



Newsletter 22/2 Spring 2022

President's Report

Dear All,

Looking back at this time last year we were still limited to local travel and unsure how the year would pan out. Now as restrictions are lifted I hope we can all make the most of getting together again in our beautiful gardens and make visiting a new garden the perfect excuse for planning a short trip away, discovering a new area perhaps and feeding our inspiration.

This year we have different challenges:

The war in Ukraine has shocked us to our core and we are all considering what we might do to help. Whilst we enjoy the freedom and safety of our own garden spaces one can't help but be horrified at how it must feel to have all that destroyed, or to have to leave it behind not knowing whether there will be anything there on your return.

Many have already offered to welcome refugees into their homes and the Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts committee are hoping that we might be able to channel some of the funds raised from our activities this year into charities helping these displaced children who are arriving in France.

If you would like to consider opening your garden or holding a fundraising event, or you may know of a local charity actively helping these children who have undergone what is undoubtedly a life changing trauma, please let us know.

Best wishes



***Karen Roper
President***

What's new for 2022?

Well, Spring has finally sprung in La Creuse and at the moment I have snowdrops, primulas, iris reticulata, hamamelis and hellebores in flower and daffodils and Chaenomeles on their way! I hope as you read this, that you too have had the opportunity to enjoy some flowers in your own garden or even had the opportunity to walk in the Spring sunshine, enjoying the best of what nature has to offer at this lovely time of year.

Already this year we have seen the opening of a garden in the Haute Vienne for a Hellebore and Hot Drink afternoon, which was a great success. The garden visitors were delighted to have the opportunity to

visit this lovely garden and it was great to see people out and about once more.

Meanwhile, I was busy being a "Tour Manager" for Sheila Cole, our resident galanthophile, and her husband Ian. This year, instead of having an open day for their snowdrop display they told me that for a change they wanted to take to the open road! I wrote to some garden groups to see if they could accommodate them for a short talk on the joys of growing snowdrops. Their members would be able to buy some of their more unusual ones at the end, sold on behalf of Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts. This has proved to be a great success and those groups who couldn't squeeze them in at such short notice have had the opportunity to book them for next year. Please let us know if your gardening group might be interested in them visiting in the future.

From time to time some of our experienced garden openers offer "Pop-up" openings. These are in addition to their normal Open Day and are meant for those days when they walk in their garden and everything looks so perfect, they just want to share it with others. They usually have a circle of acquaintances, friends, and social media contacts that they can invite at short notice, and we will advertise their event on our Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts Facebook page. If you use Facebook yourself, don't forget to "follow" us so that these, our regular garden openings, and any other events that we organize show up in your "feed" too.

I am delighted to tell you that following our last Newsletter I have had enquiries from people in the Hautes Pyrénées, the Rhône, the Vienne, the Maine-et-Loire, the Gironde, the Lot and the Loiret all wanting to become involved in one way or another. I have been out to visit some of them myself and some of our coordinators are on the case as well! My sincere thanks to them for their help and dedication to the cause. Some of our current garden openers are encouraging new people to become involved and we hope to see some new group openings on the website before too long.

On our website already this year we have new gardens opening in Allier, Dordogne, Charente, Lot, Haute Vienne, Aude, Vienne, and Alpes-de-Haute-Provence plus many of our current garden openers indicating they will be joining us again this year. Please help us by continuing to spread the word where you live and maybe before too long, we will see other departments joining us too! If opening your garden on our behalf appeals to you, don't hesitate to get in touch.



***Sue Lambert.
Garden Development
Manager***

***email:
gardendevlopment@opengardens.eu***

10 years in Provence

***This garden is
opening for the first***



time in 2022

When we bought La Redonne in the rural part of the Luberon 10 years ago we inherited a line of scrubby red roses, some sad apple trees in a frost pocket and a hedge of rosemary. There were a couple of patches of grass with an automatic watering system which we never understood and the rest of the 4 hectares were left to their own devices. Order was maintained by the local farmer walking a herd of ravenous sheep up the lane twice a year which took a mere two days to rid the terrain of anything vegetal. But the views from the house and garden were glorious and 4 hectares gave us lots of potential, so we began to plan. Most of the garden faces East/West and is wooded on the south side.



It's taken us a while to come to terms with the demanding climate of Provence – endless sunshine in the summer and frosts of -9 degrees C in the winter, coupled with little rainfall. The soil is very impoverished – limestone and rock – so every year we import lorry loads of manure plus all our own compost. One of our first investments was to put in a well which so far,

thankfully, has not run dry. Without it we couldn't have a garden.

Our first thought was lavender – it grows wild on the hillsides, so we planned out a diamond pattern along the drive, with naturalising tulips and a rose in each diamond. This has attracted bees and butterflies every summer and once we've cut the lavender it goes off to a local distillery for lavender essence – a Provencal cure-all for everything from insect bites to burns. It's now up for renewal so we have taken out the old bushes and will be replanting in March.

Then came 11 raised beds for the vegetable garden, edged with railway sleepers. We had to dig out the soil to a depth of 30 cm and replace it with bought in soil and compost. One bed was commandeered for herbs and the rest grew tomatoes, aubergines, peppers, courgettes and strawberries really well. Beans, peas and carrots sulked!

Missing a flower garden and cut flowers, more raised beds were installed, again with railway sleepers as edging and again digging out the soil and replacing it with bought in soil and compost and fitted with watering systems – these are a given in every part of the garden now. This enabled us to experiment with flowers and soon learnt that Beth Chatto was onto something with



her mantra of right plant, right place. Tulips love it, baking in the heat of summer, narcissi have to be restocked regularly, and some bulbs like anemone bland have gradually moved themselves to where they are happiest, as have the hellebores.



Dahlias and roses thrive, as do euphorbias, cistus, peonies, gypsophila, sweet williams, nepeta, alstroemeria, nicotiana, lilies, cornflowers and sunflowers. Iris grow and spread, giving a sea of blue in the late spring on an island bed at the entrance to the house.

20 little olive trees are very happy in straight

lines, along with 20 oaks purportedly impregnated with truffle spores but so far neither have cropped. They do add constant green and so we are having to be patient. Trees take a long time to settle in and require much pampering for the first few years. Liquidambers and a stately plane tree have coped well.

Eventually we realised that it was far too much work involved in having the vegetable garden in raised beds, so another area was set aside between the truffle oaks and the field and is rotavated with the little tractor and of course manured every autumn; and now we grow long lines of courgettes, aubergines, peppers, sweet corn, beetroot, peas, onions, broad beans, melons, and butternut squash. The tomatoes, carrots and parsnips are rotated still in the flower garden raised beds, with annual flowers for cutting.

So, overnight the flower garden doubled in size, and now has 19 raised beds. Jasmine happily swamps a pergola on one side, and a passion flower scrambles

over another cheerfully sharing space with ipomea. Irises have a bed to themselves, worth it for 3 weeks of glorious colour in May. Spring comes early here, with iris siberica, narcissi, anemones, tulips, hellebores and hyacinths swiftly overtaken by the peonies, catmint, aquilegia and others, then the roses. Dahlias and rudbeckias shine in the autumn along with penstemons, ricin and cannas.



We put down weed suppressant, covered with gravel and sand, around the swimming pool, and at the front of the house, and after treasure hunts at specialist nurseries, established some gravel gardens. These have flourished, needing little maintenance other than a severe haircut in the spring. Two old olive trees provide some shade, and hebes, euphorbias, cistus, pink roemary, tiny

tulips, grasses and a variety of rockery plants provide a quilt of colour.

Lawns are ambitious here, but we have laid one to the rear of the house in a semicircle, with a large retaining wall to keep back the mud from the field which flows down the hillside whenever we have a deluge (when it does rain here, it can be torrential). It's been a tussle, with specially ordered seed from England for golf courses not being up to the job. Last year the whole patch was rotavated and re-seeded with local grass for drought and so far, that's thriving. Crocus are popping up through it and a fig tree in the corner is enjoying the sprinkler system and giving us baskets of figs every autumn.

We are on the side of a hill, so have built terraces and a serpentine path to prevent wheelbarrows taking off at speed on the way down. We covered the slopes with weed suppressant and planted ground cover conifers at the top, with day lilies on the way down and then a wildflower mix to the side to add colour, and shrubs such as winter honeysuckle.

Lower down, we created another parterre

garden with larger beds, again dug out and with 200 tons of imported soil and compost, edged with metal bands. Into these beds we planted over 1000 anemone blanda and 3000 tulips and



narcissi bulbs, for the spring. These are augmented every year. Then we planted most of the beds up with David Austin roses in mixed colours, with blue agapanthus and a few beds devoted to dahlia in mixed colours. The large dahlia beds are glorious in late summer, revelling in the heat, and provide cut blooms for the house and friends.

A herb garden near the kitchen keeps the bees happy and more trees in the park are giving some shade to the sheep who act as mini lawnmowers. This year we have plans for a Japanese garden and so we always have a project to look forward to.



It's very different gardening in this area. Plants either love it and romp away, or take a long time to settle. Others simply don't want to be here and die off quickly. It's really important to take heed of what plants are going to thrive and keep well away from enticing species which demand moist, fertile soil. watering systems everywhere are a must, and as our French friends point out in

amazement on a regular basis it is indeed "so much work!" but to have colour and scent, and be self-sufficient in vegetables is reward enough.

We are opening for the first time this year. The garden is not finished (and never will be) but it is attracting interest from friends and neighbours already so we hope that others will come and enjoy it as much as we do. But don't get too close to the geese – they peck!

Jane and Garry Quarmby, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence

https://www.opengardens.eu/garden-detail/?gard_random=ZI07MGtkD7hW0Hp&lang=en-GB

This garden will be opening on 7th and 8th May, 28th and 29th May and 3rd and 4th September, between 14.00 and 18.00. Check the website for further details.

A Garden in Yvriers



This garden is opening for the first time in 2022.

We moved to France almost three years ago, and although I wanted a large garden, we fell in love with the house, so I've compromised on

garden size. We're right in the middle of the village of Yviers, at the corner of the road behind the church, and it's wonderful to hear the angelus ringing out every day, even at seven in the morning! The house hadn't been lived in for five years and the garden had been completely neglected. After a year working on the house and seeing what would come up in the garden (not much!) I started work clearing. Almost the only things worth keeping were a huge fig tree (now greatly reduced) and an ancient Pawlonia which was covered in ivy. Ivy also covered most of the walls and there was a laurel hedge right up against one of them.

A huge half dead cherry-plum stood in the centre and there was a large and ugly ligustrum in one corner and a dark green conifer right in the front of the covered terrace. Everything was dark and I needed to let light in. I imagined roses and clematis climbing the walls and two years on, it's starting to happen. The hedge and most of the tree stumps have been dug up, some by a friend with a digger and some by hand!



My garden in Brighton was tiny (as most gardens in Brighton are) but it was a walled garden with the accent on scent. Everything I grew there had either scented flowers or foliage and as my new French garden was also walled, I've continued the theme here. As well as roses and clematis I've planted the usual suspects; honeysuckle, lavender, rosemary, and thyme, along with some more unusual, scented shrubs and , one of my favourites being drageasinensis, which I brought over from the UK and which has thrived in this climate. As it gets VERY hot,



surrounded as we are by walls, I've planted a mulberry for shade as well as a mimosa (I love the scent!) and created a large pond which is filled with water lilies, lotus, fish, and frogs. Of course, the frogs are tremendously loud, but they make us laugh. It's like listening to an extraordinary piece of music.

I want to encourage as much wildlife as possible and one of the by-products of having scented plants is a preponderance of bees, butterflies, and birds. To this end I went down the 'no-mow May' path last year and this year I'm going full out and cultivating a small wildflower meadow in the middle of the garden. Hopefully it will be blooming by the time I open in June, but I'm quite prepared for the fact that it might very well be a disaster! We'll see.



One corner of the garden wasn't started until a few months ago, as there was a derelict building (very unattractive), which took a lot of clearing. The previous owners had used it as a rubbish



dump and although it was relatively easy to demolish, made as it was from the French equivalent of breeze blocks, it took in the region of fifty trips to the déchetterie to get rid of the debris.

When we bought the house, we were told that there was a secret tunnel in this building which came

out in the church. I found this 'tunnel' and as soon as I saw it, (2) realised it was actually

an old well, a much more useful commodity, and as far as I'm concerned, just as romantic as a secret tunnel. Unfortunately, it had been used as an 'annex' to the rubbish dump in the old building and was filled with old chairs, plastic pipes and goodness knows what else. My next job is to try and get it cleared and in working order.

The space where the building was is now a chicken run. I'd always wanted to keep chickens, ever since a student teacher kept a Rhode Island Red under her desk when I was at junior school. Coming to France fulfilled a life-long ambition and I now have three French hens(!) - Patti, Maxene, and Laverne, named after the Andrews Sisters.

They had the run of the garden over the winter, and it looked like the Somme! They are now safely corralled. A future project is to take the roof off the barn and extend the garden in there, so I can have a small orchard and the girls will have the run of that.



I've been very lucky with friends since moving out here, and although I brought a lot of plants over with me, I've been given dozens of plants, cuttings, and seeds, which I could never have afforded to buy. Gardeners are the most generous of human beings.

Michael Chance, Charente

https://www.opengardens.eu/garden-detail/?gard_random&lang=en-GB

This garden is opening on Sunday 15th June 14.00- 18.00

A garden with bees, the natural way - custosapium.com

This is the first of a series of articles on bees and beekeeping following the seasons.

Sunny winter days are a blessing for the gardener. Nothing beats the winter blues more than being able to go out, do some work, and spot the first spring bulbs showing their heads.



Add to this the pure joy of seeing bees flying around the hive entrance, like little gleaming gems as the sun catches their wings. These warm sunny days give the bees a much-needed chance to 'stretch their wings', gather some early spring pollen, cleanse themselves and clear out debris from the hive.

We used to let out a huge sigh of relief at the first sight of the pollen arriving at the hive. But since we've changed to better hiving, don't interfere with the colony, and don't take honey, chances that they will survive the winter have gone up significantly and we no longer need to

worry about them.

Hazel pollen to get going

Seeing pollen coming in is a signal to the beekeeper that the hive has survived the winter in good strength and the queen has started laying eggs again. Because, to feed the young larvae, pollen is needed. Hazel is, in our area of France, the Creuse, usually the first source of food, and while not of high-quality, it helps the bees to get going.

After the hazel, willow and dandelions follow suit in the wild, and early flowers in gardens provide much needed nectar. The more forage is available, the quicker the colony can get going.



In the hive, bee numbers drop down to around 10,000 bees or in some cases much less in winter, but for a successful season the colony needs to expand rapidly... a successful season for the bees means the opportunity to propagate ('swarm') at least once and secure enough stores within the hives both original and new by late autumn to survive the next winter.

By early spring the queen is getting back to laying around 2,000 eggs per day. With this explosive growth, the colony will increase in size to the point that it will divide. Natural propagation of the colony is the ultimate goal for the bees, not just for their own colony's benefit, but for the survival of their species. This period of propagation is known as the swarming season, and it usually starts around the end of April and lasts until the end of July.

Pure magic: the swarming season

The old queen will leave the hive, with about 60% of the bees, to find a new home to build a nest. In the original hive, after a few days, several princesses (still unfertilized queens) are born, one of which eventually becomes the new queen. After her nuptial flight, during which she mates with drones (males) in full flight, she will return to the hive to pick up the task where the old queen left it.

Natural nest cavities

The swarm in the meantime has landed nearby, hanging in a big cluster, whilst scouts search for a new nesting place, a suitable cavity. Once this is found, the swarm leaves its temporary spot en masse and flies to the new site. The bees then immediately start building comb and go out to forage, thus enabling the queen to pick up the thread and lay eggs guaranteeing the continuation of the colony.

The cavity must meet a number of specific requirements. Volume, shape, entrance, and height from the ground are the most important. Naturally honeybees live in tree cavities. However, bees are very good at adapting and will also accept other cavities. Especially with the disappearance of natural cavities through extensive tree felling, swarms of bees often end up in places where people would rather not have them. In France you regularly see swarms in chimneys, in air ducts in walls, under the roof or between windows and (closed) shutters. Unfortunately, they cannot always stay, or be removed alive.

Providing a good home for a swarm

Placing an empty hive that meets the requirements of the bees, and in which the bees can live naturally and undisturbed, prevents these kinds of situations. You are helping the bees and you are helping yourself by ensuring that there are bees in your area to enjoy come the springtime and so that blossoms, fruits, and vegetables are pollinated.

We place quite a few hives in the wild every spring (for our clients, but also in our rewilding program) and 'catch' many swarms. Not every hive is populated the first year, but, on average 80% of our hives are. The arrival of a swarm gives us enormous satisfaction time and time again. Because we know, another swarm 'saved' from extermination, and another healthy colony that will naturally help to strengthen the local bee population.



Custos Apium, a short introduction

Custos Apium is a small French business run by Adam Wright and Karin Maassen. We are natural beekeepers and make and sell our own design hives. Our hives are designed with the bee in mind and the design is based on the nest sites that are found in the wild. We have three different models. The Custos hive allows for a very small honey harvest, our rewilding hives are placed high in trees, out of the way, where bees find them and set up home. Also, we make log hives which in many ways are the ultimate bee habitat as these hives are almost identical to natural tree cavities.

Our principal concern is to help the feral bee population, to assure a strong and healthy population of honeybees that are not managed or manipulated by beekeepers. Our secondary aim is to promote beekeeping for honey without treatments and with minimal interference to the bee colony. Because of the design and placement, our hives will attract a swarm naturally. Our hives feel like a hollow tree for the bees and are designed with the bees in mind rather than the modern management practices of the beekeeper.

After a swarm has moved in, we will leave the bees alone. No intervention or manipulation, we will not open the hive and we will not treat the bees with chemicals or other treatments as is standard practice in modern beekeeping. We do not harvest large amounts of honey and see honey as a special gift.

Having bees around and learning about their world opens up a whole new level of wonderment in the natural world around us and our gardens.

Some early flowering plants and shrubs that are a good food source for bees: Willow, mahonia, winter flowering honeysuckle, heather, viburnum Tinus, himalayan sweet box (and regular box a bit later on), cornelian cherry, crocus, snowdrop, bluebells, winter aconite, Hellebores.



Next time: about the flowers and the bees

Custos Apium, Creuse

For more information, check the website www.custosapium.com and they welcome any bee-related questions custosapium@gmail.com

More information on this garden can be found on our website:

https://www.opengardens.eu/garden-detail/?gard_random=VS0DuwXRmMA90Ib&lang=fr-FR

Summer's on it's way!!

As we move into the warmer months of the year more and more gardens are coming on line for you to visit and enjoy. By early April we already had 12 garden opening planned for May and 15 for June - but these numbers will increase.

To find a garden near to you which will be opening this summer go to our website

<http://www.opengarden.eu>

Enjoy your visits!!!

[Unsubscribe here](#)



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