

HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



Autumn 2021

Summertime Success

The high standard of horticulture at Hill Close Gardens was recognised by success in “Warwick in Bloom” where the Gardens were awarded a Gold medal in the category of Public Access Gardens (*right*).

Horticultural Shows

Entries from the Gardens of fruit, flowers and vegetables won a fair sprinkling of awards including the Best in Show for Rosemary Mitchell. The award was presented to her by Peter Lamb on Apple Day (*below*).



Later entries were submitted to the Old Milverton Horticultural Show again with success.

Participation in these events is very much part of the involvement of the Trust in local horticultural events.



Picture: Gill Fletcher

HCG's Trustee Rich Eddy receiving from Warwick Mayor, Cllr Richard Edgington, our award from the Warwick in Bloom committee for the Best Public Access Garden

“I am calm, recharged and feel I can take on the world a delightful haven away from the madness”

‘Wellbeing in the Gardens Day’ on 3rd October was a great success, opening up for local residents to learn how being in a garden and gardening with others can aid physical and mental wellbeing.

We had many first time visitors who enjoyed exploring the contemplation seating areas around the gardens and the tranquillity the plots can provide. Achieving Results in Communities (ARC c.i.c), a Leamington-based wellbeing in nature organisation, supported the event with stalls to inform how green spaces benefit wellbeing through the ‘5 Ways to Wellbeing’.

Thanks also goes to Springfield Mind, Warwickshire Wellbeing Academy and Town Council for supporting with literature.

There was a buzz in the tearoom and a positive and welcoming atmosphere on the terrace, where our interactive survey was discussed and answers written on leaf notes stuck on the tree drawn on the glass window. We aim to use the findings of the survey to obtain further funding to hold a larger event in 2022.

From the Centre Manager

As we move through these challenging times at Hill Close Gardens, we look forward to getting everything ready for 2022 and beyond.

We are on the lookout for someone to take over responsibility of our small gift shop. If you or anyone you know might be interested in getting involved with this venture please do let me know. It is a good chance to meet other volunteers and bring some creativity to our gift shop offering. The post is voluntary. Many thanks to Val King who is stepping down from this position after doing a sterling job for a number of years.

We are also keen to hear from anyone who may be interested in joining our Events team, to inspire us with new ideas to run alongside our established Apple Day and Snowdrop Weekend, so this is a chance to get involved and shape the future of HCG.

Calling all digital creatives

Are you able help us by putting your great computer design and artwork skills to good use? Hill Close Gardens is seeking someone to take over the layout and production of the thrice-yearly newsletter, along with leaflets and other occasional print items that the Gardens require.

Everything is designed and created using Adobe Creative Suite, and in particular InDesign for the final layouts (using existing templates and previous artwork).

The role is not especially time-consuming: for example, the newsletter requires just a few hours spread across a few days three times a year.

If you'd like to volunteer to show off your creative talents, or just find out more, please get in touch in the first instance with the Centre Manager by email to centremanager@hcgt.org.uk and we can take it from there.

**“I’m a little hedgehog, brown and small,
very prickly, not that tall.”**

At the end of October, families came along to take part in a tickly, spiky, snuffling session of hedgehog happenings. They joined in a Hedgehog Hunt, as our very own ‘prickle’ of clay hedgehogs had taken themselves off and hidden around the gardens. They found Horatio, Henrietta, Hermione, Hussain, Huey and some more of their friends....

The children made their very own clay and felt hogs to take home (thanks to Carey and Liz), as well as lots of other crafty masterpieces, together with hints and tips about how to protect our prickly friends.

The sun shone, the rain held off and another great day in the gardens was had by our families once again!

We are always looking for volunteers to join our Children & Family team.

Westgate Primary comes to Hill Close

Just a few days before the end of the summer term, we welcomed all the children and staff for a day in the gardens. Some children explored the gardens on a Scavenger Hunt, others looked in more detail at the plants, how they pollinate and grow. Kate, our very own storyteller, wove her magic for the younger ones, whilst the some other intrepid explorers found the joys of the Mud Kitchen hard to resist – apologies to the parents for the state some children arrived home (see on the right as an example!).

Mathew Watson, Headteacher, added, “Thank you to all the volunteers at Hill Close Gardens for providing a wonderful visit for all of the pupils at Westgate Primary School in the final week of term. To close the Centre for us for the whole day was very generous and the children enjoyed taking part in a wide range of learning opportunities and activities, as well as having picnics in the shade of many beautiful trees. Hill Close Gardens is a hidden gem which deserves to be discovered by all of Warwickshire’s residents.”

And don't forget we sent all the children home with a two-for-one voucher - so make sure you use yours if you have one!



Membership

A big "Thank you" to all members who have joined our band of volunteers, helping in a wide range of roles: your help is greatly appreciated. For example, on Apple Day there was a record attendance and having lots of volunteers helped it to run smoothly.

Our membership has increased during the pandemic and is now approaching 800. We are pleased that so many people are now enjoying regular visits to the Gardens.

In April, membership subscription rates were increased to £18 for Individual, £27 for

Joint and £33 for Family (2 adults bringing in children). At the same time, the period of membership was changed from a calendar year to 1 year from date of purchase.

Hopefully, all members will wish to renew for another year when their present membership expires.

For those of you who pay by standing order in January, please note the increase in subscription since last year: we would ask you to check and amend your standing order if necessary.

Give a year of pleasure

Membership Gift Vouchers make excellent presents for Christmas or birthdays. They can be used at anytime to purchase a year's membership, giving pleasure from the peace and quiet of nature throughout the changing seasons of the year.



Strengthening the Board of Trustees

At our July meeting the Trustees warmly welcomed Lucie Titchmarsh to join us as a Trustee. Lucie has been a gardens volunteer for the last two years, and recently managed the repairs to the Plot 17 balustrade. Lucie qualified as a landscape architect - Masters with distinction - in 2020. Before that she had experience in events design and management, and all these skills will be valuable to the Trust. She recently applied to the "Green Shoots" programme of Warwickshire CC to fund a feasibility



study for a future carbon-neutral HCG, and although that programme was oversubscribed she is still hopeful of moving these ideas forward.

She has already achieved one success: unfortunately John Plumb has had to resign from being our Treasurer, but Lucie has found us John Gates as an ideal candidate to replace him. In the next issue we will introduce John Gates to members, and also introduce Chris Wainwright as a Trustee. Chris is already very well known to us, having served the Trust so well as Children

and Families leader for some years.

We will be sorry to lose the expertise of Tony King, who resigned as a Trustee at the AGM in July, and are very grateful for his contribution over many years. So the Trustees are now a ten-strong body, forming a great team to take the Gardens forward. They now have a new Business Plan to guide them, and we are very grateful to Herbie Jhita for preparing this powerful and far-sighted document, full of great opportunities as well as challenges.

Chris Begg

Looking back

What a fantastic turnout for Apple Day this year. Nearly 600 of you turned out to buy apples, visit the various stalls and activities and the weather shone on us too.

Whilst some people claimed it a poor year for apples, at Hill Close we saw a bumper crop. We had no June drop, the trees holding on to their fruit well and only losing some later in August. This translated into a larger harvest, though of smaller fruit. What this means is we had enough for apple day and plenty for juicing. So we'll soon have bottles available to buy.

The weather for our yearly Chrysanthemum day wasn't so good, or at least the forecast wasn't, as it cleared in the afternoon. Our remaining chrysanthemum plants were soon sold and the chrysanthemums were looking very good in the borders. In terms of the plants we offer, this year we have sold more plants and quicker than previously, and we'll look at broadening our range for next year.

Our Pruning course for this year was well attended. Focusing on top fruit we looked at apples and pears and everyone had the opportunity to prune standards, cordons and espaliers. If you'd like to learn the techniques involved in this then keep your eyes out for next year's course.

It's been great to meet an influx of new volunteers over the past 12 months and we now have enough volunteers until the spring. If you would like to volunteer in the new season please get in touch and we'll arrange a time for you to come and meet us. We always need volunteers to help in the gardens.



Thanks to a grant from Plant Heritage we were able to give our chrysanthemums more support this year. Many of the cultivars in the collection are tall and we bought steel rods which we've shaped to act as supports for them.

Our corrugated steel tool shed was in need of urgent repair work, the edges rusting away and the paint peeling, so we have had this repaired and re-painted and it now looks transformed.

We have also begun work on the green roof on the Visitor Centre, removing the moss that has slowly built up. This is usually best done in the spring but we have started on it now as the moss had begun to restrict the growth of the sedums. We'll also replace some of the gravel and give them a feed as soon as the weather warms up next year.

Our attention will soon turn to snowdrops and I hope to see you all at our Snowdrop weekend in February. Until then I hope you have a good remainder of the year.

Neil Monroe (Head Gardener)

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