

# HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



September 2017

## Wherefore art thou, Mavis?

Many plants are named after people or special occasions, sometimes to have a commercial appeal, such as Chrysanthemum 'Wedding Day', Rosa 'Congratulations', Rosa 'Bride and Groom' or Clematis 'Princess Diana'. The list is long and a lifeline for those desperately searching for that that last-minute gift.

Other plants are named to celebrate a friend or relative such as Aster (now Symphyotrichum) 'Noreen' which was named after Noreen Jardine, or the Fuchsia 'Mrs Pople'. Others are given a common name relating to a person who gives an unnamed plant to a friend and it becomes known by the donor name such as splendidly titled Chrysanthemum 'Fred's Yellow'. Plant names which start with 'Souvenir de ...' are 'In memory of...'

However it was only after three phone calls to the Gardens asking if there were any plants of Chrysanthemum 'Mavis' for sale, that we wondered why the sudden interest in this very attractive plant with lovely pink pompom flowers. It is not well known, but does hold



an RHS Award of Garden Merit. Eventually the potential buyer disclosed he needed a plant named 'Mavis' to placate his wife Mavis. We identified just three plants named Mavis in the RHS Plant Finder and one was this Chrysanthemum (*above*), so a trip from Cheltenham was required for our enquirer to collect it from Hill Close Gardens. Problem solved for us and for him. Next year we will be ready with more plants in the nursery.

### From the Centre Manager

With summer slowly turning toward autumn, we have a chance to reflect on how we have done and gear up for the rest of the season. There have been some big changes during 2017 with our revitalised tearoom and events calendar.

As always the weather plays a huge part in how we do here at the gardens and this year we have been lucky. The gardens really come to life when they are full of people experiencing and enjoying. We hope to keep this energy going with our 2018 events line up. Visitor numbers continue to increase and this is good news.

The word continues to spread about our unique attraction but it must be said that, without the dedicated help of all our volunteers and our members, Hill Close Gardens would not be able to flourish as it does.

The year is not out yet and we are looking forward to our Apple Day and Country Fair on Sunday 15th October (see back page for more on this) and a final burst of colour with our Chrysanthemum Open Day on Saturday 28th October.

And finally, do keep an eye on *everything* happening in the coming months, through our events calendar which you can find on our website ([www.hillclosegardens.com](http://www.hillclosegardens.com)).

## Arts in the Gardens

The Arts came to the Gardens on a summer's weekend in August. An influx of artists and craftsmen were at work in the first Arts in the Gardens event which attracted over 700 visitors. They admired plant photographs and marine paintings, listened to varying styles of music, wondered at beautiful patchwork, chatted to botanical artists or tried their hands at printing and ceramics workshops.

It was good to see our first artists in residence Carey Moon, ceramist, and Nigel Fletcher, painter, working in the Gardens again. Strolling actors declaimed Shakespeare, poets read poems and stories were told. Woodcarvers and spinners returned from last year and colourful old horticultural adverts were displayed in the glasshouse.

Throughout the weekend, visitors relaxed with soup and reconstructed Croques Monsieur, whilst coffee, cake and homemade ice-cream were served in the tearoom.

The event saw the first reading of our own poem about Plot 17:

### *Plot 17, Hill Close Gardens*

*Somehow, the words whisper on the breeze,  
Then hang in the air as they fall from the*

*Sunlit sky or drip from the dew on the  
Devonshire Quarrendon Desserts in my*

*Imagined quincunx. Like the bees on the  
Lavender they swarm, bringing their*

*Pollen to the page, working for the good  
Of the collective and offering a honey*

*Of sweet expectancy, teasing out the  
Splinters of distraction to deliver this*

*Collaboration of the simple and the  
Sophisticated. From the sublime to*

*The ridiculous is but a single step, so  
We should linger here a little longer,*

*And leave the world outside to itself  
While we are among friends, until the*

*Words decide that the time has come  
For them to have their well-earned rest.*

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### **Tearoom tease...**

Let us tantalise your palette with the exotic flavours of our teas including Turkish Apple, Rose, Lavender Earl Grey, and many more. Or just sit back with a traditional English breakfast tea and a scone.



Many of our excellent cakes use produce from the gardens, such as plums and rhubarb. The tearoom at Hill Close always has something new to offer.

*P.S. If you would like to volunteer to help in the tea room, please just let us know.*

## The jewel colours of Zinnias

In 2016 the annual Zinnia 'Purple Prince' proved so popular with the visiting public that we decided to take part in this year's RHS Zinnia trials. As a partner garden we were offered a number of different varieties to see how they performed in a garden setting.

The seeds were sown in April and pricked out into pots during May. After growing on and hardening off they were planted throughout the garden, but mainly on plot 19. Here varieties such as 'Solmar Red', 'Jazz' and 'Macarenia FSN' clash together in riot of colour with both single and double flowers.

Zinnias in plot 19



The genus is named after the botanist Johan Gottfried Zinn and they originate from Central America, so need a sunny, free draining position in the garden. Regular dead-heading will enable them to continue performing until the first frosts, and shorter varieties such as the Zahara series will not need staking.

Let us know what your favourite variety is and we'll grow the most popular one again next year.

Solmar Red



## Recognise these?

Every year we grow some different vegetables as well as flowers, in the past it has been squashes, pak choi, artichokes and now these...



...borlotti beans. They're not actually very good as runner beans as the pods are not very fleshy. However they should be left on the vines when they turn this flamboyant red.

When ripe the beans (seeds) can be used either fresh or dried and used as borlotti beans for cooking.

## All PR's good PR...

*Gradually Hill Close Gardens are becoming better known, often by word of mouth. But there are also some unexpected mentions of the Gardens, for example in a recent Flybe in-flight magazine; and there's a really good article about us in Period Living magazine this month. We're also hopeful that our glorious chrysanthemums will feature on the BBC's Gardeners World in the autumn (the filming actually took place last year when they were at their best).*

*This year we have attended four Plant Fairs and, as well as selling plants, it has been a great opportunity to talk about the Gardens and to hand out some leaflets.*

## Let's celebrate our wonderful apples once more

**Apple Day** takes place this year on **Sunday 15th October** and there will again be a range of food and craft stalls as well as an amazing display of apples from the garden, with a chance to take home some of the rarer varieties.

Everyone seems to disagree on which apple is the best, so here are my top five dessert apples to start the debate:

1. **Devonshire Quarrendon** - A small early apple with a good fruity flavour.
2. **Ellison's Orange** - A beautiful colour with an aniseed aftertaste when fully ripe.
3. **Golden Knob** - A good cropping, great tasting russet (*pictured*).
4. **Ashmeads Kernal** - A late apple that can't be beaten for flavour.
5. **Pitmaston Pinapple** - A Worcestershire variety with an unusual shape and flavour.



Let us know your favourite varieties (either dessert or cooking) and why; and if we don't have one already then maybe we will plant one in the future.

## Reaching for the sky

It's been a busy summer for the LaCE Team, with our regular programme of Drop-ins, educational activities and our well-attended bookable events.

There's been tidying up the Children's Garden, painting the summerhouse and filling up bare patches of flowerbeds with cheerful summer-flowering plants.

The most attention-grabbing of these are our mighty sunflowers, towering high above the apple and pear trees as they reached for the sky. Other, more modest sunflowers deck the central bed, and still others are growing as fast as they can in the space where we recently harvested a good crop of potatoes.



And there are even a few left in pots, for visiting children to plant out.

Sunflowers set the theme for our team contribution to Art in the Gardens, which took place in August.

Our beans and sweetcorn are waiting to be admired and, as always, we have left a patch of bare earth for small people to dig and delve in, searching for worms and other wriggly things.

And there are always small-size watering cans and a good supply of water from our garden tap, not to mention our willow tunnel.

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