 2023 Snowdrop days at Fullers Mill Garden, West Stow, IP28 6HD every Wednesday and Friday in February 11 am – 3 pm.

Sunday 5 February 2023 Snowdrop Fair at East Ruston Old Vicarage, East Ruston, NR12 9HN, 10 am – 2 pm

Sunday 12th February 2023 Snowdrop day at Gable House Redisham NR34 8NE for NGS

Sunday 26th February 2023 Open Garden at the Laburnums, St James South Elmham, IP19 0HN in aid of local charities. Admission £4, children 50p.

For charity openings of The Place for Plants, East Bergholt Place, CO7 6UP please check their website: www.placeforplants.co.uk.

SUFFOLK NATIONAL COLLECTIONS REPORT

DOROTHY CARTWRIGHT

We have two new collections in Suffolk:

Pelargonium held by Lucinda Skinner at Woottens of Wenhaston.

Rosa – Pemberton and Bentall hybrids – held by Debbie Symes of Earlsway Farm, Bramfield.

I have been able to visit collection holders and all the collections are doing well.

SUFFOLK'S NATIONAL COLLECTIONS 2023

Aesculus Robert Grimsey, 01728 685203	Framlingham
Bellevalia Debbie Amor 07565 966682	Lowestoft
Dianthus (Malmaison) Dianthus (Perpetual) Jim Marshall, 01473 822400	Shelley

Disporopsis, Disporum & Prosartes Helen Chen, 07805 238680	Bures
Dryopteris Equisetum Anthony Pigott, 01449 766104	Stowmarket
Euonymus Rhus Toxicodendron Rupert Eley, Place for Plants, 01206 299224	East Bergholt
Hosta Melanie Collins, Mickfield Hostas, 01449 711576	Stowmarket
Impatiens Will Purdom, team.botanico@gmail.com	Beccles
Iris (Sir Cedric Morris) Sarah Cook, 01473 822400	Shelley
Iris (Sir Michael Foster) Lucy Skellorn, 07730 507900	Stowmarket
Iris (Suffolk pre 1985) Steve Baker 07764 500104	nr Woodbridge
Narcissus (Rev. G. Engleheart) Darren Andrews, 01473 822987	Dispersed
Pelargonium, hybrids and scented leaves Lucinda Skinner, Woottens of Wenhaston 01502 478258	Wenhaston
Plants named for Ellen Willmott Nick Stanley, 07710 656757	Witnesham
Rosa - Pemberton and Bentall hybrids Debbie Symes, Earlsway Farm, 07787 152451	Bramfield
Santolina Jon Rose, Botanica, 01728 747113	Campsea Ashe
Suffolk Garden Plants Suffolk Punch Trust, 01394 411327	Hollesley

PLANT HERITAGE SUFFOLK EVENTS 2023

All talks will be held at Stowupland Village Hall. The programme of events may be subject to change - please check the Suffolk Plant Heritage website.

28th January 2023: Spices, a super spicy story by Jacqueline Aviolet
Jacqueline is a popular speaker and horticulturalist from 'Rosie's Garden Plants' in Kent with its wealth of plants from perennials to shrubs and roses.

25th February 2023: Miss Ellen Willmott, her life and gardens by Sandra Lawrence

Ellen Ann Willmott FLS VMH of Warley Place in Essex was an influential member of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Sandra Lawrence is a journalist and has written a biography of Miss Willmott entitled "Miss Willmott's Ghosts; the extraordinary life and gardens of a forgotten genius".

25th March 2023: Plants in art and culture - how plants created society by Dr Mark Spencer

Mark is a Forensic Botanist and the author of "Murder Most Florid". He started life as a botanist and rather fell into forensics when asked by the Police to assist in the investigation of 'Cold' cases.

22nd April 2023: Learning from brownfields: Bringing chaos and complexity back into new landscapes by John Little of the Grass Roots Company

"We now understand that the wildlife around us all today evolved and is adapted to the disturbance and chaos of landscapes carved out by large mammals. Most of our flora and fauna it seems are not happy in the closed canopy woodland we assumed dominated the UK. A lot of our most important sites for wildlife are in places we have trashed and then left alone. Why then don't we design back the structural complexity, topography and substrate mosaic of the mineral extraction and brownfield sites when designing our new landscapes?"

Saturday 20th May 2023 Iris Open Day at Hullwood Barn, Shelley, IP7 5RE 11.00-4.00. All three of the National Collections of Irises based in Suffolk will be on display.

28th & 29th May 2023 Spring Plant Fair at Helmingham Hall

Sunday 18th June 2023 Summer garden party to celebrate 45 years of Plant Heritage at 2 Holmwood Cottages, Bower House Tye, Polstead, CO6 5BZ from 3.30 pm. There will be wine and strawberries. Tickets £5 from Maggie Thorpe. (Guests £7)

17th September 2023 Autumn Plant Fair at Helmingham Hall

23rd September 2023: The Gardens of Windsor Great Park and Savill Gardens by John Anderson

John Anderson is Keeper of the Gardens in Windsor Great Park. The Savill & Valley Gardens of Windsor Great Park have so much to offer in terms of history, royal connections, plant diversity, landscape use and seasonal interest. They are one of the finest woodland gardens in the country.

21st October 2023: A Passion for Climbers by Jane Lyndsay and Toni O'Connor

Jane and Toni are familiar visitors to our plant fairs at Helmingham and speakers at Suffolk Plant Heritage and need no further introduction.

25th November 2023: AGM and Chrysanthemums by Twigs Way.

Twigs Way runs a small business delivering consultancy and research projects on historic gardens and designed landscapes of all periods and sizes. This includes production of Parkland Management Plans (PMP), Conservation Plans (CP) and Heritage Statements as well as undertaking specific research targeted projects for public and private clients. She is currently also working with a volunteer group in Essex to document historic parks and gardens in the area of Thurrock and the associated 'Land of the Fanns'.

WHO THOUGHT GROWING HOSTAS IN ONE OF THE DRIEST PARTS OF THE UK WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA?

The impact of climate change is becoming less easy to ignore, especially for growers. We have become accustomed to a changeable weather pattern, for example 3-4 days of heat followed by a thunderstorm. Experiencing the same weather for weeks on end was an anomaly, but now it seems more normal, and so we need to adjust accordingly.

Our top 5 tips for growing hostas:

1 Shelter and shade is essential for hostas

Direct sunlight and high temperatures exacerbate the transpiration of moisture and strip hostas of their colour. Hostas will stunt if they dry out and can reach a point where the root system becomes too dehydrated to function. The plant will then die, probably the following winter rather than immediately. Ground growing is better if you don't have the time to monitor their condition in containers.

2 Watering less frequently but well

A drenching once a week is far better than a sprinkling every day, most of which will evaporate in higher temperatures. If you water too often it encourages the plants to shallow root, which leaves them more prone to weather extremes.

3 Water from below or around

Don't be tempted to water into the crown of your hosta, let the rain do that. Water ground grown hostas around the plant to help keep the root system hydrated. Water container grown hostas from below by sitting the container in a dish or tray and keep that topped up.

4 More shelter = a higher concentration of foliage munchers

Pests need shelter, water and food too and so try to avoid overcrowding areas in the garden as this gives them the perfect environment to thrive without having to go far. Try lifting the

canopy by trimming off lower branches, this will allow in more light and air as well as predators to help keep the numbers under control.

5 Don't overfeed your hosta

Hostas like a little extra food in the spring so perhaps 1-2 feeds of a seaweed extract or diluted tomato feed is sufficient for the year.

Peat free challenge

We have been peat free for over 20 years now and an important part of the process has been learning how to put together a soil medium which can be adapted to the requirements of the various root systems. Not to put you off but we are still perfecting this for the range of hostas we grow, even though hostas are not as fussy about soil condition as other plants.

Plastics challenge

Every year the amount of plastic we recycle gets less, as our usage drops. This year saw the last of the polythene removed from our sales plants tunnels. The polythene was designed to enable the plants to emerge earlier and go dormant later whilst being protected in between. However, in the last decade or so the polythene proved to have a detrimental impact on the plant condition. We were finding the effects of late frosts to be worse, the intensity of heat during the season stressed the plants, and issues with pests become more pronounced, especially white fly, thrip, and vine weevil.

Since removing the polythene and replacing it with horticultural net the pest damage from white fly and thrip has almost been eradicated and the damage from vine weevil much reduced. The latter is probably due to the fact that it is less hospitable to over winter under the net than the polythene.

The plants have thrived and haven't needed as much watering as the temperature was much lower under the net, avoiding excessive transpiration. The net enables the contents of the tunnels to exist around the ambient temperature of outside, which helps balance the extremes in spring. Warm, bright days followed by frosty



nights work to harden off the shoots as they emerge and the early foliage suffers less damage from late frosts. Furthermore, the leaves emerge more characteristic and with much better substance having come through gradually, as they would emerging from the ground. Scorching is also minimised so the plants look wonderfully lush for much longer into the autumn.

Over winter the net reduces widely fluctuating temperatures so it is easier to maintain the level of cold the hostas like during dormancy and it is much easier to maintain a good level of moisture in the soil because, although under net everything gets watered whether or not it needs it. It does help prevent stagnant water building up, as long as everything can drain readily. Perhaps the best aspect of using net is the improved airflow, which is why we have much less damage from white fly and thrip.

As it turns out, despite climate change and the onset of more extreme weather conditions, the hostas seem to be doing very well, especially mature ground grown specimens, which have developed strong root systems to enable them to withstand weather extremes. So many customers have reportedly lost plants they would not have expected to lose, whilst their hostas have thrived – who knew?

If you would like to find out more why not take a look at our monthly newsletter archive on our website at www.mickfieldhostas.co.uk

COMPANION PLANTING FOR A BALANCED GARDEN

DR IAN BEDFORD - RESEARCH ENTOMOLOGIST

For as far back as I can remember, the different and diverse creatures from the bug world have fascinated me. From early days chasing butterflies on the South Downs and throughout my long and enjoyable career as a Research Entomologist at the John Innes Centre in Norwich where, up to my retirement, I ran the Entomology department.

Post retirement, I now spend my time visiting various clubs and societies to talk about aspects of the bug world that mainly relate to our home gardens. Explaining that many of the insects and other garden invertebrates we've historically regarded as plant pests, are actually essential for sustaining a healthy garden ecosystem and ultimately play an important role in Britain's nature recovery plans.

So I was very pleased to be asked to give one of my talks to Suffolk Plant Heritage in Stowupland Village Hall in September 2022, and the presentation that had been selected was entitled 'Companion Planting for a Balanced Garden'.

Without going into the details of naming specific plants that could perhaps be grown as 'Companions', my talk focussed on the reasons why Companion Planting might be worth trying in a home garden, and why it's not something that's widely used, especially within commercial crops. Surprising maybe, since Companion Planting has been known about for many centuries and is the subject of countless publications.

I began by explaining what we mean by a 'Balanced Garden', revealing that this is what occurs in the natural world where the creatures that feed on plants (the herbivores), are maintained at 'plant safe' levels by the creatures that predate on them. For

example, the sap-sucking aphids that are a food source for ladybirds, hoverflies, spiders and insectivorous birds.

So often though, the appearance of aphids in a garden has resulted in a pesticide being used which unfortunately harms many of the predators that feed on the aphids.

I also explained that for a 'Balanced' system to develop and work within a home garden, natural food chains must evolve, so it's important that all chemical applications are avoided (insecticides, fungicides & herbicides), so that the beneficial wildlife can survive and increase in numbers.

So, the environmentally harmless practice of Companion Planting could perhaps become a key component of a balanced garden if those plants potentially offer a natural alternative to pesticides.

Perhaps if they had 'plant pest' repellent properties when they were grown amongst other more susceptible plants, foreseeably shielding the susceptible plants from pest damage whilst allowing the 'plant pests' to remain as the food for others.

However, I also explained that it might not be as simple as it sounds, since there are many different environmental factors that could affect whether the concept of companion planting might work or not. Factors such as shade, soil type, moisture, pH and nutrient levels.

But, with Britain's diversity currently declining at an alarming rate, it would be a tremendous help if as many as possible of the country's 23 million home gardens became more inviting and safer places for wildlife to visit or survive within.

And perhaps a simple way to begin would be to try Companion Planting as an alternative to chemical insecticides, whilst allowing a natural balance to develop within the garden between the creatures that feed on plants and those that need to feed on them.



HELMINGHAM AUTUMN



Photos taken by Rosie Ansell and Kevin



PLANT FAIR



evin Pulford



PEAT TO BE BANNED FOR THE RETAIL MARKET

JIM MARSHALL - jimmalmaisons@gmail.com

If you haven't used a Peat Free growing media for your plants in pots, you should think of having a trial in 2023. Peat is going to be banned for the retail market at the end of 2024. (First a note on terminology: Compost is the word which is rightly used for composted garden waste, products used for growing plants in pots are called 'growing media', this avoids any confusion between the two!

The most common ingredients in 'peat free' growing media are composted bark, wood fibre and coir, the latter is made from coconut husks. Composted bracken and sheep's wool are also used.

Some tips for success when using 'Peat Free' compost.

- 1. Buying:** Buy supplies of good quality Peat Free Growing Media in good time – occasionally there are shortages. Consider trying more than one brand to see what suits you best.
- 2. Storage:** Store under cover in a cool dry place for a maximum of 6 months. Storage for longer will cause deterioration, particularly if the product contains fertiliser.
- 3. Potting:** Do not 'over pot' (ie do not use a pot which dwarfs the plant, it is much better to repot again at a later date). Do not press the growing media too hard when pricking out or potting on. I find giving the pot two taps on the bench after potting is sufficient to settle it in. This 'lightness of touch is one of the major differences between using 'soil based' growing media (e.g. John Innes which contains peat, loam and sand) and peat free growing media.
- 4. Watering:** 'Peat free' growing media are free draining, the surface of the pots can look very dry when the lower layers are wet. Overwatering is one of the major causes of failure when using 'peat free'. I find a 'little water' more often is best. Experience can tell you how heavy a pot feels when it has enough water or conversely when it needs watering. In addition the foliage on most plants changes

colour subtly when water gets short (this observation is Sarah's favourite method in my glasshouse!). You will soon find a method to suit you.

5. Feeding: Inspect your potted plants regularly. In a Peat Free Growing Medium they could need feeding from 4 to 6 weeks after potting. Use a liquid feed with a balance of NPK (Nitrogen, Potassium, Phosphate). I use a feed which contains these three and 'trace elements'

PLANT IDENTIFICATION APPS

KEVIN PULFORD

Have you been on a walk in the country and spotted a plant you wanted to know what it was or visiting a garden and spotted a plant you fancied and there was no head gardener to ask. Well, help is now at hand or at least on your smartphone. You need only take a photo of the plant with your phone and you then get the plant identified.



The illustration shows my favourite app, *PlantNet* and it is free! I find it pretty accurate with flowers and is good with leaves. You get several pictures of the identified plant to compare so you can see how the plant might look different in different views. You also get to identify by flower, by leaves, by fruit or, in the case of a tree, by bark. Whilst it can identify the species, it might not be able to get to a particular variant. You also don't have to take a picture with the app; you can provide an image you took elsewhere. You can even do this on a PC or Mac desktop or laptop via the internet.

There is a wide range of these sorts of apps for android phones and apple iPhones or tablets. Some apps are free and there are others which are paid for. My advice is to download some and try them in your garden or nearby country and see if they are accurate enough for you and that are easy to handle. Some even allegedly give you

cultivation advice – as if you needed it! One thing you need to check is that some of the apps are US based and may thus be biased in favour of plants native to that country.

Good luck and enjoy your freedom!

This is a small selection of plant identification apps I identified by browsing the internet. Some apps are completely free whilst some have extras which you need to pay for. For these you should check what you get for free and what you have to pay for.

Plantnet – iOS, Android and Online – Free <https://plantnet.org/en/>

Plantsnap -iOS and Android free and paid versions - <https://www.plantsnap.com/>

iPlant – iOS – Free and paid add free - <http://aitube.doukantv.com/media/html/home/iplant.html>

Leafsnap – iOS and Android – free and paid - <https://leafsnap.app/>

Picturethis - iOS and Android and Online – free and paid versions

Identification ++ iOS – Free and Paid - <https://plant-identification.flycricket.io/>

PlantIn – iOS and Android - free and paid - <https://myplantin.com/>

Flora Incognita – iOS and Android – Free - <https://floraincognita.com/>

NICK STANLEY

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Nick Stanley, our Publicity Officer and long term member of Plant Heritage.

Nick held a National Collection of Plants named after Ellen Willmott and was a member of the team holding the Dispersed Collection of Engleheart Daffodils. He spent many hours working through all the Engleheart to Willmott letters picking out any mention of Engleheart daffodils which he catalogued in detail for future reference. We shall greatly miss him and send our best wishes to his wife Pat, our Treasurer, and their family.

It is also with great regret that we announce the death of Pauline Byford. She was a much loved Membership Secretary of our Group for at least ten years, retiring in 2012.

PLANT PROBLEMS

MATT TANTON BROWN

The dry summer has caused a few issues in the garden so hopefully this will be a help if you have suffered from the following, although as I write this it is raining for the 5th consecutive day!!

FASCIATION

Not necessarily a real problem but a rather odd plant disorder that seems to be more common on a wide range of plants.



Fasciation



Fasciation on Forsythia

What is it? – these are abnormal growths on plants that are often flattened and twisted. Normally only one single shoot is affected, but sometimes it can affect several and they can become fused together.

Sometimes a ring of flowerheads is produced around a normal flower. This is a phenomenon known as 'hen and chicks'.

Plants commonly affected - Foxgloves (*Digitalis*), *Leucanthemum*, *Forsythia*, *Primula*, *Euphorbia*, *Delphinium*, *Lily*, *Salix* (Willow) and *Veronicastrum*. But I have also seen it on lots of other trees and Shrubs.

Causes - These growths often appear when the growing tip has been damaged or has had some abnormal activity, often when the plant is under severe stress due to cold, drought, flood or heat. I mention it now as with the excessive heat we have had don't be surprised if instances of this are more common next Spring.

Random genetic mutation or viral infection has been the cause in some plants, but more often the bacterium *Rhodococcus fascians* is the culprit.

Insects can also play their part in damaging the growing point by

sucking sap and therefore causing a mutation to occur.

It has also been suggested that garden maintenance such as hoeing around the plant when it's soft and vulnerable may be a cause.

Control – prune out any unwanted shoots, the rest of the plant should not be affected and will go on to mature. If stems on herbaceous perennials are affected this year, do not be concerned, often it will not reoccur the next year.

Not all bad news - Some plants are propagated to increase the instance of this happening such as *Salix udensis* 'Sekka' which is a popular plant with flower arrangers and florists, as it produces many flattened and twisted stems during the growing season. These are often dried and then used in arrangements to create flow and movement.

Veronica spicata 'Christa' often produces flowers that are flattened and covered in a multitude of royal purple flowers topped with a green cockscomb.



APPLE BITTER PIT

After the hot dry, summer we have recently experienced this disorder of plants has been quite prevalent this year.

What is it? – often with this disorder the skin of the fruit develops sunken brown spots, which are usually less than 1mm in diameter. When cut open the flesh has numerous pale brown spots which are sometimes called freckles.

The fruits can sometimes have a bitter taste. Trees that produce abundant crops are most often affected and ones that produce larger fruits such as cooking apples can also be prone. Sometimes the symptoms in severe cases will appear on the fruit whilst developing on the tree however they generally appear once in storage over the winter (see photos). Because the skin is sunken and thinner in structure, it often allows in secondary rotting diseases reducing the storage time.

Plants Commonly Affected - All apple varieties.

Causes – a deficiency in calcium is the usual cause, because the trees cannot absorb it in large enough amounts in dry conditions. This results in the collapse of cells within the fruit flesh which causes the brown flecks to appear.

The calcium levels within the soil will most likely be perfectly adequate for the tree, but in dry conditions the tree cannot absorb enough.

Control – in spells of dry weather keep apple trees well-watered, applying a good thick mulch around the base of each tree will also help to reduce water loss by evaporation and help to maintain the moisture levels in the soil. With ever increasing warmer summers this will be something more important for the future if you want to retain a good crop of fruit.

In Spring, feed the trees with a good balanced fertilizer and avoid excessive use of high nitrogen feeds as this can increase growth rates of the trees and exacerbate the nutrient deficiency in dry conditions. You can spray the developing fruits with a calcium nitrate solution to reduce the risk of bitter pit, however I find that keeping the moisture levels higher tends to be a better practice and less time consuming!

Thinning your crop of apples out can also reduce the stress that the tree is under in dry conditions helping to reduce the risk of bitter bit as there is more water for less fruit. This also helps to prevent the phenomenon known as “Biennial Bearing” where fruit trees produce a huge crop one year and nothing the next as they are exhausted and need a year's rest!!

**Interesting and unusual
plants**

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woottensplants.com

RHS SURVEY SHOWS GARDEN FAVOURITES SUFFERED FROM EXTREME HEAT THIS SUMMER

Results from the RHS' Extreme Heat Survey conducted in July after the record-breaking heatwave this summer show that plants across the country suffered damage.

Over 8,000 responses paint a clear picture that even established, formerly healthy plants could not cope with temperatures well above 30 degrees Celsius. Techniques that would usually protect plants and help them retain water, such as mulching, in some cases also proved ineffective against the prolonged heat and drought according to survey respondents.

The survey asked respondents questions about plants in their gardens that had suffered damage during the heatwave. Responses give the RHS a broad view of the immediate harm of high temperatures to garden plants and how this might be exacerbated as the climate continues to warm and extreme weather becomes increasingly frequent.

The top ten plant types reported to have suffered damage were:

- | | | |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Hydrangea | 5. Rosa | 9. Phlox |
| 2. Acer | 6. Amelanchier | 10. Crocosmia |
| 3. Fuchsia | 7. Ferns | |
| 4. Astilbe | 8. Heuchera | |

Many of the plants in the top ten were expected, such as hydrangeas, Japanese maples (acers) and hardy fuchsia species, as they prefer cooler conditions with plenty of soil moisture. In addition these varieties are often planted in dry and exposed sites and this may have contributed to their vulnerability.

However, others such as roses were more of a surprise. Some saw flower damage in July and August but many have gone on to have an extended flowering season and are still producing flowers in late October.

Fans of the fiery-coloured crocosmia will be reassured that the damage to these plants is unlikely to affect them in the long-term. Although their leaves are easily scorched, the damage is expected

to be superficial as they are drought-tolerant plants and are likely to re-emerge.

Magnolia, rhododendron and camellia do not appear in the top ten, despite drought resulting in leaf loss, dieback and often death. Having already finished flowering by the summer, damage might have been less obvious. The RHS Garden Advice Service will be on the lookout for reports of damaged plants in the spring when these plants should be ready to bloom.

If we see similar temperatures next summer gardeners should resist the urge to prune plants that have lost a lot of leaves. Most plants will still have live buds on their stems and branches, and will leaf up again when the temperature is right and rain arrives, but pruning after heat and drought can put them under more stress. Come spring, woody plants will show where any dead wood is more clearly, ensuring you can prune the right parts of plants affected by the heat this summer.

Leigh Hunt, RHS Principal Horticultural Advisor, said: “As temperatures become more extreme don't replace like for like – if a plant is struggling in your garden you can plant something better suited to the space. Dry gardens don't have to mean gravel-gardens, you can keep an English-style garden by swapping plants, for example exchange rhododendrons for grevillea.

“Timing is especially important in the garden, and gardening calendars aren't as reliable as your own green fingers as seasons become more variable. You can make good use of the longer seasons as many plants including asters and salvias are now providing a brilliant show well into November.”

The results highlight the importance of planting in the right place at the right time and being water-wise all year round. Climate-resilient planting can help gardens cope with extremes of temperatures and moisture, as well as ensuring habitats and food for wildlife throughout the year.

While mulching alone does not seem to have protected some plants from such high temperatures, a combination of measures such as improving soil with home compost to ensure it holds more water and harvesting rainwater with water butts to keep plants that require it moist could help.

More information can be found at www.mains2rains.uk

THE SUMMER WE HAD

ROSIE ANSELL

Only a few members responded to my enquiry about what did well (or not) in their gardens in the very hot weather we had last year.

Jim and Sarah reported that they lost a young magnolia and an established rhododendron from their garden in Shelley, and that Dahlias, Asters, Chrysanthemums, parsnips and runner beans did not do well. Brussels sprouts and purple sprouting broccoli needed a lot of water.

Their roses did very well, though the flowers were damaged in hot sun, as did Hemerocallis, Nerines, Dierama, Kniphofia and onions.

In our sandy garden in Bury St Edmunds the dahlias did not come good until we had rain at the end of August, but then I was picking them until the end of October. Our Salvia Amistad was also flowering well until our first real frost a week into December. One of our neighbours told me that she gives her nerines a good bucket of water in the last week of August to make them flower well. Well we had torrential rain on the 25th August, which was the first rain we had had for weeks, and our nerines also flowered well until the frost. Apparently in Bury we had 46mm of rain that day, but the weather station at Barrow several miles to the west had 76 mm. Jude Law, in her garden near Eye, did not get any rain at all!

The leaves on our deutzia turned completely brown and we feared that it had succumbed to the drought, but after the rain it appeared to recover completely.

Our runner beans were very poor, but I picked loads of tomatoes and still have a freezer full of tomato puree. Some of our butternut squashes were so late that the skins did not cure well and needed using early.

The autumn fruiting raspberries did not like the conditions at all, the canes barely put on any growth and did not produce any raspberries. We had a massive crop of gooseberries, but I am not sure that was down to the weather as they were all picked before it got hot.

Gill Beardsworth reported that she sowed a lot of verbena bonariensis in her Leiston garden and they all loved the hot weather and she is hoping that their seedlings will populate her garden for years to come.

Our secretary Isobel Ashton has a walled garden in the centre of Bury with light soil and reports that her evergreens all revived after the rain in late summer. The flowers on her roses were also damaged by the hot sun.

Otherwise most flowering plants waited until after the hottest weather had passed and we had more rain, continuing to flower into November.

Her apples and pears did badly but greengages did well, and her walnuts were very small.

Of course we may find that some effects will not show until this summer.

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Plants of Distinction is a local family run seed company based at Framsdon near Stowmarket. Members of Suffolk Plant Heritage can order seeds from them at a 50% discount on the catalogue price. Catalogues can be obtained by calling the Order Hotline and Customer Service No. 01449 721720. Seed orders can be posted using the order form in the catalogue and applying a 50% discount to the seed price, but the postage and packing cost is **not** discounted. The website has a greater selection of seeds than can be found in the catalogue together with a selection of bulbs and plants.

The discount code shown below must be written on the order. Orders may be placed on the hotline number shown above and again the discount code must be quoted when placing the order. If you place your order via their website www.plantsofdistinction.co.uk and enter the discount code the discount will be applied automatically.

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For an update on what's happening at National Office visit the current issue of Newlines on the website www.plantheritage.com

To find out more about Suffolk Group activities - including details of garden events and openings visit

<https://suffolkplants.org.uk/>

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