

HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



June 2021

Plant Exchange

The Plant Exchange is one of the most interesting days in the calendar of Plant Heritage when just under a thousand rare plants of all sorts and sizes from all parts of the UK change hands and move to new gardens/owners. All are donated by members who offer these plants to other PH members, who at the same time request plants which they would like to receive.

Hill Close was delighted to act as a national hub for the grand exchange on a sunny day in May when the Lammas room and the outside garden presented a perfect setting for the business of ensuring all the plants went home with the right people.

Covid prevented the Plant Exchange to take place last year so we were delighted to have enabled the Plant Exchange to take place in 2021.



Francoa 'Molly Anderson'
© Avondale Nursery

We received plants ranging from an abutilon from Hampton Court to a very tiny auricula. It was a pleasure to receive *Francoa 'Molly Anderson'* which was named after a great plainswoman who helped Brian Ellis in the early days of his Avondale Nursery.

We offered a total of 27 plants including *Symphotrichium 'Hill Close Blue'* which was bred in our gardens, and we received 20 new plants in return.

The definition of a "rare plant" is one which is described in The Plant Finder as being sold by fewer than two nurseries.

Somehow a virtual AGM instead of one where plants are normally swapped would not have been quite the same!

We welcome you to our first Summer Evening Opening in the gardens. On 6th July our evening opening will be from 6-10pm. There is a particular charm about the gardens in the evening: the world seems to slow down and the gardens become a

place of quietness. So bring some friends and a picnic and enjoy the tranquillity of the gardens. Volunteers will need a ticket for free entry (these can be picked up at the Centre). Members & RHS free entry. Other visitors normal entrance fee.

Become a Trustee and help shape Hill Close Gardens' future

For more than two decades, Hill Close Gardens Trust has been dedicated to a continuing programme of development and enhancement to preserve the gardens as the UK's only surviving group of detached Victorian pleasure garden plots with public access.

Throughout our journey of restoration, maintenance, and growth, our Trustees have guided the way. Made up of local volunteers who give their time and multi-disciplined experience to oversee the general management of the administration of the Gardens, our Trustees make a vital contribution to the Gardens' on-going success.

We are now looking to welcome new volunteer members to our Board of Trustees.

As the popularity of Hill Close Gardens and its variety of offerings and services has grown, we need people from all walks of life to give their time and help ensure that the Trust is managed effectively. We invite applications from all interested parties, especially those who can bring valuable experience and skills to enhance the Board's leadership.

As well as devoting time, which includes six Trustee day-time meetings per year, we're also looking for new Trustees who have an interest in the Gardens, and who

can bring a range of management skills and experience to support the Trust going forward.

There is no requirement for incoming Trustees to be horticultural experts – we are particularly interested in applications from people who can bring business and/or professional management experience, legal experience, skills in fundraising and online marketing, IT, HR and other disciplines, to benefit the Trust and further develop a diverse Board.

While a volunteer position, being a trustee is hugely rewarding. As a trustee, you have the chance to support and shape the work of the Gardens and make a significant contribution to the Trust's future. In addition, some of our Trustees invest additional time to serve on the Trusts' operational committees, which brings them even closer to the day-to-day running of the Gardens.

If you have an interest in becoming a Trustee with Hill Close Gardens, we would love to hear from you.

Please email your details to the Centre Manager at centremanager@hcg.org.uk or ring us on 01926 493339 requesting either an application form or a callback to discuss the role in more detail.

...and on that subject...

We are now inviting applications for the position of Treasurer for Hill Close Gardens.

The Treasurer is a key voluntary position, responsible for ensuring that the financial operations of the Trust are carried out in accordance with our Financial Procedures. In this s/he is assisted by the Centre Manager, who is responsible for invoicing and credit control of our customers. Volunteers are also available to undertake routine data entry, supplier payments, cash counting and banking, salary adjustments and resulting payroll updates in conjunction with our paid payroll administrator, and fund raising.

The Treasurer will be invited to become a Trustee, and will attend the six Trustee meetings annually and the AGM, delivering a Treasurer's Report to each meeting. An important part of the Report is comparing budget to actual through the year, the Treasurer having led in setting the year's budget.

If you are interested in applying for this position, please make initial contact with the Centre Manager by sending an email to centremanager@hcg.org.uk or phone 01926 493339.

Special Lavender 'Maillette'

Delivery has just been taken of lavender 'Maillette' which has been recommended by Dr Charlesworth of Downsderry Nursery as the lavender of choice for the new perfumery bed in Plot 12. This bed is being cleared of perennial weeds, especially ground elder and convolvus, before new planting can take place later this summer.



From the Centre Manager

Although we were not able to hire out the Lammas room for the best part of a year., now things have relaxed a bit we are once again preparing to open up fully and getting back to what we do best.

We are looking forward to hosting our summer events including Heartbreak Productions' performance of the Great Gatsby on the 13th July. Tickets sold out quickly for this event but there are still tickets for our Midsummer Music in the Gardens event featuring Katie Leaver and Emma Cockbill on the 26th June.

We are also keenly anticipating welcoming new and returning visitors to the gardens: much has been going on behind the scenes during lockdown so if you have not been to see us for a while do come along.

Finally, we have benefited from a recovery grant, which allows us to play catch up in some areas of the gardens, enabling us to improve our offering still further.

“Why volunteer?”

We recognise the vital role our volunteers play in making the gardens a special place, and without their hard work and dedication we would not be able to operate in the way the way that we do.

Our teams of volunteers look after and maintain the gardens, provide activities for children and families, run the tearoom, give guided talks and tours, welcome visitors and so much more. And in return (they have told us) they make new friends and get a real sense of achievement in helping to maintain and develop this wonderful facility.

So if you have some spare time on your hands and would like to join one of our teams, please get in touch by email to centremanager@hcgt.org.uk or call 01926 493339. You don't have to give a regular commitment and you don't require any experience. All you need is enthusiasm, a willingness to roll up your sleeves and get stuck in, and maybe occasionally dig for worms!

Mid-year update on all the latest activity in the Gardens

Unfortunately our annual Snowdrop Days back in February had to be cancelled, as were most events this year, but we still had plenty for out for sale and as the Gardens were open it was great to see that many of you still came in to buy some to add to your collections - or perhaps start your collection. Some of these varieties we haven't had available before and it was great that we could offer these to you.

We're now busy propagating the chrysanthemums that will be for sale later in the year. This is a little later than in previous years but a combination of dry and cooler weather meant that there hasn't been sufficient material to propagate from until recently. So pop these wonderful plants in later in the year to add late colour to your garden.

Don't wait until then though, as we have many plants on sale throughout the year in the Nursery and there's a continually changing choice available, so it's worth popping in when you're nearby to get hold of something new. As always most of these can also be seen in the gardens. You'll can spot many new plants throughout the gardens as we slowly replace or add to the existing plantings within the borders and this process will continue throughout the year.

As mentioned in our January Newsletter, work is carrying on in Plot 12 though once again the weather held us back; but we hope that this will be planted up in the Summer, ready for those warm, sunny days that are now here. One of the big tasks that is taking much longer is ensuring we have removed the perennial weeds that over time have made their way through the borders. Thank you to the many volunteers who are getting their hands dirty doing this vital task.

As a result of funding, we have been able to purchase a large shed (right) that will be home to our small team of propagators and we are in the process of fitting out the interior. This will mean that the display museum on Plot 24 will be permanent and won't have to be part-used for propagation, allowing for a much better display space.



Education update

The magic of Hill Close Gardens is a mixture of many things: the grass and the trees, the flowers and the bees, the hedgehogs and the bugs, the gardeners and the Volunteers. Through the winter and spring we have seen the gardens change and grow in a different way. With no visitors treading the paths, the gardens were missing an essential element: the voices, the joy and the laughter of young children and their families. The gardens flourish, as we do, when we all meet together and share in the wonders and delights of being outside.

We have been delighted to welcome Kate's Storytree, our very own storyteller, to the gardens for a weekly story time session. Kate has been weaving the story of Sparrow, who visits the garden, making friends and exploring hidden places .



Sparrow gathered the forget-me-nots, flew through the willow tunnel, found the secret garden, all the while building a nest.

Last month we were so excited to welcome families to our Boggling Bugs and Creepy Crawlies Workshop. The

children and their families explored the gardens as they embarked on a Bug Hunt, seeking out butterflies,

story of The Ugly Bug which does have a very happy ending when Bug finds true love!



beetles, bluebottles, bugs and our family of ladybirds. It was a joy to get the garden tools out for digging and watering and, not surprisingly, some wonderful mud pies and puddles were created. The birds were very noisy, welcoming the children back to the garden and obviously pleased to have an opportunity to feast on the worms that the children's digging had uncovered. We also made a snuggle bug and a dragon fly to take home. We finished the morning hearing the

The Volunteers continue to look after the garden: the willow tunnel has had a haircut, the sensory garden is blooming, the strawberries are full of fruit and Joe the Scarecrow is about to have a fashion makeover.

Make sure you check out the Children and Family section of the Gardens' website or follow us on our Facebook page to see upcoming events and activities, such as our very popular Teddy Bear's Picnic on August 5th.

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