

HERGEST CROFT GARDENS

Newsletter March 2009

Welcome to the Garden

We hope that Hergest Croft Gardens will give you all pleasure and relief in these difficult times. A garden soothes the spirit with sights, smells and sounds and provides a respite from the troubles of the world. We depend on the support of our

visitors to pay for the maintenance of the Gardens and we thank you one and all. Sometimes when I sit down to write these letters I find my self wondering what to say but on this occasion at the end of February I am more concerned at what to leave out

The Winter

The news is, of course, that we had a winter for the first time for more than 15 years. We had continuous hard frosts for most of the time from the beginning of December until the middle of February, our lows reached the low 20s Fahrenheit or -7°C and on some days the temperature never rose above freezing. We also had snow, though not as much as some places, and unlike last year, not heavy enough to do significant damage to trees and shrubs. We have, so far at least, been spared damaging gales and the clearing up that they cause. For those who thought that 2008 was exceptionally wet, it is interesting that our rainfall was 46 ins (1,100mm), a little above our long term average of 4 ins (1,000mm) but way below our peak of 55 ins

(1,320mm) in 2000. This brings good news and bad news. Some of the plants from exotic parts of the world like the mountains of northern Vietnam and Taiwan, many collected by the indefatigable Bledwyn and Sue Wynn Jones from Crug Farm Plants on the Menai Straits, are looking the worse for wear and some probably won't make it. There are as many pleasant surprises as unpleasant ones. However it is only by stretching what you try and grow that you discover plants that are truly worthy additions to British gardens. We will try and keep you updated with news from the sick bay over the course of the spring and summer. On the other hand plants are flowering at their proper time in concentrated displays rather than dribbling out in penny numbers from January onwards.

Spring Bulbs & Hellebores

This is going to be a spectacular March for bulbs, the best for many years. The drifts of *Crocus tomasinianus* in the Rockery are a real feature now; this is often a disappointing plant but is looking wonderful against its new gravel mulch that compliments its colour well. The *Iris reticulata* in shades of purple and blue by the Entrance Path and Drive are reaching their peak - they are not as easy to naturalise as crocus and daffodils and need constant reinforcement with new bulbs but I think that we are finally making progress, Sadly the yellow *Iris danfordiae*, which are a splendid contrast with the blue never last with us, they and yellow crocus are too attractive to mice who eat the bulbs. The blue *Scilla bifolia* on the lawns with islands of snowdrops are not

yet at their best but should be wonderful in the middle of the month. There are still crocuses and early daffodils to follow. Hellebores have become, like snowdrops, something of a cult plant and I fear that there are too many Helle-bores about! We certainly don't claim to have many of the most fashionable rarities but there are many fine unnamed plants about, including yellows, doubles and dark reds; our earliest plants came from Helen Ballard at Colwall, one of the earliest and best of hybridisers, some more recent from John Massey at Ashwood Nurseries who has specialised in double cultivars and those with more erect heads. But there are almost as many natural seedlings throughout the garden that give me as much pleasure

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Winter Work

A lot has been going on to tackle some of the “black holes” in the garden that. We have somehow managed to miss. The Drive in front of the house has been smartened up to match the restored conservatory with plants on the house cut back and a new dressing of gravel, as it is a north facing wall it will never be very exciting but it looks much better. Both the terraces on the south side of the house have become full of old plants especially of *Cistus* and *Ceanothus* that need renewing or replacing and this will be going on during the Spring and Summer. Interestingly these plants from the Maquis habitat of the South of France and California do not take kindly to

pruning back since in their native heath they are regularly burned and regenerate from seed. The old apple trees in the Spring border, many of which are at least 100 years old have been given a really hard prune, they will not fruit too well this year but hopefully will show renewed vigour in the future – an added benefit is more light on the magical spring borders beneath which will be at their best in March and April. You may be surprised by the sound of cockcrow in the Kitchen Garden, the new arrival’s name is Alasdair, and you can guess why if you know that he is an Exchequer Leghorn

A few Plants not to Miss

Daphne bholua on the Boundary Path, and *Viburnum x farrerei* on the Sycamore Walk – just follow your nose. Later on various *Corylopsis* and *Skimmias* on the Sycamore Walk and Boundary Path again with good scent; *Sorbus caloneura* in the Maple Grove, almost the first tree to flower in the year and picked out at the

Wisley Sorbus day in September as one of the most promising new plants. There will be early rhododendrons in Park Wood and later on camellias in Hergest Croft and depending on the weather at the end of the month, magnolias in both the garden and Park Wood

Shop and Plant Sales

Look out for a new range of exotic Chutneys and relishes made in Kington by Woodhouse Farms - a real experience even if the stoppers are a bit stiff. The Credale strain of single and double Hellebores – these are a steal at the price as some of them would sell to London to Helle-bores at £40+!

EVENTS

The Flower Fair on Monday 4 May 10.30 – 5.00pm

More than 50 stands will be selling a huge range of rare and unusual plants that are hard to come by elsewhere, giving visitors a great chance to buy something really special for their gardens.

The Raffle & Chinese Auction will be in aid of **The Gateway Gardens Trust**. The raffle includes many fantastic prizes ranging from a rent-free week for up to ten people in a converted mill on Speyside in Scotland to delicious meals à deux, while the Chinese Auction offers the chance to win dozens of interesting shrubs and plants.

RAIN and SHINE Company Shakespeare’s “*The Taming of the Shrew*” on Saturday 27 June at 7.30pm

The Receptionist, Jill, Sandra, Melissa, Pat and Veronica welcome any comments