

Replacement talk by Tom Cole

Tom Cole, who lectures at Writtle University College, is a popular speaker and we were delighted to hear from him again. Tom emphasised that green gardening should focus on ecology, sustainability, horticulture and recycling. Water features are attractive, but make sure they have at least one gently sloping side to allow wildlife in and out. Marginal plants are needed to encourage diversity, such as water iris, *Nymphaea pygmaea*, *Ranunculus flammula*, *Myosotis* and *Zantedeschia*. Include some floating aquatics, such as water lilies, to give hiding places and shade, and underwater aquatics for aeration. Beware of skunk cabbage - the name says it all! Boggy areas near ponds, where the area is permanently damp but not waterlogged, can be planted with *Astilbe*, *Rodgersia pinnata*, iris and *Ligularia*, but the last has a tendency to collapse if too dry. Only plant *Gunnera* if you have plenty of space.

Pollinators are the gardener's friends so plant to attract them. Chives are excellent, and make good companion plants for carrots and parsnips to deter carrot fly. Encourage native ladybirds with open centred flowers such as *Calendula*, which can be companion planted in fruit areas. Ladybird larvae are voracious and make short work of aphids, as do the larvae of Hoverflies and Lacewings. *Limnanthes* (poached egg plant) is useful too but can spread wildly. *Tagetes* are great in vegetable gardens, and will keep flowering if regularly dead headed.

Pests are a problem, but can be dealt with in a green way. Blue methaldehyde slug pellets will not be on sale after 2020, so a trip round the garden in the evening with a bucket and a pair of scissors is a permanent solution, or slug traps for the more squeamish. The dreaded box moth caterpillar is now in the village, and will produce 4 generations in a year so constant treatment is required. Pick off and dispose of the green caterpillars if you spot them. Organic sprays or pyrethrum must go directly onto the pest to be effective, and these beasties roll themselves in several leaves to can be hard to get at. If all else fails and you have to remove the plant, and then burn it. *Euonymus*, *Taxus buccata*, *Pittosporum* and *Lonicera nitida* are alternatives. Pheromone traps are preventative and effective. Only 1 trap is needed per quarter acre, placed in a tree, and last about 4-6 weeks but need to be replaced. Basil is good in gardens and will deter midges. Barriers are useful ways to stop pests. Recycle wooden frames with netting to keep pigeons away, and if the mesh is small then cabbage whites cannot get in.

Check plants regularly for disease, and plant at the correct spacing intervals as crowded plants are more susceptible, and allow good air circulation. Mulch round veg to retain moisture. Recycle plastic sheeting as a vertical barrier to carrot fly, as they don't go above 18 inches. Spring onions and chives will help disguise the smell of tasty veg from pests.

Watering should ideally be done in the evening, but that is nice for slugs and snails too. Tomatoes need water twice or three times daily. Cut the bottoms off plastic drinks bottles and push them neck first into the soil and water into these to keep roots moist. Make use of rainwater butts and barrels and rain diverters to collect water for plants, especially orchids and ericaceous plants. Water can be harvested from sheds and polytunnels too. Mulching is essential, applying a good 4 – 6 inches as summers are warmer now. Apply mulch when it is wet, and collect leaf mould which decomposes quickly but is not long lasting. Compost waste as much as possible, but don't overdo the grass clippings. It is best to place these in thin layers with other organic material or the compost will become slimy.

Green manure can be grown and then dug in to enrich the soil. Phacelia keeps down weeds, and clover and legumes do the same job. Buckwheat and red clover are alternatives. Liquid manures can be made from comfrey plants steeped in water, but it is very pongy! Nettles can do the same job and smell less awful.

Tom suggested trying a green roof of sedum. However it does need maintenance, filling gaps and removing grass. He gave us some excellent ideas that we can take and use effectively in our own gardens. Certainly his pictures of the healthy and vibrant growth at Writtle showed what can be done with a little lateral thinking. We look forward to seeing him again. Jan Still