

# CSGGA Newsletter

## March 2021



RHS Affiliated Membership Number: 10570237

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### Luscious Lawns – Geoff Hodge

Geoff is a busy man, working as a tv presenter, writer and lecturer. He has visited us before, giving talks on Winter Colour in 2018 and House Plants in 2017.

This time we were treated to an entertaining, detailed run-through of everything lawn-related, no slides, just Geoff. I think it's worth repeating here what he suggested so this is quite a detailed run through...

When it comes to lawns, a good one will set off your plants. A poor one brings the whole garden down with it. However, not surprisingly, a fabulous lawn involves hard work. Geoff suggests that if your lawn is terrible but you don't want to spend a lot of time on it, you could turn it into a patio or use artificial turf. The latter has come a long way and now offers

good quality choices. However, we are members of a garden association, so of course we all want a good lawn that involves real grass. Read on...

Geoff took us through the different types of lawn:

**Luxury:** the bowling green type. This takes a lot of maintenance with a fine-leaved grass species that cannot take a lot of wear and tear.

**Utility:** what most of have (or aspire to). It's a mix of grasses including perennial ryegrass so it's hard-wearing.

**Second-grade:** it's starting to go wrong, with patches, weeds and moss. Most lawns are like this. Moss and weeds are a sign of poor husbandry.

**Worn-out:** aka 'knackered', when it's all gone wrong. If you get to this stage, it may be quicker and easier all round just to kill off what's there and start again. If that's the case, it needs good soil well prepared with organic matter, dug over to a depth of 6-9 inches. Then cast your seed. But this is just the start of lots of effort to maintain it.

The single most important thing with regard to maintenance is mowing. The first rule is not to allow your grass to grow tall and then shear it down short. This weakens the grass. Good mowing thickens the grass as it is encouraged to produce side shoots. Mow whenever the grass is growing with the aim of keeping it at a consistent height of between 1.5-2" high. Don't remove more than a third of the height. This might mean, of

course, mowing twice a week in summer. The frequency is dictated by the speed of growth. You can cut wet grass (not saturated) and frozen grass so mowing during winter is possible. Make sure you have a good mower. Geoff reckons battery operated lawnmowers are excellent. Cylinders mowers are designed for luxury lawns so they are a waste of time for utility lawns which are best suited to rotary mowers. Make sure the blades are regularly sharpened!

The second most important aspect is watering. If you don't get this right, weeds and moss will take over. Geoff has an ingenious way of working out how long to water his lawn. He puts jam jars in the watering zone of a sprinkler and turns it on. The trick is to time how long it takes to fill the jars with an inch of water. That indicates how long you need to water each square metre of lawn. Don't forget to remove the jam jars!

Next is feed. Feeding improves the thickness of grass and enables it to out-compete weeds and moss. It improves the drought and cold resistance of your grass and makes it stronger. You should feed from mid-March through summer and then change to a specialist autumn feed. Don't feed it when it's not growing. You can get granular feed with a spreader pack and this is best suited to small lawns. It requires carefully measured applications when the soil is moist, the grass is dry and there will be rain within a week (or you need to water). A more natural alternative containing friendly bacteria is 'Safe Lawn' marketed as 'child and pet friendly', although Geoff noted that actually all feeds are the latter. Granular types need to be spread evenly or they will burn but there are liquid feeds, such as 'Lawn Magic' which don't burn and work instantly.

Raking comes next. Scarifying is essential to help water and air to get into the soil. You should aim to leave a small amount of thatch but not allow it to build up. It should look a bit like you've devastated it when you've finished! Make sure the tines of your rake are shaped to get into the soil properly. You should scarify every year in spring or autumn.



Geoff recommends over-seeding by  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz per square yard (old money) each year in March or April. Throw it over the whole lawn, rake it into the soil and water it in. It will produce a thicker and greener lawn.

If you require weed killer, Itax 'Lawn Clear' will get better results than a 'weed and feed'. Applying it with a fine spray is important and you shouldn't use it on a hot day.

With regard to moss killers, there are organic ones available which include bacteria which eats the moss so you don't have to rake it out. It is always better to kill moss before raking because if you rake it, you will spread it further.

Gaps can be sown with fresh lawn seed. Some include gel or coir to keep it moist. If patches are caused by your dog weeing, 'Patch Magic' is urine resistant (clever stuff!) but Geoff recommends training your dog not to wee on the lawn or you can excessively water where it's just been. (In my garden, option A is too late and Option B is a non-starter!)

That's your guide to a perfect lawn! I won't say which type mine is, but suffice it to say, remedial action may be required.

Questions included top-dressing, which Geoff explained is not needed if you have a good lawn as it is for compacted soil. You need to aerate it first. Don't use a fork for compacted soil, instead use a hollow tine aerator which takes out a plug of soil. This is hard work but you can hire an automatic aerator. You then fill the holes with top-dressing.

Worm casts are the sign of a lot of humus or thatch in the soil. Worms don't like acidic soil so a product like 'Sulphur Lawn' which acidifies the soil will put them off without killing them.



Grass cuttings can be left on the lawn if you are cutting regularly and therefore not cutting off much volume but you will end up with a lot of thatch to remove. Too large a volume of cuttings will just kill off your lawn. Ideally get a mulch mower which chops the grass very finely and leaves tiny grass cuttings behind that help the grass to retain the moisture without stifling it.

Bath water can be used on a lawn as long as there is not a lot of detergent in it.

The final question was on leaving a patch of lawn to grow wild. This is a great way of attracting insects and other wildlife. Wildflowers won't grow in rich soil, however, so if your soil is well-fed, you could use yellow rattle plants which remove the nutrients and starve 'normal' grass leaving it ready for other wildflowers. Geoff recommends sowing them as seed in small pots and placing the plug plants in the ground using a bulb planter. (I started a wildflower patch in my front garden where the wildflowers had no problems growing. The soil was perfect for them!)

So, here you have it. No excuses. Good luck and happy mowing, watering, feeding, raking and weeding!  
**Eleanor O'Connor**

**For the green gardener** .. Caroline looked up biodegradable moss killer for lawns ... Found Neudorff products – see picture above. Apparently stocked by Rowan & Van Hage

**Next Month's Talk 8<sup>th</sup> April 2021 via Zoom 7.45 for 8.00**

### **Tom Cole – Vertical Gardening**

A popular speaker with CSGGA, Tom will tell us about creating another dimension in the garden. Plants suitable for clothing walls, trellis and other upright landscape areas plus the use of roofs and green walls; including plant establishment and maintenance. Details for the zoom log in will be sent about a week before hand and again on the day.



### **Spring Show 2021**

This time last year we certainly didn't think that we would be unable to hold our popular Spring Show again one year on. However, we have decided to hold it online again using Pollunit. We will be reducing the number of classes and hope to find a willing volunteer to judge. Further details will be sent in the next few days.

We are considering holding a show later in the year when we are at last able to meet in the Memorial Hall.

### **M's Action Diary for March**

- Trees and shrubs planted permanently in pots need a boost to keep them healthy – so use a hand towel to scrap away the top 5 cms of compost, take any weeds with it. Add slow release fertilizer, top up with fresh compost and water in.
- Give ericaceous plants such as rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias acid plant food.
- Cut back penstemons to allow new shoots to grow.
- Repot house and greenhouse plants, apply slow release fertilizer pellets.
- Apply moss killer to lawns for short term control, then rake or scarify to remove thatch. Start to mow on a high setting.
- Deadhead daffodils but allow foliage to die naturally.
- Improve the soil in established borders by mulching the surface with a layer of organic matter such as garden compost
- Pot up dahlia tubers which have been stored during the winter.
- Lift divide and remove blackened leaves from Sisyrrinchium and replant.

- Buddleias, climbing (but not rambling roses) later flowering clematis and sambuccus can all be pruned this month.

## Green Gardening Tip – Making use of lawn clippings

If cuttings are long, add them to the compost heap (alternating with layers of brown stuff, such as straw, paper, or cardboard, otherwise they go soggy.) Or use them as mulch over damp soil around trees, fruit, vegetables and flowers.

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

At last some good news! As things stand at the moment, we will be able 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! Caroline has potted up surplus foxgloves and her seeds are germinating!



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## New Gardens Association Facebook Group

In a bid to expand our presence on social media, the committee has created a private Gardens Association Facebook Group.

It will be open to non-members as well as members of the Gardens Association and applications to join will need to be approved by the admins (Ellie, Briony and Caroline). As a private group, posts and participants will be visible only to those who are within the group. We hope this will help us to attract new members.

If you join, you will be able to post, ask questions and answer them and enjoy a new forum for discussing all things garden. If you are on Facebook, you can find us at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/437169020907963>



We will start inviting members we know are on FB, we hope you will want to join and invite your friends. It should be a great way to keep in touch and stay informed.

## Outing to Pashley Manor



Our first trip is planned for **Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> April** to Pashley Manor Gardens, near Wadhurst, in East Sussex. The trip is being organised on a 'drive yourself' basis so no coach will be provided and the entry ticket is £12.50.

They have planted around 45,000 tulips so the displays should be absolutely stunning and goodness knows, we could do with a change of scene! Further details on the gardens can be found on their website at <https://www.pashleymanorgardens.com/>

At this stage, we're asking members to indicate if they would be interested in visiting Pashley Manor Gardens on the above basis. Please email Eleanor at [elle.oconnor@ntlworld.com](mailto:elle.oconnor@ntlworld.com) to register your interest, that will enable us to decide if the visit is feasible this year and keep you informed.

## Holiday 2021

### The Gardens of Essex and Suffolk 5 days Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> June to Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021

Our holiday to Essex and Suffolk, postponed last year, has been re-arranged by Tailored Travel and, provided the easing of lockdown goes to plan, it will be able to go ahead. Those previously booked will be receiving a letter from Tailored Travel in due course but we have secured a few additional rooms, so if you would like to join us, please let Briony know.

Travelling by executive coach, we will stay four nights on half board basis at the 4\* Stoke by Nayland Hotel [www.stokebynayland.com](http://www.stokebynayland.com) on the outskirts of Leavenheath.

The hotel is located in a countryside setting in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 10 miles from the centre of Colchester. Facilities at the hotel include a restaurant, bar, spa with swimming pool, gymnasium, sauna, steam room and a Jacuzzi and two golf courses! All rooms are en-suite and feature television, telephone, hairdryer. A double room will cost £599.00 per person, for single occupants there is an additional £99.00 supplement. Lunches, holiday insurance and gratuities are also not included.



We have agreed a full programme of excursions that will appeal to both garden lovers and art enthusiasts. The cost of the holiday includes the services of a blue badge guide for 3 days and entry to all the gardens, except Ickworth (which will be free to National Trust members). We will be visiting:

[Wyken Hall Gardens & Vineyard](#)

Southwold

[Layer Marney Tower – guided tour](#)

[Gainsbrough's House and Gardens](#)

[Marks Hall Gardens & Arboretum](#)

[Ickworth House \(National Trust\)](#)

[Adnams Brewery](#) (not inc)

Colchester

Lavenham

[Gibberd Gardens](#)

Ipswich – guided tour

[Green Island Gardens](#)

[Helmingsham Hall Gardens](#)

For more details go to our [website](#) or click on the “View Your Tour” tab at [www.tailored-travel.co.uk](http://www.tailored-travel.co.uk) and quote **csgg211**.

## 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.