

Issue No. 60

August 2022

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



Open Day 2022

We had a wonderfully successful Open Day and banked more than £6,500 (to our amazement). Our many thanks to all of you who came along, bought tea and cake, played tombola, bought plants.

We were lucky with the weather which was bright and sometimes sunny. The All For One choir sang magnificently to the great pleasure of the audience. Large groups of people attended John Killingbeck's tree walks.

People were arriving from 10.30am, despite official opening not being until 11.00am, and from 11.00 onwards it was very busy. We estimate that at least 750 people came through the gate.

The people setting out the cake stall thought we had too much cake, but we had sold out by 2.30pm. Tombola was sold out by mid afternoon. We sold an enormous number of plants.

Exhausted as we were by the end, it had been great fun and when the takings were added up we felt that all our hard work over the year had come to fruition.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who work hard all year whatever the weather and who worked extra hard on Open Day itself. My thanks too to the extra people who came along to volunteer on the day, spouses and friends and relations.

Annie Bourton Card

3.6.22

PLANT OF THE MONTH – VERBENA (*Verbena bonariensis*)



Every now and again a plant comes along that seems to revolutionise gardens everywhere. *Verbena bonariensis* is such a plant. A few decades ago, the plant seemed to be scarcely known, except perhaps among the cognoscenti but once it came to wider notice, everyone seemed to want one and it became common almost overnight.

There were good reasons for this. Although tall, it is very light and airy so can be used in almost any position in a border. As a backdrop it rises above many other herbaceous plants but equally in the foreground or middle distance, smaller plants can grow through and beneath it to charming effect. It also flowers for an enormously long season, starting mid-summer and going on into late autumn, depending on the weather. Even in winter, the sparse seed topped stems are attractive if left in frost and retain their elegant structure for much of the season. One of its greatest delights is that it is beloved by insect nectar feeders – both butterflies and bees, so has become a ‘must have’ for the wildlife garden, too.

Perhaps part of the explanation for this plant’s sudden success after years in obscurity was the coming of the naturalistic ‘prairie’ garden style. With the advent of this fashion, mainly from the 1990s onwards, the time for *Verbena*

bonariensis had really arrived. Although it will grace any herbaceous border of the traditional Edwardian type, it undoubtedly fits best of all in the prairie style. Self-supporting and waving fluidly in the breeze, it partners superbly with grasses, *Rudbeckia*, *Echinacea*, *Crocsmia* and other stalwarts of the prairie composition, where it was used from the first. Verbena soon attracted the attention of gardeners who have never been at ease with naturalism itself (perhaps the majority), but could still see a place for it in their own set up.

The individual flowers, though very small, are borne in tight heads and open in prolonged succession. Until cold weather sets in, there never seems to be an end of new heads to replace the expired. The colour is an intense, almost luminous light purple. The plant is perennial and will survive most winters on a well-drained soil, though, not surprisingly given that it is native to warm temperate eastern South America, may be killed by severe frost. It can be purchased as a small plant in spring and will flower by summer, though once established will often self-seed, to very pleasing effect in all sorts of places, including paving and walls and gravel, for those who can bear not to be too tidy minded. Other than cold, its success may also be limited by drought on poor soils and by overcrowding by lush neighbours on richer ones.

At Thwaite, we have included a lot of this plant in our new prairie border, situated on Green Wickets lawn. This is part of our plan to shrink the area of mown lawn considerably, so as to reduce our dependence on outside mowing to keep the garden looking good. As well as the prairie meadow we are trying a wild flower meadow too, nearby.

There are a number of other Verbena species which can be used in the garden and are becoming increasingly popular. Of similar character, though smaller than *V. bonariensis* are *V. tenera* and *V. rigida*. Tougher and also good for prairie gardens is *V. hastata* with its sparser haze of pink, mauve or white flowers. Longest established, though not well known and rare in East Yorkshire, we also have one native Verbena, *V. officinalis*, sometimes grown in herb gardens and known as Vervain.

John Killingbeck, July 2022

TREES OF THWAITE : NYMANS HYBRID EUCRYPHIA
(*Eucryphia x nymansensis* 'Nymansay')



If this newsletter appears in the latter part of summer, there will be a chance to see this tree in full bloom. It is a stunning sight and one of relatively few trees that bloom late in the summer season. It grows in the 'Secret Garden' at the top of the section beyond the greenhouses, near the boundary wall. The 'Secret Garden' is so called because it was once very overgrown and abandoned yet concealed many secret beauties that were revealed as it was cleared by Friends over the years.

Eucryphia is one of these treasures and was planted originally as a specimen from the old botanic garden days, meaning that it must be at least 50 years old. In fact, there used to be two specimens close together but one of these was severely damaged by harsh weather some years ago and was eventually felled. It re sprouted at first and we had hopes that it would revive but eventually it died. The existing tree was also damaged at the time – by the winter of 2010 - and only just recovered. Even the bark on the main trunk was partly killed by frost, never mind the foliage, so it was a close thing and the tree looked very miserable for many years afterwards but has now more or less recovered.

You will have gathered by now from these events that *Eucryphia* is not of the hardiest constitution and this is just one reason why Eucryphas are very

uncommon in East Yorkshire. In fact, East Yorkshire, along with much of eastern England, is just about the worst region of the country for growing these trees. As well as preferring a mild climate, *Eucryphias* enjoy plenty of rain and ideally acidic soils. All things considered, our tree at Thwaite is quite remarkable and I know of none larger, locally, though a bigger one once grew in Swanland, sadly now gone. Our tree also suffers to some extent with being somewhat overshadowed by a nearby copper beech and is poorer than it could be.

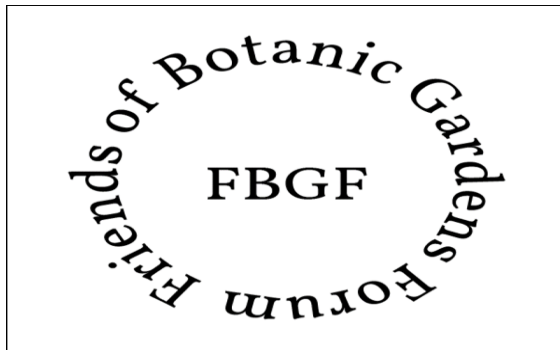
It is perhaps important to realise how modest our Thwaite *Eucryphia* is compared with its potential. If you really want to see how splendid these trees can be you need to visit gardens on the mild wet western seaboard of Britain and perhaps even more so, Ireland, where the climate more closely resembles that of their native homeland in the temperate rainforests of Chile. In these regions of the British Isles, *Eucryphia* trees including other even more demanding species can be seen attaining more than 20m in height. When in full bloom such trees are breath-taking – great pillars of densely packed snowy white flowers in late summer, resembling wild roses, sweetly scenting the air around and emitting an audible hum of bees harvesting the rich nectar and pollen.

Our tree is indeed modest by comparison but even so is quite a sight and well worth seeing. There are also much better *Eucryphias* not that far away in west Yorkshire – places like Harlow Carr or ‘The Hollies’ in Leeds. Harewood House once had quite a good one but, like one of ours, it was killed in 2010. This tends to make me think that probably, in carefully chosen spots in the East Riding, much better specimens of *Eucryphia* could be grown than might be thought; given the tree had a sheltered moist site with rich leafy soil that was not allowed to dry out. Even a small young one will flower well, too, so though might need to be obtained from a distant nursery, is worth a try.

There are several other species and many hybrids of *Eucryphia* besides *E. x nymanensis* but which are even rarer locally. A specimen of the deciduous *E. glutinosa* once grew in a special acid soil bed at Cleminson House, when it was owned by the university but this was obliterated along with all traces of the

bed when the house was sold and developed, years ago. I have planted a new young specimen of *E. milliganii* in the secret garden. This is one of the daintiest Eucryphias and if you come across one is perhaps the most suitable species for a sheltered small garden.

John Killingbeck : June 2022



Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum news

The Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum held their second ever 'live' meeting at Birmingham Botanic Garden on 14th May. This was the first live event since the start of the pandemic and was attended by eight at the gardens, and a further six on zoom.

The FBGF group is an informal network but decided that it would be useful to have a constitution to provide a framework for how the group will function. The representatives of the member friends groups have therefore been developing a simple, broad-based constitution. The finalised version should be agreed at the next meeting in September, but can, of course, be amended over time with members' agreement.

The latest FBGF newsletter is available on the Forum's website (<https://fbgf.org/>). News from Thwaite was unfortunately missed out in this edition but will be included in the next one!

Dr Lindsey Atkinson

Some good news and thanks

On 31.7.22, Jane Scorer (one of our volunteers) and her husband Allan opened their garden in Winterton in aid of NGS charities. Steve and Annie took three car-loads of plants and sold these in aid of Friends of Thwaite Gardens. Many were specialist and/or exotic plants, grown by Steve in one of our Thwaite greenhouses expressly for this event. They took £610, despite the rainy weather. ABC/SH

Moth survey at Thwaite Gardens

We were approached by a local recorder to carry out a moth survey at the gardens at the end of July. In total 15 species of moth were recorded including some with intriguing names such as mother of pearl, willow beauty, riband wave and shuttle-shaped dart. The gardens are located in a high priority area for recording and have been described as having great potential. The data will be reported to the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC).

Moth numbers are in decline in the UK. Why does this matter? Apart from their aesthetic value, moths play an important part in the ecosystem both as pollinators and as a food source for birds, small mammals, amphibians and bats. What can we do to improve the habitat for moths? We can leave some untidy areas in our gardens with dead stalks and other material, reduce the use of pesticides and maintain a wide variety of plants as food sources.

For more information on moths, including their identification and conservation take a look at the Butterfly Conservation website



(<https://butterflyconservation.org/moths>) Mother of pearl

Photo source

<https://butterflyconservation.org/sites/default/f.../styles/large/public/1405-mother-of-pearl-msp.jpg>

Dr Lindsey Atkinson

DIARY DATES

AGM/ evening meeting 18th October, 7.30pm. Will include a talk given by Bob Hall entitled “Natural Remedies and Toxins – Be careful what you pick”

We will be sending you the AGM Agenda and associated details regarding this meeting some time in September.

Gardens Opening Times Reminder

Tuesdays 1.00 – 3.00pm

Fridays 9.30am - 3.00pm

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