

# CSGGA Newsletter

## January 2021



RHS Affiliated Membership Number: 10570237

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### Medicinal Plants from the Hedgerows Frances Watkins

Frances Watkins practises Western herbal medicine in Hertfordshire. Her particular areas of interest include menopause and executive stress although her patients seek herbal medicine for many different reasons including insomnia, chronic skin conditions and immune support.

She led us through a wide range of plants and remedies which include tinctures, creams, oils, syrups and teas. Before taking us through a whole range of plants and their medicinal properties, she emphasised that you must make sure you have the right plant and you must obtain permission if you are taking it from private land. Identifying the plant when it is in flower is recommended. A good plant

book is essential and she suggested *Wildflower Key* by Frances Rose – although out of print, second hand copies may be found on the internet. In addition, knowing how the plant should be kept or dried once harvested is important to avoid waste. Another book recommended by Frances is Maud Grieves' *Herbal* which is still in print, providing recipes and other useful information.

Western herbal medicine is a tradition in England which dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century or earlier with *Old English Herbarium* manuscripts dating back to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Many of us buy remedies over the counter and there are brands that have been around for many years such as Potters which was established in 1812. We are also familiar with Culpeper the Herbalist, dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Frances focussed on a range of plants that could be obtained from hedgerows, some of which are described here:

Holly and Ivy – only use the smaller, young leaves of ivy (old leaves have a toxic layer of dust on them) and wash them before use. Cough mixture can be made from holly and ivy: gather and finely chop 30g each of holly and ivy leaves, add spices such as cardamom, cinnamon, star anise, thyme and sage. Add 500ml of water. Bring to the boil and simmer for an

hour. Strain and measure the liquid then add an equal part measure of sugar or honey and bring to the boil



again. Cool the liquid, bottle and label. Dosage: 2.5ml twice a day for children, 5ml three times a day for adults.

Ground Ivy was popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a blood tonic. Further back it was traditionally used as a flavour for English beer. Anglo Saxons called it alehoof and infused it in wine for "hysterical complaints". Frances uses ground ivy to treat respiratory catarrh, laryngitis, cystitis, gastritis, diarrhoea, and haemorrhoids, the latter responding particularly well to a cream.

Dandelion flowers can be used in wine as a folk remedy and in an infused oil for rheumatism. The heads are currently being researched for cancer treatments. The root acts on the liver, whilst the leaves are diuretic and high in potassium. Conditions treated by dandelion include constipation, jaundice and rheumatism. Roasted dandelion roots were used as a substitute for coffee in the Second World War.



Herbs can be foods as well as medicine and provide many useful minerals.

Teas today are much more dilute than they would have been at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When drinking herbal tea, Frances advised us to make it in a teapot not a cup. A lot of plants have key aromatic or volatile oils which, when you pour boiling oil on the tea bag, dissipate in the steam. A lid on the teapot prevents this from happening so that they go back down into the brew. Make a note if you are making mint or camomile tea.

Cleavers or Goose Grass offers a spring tonic. It is a lymphatic and has diuretic properties. It is a good remedy for skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis and is excellent as an infusion. Frances also uses it in tinctures.

Couch Grass is also recommended in an infusion for Urinary Tract Infections. Wash and chop the roots, add to boiling water in a teapot and let it stew for 10-15 minutes. Try it and see what you think of the taste. The roots can be stored but make sure they are brittle before doing so.

Betony is Frances' favourite plant. It flowers in July and August. An infusion made from Betony was used as a substitution for tea in the past. Now it is used to calm nerves, for headaches, and to aid sleep. Bees adore the flowers and it likes full sun or a little shade. Frances urged us all to have at least one Betony plant in our gardens and she noted that they are particularly scarce in Hertfordshire. One old remedy using Betony suggested it would prevent inebriation!

Peppermint, Yarrow and Elderflower were used as an infused remedy during the last pandemic of Spanish Flu in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There are many plants in the Bramble family, with many properties, notably Raspberry leaf tea, an infusion which is a good tonic for pregnant women (note, not in the first trimester but in the last six weeks).



Other ways of using plants include making infused oils, cordials, sugar layered syrups and yarn! The latter being from nettles (who knew??).

Frances was asked how to make onion sugar layered syrup. If you fancy doing this, you need onions, sugar or honey, and a jar. Layer each to the top and leave to sit until the onions dissolve. Strain the liquid and use the syrup as a cough mixture: half a tsp twice a day for

children and 1 tsp up to three times a day for adults. Briony's mother-in-law used to make this but Clive and Briony cannot attest to its efficacy!

The antimicrobial properties of honey were noted. Frances makes a winter tonic from two unwaxed lemons sliced and two large dessertspoons of honey. Add boiling water, cover and leave for 20 minutes before drinking. This makes a lovely drink hot or cold.

She was also asked what bases would be best for creams and oils: she makes her own cream from scratch (recipes online) and uses organic sunflower oil in larger quantities, or olive oil in smaller quantities.

The dangers of misusing plants were also discussed. Remember, misidentification can be fatal so know your plant and visit a professional if you're in any doubt! **Eleanor O'Connor**

## Next Month's Talk 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021 via Zoom 7.45 for 8.00

### Garden Photography – Gill Ferguson

Gill will deliver an illustrated talk that aims to improve your photography of plants, as well as insects and birds. Gill's love of photography started as a small child and led her to pursue a career in teaching, lecturing and professional photography.

This talk will again be via Zoom. Details of how to log in will be sent to you a few days beforehand. The talk will start at 8.00 pm but zoom will be open 15 minutes beforehand and we will stay open after the talk for members to have a chat.

### M's Action Diary for January

- Prune wisteria by cutting back laterals and side shoots to 2 or 3 buds. Thin out congested spur systems now by removing excess spurs.
- Plant lily bulbs in pots to flower in the summer.
- Remove old bergenia leaves before new buds appear.
- Prune group 3 clematis, such as C.Viticello, down to a strong bud about 15/30 cm above ground level. (*Group 3 clematis flower in late summer on growth made in that season – if in doubt, Gardeners World has an excellent guide to pruning clematis.*  
[www.gardenersworld.com/plants/clematis-groups-explained/](http://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/clematis-groups-explained/) **Ed.**)
- Remove any damaged or diseased branches from apple trees using a pruning saw and boost fruit trees with Sulphate of Potash, "Growmore or chicken manure pellets.
- Mulch borders generously with well-rotted organic material such as mushroom compost, garden compost or bark chips.
- Sprinkle pelleted chicken manure under hedges.



### Green Gardening Tip – Great Garden Birdwatch

The Great Garden Birdwatch takes place at the height of winter, this year on **29-31 January**, when our feathered friends visit gardens more frequently in the search for food. Attracting and looking after birds in our gardens bring many benefits. Watching birds, interacting with them, listening to their songs can help relieve stress and promote well-being. Birds play a vital role in our garden's ecosystem, they act as pest controllers of everything from snails to aphids. So why not take some time out of your day to watch the wildlife visiting your garden and to provide valuable data to the RSPB helping them monitor trends in bird and wildlife across the UK. All you need to do is spend an hour in your garden or at your window and make note of what



types of birds you see during that time. For more information go to [www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/)

If you want to do more than feeding the birds, why not add a nest box during National Nest Box Week? This annual event that takes place every year from the **14th to 21st February**. Apparently, it has been running for over 20 years. St Valentine's Day was chosen for the start of National Nest Box Week as this is the traditional date when birds pair up for the new breeding season.

## Sam Decides to Build a Heat Bench

Having studied very carefully the produce I successfully grew last season, I realised that in order to get ahead of the game and to make the most of the growing season I would need to invest in a heated propagator.

Imagine my dismay when I discovered the expense and more worryingly the size. Just didn't see the point in spending just short of £40 on seven very small size pots!

Armed with determination, enthusiasm and the genes I inherited from my father who was a carpenter and engineer, I decide to embark upon Project No. Six! I would make my own heated bench. I was keen to keep costs down (if only to keep on the good side of my husband who resists spending money!) and to recycle as much as I possibly could. I used wood that had been saved for a rainy day and was delighted when Fleetwood Studios provided the perfect pallet box. Total Cost £0.

To maximise the space in the greenhouse and to ensure the timber frame would be used throughout the growing season, I decided to engineer two boxes. One a length of 150 cm, the other a length of 70 cm, both 60 cm wide. Due to the vagaries of the timber, the sides varied between 20 cm and 30 cm.

The structure first required an insulation foam board to cover the base. A message on Next -Door Neighbour brought a number of responses and I was delighted to pick up the required foam boards Total Cost £0.

Next, I utilised old pond liner from a project I undertook 6 years ago – we are very much a household that never throw anything away just in case...

Being a keen mathematician, I calculated the volume of sand required and knowing the density of sand worked out the required mass – not a complicated problem and there are calculators online for you to use.



*Work in progress*

Now came the tricky part – persuading my husband to purchase bags of sand. Due to the small quantity required and the fact that the sand would have to be transported up two flights of steps and to the back of the garden, I opted for buying single bags – Total Cost £14.80.

Four bags of sand were evenly distributed across the two boxes before laying down the heat warming cable. Although Parasene was the brand recommended by many, this company was bought out by a former employee and is not currently in a position to supply cables or thermostats. I settled for a 24 m warming cable and thermostat manufactured by Elixir. I contacted the company directly and obtained a 10% discount – always worth asking Total Cost £44.00.

The remaining sand was put on top and was given a really good soaking.

I have invested in a polytunnel which should arrive next week. Once installed I will have surplus SuperLux Polythene, which I may use to further control the humidity of the

bench. This is particular important for cuttings while they are at that vulnerable not-yet-rooted stage. It will not only keep the heat in but also protect the seedlings from strong sunlight.

Now all I have to do is pot up the seeds. Wish me luck! **Sam Patel**



## Green Fingers Forum – No Question is Too Trivial

As a new member of the Committee and very much a novice gardener, I am keen to get to know members and more importantly tap into the huge font of knowledge that collectively is a very significant and valuable resource. Nothing beats experience and local knowhow.

As such I would like to set up a forum. Membership of the 'Green Fingers' is entirely voluntary.

The idea behind it is that if you sign up you can ask pertinent questions, for example, do you water Agapanthus during the winter months? It will allow members to offer timely advice and suggestions to help each other out, swap seeds and seedlings and other good things.

If you wish to be part of the forum please let me know by dropping me an email.

Although at the end of our monthly meetings we are invited by Briony to ask questions I always feel mine are really silly and possibly of no importance to anyone else. By asking questions through the forum, I will hopefully get a timely and personal response. **Sam Patel** [sumitrardpatel@outlook.com](mailto:sumitrardpatel@outlook.com)

*No question is ever too trivial or silly, if you ask a question you will probably be helping others and where gardening is concerned there's often more than one answer!* **Briony**

## Looking Ahead – Plant Sale – 8<sup>th</sup> 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

A full programme of outings had been planned for 2020 but, inevitably, the Coronavirus pandemic stopped us from going anywhere last year, except Wisley on a drive yourself basis in October.

The 2020 programme has therefore been carried forward into 2021 and the committee very much hopes that some, if not all, visits might be feasible. Subject, of course, to the vaccination programme and advice on when/how it is safe to travel and mingle again, we will probably all be ready for a change of scene in a beautiful garden. Those of you near the front of the queue for the vaccinations may have a head start – who knows! Even where we don't think it's safe yet to travel by coach, we may decide to offer a visit on a drive yourself basis.

The schedule is as follows and we will keep you informed about whether and how they might go ahead as the months progress – full details are on our website:

**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> April, Pashley Manor and Caxton House**

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

[www.csgga.org](http://www.csgga.org)

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

**Saturday 24th July, National Memorial Arboretum and Hill Close Gardens, Warwick**

<https://www.thenma.org.uk/> and <https://hillclosegardens.com/>

**Thursday 19th August, Beth Chatto's Garden**

<https://www.bethchatto.co.uk/gardens/our-gardens.htm>

**October** – whilst a small number of us visited Wisley last year, I may organise another trip in 2021 if they are holding their Taste of Autumn event, as this was cancelled in 2020.

**Christmas** – I'd like to explore possible outings around Christmas time as no doubt we'll be ready for something special this year, given what a damp squib the whole thing was in 2020. Suggestions welcome!

Keep checking the Newsletter for updates as the months roll on. Meanwhile, if you have any queries feel free to contact me at [elle.oconnor@ntlworld.com](mailto:elle.oconnor@ntlworld.com) or telephone 01494 875646. **Ellie O'Connor Outings**

**Supremo**

## Christmas Competition

Sadly, there were too few entries to the Christmas Pollunit Competition to make a viable competition, you must have been busy making mince pies! However, here are the entries received from Caroline and Chin.



*Caroline Jackson*



*Chin Fenton*

## Your CSGGA Committee

**Chairman and Membership Secretary:**

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**Committee Members:**

|                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| Caroline Jackson | 01494 876685 |
| Eleanor O'Connor | 01494 875646 |
| Sam Patel        | 01494 875319 |

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.