

# HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



January 2018

## Chrysanthemums a sell-out

A surge in the demand for hardy Chrysanthemums followed our appearance in October on Gardeners World. So much so that by the end of that weekend the nursery had sold out. This presented us with a bit of a dilemma as the Chrysanthemum Day was due to take place a fortnight later.

Not wishing to disappoint visitors who had come specifically to view and order Chrysanthemums we decided that for the first time that we would grow to order and post out plants when ready for anyone who was too far away to collect. A picture list, catalogue and order form was provided to all visitors and the response was very positive.

We will be putting more information on the website regarding this new service, which will only be available in the early part of the year.



### Our shelter

At last the shelter is nearly finished with only the glass window to be installed. As soon as the benches were finished the shelter was used. In fact there was a couple sitting there 20 mins after Apple Day started (*pictured*).

In April there will be a party of Roger and Caroline's family and friends to open the shelter in memory of his sister. Special planting each side of the shelter will be undertaken in the early spring as well as the revamped herb garden outside the shed in Plot 23.

### Would you like to help us?

Activities at Hill Close Gardens are supported by more than 100 volunteers in a variety of roles. Volunteering here offers flexibility, with our volunteers choosing dates when they can help and roles that suit their own interests and skills. If you'd like to join the team, visit our website or ask at the Visitor Centre.

## Plants and presents

At Hill Close Gardens we are often offered plants which for a variety of reasons are no longer wanted. Some are offered as a result of downsizing or moving house: one particularly fine collection of sempervivums was given when Susan Solomon was leaving the area. Similarly a mock acacia was left in the Glasshouse when the Fowler family moved away; and a couple of interesting chrysanthemums, Rosemary's Biscuit, donated by Rosemary Hackett, and Hillside Apricot, given by Sylvia Fenwick, were very acceptable.

Our most recent gift is a very tall chrysanthemum passed on by Caroline Stone from the Devon Plant Heritage Group with the following details:

### *Bring me Sunshine!*

*I recently received a phone call from Mrs Sally Mulford who is looking for someone to take on growing a chrysanthemum with a long heritage in her family. I was told it is a late flowering single yellow which she calls Sunshine because the flowers look rather like suns. Could I help find someone interested in carrying on with the plant because she was concerned to ensure its future?*



*There is a photograph (dated on the back 1896) of her mother sitting next to some pots of the plants. Her mother Mary lived at Fingrinhole Hall, near Colchester in Essex. Sally's Aunt Margaret grew the plant for years and gave plants to Sally and her sister Betsy. Aunt Margaret died this year aged 101, and Sally's sister*

*died three years ago. Although her niece has the plant she has not been very successful propagating it so Sally is worried it will get lost.*

*It is a slightly straggly plant which needs to be brought under cover in the winter. It flowers in November with a large flower useful for flower arrangements. Sally propagates it with Irishman's cuttings (taking a rooted shoot from the plant early in the year). It needs to be given a fairly large pot, I am told.*

*If anyone would like to have a plant please contact me. It would be nice to keep alive this plant with well more than a century of provenance. Mrs Mulford has given me several plants and is happy to provide more cuttings next year. I can bring plants to the AGM if you would like one.*

*Written by Caroline Stone*

It is a true responsibility. A plant will be kept by each of the three National Collection Holders, Judy Barker, Andrew Ward and Hill Close Gardens, of the dispersed National Collection of Hardy Chrysanthemums.

It is a tall lanky plant and now in December (at the time of writing) it has large single flowers about 3" in diameter of pure yellow. Although most of the flowers are slightly misshapen, they are a most welcome glorious splash of colour in the glasshouse. Next year we may stop it twice, as recommended for show chrysanthemums.



Val King (below) decorated Hill Close Gardens' winning entry to the Christmas Tree Festival competition at St Mary's Church in Warwick. The decorations are supposed to reflect the entering organisation or group. We are all delighted for Val, who is a very active member of the Management Team here at Hill Close Gardens.



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## The Garden

by Sara Teasdale

My heart is a garden tired with autumn,  
 Heaped with bending asters and dahlias heavy and dark,  
 In the hazy sunshine, the garden remembers April,  
 The drench of rains and a snow-drop quick and clear as a spark;  
  
 Daffodils blowing in the cold wind of morning,  
 And golden tulips, goblets holding the rain —  
 The garden will be hushed with snow, forgotten soon, forgotten —  
 After the stillness, will spring come again?

*Sara Teasdale (August 8, 1884 – January 29, 1933) was an American lyric poet, not very well known currently, but she was very popular in her lifetime with public and critics. She won the first Columbia Poetry Prize in 1918, a prize that would later be renamed the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.*

## New planting in plot 23

Following on from the completion of the shelter on plot 23, new planting is needed in the beds on either side. Traditionally these have always been herb beds but a decision has been taken to replant them as late season borders containing plants such as miscanthus, salvias and asters. These larger plants should be more in scale with the new building and help soften its lines.

Culinary herbs will not be lost from this plot as a more formal bed has been planted in front of the wooden shed containing oregano, chives, sages and thyme. By the summer of 2018 both new plantings should start to take shape.

## January a time for reflection

January is a time to look back, to celebrate the successes and to see what could be done better. It is also a time to look forward to the new and the familiar pattern of events.

Looking back, 2017 has been an amazing year for visitors: over 8,000 came to the Gardens compared to about 5,000 two years ago. Nearly every day that the Gardens are open there are visitors, some from far away countries such as Russia, China, Australia, South America and Poland. There may be two main factors: RHS visitors account for nearly 10% and the fact that the Gardens are open every weekday.

Publicity from BBC Gardeners World may also have been instrumental in that over 800 visitors came to Apple Day and also to Chrysanthemum Day when the true enthusiast came to see the National Collection of Hardy Border Chrysanthemums. The Arts in the Garden event was a great success and will most probably be repeated in 2019. Another success was the grant from Smart Start to prepare materials to equip children for the start of their schooling.

2018 will welcome visitors to see, admire and buy snowdrops which tell us that winter is on its way out and spring is nearly here; and this leads all the way through to Apple Day and Chrysanthemum Day.

Many activities will take place between those points: Maypole Dancing; World War I will be remembered in the summer with a special event of music and verse; children will come for the monthly drop-in sessions; gardeners will come for pruning courses and much more; still others will come to enjoy the rich horticulture of the Gardens or because they are part of a garden conducted tour or just to have a cup of coffee, a cake and a catch up with friends. Some come just to buy plants (no admission fee) or to order chrysanthemums, and others because they are using the Lammas Room for meetings, parties and celebrations.

We are exploring ways of demonstrating how our garden produce can be used for interesting and unusual dishes and beverages, though this is still in early days. Whatever the reason for visiting there is always much to see and enjoy.

## Learning and Community Engagement (LaCE)

2017 has drawn to its cold, dark close, but it is pleasant to look back at sunnier days and recall what the LaCE Team has been up to.

We have built up our regular Drop-in and Pre-school sessions for young children who come with parents or carers and enjoy what we offer. Creating a hedgehog in play dough or grubbing about with small trowels in the Children's Garden seem very simple pleasures, but children never tire of them. Schools visit the gardens to see the changing seasons, the wildlife.

If we sometimes think, "Oh! We can't do that again, we did it last year," we have to recall that it may well have been with a different set of children. If it works, don't fix it! All the same, we do endlessly discuss what went well or not so

well and how we could make it better still.

We were fortunate to receive a grant from Warwick County Council to run a programme that used the gardens and the outdoors to encourage and develop children's early language and communication. It was a joy to watch the children grow in confidence as they shared stories and songs and explored the outdoors.

This year the LaCE Team has offered workshops at each half-term and a Christmas Craft Family Workshop. These take time to plan and prepare for, but a lot of happy families take away magnificent works of art to hang up at home.

To achieve what we do we need help from volunteers. Many of our volunteers are experienced with working with families, but it is not essential. Come and give it a



try: you may find you know more than you think and it is immensely satisfying. To find out more, please contact the Centre Manager (01926 493339) in the first instance.

### A bit from the Centre Manager

*2017 has been an exciting and busy year here at the gardens and we hope to continue this into the New Year.*

*After a very successful Apple Day in October, we are gearing up for another programme of events for 2018.*

*Visitor numbers have continued to increase year-on-year including more guided tours and off-site talks. This means the word is getting out there and hopefully we are giving the best experience we can.*

*Our guided tours and off-site talks offer an insight into the fascinating history of the gardens and their past owners.*

*Specialist knowledge through our team of volunteers is passed on, to take advantage of the uniqueness of Hill Close Gardens. For more horticultural expertise our Head Gardener Gary Leaver holds a guided tour once a month from April to October.*

*We look forward to seeing you back at the gardens through 2018.*

*Don't forget 3rd-4th February when we will be hosting our **Snowdrop Weekend** where the gardens spring into life with a flourish of snowdrops. There will again be a raised display within the centre where visitors can get up close to enjoy the beauty and individualism of these interesting flowers.*



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