

Issue No. 63

March 2024

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



Diary Dates

FOTG Spring meeting Sunday 24th March (see details below)

FOTG Open Day Sunday 19th May 11am to 4pm

There will be tree walks, a variety of plants for sale, refreshments, tombola and the 'All for One Choir'. More details to follow.

Cottingham Gardens Open Day Sunday 23rd June- to raise funds for Dove House Hospice

SPRING MEETING

The **Friends of Thwaite Gardens Spring Meeting** will be held at the gardens on **Sunday 24th March 2024 at 1.00 for 1.30pm**. There will be time before and after the meeting to look round the gardens and glasshouses.

The talk will be given by Dr Peter Williams a retired plant lecturer from York University entitled '**A year in a woodland garden**'.

The talk is based mainly on Weathervane House and looks at the plants that come and go throughout the year. Plant types covered include trees and



shrubs together with woodland plants, herbaceous perennials, and bulbs. Special emphasis is given to plants for acid soils and the talk is richly illustrated with images of azaleas, rhododendrons, magnolias, lilies, erythroniums, ferns, trilliums and meconopsis.

Entry free to members and £2 for non-members and will include refreshments. Guests welcome.

If you ever find yourself in Basel ...



The Victorian House, overlooked by University buildings

Founded in 1589 the University of Basel Botanical Garden (Switzerland) is one of the oldest botanic gardens in the world. It relocated to its current position in the historic part of the city near the Spalentor (city gates) in 1898.

The gardens are used for teaching and research, and plant conservation, but also as a recreational space so there is free entry, and they are open to the public every day. The gardens are partially accessible by wheelchair but with uneven paths and access is limited in the historic glasshouses.



At just under one hectare, this garden is a gem, packed with over 7500 plant species from around the world, including an arboretum of 300 woody species, some originating from 1898. Once inside it feels so much bigger than a hectare with winding paths passing through the collections and connecting through the glasshouses. Of particular note is the historic Victorian House containing giant water lilies (*Victoria cruziana*) and other aquatics. The new tropical house was opened in the spring of 2023 and their titan arum (*Amorphophallus titanum*) flowered in here in June. The tropical house then leads you on to cooler house representing tropical mountain.

The tropical house with the Spalantor behind.



Giant water lilies (*Victoria cruziana*) in the Victorian glasshouse.

Other glasshouses contain succulents, mosses and ferns plus the Namibia House including *Welwitschia*. There is a fine collection of carnivorous plants, alpines, geophytes, a shade garden, pond and Mediterranean garden so the gardens cover a wide range of habitats.

The primaeval garden, bordered by *Ginkgo* and *Metasequoia*, displays a large selection of ferns, clubmosses and primitive flowering plants. There is also a petrified tree trunk of *Araucarioxylon* sp. from the Triassic period.



The Namibia House



***Araucarioxylon* sp.**

If you ever find yourself in Basel these gardens are definitely worth a visit and showcase just what can be achieved in a small space!

Find out more at <https://botgarten.unibas.ch/en/>

Lindsey Atkinson

TREES OF THWAITE – SNOW GUM (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*)



This tree is easily identified in the garden being beyond the greenhouses adjacent to the new classroom. It is tall, evergreen and obviously a Eucalyptus. This tree was originally given to us as a seedling among several others and was the only one to survive. It was given as *E. pauciflora* but some doubts over ID do remain. Close examination of flowers and fruits is the most reliable way of ascertaining the identity of the majority of Eucalypts because there are so many species (around 900 all told) and many of them look quite similar. Eucalypts - known as gum trees - are native almost exclusively, though not entirely, to Australia where they are remarkably dominant and have adapted to habitats ranging from moist warm forests to deserts to cold high mountains. Eucalypts have been widely planted outside Australia and are now common throughout the warm climate world including southern Europe.

The vast majority of them are not hardy in Britain and even less so elsewhere in N. Europe. However, unlike most of our continental neighbours, we are lucky that a surprising number are remarkably hardy in the somewhat milder climate of the UK, though very few absolutely so in all regions. The hardy ones all hail from the far south east of the Australian continent and Tasmania usually from mountain localities. Even so, few can survive frost below minus 18 degrees C and most dislike prolonged but less extreme freezing too, which does occur from time to time in most parts of the UK. Some mature trees were killed in East Yorkshire in 2010 when hard frost persisted for much of December.

However, the hardiness of particular trees is influenced not only by species but also its provenance. This means that individuals originating from a cold mountain area are usually hardier than those of the same species from warmer lowlands nearby. So, a lot of work has been undertaken to search out trees of many species from the toughest locations which has steadily increased the range successful in the UK.

Eucalyptus pauciflora is one of the high mountain "Snow Gums". Ours has a classic Eucalyptus look:- tall, white shredding bark, long sickle shaped leaves. Nearby is another smaller species – *E. niphophila*. Some authorities regard this as only a variant, albeit a very distinctive one, of *E. pauciflora*. It is slower growing and particularly hardy with very attractive bark, leading some people to consider it among the most beautiful trees grown in the UK. Neither, though, is anywhere near as common as *E. gunnii*, the Cider Gum. If you see a Eucalypt in a Yorkshire Garden, the most likely by far will be *E. gunnii*. In fact, in Beverley there is a specimen recorded as having one of the largest girths in the UK, remarkable for northern England! Cottingham also has a few big ones, though very sadly, the best of these, off St. Margarets Avenue was felled recently.

People tend to strongly like or dislike Eucalypts. The main dislike is that they seem 'alien' in the British landscape. Their foliage, being evergreen of a greyish cast seems to hang in an odd way compared to most trees. These are adaptations to minimise water loss which is a prevalent problem in Australia. The greyness is caused by a coating of wax and the hanging because of the way the leaves are angled to minimise the sun hitting the leaf surface full on (the reverse of most trees). One positive effect of this is that it enables sunlight to penetrate the Eucalyptus canopy and reach the ground more easily than with other trees, so they cast less shade - an advantage in a garden.

Another aesthetic dislike of Eucalypts is that they seem rather gangly. This is particularly true when they are very young and is caused by the fact that many grow very fast. However, once past the initial stages, the majority of species broaden out and are as stable as any other tree. Most Eucalyptus have different looking (juvenile) foliage when young which alters as they mature.

This juvenile growth is often particularly attractive (typically round and silvery), so some people coppice them regularly to keep this going.

Eucalyptus trees have nice flowers too – creamy white and fluffy looking. They usually appear in summer, but some trees will flower at odd times of year, even into winter. They are very rich in nectar with a sweet sugary scent which is a big draw to bees. Fruits are little dry capsules and some species have been known to self sow. Many scarlet flowered species also exist but sadly, none that are hardy in Britain. The bark of many Eucalypts is also outstanding. It is a feature of many (including *E. pauciflora*) that the bark peels regularly leaving a smooth white surface. This is thought to be an adaptation to strong sunlight and perhaps bush fires in the natural habitat.

There are a few golden rules when planting a Eucalyptus: 1. Plant them very young and small (don't be tempted by bigger ones trained to a stake). 2. Make sure they are not pot bound when you buy them. 3. Don't transplant them. 4. Plant in full sun, or they may stretch at a funny angle. Your young Eucalyptus may need a light stake the first year to steady it but if you find yourself struggling to hold it up after the first year or two, you are probably fighting a losing battle. Cut it to the base and it will re sprout. Select one or perhaps more of the shoots (multi-stems can look very attractive) to grow up again into a tree which will be more stable.

Our two Eucalyptus look set to become star trees in the garden, such that they have become the inspiration for our new "Australian Border". The trees will be under planted with Australian native plants and the ground covered with reddish chippings so that it looks something like Australian dry bush. Keep a look out for this as it progresses.

John Killingbeck Jan. 2024

PLANT OF THE MONTH – WINTER ACONITE (*Eranthis hyemalis*)



Rowley Church

Winter Aconite is one of the best loved of spring flowers and a common partner to snowdrops (*Galanthus*) in many gardens. It is rather less common overall, though, than snowdrops, particularly in domestic gardens. Its colour, a bright buttercup yellow, provides a warming contrast to the icy white of *Galanthus* which gives it a special charm. Each flower is close to the ground on a short stem and surrounded by a ruff of green bracts which seem to set it off like a jewel in a clasp. I remember being enchanted with aconites when I first saw them as a teenager on my way to my new school. I had to walk a new route which passed by a garden where they grew. I had never seen them before and at first could not fathom what they could possibly be. At home we only had snowdrops.

The finest displays seem to occur in woodlands of stately homes and large, old, somewhat neglected gardens generally. Perhaps this is because, where happy, the aconite will spread and naturalise over large areas that in time can form spectacular carpets. To do this it is perhaps best left to its own devices undisturbed – something that does not usually happen in tidy small gardens. It grows well in alkaline soils and underneath trees, so is very useful in these otherwise difficult conditions.

Aconite is one of the very first flowers to emerge at the start of the year; quite often in January and rarely later than February. It is possible that by the time this newsletter comes out, the plant will have finished and starting to produce its seed pods. We have a particularly attractive display of it at Thwaite, under the weeping pear near the entrance to the car park where it combines

beautifully with snowdrop, *Cyclamen coum* and various hellebores. This is one of the favourite corners in the garden in late winter. The first flowers push their way through the leaf litter, stealthily at first and seem suddenly to burst into bloom on the first mild sunny day.

Aconite is native to Europe over quite a large area, mainly to the south of the continent and East towards Turkey but has naturalised in regions further north, including to Britain. Further east it is replaced by a different species, *E. cilicicus*, which differs in having slightly larger flowers and more slender bracts, though is otherwise quite similar. In fact, some authorities regard the two as variants of the same species. They have, however, been cross fertilised and have produced the named variety 'Guinea Gold' which again is fractionally larger. Both these forms are widely offered for sale in garden centres; indeed, I think more readily than the common type – possibly because they are more tolerant of the drying out process that the commercial market demands.

The plants are usually bought as dry corms but may be more successful if obtained fresh from an existing source just as they are dying down in early summer. Commercial corms are sometimes badly dehydrated, from which they may not recover, particularly if bought late and cheap in a clearance sale. Seed propagation is another possibility, and it is produced abundantly on established plants. Sow it fresh but you may have to wait a few seasons for the plants to reach flowering size. If you already have plants, do not be tempted to tidy them up when still green but allow them to die down naturally. The post flowering leaves are like small parasols and not particularly unattractive. They will also cast seed around on their own.

Aconites are a member of the buttercup family, *Ranunculaceae* (which for once in botany is perhaps not a surprise and could be guessed from superficial appearance!). Other members of this family include some really toxic plants like monkshood (*Aconitum*), Baneberry (*Actea*) and Hellebore (*Helleborus*), so it seems safest to assume that aconite itself will be somewhat poisonous if ingested, unlikely though this is to happen.

John Killingbeck Jan. 2024

News from your Treasurer

Hello everyone. I can't believe it is February already, with all the first signs of spring growth in the gardens.

Financially we are in a good place, having had such a successful Open Day last May. Fingers crossed for another sunny Sunday for our next one.

Thank you everyone who has renewed their membership, because that is our second major source of income. Fortunately, we haven't needed to increase the rate, because of doing so well at Open Day. **Can you check your cards, please? You should have a pale blue card with flowers on, which says valid until 31.7.24.** I do appreciate it is hard to keep on top of these things, especially when you have been members for years and years so that all the renewals merge into something you think you did recently. **We remove names from the list if the renewal hasn't been made by the end of February.**

Doing all correspondence by email has certainly helped, we have minimal expenditure on stamps. Can I also say thank you to all of you who included an s.a.e. with your renewals. This makes a huge difference, both financially and in the time taken to address envelopes.

Most of our expenditure is, as ever, on plants and gardening goods (compost/ bark/ etc). We have a good supply of tools which we have accumulated over the years and make a big effort to keep track of the secateurs (which are clever at hiding themselves in the undergrowth). When you come to the gardens you will see lots of changes, with beds being extended and interesting things planted.

We have purchased four garden benches in the last year and were given another. This was in response to people (some of you, the members) asking for seating so that you can enjoy the gardens quietly or rest on your walk round. I got an amazing deal on these by buying them in Cottingham market. Support your local trader! (Actually, they came from near Leeds, but it was

still supporting the Thursday market.) They have been painted with teak oil a couple of times, to preserve them.

We have also continued to raise money from plant sales, notably at the Cottingham Green Fair in the autumn, and volunteers have provided talks for local U3A groups on Friday afternoons, for which we make a small charge.

In October we had our AGM and talk on a Sunday afternoon. Everyone said they preferred this time and venue (our classroom on site) so we will hold our March meeting on a Sunday as well. Details are below. It provides an opportunity to visit the gardens on a weekend as well as the usual Tuesday afternoons and Fridays (times also below, and on the website).

Annie Bourton Card

4.2.24

Aloe arborescens



Aloe arborescens is endemic to the south eastern part of Southern Africa. Specifically, this range includes the countries of South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Growing quite happily and flowering in the cacti house at Thwaite botanic gardens. It can grow tree like as its Latin name suggests.

Bob Hall

Keep in touch.

It's easy to keep up with all the Thwaite Gardens news!

As well as all the info in this newsletter we have a website, a Facebook page, and a Twitter feed. All are regularly updated to give you news and upcoming events as well as photos of plants and projects. We welcome your comments and questions and try to get back to you as promptly as we can.

Website

<https://thwaite-gardens.hull.ac.uk>

Facebook

Friends of Thwaite Gardens

<https://www.facebook.com/FOThwaitegardens>

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