



Gleanings from the
Compost Heap



Autumn 2009

Gardeners' Question Time in Letchworth

Having only previously listened to Gardeners' Question Time on Radio 4, it was extremely exciting to be part of the audience at a live recording of the programme in the Free Church in Letchworth on July 6th. The LDGA Committee were delighted that we had finally managed to host this event after several years of dedicated attempts by Maureen Hersee, our Chairman.

Setting the scene

Three hundred people packed into the church on a warm Summer evening, to be entertained and informed in the best traditions of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The panel consisted of Bob Flowerdew, renowned organic gardener, Pippa Greenwood, pest and disease expert and Anne Swithinbank, expert plantswoman. Everyone was impressed by the efficiency of the BBC Team and the friendly atmosphere of the whole event. The chairman, Eric Robson, far nicer

in real life than on the radio, set the tone for a really informal - and funny - interchange of ideas.

And the answer is...?

Questions were many and varied, from what plants will be around in 100 years time as climate changes to "What has half-eaten my courgettes?" Answer to the second, "probably two-legged rats". There were lots of practical tips. Bob Flowerdew suggested getting rid of ant infestations by putting out tin cans near ant nests. As the cans warm, the ants carry up their eggs for successful hatching. You can then remove the can at the end of the day and dispose of the ants as you see fit.

Keeping chickens was another solution, though Anne Swithinbank (pictured above) did admit the chickens would probably eat your plants as well.

Dirty hands and white flowers

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A questioner asked about how to cope with gardeners' dirty hands. Hand-washing jumpers, washing your hair and in Bob's case "being allowed by my wife to do the washing up" were the panel's suggestions, which delighted the audience

Kathy Bee asked for recommendations for a white garden which would especially attract her namesakes. This provided a whole list of plants: white mallow; Jacob's ladder; white cosmos; nicotiana alata (good for moths); nicotiana sylvestris; white foxgloves; milk-thistle (seedheads good for birds); night-scented stock and many of the rambling roses.

There was much laughter over the questioner who asked if electric toothbrushes should be used to vibrate tomatoes to get a better crop. The panel response was that there was a lot of rubbish on the Internet, which was the source of the 'information'. Joshua (aged 9) and his grandmother had a dead looking acer. Solution: forget about it and buy a packet of acer palmatum seeds to sprinkle over ericaceous compost – and start again.

Practical advice that works

Other useful tips included ensuring good pollination of sweetcorn by planting in blocks; to stop removing the side stems of tomatoes at the end of the season to gain as many tomatoes as possible before the frosts; prevent unwanted plants from encroaching from a neighbour's garden by lining the hedge/fence edge with old paving slabs and turning windfall apples into apple juice.

All in all, this was a splendid event, full of laughter and very useful information. I am sure everyone who attended would like to pass on heartfelt thanks to Maureen Hersee for her persistent efforts to host Gardeners' Question Time, which culminated in such a successful evening.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER

If you have not renewed your membership this year, please note that you will be kept on the database only till the end of the year. After that, you will need to contact the LDGA if you wish to remain a member.

IMPORTANT NEWS FROM THE STORE

A number of the regular Store volunteers have had family and other commitments preventing them from donating time to operating the Store. We need new people to replace them, otherwise the Store may have to close on some Sundays.

If you have two or three hours to spare once a month or even once a year, please contact the Association as soon as possible. You will receive all necessary training and join a friendly band of volunteers, all doing their bit to help our gardens flourish.

EQUIPMENT WANTED

If you have any unwanted equipment in working order, please contact LDGA. We are seeking to hire out equipment like rotavators, or strimmers, but need a number of items to start this off.

PLANT SALE RAISES £500

Many thanks to those of you who brought plants to the Plant Stall at the Summer Show, and those who bought them. We raised £500 which will be donated to local groups, including the Ernest Gardiner Day Hospital, Cancer Research UK, the Trefoil Guild, the Scouts and the Alzheimer's' Association.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

October 15th: Climate change and the effect on wildlife, Keith Hichisson

Nov 19th: Annual General Meeting

Both meetings start at 7.45 and are **open to members only**. The venue is the Guide HQ, 247a Icknield Way, Letchworth Garden City

COMMITTEE CONTACTS

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