

# CSGGA Newsletter

## July 2022



RHS Affiliated Membership Number: 10570237

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### Naturalistic Planting – Amber Hine

A smaller than usual group of members were treated to a lively and interesting presentation on ideas for naturalistic planting for our July talk. Were you all enjoying some well-deserved R & R, like Briony?

Amber has won awards for her designs and the Latin names of the plants she suggests trip off her tongue. Just don't expect me to have noted them down! Naturalistic planting draws inspiration from the natural world and those who follow it look at nature for guidance, including wildflowers and even what some might call weeds. Planting can be anywhere – in the margins between infrastructure and buildings for example.

Amber quoted the famous Beth Chatto advice of "Right Plant, Right Place", watering plants at the time of planting and never again. Autumn is the time to plant so they can use the winter to root down far enough to survive on their own. Buy plants in 9cm pots, water once and leave them.

Site conditions determine the type of seeds/plants used and nature likes variety and textures in plants, as does wildlife looking for food.

Designers may plant in blocks, creating a river effect or clumps, with grasses to fill gaps and add texture. Amber particularly loves texture and grasses. Maintenance should be low, as, once established, the plants require very little work.

The blocks may be planted using a matrix method which we can use to good effect at home. This is where the mix of plants or seeds are applied per square metre, eg, 5, 7 or 12 plants, or 5-10g of seed. A tip for seeding is to use hessian over the top to keep the seeds in situ as the hessian will rot away over time.

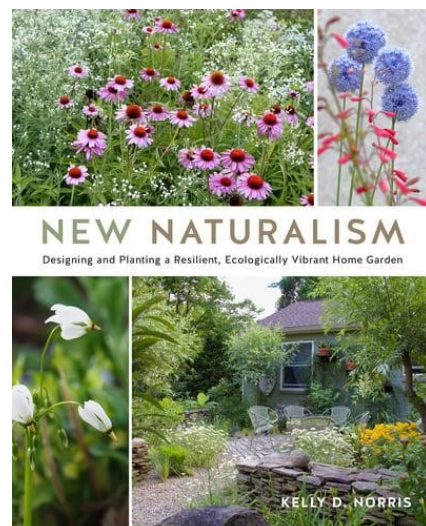


Amber also explained how percentages can be applied to planting in layers. Fifty per cent may be ground cover planting which helps to maintain water. Examples might be pulmonaria or geums. Shrubs and grasses could then make up around 10-15%. Then add a seasonal theme of around 40% with plants that are dominant

during a particular season to add colour, eg, salvias, asters, and rudbeckia. Finally, you add filler plants at around 5-10% and these may only last 2 or 3 years, fading away over time. You can be flexible over the percentages and some plants might cross over these categories.

Books that are worth reading on the subject include those written by Nigel Dunnett, who planted the Olympic Gardens, Thomas Rainer and Claudia West, Piet Oudolf and Noel Kingsbury. Amber's favourite is "New Naturalism" by Kelly D Norris.

Gardens which include naturalistic planting techniques include RHS Wisley, Trentham Estate, the Olympic Parks, Sheffield City and the Barbican. Photographs of these gardens highlighted the variety and textures of the planting and how they worked in different seasons. The Barbican design particularly took into account the exposed nature of the site, despite being surrounded by buildings, where naturalistic planting replaced traditional bedding, using plants that can cope with extreme temperatures and which are low maintenance. The residents did need some persuading apparently but they are no doubt relieved they no longer have to water incessantly!



When it comes to new naturalism at home, Amber recommends buying 3, 5 or 7 herbaceous plants. This creates continuity. Include grasses and look for texture in leaf and flower shape. If it works in a black and white photo where interest is still visible despite lack of colour then you've got it right so arrange your plants before planting and get your camera out!



Questions included a discussion of the watering system "Treegator". Amber suggested trying the Barchams tree website for a non Treegator brand. If you have plants in pots, make sure they are on [feet](#) so the roots can breathe and there is a gap between the top of the soil and the top of the pot. Water, leave for ten minutes, then return to water again.

When asked if these methods can really be applied to smaller gardens, Amber advised on taking inspiration from the larger gardens, using (you guessed it) ornamental grasses and a rich tapestry of different plants. It could just be one bed devoted to naturalistic planting – the book "New Naturalism" offers ideas for different sections in a garden. If you want to try wildflowers, remember they do look terrible for most of the year (as my small front garden sadly proves!). They need low nutrient soil and grass will take over so try planting yellow rattle in the autumn and wait a year for it to work. Plug plants can be an option in spring but you need the right mix for your area. An alternative is to plant ornamental grasses or verbascums which are low maintenance. Try the Knoll Gardens website as this has a good search facility, enabling you to narrow it down to factors relevant to your site.

In summary, Amber's talk was very well received. She's a lively speaker who knows her stuff and she left us all with ideas of how we might work more with nature in our gardens. I'm all for low maintenance! **Eleanor O'Connor**

## Next Month's Talk – 11<sup>th</sup> August

### Hazel Roberts – Growing Food Not Gluts

It is all too easy to grow an abundance of food when kitchen gardening. In her talk, Hazel looks at how to avoid growing gluts, starting with the planning process and following right through to finding ingenious ways to use and store what you grow so that it is manageable and doesn't go to waste.



## M's Action Diary for July

- Sew wallflower seeds now, ready for planting out in autumn.
- Give rosebushes a trim to promote more flower throughout the summer.
- Strim areas of lawn that have wildflowers – leave the trimmings where they fall for a few days, then rake it all up and add to the compost heap.
- If necessary, prune wall trained magnolias – keep it to a minimum because large wounds don't heal well.
- Deadhead continually to encourage plants to make more blooms.
- Plant Autumn crocus.
- Continue deadheading rhododendrons and azaleas.
- Some varieties of penstemons are not fully hardy so take soft wood cuttings.
- Water trees and shrubs planted in the last 18 months.
- Remove vigorous upright shoots from apple trees so as to keep the centre of the tree open. Rake up fallen fruit to discourage wasps.
- Lily beetle are still around so seek and destroy!
- Keep bird baths clean and filled.



## Green Gardening Tip – Water wisely!

With the prolonged absence of any rain from our gardens, here are a few simple ways from Garden Organic to make this precious resource go much further. You probably know them all, but here's a quick reminder:



1. Prioritise which plants need water most. Mature shrubs, trees and grass do not need watering as they will recover quickly, but food crops, pots, hanging baskets and young plants will need to be looked after.
2. Water carefully in the right way and at the right time of the day. Watering early in the morning or after dusk prevents water loss through evaporation in the heat, and make sure you always water the soil, not the plant.
3. Watering for longer but less often ensures that water seeps below the surface layer, making water available to the plants' roots for longer.
4. Use watering cans rather than hoses and sprinkler systems – they will allow you to be more accurate and less wasteful with your watering.

For more advice on gardening during a drought go to <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/news/gardening-during-drought>

## CSGGA Holiday 2023

We've started to plan the holiday for next year. Currently Devon is the favourite on the list staying at a hotel in Torquay at the end of May with a visit to the stunning RHS Rosemoor. Watch this space!

## Chalfont St Giles Village Show

A reminder that the Village Show is being held on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September in Stone Meadow. Schedules for the competitions are in the library and shops in Chalfont St Giles or you can visit the website. <http://www.csgshow.org/comps.html>

If you are able to help with stewarding, setting up or clearing away, please get in touch with either me or Caroline. We will both be organising the horticultural competitions, Mavis Roberts will be judging the floral art competitions and Brian Fisher the horticultural classes. I hope you will find a class to enter, it is good fun.



## Community Orchard Update

The ecological survey of the meadow attached to Milton's Cottage was carried out earlier this month. We have not yet received the report, but understand that it is encouraging. Once it's received and they are able to review it, we hope to be able to take the matter further with the Trustees of Milton's Cottage.

### Your CSGGA Committee

**Chairman and Membership Secretary:**

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New Committee members are always welcome. We are a friendly bunch! Please contact a committee member to find out more if you're interested in joining us.