

Issue No. 57

March 2021

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



WELCOME TO OUR MARCH NEWSLETTER

Hello everyone. It seems a long time since the last newsletter even though nothing much has happened in the interim apart from us all staying at home and trying to keep clear of Covid, followed by the excitement of being vaccinated or waiting to be vaccinated. I know one or two of you have been ill with Covid and I hope you are making a good recovery.

Hopefully those of you who live locally or who visit our Facebook page will have seen that the gardens have been open to members again since just before Christmas. The gates are open 9.30am - 3.30pm Monday – Friday (3.00pm on Fridays). I have noticed that some days the gates remain locked and I guess this is because the person with responsibility for the gates has not been at work that day, so please be aware that this may recur. In principle, however, the gardens are open for you during the week.

The Friday volunteers have been working there too, but we have strict Covid rules to follow.

Tony Evans, a local photographer and member of the Friends, has posted some lovely pictures on the Cottingham site of Facebook, some of which will appear in this newsletter. The winter garden looks splendid and spring flowers are beginning to appear throughout the gardens but especially in the long borders at the front. The Daphne, on the left opposite the entrance to the building/greenhouses, is smelling gorgeous. Sadly, the boiler is out of action and we have lost a number of greenhouse plants to frost. We hope the boiler can be mended.

The usual team of volunteers have pruned the roses in the rose arch. With five or six people working for two or three hours each week, this still takes eight weeks. It is a mammoth task, but well worth doing. Hopefully, unlike last year, this year we will get to see the roses.

Memberships. We have not asked you to renew your memberships as the gardens were closed for 8 months. Our current plan is to move renewal date to the 1st of August (our financial year ends on 31st July). We will be in touch with you about this in due course. Anyone who has renewed his/her membership already has a card dated 2022.

Open Day. Normally our Open Day is in May, just before Chelsea Flower Show. As the RHS has moved the date this year to 21-28 September, given all the uncertainties around the current lockdown, we propose holding our Thwaite Open Day in early September, probably the 5th or the 12th. You might like to pencil those dates into your diaries. Obviously, everything will hinge on the rules and regulations around Covid, so we will notify you nearer the time.

AGM. We propose having the AGM in October as usual, but with a two year gap. The committee continues to meet, on Zoom, with officers and members being the same as last year.

The future of Thwaite Gardens. We are told there are no plans to sell the Botanic Gardens. We have no knowledge of the current position vis à vis the house and woodland but we have been liaising with Andrew Steel from the Plant A Tree Today (PATT) Foundation who has himself been liaising with university staff. You can look this organization up on line. Essentially, it works with Forces Veterans programmes (no, not the one on Priory Rd) and recently planted 2,640 trees near Bewholme in Holderness, supported by East Riding of Yorkshire Council and a firm in Hull (Kingston Modular). The PATT Foundation is interested in working with the woodland at Thwaite, where there are a number of “champion trees”. The British government has a target of creating 30.000 hectares of new woodland by 2025, while the Committee on Climate Change advocates planting 30.000 new trees pa up to 2050. Managing Thwaite’s woodland clearly fits with all this. We were told some time ago that when the land was sold, there would be a covenant on the woodland precluding housebuilding.

Finances. Last year we missed out on all our income, Open Day was cancelled and memberships were held over, but neither did we spend much. We have the funds to carry on. Let us all look forward to being out and about this spring and summer.

Annie Bourton Card, Treasurer

10.2.21

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## **MARCH MEETING**

Given the restriction of Covid lockdown, we are organizing our March meeting on Zoom. We realize this may restrict attendance but a number of members should be able to join in. If you haven't ever tried Zoom before, now is your opportunity. You will need to download the Zoom app. There are a number of Zoom apps, and you will need the one which is a diagram of a white camera on a pale blue background. It is free.

**Dr James Gilbert**, who undertakes bee research at the Botanic Gardens, will talk about this:

### **A bee's guide to a balanced diet**

The garden buzzes with bees in summer, merrily pollinating our flowers and crops. But behind this country scene, the relationship bees have with the flowers they visit is as complex as any social network. We know bees are important, and we should help them. But amid all this complexity, how do we know which plants are really best to grow to help bee populations? This talk will focus on how you can help encourage wild bees in your garden, and how at Hull we are working to help make more effective choices for bee-friendly gardens.

Dr James Gilbert

Department of Biological and Marine Sciences, University of Hull

The meeting will take place at **7.30pm on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

To book yourself a place, please email Vic Swetez on [vic.swetez@outlook.com](mailto:vic.swetez@outlook.com)

In due course, Vic will send you an email with the zoom link in it. On the night of the 16<sup>th</sup>, you will need to click on the link about 5 or 10 minutes beforehand. A message will appear asking you to wait and then you will be “let in”. You will then be able to watch and listen to James’ presentation.

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Growing *Impatiens* in the heated greenhouses at Thwaite Gardens



There are several varieties of tender *Impatiens* growing successfully in the heated greenhouses at Thwaite Gardens, some of which have been grown from seed. They are rewarding plants to grow, as they have such a long flowering season, and are generally trouble free. There have been recent challenges because the boiler is out of action and the glasshouses are temporarily reliant on additional forms of heating. So far all have survived the lower temperatures with slight frosting of the leaves, but conditions are not ideal.

The main varieties grown currently are *Impatiens sodenii*, *I. tuberosa*, *I. auricomia x bicaudata*, *I. scabrida*, and *I. balfourii*, with many others to choose from in the future.

Many *Impatiens* grow easily from seed, particularly if it is fresh. However, they can be prone to infection so it is important that seed trays / pots are scrupulously clean. Seed is surface sown and then either pressed gently into the compost, or very lightly covered with grit, as light is needed for germination. Humidity is also needed, so the seed tray can be covered with cling film until germination begins. As germination takes place at 21 - 25 degrees, a propagator is essential. Germination can be slow but usually begins after 2-3 weeks. Compost needs to be kept moist but not wet.

Impatiens seed can be challenging to collect as, when the ripe pods receive the slightest touch, they spring open, shooting out the seeds with great force! It is best to fasten a paper bag over the seed pod, before that moment is reached, so that the seed is not lost. Although initial plants may have to be seed grown, subsequent ones are more easily taken as cuttings, as the strike rate is high. Cuttings can be started in water or growing medium, and root quickly if the temperature is suitable.

Impatiens prefer moist shade so are mainly grown in the left hand bed of the end glasshouse, where conditions suit them best. Some are annual, some perennial and some are untouched by the seasons, as long as the temperature remains reasonably constant.

Impatiens sodenii is a star performer as it has an unbelievably long flowering season and is usually covered in single, pale pink blooms. Our main plant is currently around one metre tall and wide, and has been growing happily for approximately two years. It is a very forgiving plant and can be cut back as necessary.

Impatiens balfourii is a half hardy perennial but is usually grown as an annual. It is easily raised from seed, although germination can be slow. A delicate looking plant with typical foliage and purple and white bi- coloured flowers, it is useful as a filler at the front of the beds.



Impatiens scabrada is a hardy annual covered with typical yellow flowers and although it is grown at Thwaite in a heated greenhouse, it will flourish in a shady border in the summer garden, as will *I. balfourii*. Although it looks as exotic as *I. sodenii* it is considerably hardier and grows to about 60 cm in height.

An eye catching Impatiens with bright orange flowers is *I. auricoma x bicaudata*, which so far has only been grown in the greenhouses in pots on the bench. When the weather permits, a couple of cuttings taken last year will be planted directly into the soil, and should grow to be a similar size to *I. sodenii*.

Impatiens tuberosa can reach 1m x 1 m in the right conditions, and is similar in habit to *I. auricoma x* but the flowers are a clear, strong pink.

All the Impatiens grown tend to be easy, healthy plants, but have been prone to whitefly in past summers. These infestations have been kept under control recently by the introduction of nematodes, in the form of tiny wasps. It took several months to achieve good results, but last summer saw a big reduction in the number of whitefly, and a matching increase in the number of wasps.

There are many other varieties of Impatiens, both tender and hardy, to enjoy in the garden and the greenhouse, which can be planted in shade/ partial shade. Sourcing seed and plants is not always easy, but the internet is the place to go, as there are hobby enthusiasts selling a variety of seeds, often very reasonably.

Jane Scorer

TREES OF THWAITE – JUDAS TREE (*Cercis silquastrum*)



By the time this newsletter comes out, we should be into spring and the Judas Tree should be on the point of flowering (generally late April to May). It is an easy tree to find in the garden, growing in the corner of the little car park on the boundary of Holtby House.

This is an interesting species in many ways. Though not rare, it is fairly uncommon locally and there is a scatter of fairly large specimens and more that are smaller in the Hull/Cottingham district and elsewhere in East Yorkshire. It seems to have become more frequent in recent decades since it became available in many garden centres. It makes a refreshing change from the more widespread spring blossom trees, being a member of the pea family rather than the rose family of most the others. The flowers, incidentally, are said to be edible.

Judas Tree originates from the eastern Mediterranean and as such its success here is perhaps surprising. It does however do better the warmer, drier and

sunnier its location here, as might be expected. In Mediterranean countries it is widely planted as an urban garden and street tree and in March and April there, is really eye catching. The main reason for this is that the flowers appear before the leaves in dense wreathing masses and clusters all along the twigs, branches and even down the trunk. This trunk flowering is technically known as 'cauliflory' and is fairly unusual in temperate trees though much commoner in tropicals, notably cocoa. The flowers are generally pink in colour, although there is a rare white form. Most southern European trees are in some range of stunning deep magenta pink. For some reason, most in Britain (including Thwaite's) are a paler pink. I know of no reason for this, unless it is some influence of light levels or temperature – but it is a pity. Another slight detracting factor here is that, unlike in the south, the leaves too are usually breaking by the time the flowers come out – so the solidity of the flowering is a little diluted.

These minor failings, though, are easily over ruled by other virtues. The whole tree is of quaint gnarled appearance, increasingly so with age. The leaves are a charming and distinctive kidney shape of a subtle sea green shade. Out of leaf, it is generally decked with brown 'pea pod' fruits which have a certain appeal. The tree is relatively small, about up to the size of a big apple tree, so manageable in modest gardens. It is supposed, too, to be very long lived. I have heard it said that the oldest tree in the city of Bath is a Judas Tree, though I cannot verify this.

Why Judas is the obvious question? One theory is that the name simply relates to Judea, perhaps the epicentre of its distribution. However, legend has it that it is the species Judas Iscariot chose to hang himself from after his betrayal of Christ and that the name derives from this. It must be said though, it is not the only tree with this claim – which includes even common elder (*Sambucus nigra*). I suppose being a common native to the region, *Cercis* has a better claim than most. Who knows? An additional twist to the story is that, originally white flowered, it thenceforth blushed with shame! How the remaining white trees fit with this story I hesitate to suggest.

In general, *Cercis siliquastrum* is pretty hardy to winter frost, even if it appreciates a hot summer. It also grows well on chalk – always a bonus in East Yorks. There are a number of other species of *Cercis* scattered across the northern hemisphere, where in every other case they are known as Redbuds. At least as common in gardens here is the lush purple foliage form of *Cercis canadensis* - ‘Forest Pansy’. From eastern N. America, it flowers only thinly here if at all unless following an exceptional summer. Really, ‘Forest Pansy’ is purely a foliage plant. We have a small specimen in the ‘Secret Garden’ at Thwaite. One of the Chinese Redbuds – ‘Avondale’ is also widely available but as yet is very uncommon. Theoretically it could be magnificent, though in East Yorkshire, it may be too early to pass a verdict, as its long term performance might also be strongly influenced by summer heat. Although potentially ‘Avondale’ is a bigger more vigorous tree, *C. siliquastrum*, seems still the more reliable.

John Killingbeck Jan. 2021

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## **PLANT OF THE MONTH – ANTIPODEAN DELIGHTS (*Correa* and *Grevillea*)**

Normally Plant Of The Month concentrates on one species but this time will feature two genera and their species. The reason for this is that both are from Australia, both are relatively recent at least to East Yorkshire gardens and both are interesting for prolonged periods even through the winter. Both can also be seen close together in our ‘Antipodean border’ project, in the vicinity of the classroom. Inspired initially by the *Phormium* bed, established by Joe Garner of the university, credit for much of the effort in the antipodean project must be given to our chairman – Steve Howe, who has sourced the plants from far and wide. These sorts of plants have been grown for years in Cornish gardens on the assumption that they must be very tender. But as so often, it turns out that some at least are hardier than expected and well worth a try here.



*Correa* are delightful shrubs eminently suited to small gardens and sheltered corners. They are sometimes known as 'Australian Fuchsias' and have something of that look about them, with small evergreen rounded leaves and pendulous bell-like flowers. Their main flowering period however, is through the winter for a remarkable spread of months. There is a small number of species and named varieties. At Thwaite we have *C. backhouseana* (one of the wild species) which has pale creamy flowers and 'Marian's Marvel' – a two-tone pink and greenish white cultivar.

I first came across *Correa* in my young days at college, where *C. backhouseana* and another species *C. harrisii* (red) were grown in a cool greenhouse, assumed too tender for outdoors. I never saw them again until I worked in Somerset, where they grew outdoors in a walled garden there. I tried one in my parent's garden up here at Spalding Moor. It grew well for a few years but was killed by frost eventually. This suggests that *Correa* will survive some frost but not too much. So far this winter at Thwaite, which has been colder than for some years, they are doing fine. But perhaps one shouldn't push one's luck too far – give them as sheltered a position as possible and perhaps take precautionary cuttings in late summer.



*Grevillea* is quite a big genus with a great diversity of morphology, ranging from low sub alpine bushes and desert scrub, to large trees. Only a small number are generally hardy in the UK but in the far south west many are being tried successfully. Many hardy *Grevillea* are appealing because they are so different from most other shrubs we grow. The majority of the hardy ones look almost coniferous with dense needle-like foliage. Yet the flowers are rather exotic, a little like honeysuckle, often red/pink or orange/yellow and close to perpetually in bloom or at least seeming to be on the point of it.

The best established *Grevillea* is probably 'Canberra Gem', a red flowered hybrid. I first tried this locally about 35 years ago. Treating it initially as a rather optimistic experiment I was amazed to find it grew quickly and survived each winter with next to no damage. Eventually at 2m high x nearly 3m wide it proved 'too big' for its location and had to be cut back. It took this in its stride too and flowering continued unabated. We left the house in the end, though I suspect the winter of 2010 will have killed it. But 2010 killed a lot of 'hardy' things too.

'Canberra Gem' is a hybrid with species *G. juniperina* – the commonest form of which is *G. j. sulphurea* with yellow flowers. This is one of the original Grevilleas long grown in the south. The other is *G. rosmarinifolia*, a delightful plant with red flowers and slightly broader rosemary-like foliage. We have both at Thwaite doing fine. There are a number of other Grevilleas coming into

the trade too though as yet most are obtainable only through specialist nurseries.

A strikingly different relative newcomer to the hardy *Grevillea* range is *G. victoriae* – the so called Royal Grevillea. Said to be very hardy, it has broader, slightly silvery leaves lending it the look of a more ‘normal’ garden shrub. However the flowers are the most exotic yet – pendulous racemes of orange/red guaranteed to raise the question “what is that?” from any visitors to your garden. We have a young specimen at Thwaite doing well so far. I have tried this one too myself in my cold Market Weighton garden. It certainly survives but on my dry chalky soil is not flourishing. The flowers tend to drop just before opening.

This is possibly due to insufficient moisture. It seems improbable that an Australian shrub might perhaps suffer from drought in Britain but one has to remember that parts of Australia are very wet, particularly the cooler mountainous south from where many of the species mentioned above derive. So don’t assume they enjoy being bone dry. Soils too are probably significant. My old ‘Canberra Gem’ grew on acid sandy soil. The soil at Thwaite also seems to suit. Dry chalk or perhaps wet clay might be more difficult.

John Killingbeck Feb. 2021

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Some Cacti Photographed by Anthony Evans



'Crassula pubescens'



'Buddha's Temple'

Unfortunately he doesn't know the name of the second one. Does anyone else?

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