

CSGGA Newsletter

January 2024



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All Muck and Magic – Geoff Hodge

Geoff Hodge has entertained us with his knowledge of things horticultural a number of times and for our January meeting he shared his expertise on "All Muck and Magic" or how to get the best out of your soil and therefore the best out of what you have planted.

A good and healthy soil is vital, especially as we have fewer pesticides available for use now (and some of us would say that's a very good thing!).

Geoff explained the importance of working in some bulky organic matter, looking at the different options available. If you've got heavy clay soil, you'll need a flocculating agent to break it down.

He explained how macro nutrients work. These are listed as NPK, or Nitrogen, Phosphorous and Potassium. Check out the label for the ratios: a high potassium content will encourage flowers and fruit.

Feeds come in liquid, granular or controlled release forms and Geoff discussed how effective the different types are and how they work. He recommended seaweed extract as a great plant tonic as it stimulates growth and helps the plant resist pests and diseases.

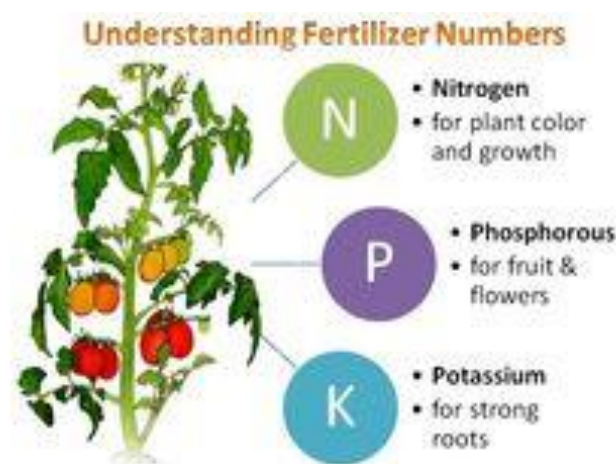
A more recent innovation is mycorrhizal fungi which helps the plant's root system to absorb the right amount of water and nutrients. When feeding the roots of a tree, Geoff reminded us that we need to spread the feed in the same circumference as the tree's canopy or it will be ineffective.

He brought a number of different products with him, explaining how effective he thought they were and their benefits. Geoff is an interesting and informative speaker and we learned a lot. I will certainly be applying some of his expert advice to my gardening this year!

Eleanor O'Connor

Want to know more? Take a look at these two websites.

[Understanding and Using NPK Fertilizer. | BBC Gardeners World Magazine](#)
[Fertiliser labels explained / RHS Gardening](#)



Next Month's Meeting – Priestfield Arboretum – Tim Pye



Priestfield Arboretum is a privately owned tree collection in Little Kingshill, described as a "hidden gem in the Chilterns". Tim is the arboretum's curator and will give us a brief history of the arboretum and then focus on some of the more interesting specimens.

Reminder that we are serving refreshments after the talk for the next couple of months. Doors open at 7.45.

M's Action Diary for January

- Boost fruit trees by feeding with Sulphate of Potash, Growmore or chicken manure. Hedges could do with similar feeding.
- Plant lily bulbs in pots to flower in Spring.
- Shredded cardboard provides a source of carbon for compost heaps also helps to balance out additions of green waste and prevents soggy. Remove coloured or plastic film-covered pieces, staples and tapes first.
- Arrange service of petrol mowers and shears.
- Recycle your Christmas tree. If you have a shredder, use the clippings as a mulch around established trees and shrubs.
- Winter prune wisteria by cutting back laterals and side shoots to 2 or 3 buds. Thin out old congested spur stems now by cutting out excess spurs.

Merida wishes all members a happy new year.

Big Garden Birdwatch 26-28 January, 2024

The world's largest garden wildlife survey, the [Big Garden Birdwatch \(rspb.org.uk\)](https://www.rspb.org.uk) is taking place later this month. Last year, over half a million people participated.



It's very easy, simply choose an hour between Friday 26 and Sunday 28 January to count the birds you see landing in your patch. If you don't have a garden or balcony, you can choose somewhere comfortable with a view of the outdoors. You need to register with the RSPB and then you'll be sent a digital guide to help you identify the birds and record your findings. [Big Garden Birdwatch | Register \(rspb.org.uk\)](https://www.rspb.org.uk)

Green Gardening Tip – Helping Birds Find a Home

The spring breeding season is just around the corner and as soon as the new year dawns, birds will be scouting for homes to raise their chicks. Winter is a good time to give existing nest boxes a good clean in preparation, or to put up new ones.

It seems so simple, but providing nest boxes is one of the easiest ways to help birds in your outside space. Putting out bird food is great, but if birds don't have access to nesting sites, they won't have anywhere to raise the next generation. It's also key that the nest sites are nearby to foraging locations, where they can find plenty of invertebrates without leaving the nest for too long.

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Different birds prefer different-sized nest boxes and entrance holes – it's all about safety and shelter. A hole that is just about big enough for them to squeeze through means nothing larger can reach them, and they are also well protected from anything the weather can throw at them.

To find out more go to [Our ultimate guide to nest boxes \(rspb.org.uk\)](https://rspb.org.uk)

Plant Sale – Saturday 11th May, 2024

This year we are holding the Plant Sale in the Reading Room, to avoid the two issues of transporting tables and the vagaries of the weather. If you've already started planting your seeds, don't forget to plant a few extra for the plant sale.

Seeds to plant now that are always popular at the sale include:

Begonia	Aubergine
Lobelia	Chard
Pelargonium	Chillies
Salvia	Coriander
Sweet peas	Lettuce



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