

CSGGA Newsletter

February 2021



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Garden Photography – Gill Ferguson

Gill Ferguson is a seasoned photographer, having learned the skill from her father and she continued that into her working life. She runs photography courses in adult and further education and offers a range of lectures. This is the second time she has joined us for a talk.

On this occasion, she treated us to a range of truly beautiful images, some taken by her and some by her husband, together with explanations of how she took the photograph and what to consider when composing a shot.

She started with flowers, advising us to consider how the colour will look in the photograph and be open to colour combinations, as well as using the background as a contrast. Photos don't have to be wonderful – simple works

well. Also consider textures, patterns and shapes, especially with regard to plants - for example in the petals, the stems or leaves. Close ups work well when focusing on these and shadow can provide interest. Her photographs included hostas, a cactus, a dead leaf, a nibbled leaf and the bark of a tree.

If you're using a camera, look for the Macro setting to enable you to focus closely in on the image and remember the Rule of Thirds instead of always focussing the image in the centre. For anyone unfamiliar with



this concept, imagine the screen is split into equal thirds horizontally and vertically. Focussing your main image at one intersection helps draw the viewers' eye into the image and places more emphasis onto the subject.

You might also give some thought as to where you are in relation to your subject to provide a different, and possibly more interesting perspective. Try diagonals rather than vertical or horizontal images, eg, the stem of a flower working from the bottom left corner towards the centre. This gives a sense of more dynamism in your photograph.

Gill showed us a range of photographs using the art of 'Bokeh' which intentionally creates aesthetically pleasing out-of-focus parts of an image, ie, creating blur. With compact cameras, this can be achieved by setting the Aperture to a low number, eg, F2.8. This creates a shallow depth of field, and a blurred

background. However, bokeh and a shallow depth of field are not the same thing; bokeh refers to the artistic quality of the background blur, not the blur itself.

You can play with this with two flowers, one in the foreground which is sharp, another further away which is blurred.

Fungi can offer some really stunning colours, textures and shapes. Gill noted that if you want fungi in your lawn, don't feed it! Or you could go to Chalfont St Peter Common in Autumn and look under the Silver Birch trees. One photograph Gill showed us was of two Magpie Ink Caps which disintegrate in the most spectacular fashion with the ink dripping down. She recently discovered that the Magna Carta was signed using ink from Magpie Ink Cap fungi.

Droplets on plants offer opportunities to play with light and, with another flower in the background, it is possible to produce a stunning photograph with the image magnified in the droplet. Condensation on a window can also provide inspiring images.

Insects are an obvious subject for photography in the garden. Gill noted that dragonflies are particularly fun to photograph as they are predictable. They will fly round in a circuit and then return so you have time to set up your photograph. She advised photographing butterflies with the camera parallel to its wings which offers the maximum amount of the butterfly in focus. Moths, bees and flies are also fun to photograph. As a general rule, Gill advised capturing wildlife doing something as it is more interesting than when the subject is stationary. Check out that bee hotel in your back garden for an opportunity to capture some close ups of bees and possibly a cuckoo wasp which lays its eggs where they can eat the bee larvae. Flies, whilst not something we might consider an obvious choice for a photograph, can be bright and colourful up close. Insects are difficult to capture in a photograph, however, as they are often moving fast, except on two notable occasions – when eating or mating!



Gill showed us some stunning photographs of birds. She has a bird feeder in her garden with an obelisk next to it. She attaches sticks to the obelisk and photographs the birds when they sit on the sticks. The contrast between the two can be striking. She also puts an apple out on the lawn to attract blackbirds, fieldfares, blackcaps and robins. Dried mealworms on a log will encourage robins to your garden. You don't have to photograph the whole bird though, an example being the feet of a heron as it was taking off.

Gill had looked at the pictures entered in our Spring Show and observed that those that won seemed invariably to be the ones with a plain background. A point to note if we have to do this again!

When asked about bokeh and a narrow/shallow depth of field, Gill noted that one way of achieving blur in the background if you only have a phone camera is to move the subject as far away as possible in front of the background.

When asked what camera she uses, she explained that her preferred camera is an Olympus which has a macro lens and is really light. Some of her pictures are very technical – she showed us an example of a photograph taken using a 'stacking' technique where one image is taken focussing on one part, then another further back, then another further back again. When put together the final image combines the sharpness from each, creating a stunning image.

Gill's website at <https://www.gillfergusonphotography.com/> includes some of the beautiful photographs she used in her talk. She has certainly inspired me to look at my camera manual again and get out into my garden to see whether I can create pictures half as good as hers! **Eleanor O'Connor**

Next Month's Talk 11th March 2021 via Zoom 7.45 for 8.00

Geoff Hodge – Luscious Lawns



British lawns are renowned across the globe as being the best of the best. Or are they? Some are in desperate need of some timely TLC, especially after recent adverse weather patterns and years of use and abuse.

So, if your lawn isn't the green, green grass at home that Tom Jones would be proud of, Geoff Hodge shows you how to ensure it stays luscious, thick and green.

Details for the zoom log in will be sent about a week before hand and again on the day.

M's Action Diary for February

- Dogwoods that have been kept for their colourful stems need cutting back to their woody base. Willows, cotinus and buddleia also require cutting back now.
- Prune mahonias after flowering, removing old stems to make room for new growth.
- Lift and divide clumps of snowdrops after flowering, and replant to the same depth as before.
- Cyclamen coums can also be lifted and replanted to encourage spread.
- Cut all tatty, brown fronds of ferns back to the base of their stalks to make way for the fresh new foliage that will unfurl.
- Trim winter flowering heathers after they have finished flowering, to keep them neat and compact – do not cut into old wood.
- Prune winter-flowering jasmine after flowering and tie in any long stems.
- Sow sweet peas seeds now.
- Remove old hydrangea flower heads down to large bud once danger of frost has past.
- Prune shrub roses.
- Keep feeding the wild birds and make sure they have fresh water to drink and to bathe in.
- Cut down ornamental grasses before new shoots appear. Only the deciduous grasses such as miscanthus can be cut back hard, evergreen grasses such stipa and festuca should merely be combed through to remove any dead material.

Green Gardening Tip – Pots without Plastic

Many of us have hundreds of old plastic pots from previous purchases which I re-use time and again, but more sustainable alternatives are appearing in the garden centre. There are many different biodegradable materials currently used as a replacement for plastic in gardening products. Clay and metal pots are an attractive alternative have been used forever but now there are pots made of:

Bamboo One of the most useful natural materials on the planet, bamboo is harder than oak, and doesn't swell or shrink like other woody products. In other words; it's a great material for making plant pots. Bamboo pots are made by mashing up the bits of bamboo left over from making furniture and so

on and moulded into pots using binding agents – usually resin, or cornstarch – heated and pressurised to form the final shape.

Coir - a by-product of the coconut industry. A single-use biodegradable which the plant roots can grow through, so you plant it along with your seedlings. It's also made from what would otherwise be a waste material.

Unfortunately, both come with quite a high environmental cost because they are made in the Far East. So if you're trying to avoid plastic and want to sow some seeds why not use cardboard boxes – egg boxes are ideal, loo rolls or make your own newspaper pots using a jar or can as a mould – you don't need a fancy Burgon & Ball pot maker - though they are lovely! Paper pots should last long enough for the seed to germinate or could be used for potting on, just make sure you put them in a tray before filling with compost or watering as they can collapse! For a good RHS guide to making them see:



www.schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/resources/sequence-card/how-to-make-newspaper-pots

For more information on gardening without plastic and where to buy plastic-free garden products see

www.gardeningwithoutplastic.com/category/plastic-substitutes/

Looking Ahead – Plant Sale – 8th May

We really hope that Government restrictions will allow us to hold our annual plant sale on the Village Green this year, so please remember to plant some extra seeds, make additional divisions and take extra cuttings in preparation!

Planned Outings for 2021

I'm sure we're all hoping that we can resume garden visits this year, initially though it may be necessary to drive ourselves rather than the luxury of a coach. The first visit is on:

Thursday 29th April, Pashley Manor and Caxton House

<https://www.pashleymanorgardens.com/>

<https://www.surreylife.co.uk/home/caxton-house-garden-in-reigate-1-2174247>

Your CSGGA Committee

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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.

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