CHS NEWS

NEXT MEETING

Monday, 4 July 2022 at 20:00 at The Athenaeum

CREVICE GARDENING

This is a Garden Master Class presentation with Kenton Seth and Paul Spriggs in the USA.

"*Crevice gardening aims at imitating those situations in rocky landscapes where plants grow in cracks and crevices. It's a visually dramatic and low-maintenance way of growing a wide range of smaller plants in a small space.*"

It is a fascinating subject, so please join us.

- There is no entrance fee for members. Visitors will pay R30.
- The library has re-opened and you are welcome to borrow books until the next meeting.
- The Plant Table is operational again. Bring your blooms or pot plants and place them on the table. Please fill in a form giving your name and the name of your plant. No need to advise the watering regime but if you have anything interesting to say about the specimen, please write it on the slip.
- Tea will not be served.

NEXT OUTING

- **Sat, 16 July at 14:00:** Visit the garden of Margaret Moir in Lakeside, as well as a community garden on the slopes of a park above the Fire Station which is expanding month by month and is very impressive, and Cherry Mann's verge garden, often seen in our Plant Show and Tell videos. If you would like to attend, please RSVP to Glenda by 13 July. Limited to 20 members.

WELCOME TO …

… Sally-Ann Spooner and Ingrid Nye. We wish them many happy years with the CHS.

REPORT BACK

Autumn Plant Sale

The final figure, after expenses, was **R18008.00!!!** What a fantastic effort. A big thank you to everyone for their help and support.

A decision will be made shortly by the Committee whether there will be a repeat performance in Spring or if we wait until next Autumn.

In the meantime, there are a few things you can continue to do.

- Nurture your plants by making sure they are not getting over-watered in the rain.
- Take cuttings when you prune your deciduous plants in winter – hydrangeas, roses, trees, frangipani, wisteria, and more. Keep them only slightly damp, but don't leave them out in the rain or they might rot. They will take quite long to root, but it's a good way to use pruned material. If they don't make the grade by Spring, there's always Autumn.

JUNE 2022

"Friends are flowers in the garden of life."

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- Get things started NOW so that they can settle into their pots and show some growth.
- Pot up a six pack of herbs giving time for them to grow into decent sized plants. These seem to be very popular with the public, but we didn't have enough.
- Collect 1 Kg yoghurt containers (or any container made of rigid plastic) – long strips are easier to see in pots with lots of foliage; pointy ends are easier to stick into soil; thin, soft plastic has difficulty going through mulch or hard soil. Tthese strips are needed for both the labelling of plants, as well as the prices. We just never seem to have enough.

We don't want to discourage the growing of Spekboom but this sale showed that it seems to have already lost its appeal.

The general public showed very little interest in plants that were not a good size (only well-informed gardeners know the potential of a plant that hasn't been growing for too long) but keep your plants going until they are big enough to sell!

We will have an answer for you in the next newsletter.

Right: The winner of the *Cochliasanthus (Vigna) caracalla* 'Snail Vine' (donated by Marianne Alexander) was Jose De Abreu. His wife, Brigitte, came to claim the prize.

June Plant Table

Read this in conjunction with watching the video of this month's Plant Table.

Far right: *Senecio articularis* – a cutting taken on our visit to Babylonstoren, which Ernst van Jaarsveld called a "worsie" (little sausage).

Above, left to right: *Lachenalia viridiflora* and *L bulbifera*; *Kalanchoe longiflora*

Below left: *Tecomaria capensis* "Cape Honeysuckle" – good hedge subject; attracts birds and bees.

Below right: *Freylinia lanceolata* "Honeybells" – a 3m tall tree; golden yellow flowers from June to August; attracts butterflies; honey scented.

Other plants:
Hamelia – 2m tall shrub; cut back hard; sunbirds love it
Chasmanthe aethiopica
Schlumbergera – grow in a pot; afternoon sun; roots fairly easily
Protea cynaroides 'Little Prince'

A MEMBER'S PLANTS

Isabella sent in these beauties blooming in her garden this past week:




L to R: *Kniphofia x praecox*; *Anemone coronaria*; *Buddleja auriculata*; *Iris stylosa*, now *I unguicularis*

FEMALE PLANT HUNTERS (cont)

Married to a Scottish doctor named Farquhar, Jane Colden died aged 42 in 1766, in the same year that her only child also died. Her reputation grew posthumously, and wider recognition came four years after her death when some of her carefully observed plant descriptions were published in the second volume of *Essays and Observations.* Today, one of her manuscripts is held by London's British Museum; it contains more than 300 descriptions of plants, all accompanied by illustrations. The Latin and common names of the plants are also given, along with their flowering time, seeds and medicinal properties.

Like Jane Colden (1724 – 1766), Marianne North* (1830 – 1890) was educated at home, and she too expressed an early interest in the natural world. As a young woman, she grew various fungi in her room and made frequent trips to London's Kew Gardens to draw and paint rare plant specimens, encouraged by the then director William Hooker. As daughter of the Member of Parliament for Hastings, East Sussex, Frederick North, Marianne was well connected and travelled abroad with her parents, something that she continued to do with her father following the death of her mother. However, her life changed drastically when her adored father died. Aged 40, unmarried and independently wealth, North set out on a series of exotic and adventurous journeys. She travelled largely alone, a great rarity at that time, saying that her intention was to go 'to some tropical country to paint its peculiar vegetation in its natural abundant luxuriance'.

North's most active period of painting spanned 13 years and included journeys to the United States, Brazil, Canada, Chile, India, Jamaica, Japan, Java, Singapore, South Africa* and Tenerife. Her friend Charles Darwin urged her to travel to Australia and New Zealand, a suggestion she readily acted upon. Once abroad, she did not confine herself to painting native flora and fauna within the safe confines of the world's botanical gardens, but instead journeyed deep into the terrain of each region she visited. North discovered and recorded with great accuracy many plants that were then new to science, sending her oil paintings back to Sir Joseph Hooker at Kew. The genus *Northia* was named after her, along with species such as *Areca northiana, Crinum northianum* and *Kniphofia northiana*. Despite having received little formal artistic training, her work is marked by a vivid use of colour and a fluid handling of paint. The Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens opened in 1882 and now houses 823 of her canvases, depicting more than 900 species of plant.

[Source: RHS Latin for Gardeners, chapter on Plant Hunters]

* You may recall the talk John van der Linde gave in May 2014, *When Marianne met Katherine.*

HOW TO TURN YOUR GARDEN INTO A CARBON SINK

By Isabelle Gerretsen – 13th June 2022

From patches of wilderness to decomposing plants, turning your garden into a carbon sink isn't just about adding lots of trees.

During World War Two, the UK ministry of agriculture encouraged gardeners to "Dig for Victory" and grow their own vegetables to help feed the country. Allotments sprung up in private gardens and public parks – even the **lawns outside the Tower of London were transformed into vegetable patches.**

Almost 100 years later, the "Dig for Victory" slogan has been repurposed by the UK's Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). The gardening charity aimed to mobilise the biggest gardening army since World War Two to fight the biggest threat of the 21st Century: climate change. The tools at their disposal? Planting trees, using rainwater instead of sprinklers, and making compost.

If every one of the UK's 30 million gardeners planted **one medium-sized tree** and let it grow to maturity, they would store the same amount of carbon as is produced by driving 284 billion miles (457 billion km), 11 million times around the planet, **research by the RHS shows**. If every gardener produced 190kg of compost each year, they would save the amount of carbon produced by heating half a million homes for a year.

As governments and companies race to slash their emissions, there is increasing interest in the ability of natural landscapes, such as forests, wetlands and mangroves, to protect against the risks posed by climate change. Horticulturalists say the humble garden can also serve as a powerful tool in this fight.

"Gardens are becoming shop windows for the wider environment, demonstrating the dangers of pests and threats of climate change and showing what can be done to tackle it," says Simon Toomer, curator of living collections at Kew Gardens in the UK.

To cope with climate change, gardens must become more resilient to hotter and drier conditions in the summer and more rainfall in the winter, **the RHS** warns.

The ideal low-carbon garden **has a wildness to it**. It is **packed with plants and teeming with life**. The **gardener in this sustainable haven** is equally mindful of nurturing life below the ground as she is of tending to her flower displays and shrubs. She recycles every grass clipping, fallen leaf and broken twig within the garden and **avoids toxic chemicals to boost plant growth**, relying instead on **home-made compost and living mulch** to create a thriving habitat.

Wild lawns

"In the past everyone wanted a pristine lawn, but now there's a big movement in gardening for more natural landscapes which is really quite exciting," says Justin Moat, senior research leader on Kew Gardens' Nature Unlocked programme, which explores nature-based solutions to climate change and food security.

21ST CENTURY GARDENING

From working with contaminated city soil to reconsidering weeds, pests and even lawns, gardening is changing as we adapt it to the realities of modern life. This series takes a look at the future of **gardens in the 21st Century** – and explores how it can be updated to fit with modern sensibilities and challenges, such as environmental awareness and pollution.

"We need to put up with scruffy lawns," says Moat. This may be wishful thinking, as BBC Future revealed recently: we appear addicted to manicured lawns (*read more about their strange appeal and **the people who think we should get rid of them***).

In the UK, gardeners were recently encouraged to let nature take its course during **"No Mow May"**. Environmentalists say if left alone, lawns could become thriving wildlife hotspots. Given that **an estimated 23% of urban land is covered by lawns**, there is great potential for them to help fight the global biodiversity crisis.

Leaving the lawn mower in the shed also benefits the climate. One of the most important things gardeners can do in the short-term is reduce their energy consumption, from lawn mowers and sprinklers, says Toomer.

Operating a petrol lawn mower for one hour releases as much smog-forming pollution as driving for 160km (100 miles), says the **California Air Resources Board** (CARB).

Sally Nex, a professional gardener and author of the book How to Garden the Low Carbon Way, switched her petrol mower for a battery-powered one years ago after learning **how many toxic fumes it spews out**.

"There's no regulation on the maximum emissions for petrol powered tools – it's really shocking," says Nex.

Other gardening tools are just as polluting as mowers. Using a petrol-powered leaf blower produces the same amount of emissions as a 1,770km (1,100 mile) car journey – the distance from Los Angeles to Denver – according to **CARB**.

Effective carbon sinks don't have to be boring – the idea is just to have an abundance of plants

Trapping carbon

Moat says the Nature Unlocked programme has highlighted the "phenomenal" power soil has to transform our gardens into biodiverse havens that can help mitigate climate change.

"So much more is happening underground than above it," he says. "We need healthy soil for our food production and we need it to trap carbon."

Replenishing and restoring the world's soils – both in farming and natural landscapes – **could help remove up to 5.5 billion tonnes of CO^2 every year**, according to a 2020 study. That is equivalent to the **annual greenhouse emissions of the US**, the world's second largest polluter, in 2020.

Healthy soil offsets emissions by soaking up carbon from dead plant matter. To lock in as much carbon as possible, soil needs a good balance of water, pockets of air, living organisms, such as fungi, and nutrients. Gardeners maintain this balance by constantly adding organic material to their soil.

"I compare it to a carbon checking and savings account," says Andrea Basche, assistant professor at the department of agronomy and horticulture at University of Nebraska. "You need a constant input of decaying plant matter and roots into the soil checking account to feed all the living organisms."

Gardeners shouldn't press the soil down too much or use heavy equipment when it's wet as this will cause it to become compacted, closing vital air pockets and preventing water from draining, Gush says.

If left bare and exposed to the elements, soil will degrade and its carbon stocks will deplete. Covering the bare soil with plants, such as clover, and mulches – **loose coverings of biodegradeable materials** – is therefore key to prevent CO^2 from seeping into the atmosphere, Gush says.

A recent study by Penn State University found that **cover crops were more effective at protecting corn and soybeans from pests** than applying pesticides.

Mulching has transformed Nex's garden. "When I stopped digging and started mulching, I realised my topsoil was getting deeper and deeper," she says. "The soil is black and teeming with life – it's very rewarding."

Mulching also suppresses weeds, helps soil retain moisture and protects plant roots from extreme temperatures.

Fallen leaves and broken twigs don't need to be removed from flower beds but can be treated as "living mulches", which are contributing vital nutrients to the soil. "Essentially leave any organic matter to feed into the soil," says Toam.

Even balconies can be turned into carbon sinks

Living mulches can also reduce gardeners' reliance on nitrogen fertilisers, many of which **have a high carbon footprint**. Basche says **farmers in Nebraska are having to use less fertiliser** on their crops after growing a cover crop and using living mulches for several years. Legumes, such as beans and peas, **act as a green manure** by adding valuable nitrogen – vital for plant growth – to the soil when they decompose. Introducing a legume crop for one year at a cereal farm in Scotland could reduce the amount of nitrogen fertiliser needed over the entire five-year cycle by almost 50%, **according to a 2021 study**.

Observations. Today, one of her manuscripts is held by London's British Museum; it contains more than 300 descriptions of plants, all accompanied by illustrations. The Latin and common names of the plants are also given, along with their flowering time, seeds and medicinal properties.

An easy way to enrich your soil is by adding homemade compost. **Healthy compost should contain** a 50:50 mix of materials that are rich in nitrogen, such as grass clippings and vegetable peels, and carbon, such as woody stems and paper towels.

Composting also allows you to discard any leftover food in a sustainable way. When dumped into landfill without oxygen, food waste rots and releases methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas which, although shorter-lived in the atmosphere, has a global warming impact **84 times higher than carbon dioxide (CO^2) over a 20-year period**.

But on a compost heap, exposed to oxygen, organic waste is converted into stable soil carbon, while retaining the water and nutrients of the original matter. Food which is **composted releases just 14% the greenhouse gases of food that is** thrown away.

"I dispose of all my garden waste, vegetables and peelings in the garden. Every time I harvest vegetables or prune roses, I'm removing carbon from the garden, so it's important to return that carbon to the soil," says Nex.

Compost heaps must be turned regularly – **the RHS recommends** once a month – to add air to the biomass and keep it moist. Garden compost can take up to **two years to reach maturity**, when it turns a dark brown colour, has a crumbly texture and smells like damp woodland.

Wild lawns absorb more carbon than those that are mown often, and have the added bonus of producing bee-friendly flowers

If you plan on buying compost, avoid one containing peat, says Gush. Peatlands cover just 3% of the planet's surface, but store **twice as much carbon as all the world's forests**. They lock in carbon over thousands of years, with **1cm of peat forming roughly every 10 years**.

"Peat bogs are very important sinks, they have accumulated carbon over millennia," says Gush. "As soon as they are drained and the peat is exposed to the air, carbon is unlocked and released back into the atmosphere."

The UK government said last year **it plans to ban the sale of peat compost to gardeners** by 2024, but critics warn that the two-year delay will add more than **1.5 million tonnes of CO^2 to the atmosphere** – the equivalent of the annual emissions of 214,000 UK residents.

WHAT IS CO^2 EQUIVALENT?

CO^2 equivalent is the metric measure used to compare the emissions from various greenhouse gases on the basis of their capacity to warm the atmosphere – their global warming potential.

Plant abundance

While some gardeners might desire a uniform look for their flower beds and lawns, growing a wide range of plants is beneficial if you are looking to transform your garden into a miniature carbon sink.

Plant diversity has been shown to increase productivity and the amount of carbon stored in the soil. "Increased plant diversity boosts carbon sequestration by optimising use of available space in a garden, both above-ground and below-ground," says Gush.

It's important to grow layer plants in your garden and grow crops with roots that will reach different depths so that they can penetrate all parts of the soil and spread nutrients around. "This facilitates maximum carbon drawdown," says Gush.

… to be cont.

Source: How to turn your garden into a carbon sink - BBC Future

Photos: A Thorpe, I Hayden