



Newsletter 2020/2 Summer 2020

President's Remarks

In early 2020 at Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts we felt on the brink of a new adventure.

Much planning had gone on through the winter months and we were setting off on a new journey. Little did we know that we would have to navigate the crevasse that was looming in the shape of the coronavirus. Everyone had to find a new route and the first stage would be to cross the bridge that was designed to lead the country to safety. Now we find ourselves on the other side of that lockdown bridge. Time flies and we have all made that crossing in our own ways. But the path is still unclear. For many people it has been a wonderful opportunity to embark on unplanned activities. A small gateway opened up offering a field of possibilities, new projects and new horizons for those with the freedom to make a little diversion. For others it led to a steep path of a hard and sometimes hazardous nature. We are very grateful to all those people who have kept things running smoothly and kept so many of us safe and well.

We know that whilst the initial shock is over we need to remain vigilant and it is for this reason that the association is maintaining a low profile for this summer. We are delighted to welcome new gardeners and coordinators and potential friends and visitors who will be able to reap the benefits next year of the creative efforts that have blossomed during this uniquely challenging but also invigorating spring. The renewed sense of community and awareness can only be of benefit to the success of our future garden events as we focus on bringing pleasure, comfort, inspiration and financial help to those involved in or benefitting from the activities of Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts .



Website Update

Lockdown for some was (and still is for many) a time for personal projects and planning. Although everything stopped in Open Gardens the reflections and planning has kept going. One of the many things talked about was an improved website to make communication easier and hopefully make the presentation more up to date.

As a result, we spent some time deciding what we wanted to see and how best to manage things.

Over the next few months we hope to bring our efforts online!

Tim Roper

Website Administrator

How you might be able to help!

Some of the most valued members of our association are our Area Coordinators and we are constantly looking to recruit new coordinators to help us, so I am delighted to tell you, that over the last few months we have recruited three new coordinators who have replaced others who have moved on to pastures new! So, a warm welcome to Heather McCarthy who replaces John Massey in the Lot-et-Garonne; Barbara Hann who has taken over from Isobel Beazley in Finistère; Veronica Lester, who is in the Indre and has replaced Richard Clarke. She will be able to work in conjunction with our next nearest coordinator in the Indre-et-Loire, Martin Looker.

Sincere thanks to John, Isobel and Richard for all their hard work on our behalf in the past.

If you live in any of these areas and you have ever considered opening your garden for us, please don't hesitate to contact me at

gardendevlopment@opengardens.eu and I will be delighted to put you in touch with our new team members.

So, what do coordinators do? One of their prime roles is to help us find new gardens willing to open on our behalf. Coordinators go out on initial visits to discuss with potential garden openers how OpenGardens/JardinsOuverts operates and help garden openers decide if they should open independently or in conjunction with others. They try to keep in touch with people on their lists throughout the year in various ways. As we try to encourage our gardeners to choose their opening date as early in the year as possible, some coordinators organise a yearly meet-up of gardeners at the beginning of the new season or at the end of the old one to make joint plans. This can be a very supportive way to keep everyone in touch and maybe organise communal open days. If gardens are widely dispersed through an area, coordinators will keep in touch by email to discuss their plans. Coordinators cannot always help personally on a person's open day but they may know of someone who can help take money at the garden gate or help make or serve refreshments. We encourage our coordinators to build up their list of "Friends of OGJO" for just this purpose. Some coordinators are able to help us when we come to plant shows in their area. For the central team these can be a fun way to see new places and meet new gardeners who we hope will help us in the future. When we go home, the local coordinator will follow this through on our behalf. Sometimes coordinators contact us and then arrange to attend a local show without us, but we can provide additional publicity information. Some coordinators help with organising local publicity with mayors or perhaps produce an article for a local paper or talk on the local radio. We have Social Media and Publicity people who can support the coordinator in this area too should they need help.

Other coordinators might think about organising an event in a garden other than an actual garden opening, such as a Plant and Seed swap or a small musical or artistic event. Others give talks to local gardening groups, or ask us to come and do this on their behalf if they know of an interested group. There are numerous ways in which coordinators help us.

So in short, a new coordinator can tailor the role to the amount of time they have to offer and we are here to help them in any way we can.

We are actively trying to expand down the eastern side of France as we have a stronger presence on the western side and it would be great to find new coordinators to volunteer for us there. I recently recruited my first garden opener in Lyon and she hopes to open for us in 2021, so to build on this small beginning would be wonderful.

At the moment we are also looking for replacement coordinators in the Hérault, the Côtes-d'Armor and parts of La Creuse. These areas come with gardeners who already open on our behalf, so any new coordinator would have their knowledge and experiences to share.

Coordinators do not have to open their own garden and indeed not all of our coordinators even have one, but they are usually good at organising people and getting things moving on our behalf!

So, if you are an organised type of person with time on your hands and being a coordinator is something that appeals to you, please don't hesitate to contact me as above. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sue Lambert



Garden Development Manager

Online Gardens

Although we have been unable to open our gardens for the past few months, we have been able to enjoy some of the gardens from a distance thanks to our Facebook and Instagram pages. People have been wonderful, sending in photos and even virtual tours that have allowed us to roam around their gardens without having to leave our homes.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in this online adventure with us and we hope that you have enjoyed seeing the different gardens as much as we have. In case you did not manage to see the photos, here are some that you may like. If you would like to see more, follow us on both Facebook and Instagram at Open Gardens / Jardins Ouverts



<https://www.facebook.com/opengardensjardinsouverts>
https://www.instagram.com/open_gardens_jardins_ouverts

Jess Roper
Media



Working from a Blank Canvas

In the UK we had a garden of about an acre. When our son grew up and the lawn ceased to be a sports pitch we began creating a garden which evolved during the following twelve years. By this time gardening had become my passion so much so that when we retired we knew that it would be a major part of our lives. When we moved to France we were looking for a property to renovate with land suitable to transform into a garden. I was insistent that we had a shovel in the boot so that I could investigate the soil when we found the property of our dreams. Needless to say the shovel never came out of the boot and I went from gardening on neutral grade 1 agricultural soil in Lincolnshire to 15cm of alkaline "soil" and stone on top of solid limestone. Little did I realise what a challenge we had taken on.

The house we decided to buy has about a third of a hectare of ground to the front and two thirds of a

hectare to the rear all of which had been used intermittently for grazing. Whilst we were waiting for planning permission on the house we set about clearing the "estate". For me that entailed 6 months of clearing brambles from the entire perimeter. The brambles were five metres wide.



We uncovered a lorry load of old farm equipment underneath them. Meanwhile John was removing saplings from everywhere including a ruined building and sieving the household rubbish tip which was used before municipal waste collection was ever thought of. Our bonfire never went. During this period I began to think about designing the garden. Whilst waiting for the formalities to be completed before buying the house we visited many well known gardens in the UK to garner ideas for our French plot. In October 2007 the builders moved in to carry out the major works on our house and they eventually left in June the following year. We were left to finish the rest of the restoration which actually took another 10 years.



With the builders gone I started to mark out my ideas on the land. I am absolutely no good at drawing plans to scale etc. as is recommended, so it was a trusty hosepipe layout for me. John had bought a mini digger for use in the house renovation and it was invaluable when it came to creating paths and he rotavated the bit of soil we had.

Like most people when they are creating a garden I was glad to beg, borrow or steal any plants I could to fill this vast space. With hindsight, study and experience I now think this is the worst thing I could have done. Furthermore I still have the invasive Japanese Anemones to show for it. I did also grow a lot of plants from seed which was very rewarding but slow. The rear of our house overlooks an area which we planned to turn into a courtyard. Parallel to the house is a barn which marks one side of the courtyard. In keeping with many local barns it had a ramp leading up to the second story. Unfortunately this ramp was obscuring the view of what was to become our rear garden. We soon discovered that the ramp was made of a pile of stones. So when my cousin and his wife arrived in October for a "holiday" we formed a chain gang and the rocks were moved to form the base of the courtyard, for the terracing and the retaining walls. I had the brainwave that if I put compost on top of the rocks I would be able to sow grass and have a simple grass courtyard. Why on earth I had this stupid idea I do not know. We struggled for many years with the soil inevitably disappearing through the rocks and the resultant "lawn" dying once the drought of summer took hold.

Throughout 2009 and the early part of 2010 we juggled house renovation and garden development. The front garden is dominated by a double herbaceous serpentine bed running diagonally across the middle with an iris walk and formal rose beds and a rose arbour. We try to limit the colours here to pinks, blues and whites.



To the rear we have an alley of mature trees with a very long bed running on the outside with a hot colour scheme. I have to admit that this bed was a mistake as in summer the trees take all the available moisture so the plants

suffer, but they mostly recover.

Unfortunately in June 2010 John was diagnosed with a serious heart condition which necessitated chemotherapy from September to June 2011. Whilst John spent a day a week in hospital having chemotherapy I spent the day in the car park redesigning the planting in our garden. It had taken me all this time to realise that it was impossible to create an English country garden full of colour in the Lot where the temperatures oscillate between -12C and +40C. Then in September 2011 to add to the delay with our garden and house developments I was diagnosed with bone cancer and was bedridden for 4 months with months of chemotherapy. Never mind as soon as I could I was sitting on a chair in the middle of the flower bed weeding, after all weeds wait for no woman!

Each year since this temporary hiatus we have undertaken a new project in the garden. A woodland bed, with azaleas and rhododendrons (sunk in pots) plus shade loving plants in the alley. We have two island beds in the rear garden. One is actually a pile of rocks left by the builders which we have turned into a bed for drought loving plants and the other is a riot of clashing colours with dahlias, buddleias and other sun loving herbaceous plants which we call the Christo bed. Christopher Lloyd (Great Dixter) was a garden designer of a previous generation who was never afraid to use bright colours. Also in the back garden we have an area of wild flowers bordered by beds inspired by Piet Oudolf. The lower courtyard is now a Japanese garden and the upper terrace has a central bed of stachys byzantina and pots of seasonal colour. We plan a shrub bed for next year.



I continue to make mistakes and I have made countless since we started. We should have planted the specimen trees as soon as possible but most have only been planted in the last five years. I wish I had studied even more than I did about garden design before I laid out and planted.

We constantly look forward when designing and planting now, but realising that we are not immortal we buy larger plants and more of them. We planted 3600 alliums in our prairie last Autumn but only six flowered!! Ever optimistic we hope to see more next year. We get immense pleasure from the wild life that share our land but we have had a battle with the deer from the start and we now have a regular visit from a badger. Please come and see what they have left us when we open in 2021.

Sue and John Herring, Lot

Bee Happy!

In 2018 we bought a beehive from Karin and Adam (at Custos Apium), who are also Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts members. We installed it in the garden and baited the hive with citronella essential oil every now and then in order to attract them naturally.



After a couple of evictions (hornets liked the idea of an insulated home), we finally have our bees! We made the decision to get a beehive not for the

honey but for the bees. We are building our own microsystem in the garden and wanted bees to be a part of that . In the long run, we are hoping that the veg patch and the fruit trees will benefit from having them around. In other parts of the garden we will set up insect hotels, we have also left a big part of the garden wild so that all animals and insects can thrive. We look forward to learning more about these fascinating creatures and will let you know how they are getting on from time to time.

Jess Roper
Haute Vienne

Keeping Watch over the Garden

It was a complete accident that, trailing around after my contractor husband, I found myself living and gardening in a remote little corner of Lorraine. We first saw this house and garden in the old Renaissance village of Châtillon-sur-Saone in April 2011 – all old walls, soft spring greens and dark box shapes – and fell in love. When we returned to sign the *compris de vente* in June 2011, the owner's partner cut us a huge bunch of the 'Gloire d'Hollande' rose that grows on the front of the house and I was completely smitten.



The house itself was the sixteenth century watch keeper's house, situated at the point where the old village (built on a spur of rock) is most easily accessed from the surrounding fields.

These days I sometimes lie in my new bath looking out of his tiny watch window and imagine the carts, horses and pedestrians who must have trailed back and forth across the little drawbridge that would have been thrown over the ditch in the village street. Elsewhere the village is protected by medieval ramparts and they make rather a wonderful feature in our garden – even if the areas next to them are as hot as an oven in summer. In spite of the fact that I had lived in Alsace for 3 years, summer heat and watering was the furthest thing from my mind. Now I am perpetually worrying in summer and running up and down our steps with hosepipes.

The love affair continues, but reality has bashed it about from time to time. I started gardening in February 2012, preparing matching long borders for old roses and a vegetable garden on the slope where we'd seen the broad beans. My first physical contact with our heavy, badly drained, clay soil.



Sometimes I feel I've time-travelled back to the battle of the Somme in winter, while in the hottest months the cracks in the soil make it resemble a natural limestone pavement more than a garden. Gradually the soil has been improved, of course, but I always have to take into account our 96 steps when thinking of adding organic matter.

And talk about plagues! The first year we were besieged by what my neighbours call 'rat-taupiers' (voles) that ate the roots of every blessed herbaceous plant (and a very expensive wisteria) that I put into the ground. I resorted to planting the roses and shrubs in the top part of the garden in wire baskets, as well as ringing certain plantings with garlic and narcissus (said to be a deterrent). In the end it was my territorial Burmese cat that saw them off. The next year it was the ver blanc grubs, then box blight

imported on some young plants from Aldi (I take my own cuttings now). Finally, just before I opened the garden for Jardins Ouverts for the first time in 2018, I discovered my first box tree moth caterpillar. Horrors – the worst plague yet! I clipped all of the box, bagged up the clippings, and sprayed with *Bacillus thuringiensis*. This year we noticed a huge increase in the number of blackbirds in the garden – and, in spite of the fact that the caterpillars are said to be poisonous, we believe they may be the best control yet. Touch wood, we’ve still to panic (or spray) in 2020.



During all of this I was terracing the vegetable garden to make flatter areas for cultivation (I laid landscaping fabric on the slopes and planted Santolina, lavender and *Lonicera nitida* to retain the soil), maintaining the Rose Walk, and digging and planting a very broad summer border overlooking the bottom of the garden.

Down below I dug and planted up two garden ‘rooms’ contained by hornbeam hedges (planted in 2014). The top is a cut flower garden, the bottom a wild spring shrub garden. In the orchard I planted about 15 different apples and pears, grafted by me courtesy of the Croqueurs de Pommes ‘bourse aux greffons’. Much done, a lot still to do!

Things begin to look much prettier – when we arrived here there was virtually nothing except formal box and lime shapes, with some hazels and walnuts for nuts. Now I have flowers to admire when I walk out every morning and something to encourage in every corner.



I’m definitely on the wild side as a gardener –there are so many plants that self-sow here, because I’m not overly careful. We can be sure when I dig a new border that tracts of nigella (love-in-a-mist), cornflowers, marigolds, *Verbascum thapsus*, *Salvia sclarea* var *turkestanica*, borage, opium poppy and field poppy will colonise. Sometimes, on a hot morning, walking amongst the flowers, I feel I’ve been transported to bee and butterfly paradise.

CathyThompson, Vosges

Picnic in the Park

We have been invited by Béatrix d’Ussel, Chateau Neuvic d’Ussel, 2 Avenue des Maroniers, 19160, Neuvic d’Ussel, the owner of one of our Partner Gardens to hold an Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts event in her grounds. Last year some of us enjoyed a very successful visit to the Arboretum and gardens with a private tour by Béatrix who is very knowledgeable about the trees and plants in her garden and the Château. Béatrix is keen to do something again this year for Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts and since she operates commercially she has now reopened the parc to the public. With this in mind we are inviting you to join us for a ‘Picnic in the Park’ on Wednesday 26th August 2020. This will be a strictly private visit restricted to members and friends of Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts. It would comprise a morning guided tour of the arboretum with all appropriate personal protection in place, followed by individual group picnics in the park. The cost will be 10€ per person, to be paid in advance. All appropriate guidance with regard to social distancing and facemasks will be applied. The number of places available will be limited and offered on a first come first served basis. If you would like to come along please contact Sue Lambert, Garden Development Manager,

Gardening with Nature

It is a privileged place where everything is done so that everyone is comfortable, including the gardener.

My garden is not very big, but the plants that live there love each other enough to be able to grow each at their own pace. There are especially nourishing plants and like all food you must neither spoil it nor lose it. But before it nourishes us the plant must itself be nourished to grow.

We don't use chemicals and the soil is not turned every year. Microscopic fungi and earthworms are well cared for. We respect the seasons, but the work of the land is permanent; unlike that of the gardener there is no rest time, land that rests is a land that will die!! If you don't give her anything to do, she will get bored and do silly things and let anything grow!!!



So, each time we finish a harvest, we scrape the soil a bit and sow something else. We are not afraid to sow or plant because we do not have to bend down!!! Indeed, we garden sitting or strictly speaking standing.

My garden is made up of raised beds placed on the ground; they are 3m long, 1.20m wide and 60 to 80cm high; the wooden uprights, untreated, are 3cm thick. Inside there is 10cm of cardboard boxes to contain unwanted weeds! Then there is 20cm of wood already largely decomposed and dead leaves, finally earth and a little sand to lighten it.



You will tell me that all this is not very lazy!!!! Oh yes! because a nice 'earthworker' can perfectly help you to fill the beds and this construction will last at least fifteen years. It only remains to buy a stool to be comfortable to work in front of your beds; choose a stool of the correct height, and don't hesitate to put a cushion on you wish.

Now you are ready to sow quietly, first on one side and then on the other. In my garden we have 15 raised beds, a semi-buried greenhouse, a tunnel of climbing vegetables; all on the same principle and with the same composition.

It's always amazing how fertile my garden is!!!



But I have to tell you 3 secrets!! Do not repeat them, it's just for you!!!!
- there is, of course, a mulch between the plants but this is sheep wool, just wool!!! we put it in a large strip 1.2m long and sow either side; it is very interesting and economical because the wool lasts about 300 years. It keeps moisture very well, there are no weeds underneath, it's as if we turned off the light!!

As we don't dig, we only need to move each strip to have a perfect soil the following year.

- we often mix things together but as there is not much room we put plants

close together, and if the plants get along well there will be many "fruits"
- of course, we don't use chemicals. To the gourmet plants in spring a little extra nourishment of manure of nettles is given, and to have beautiful fruits later in the year comfrey manure replaces the nettle.

Sometimes we need to water but carrying a watering can is much too heavy so there is a network of water pipe which serves each bed and allows individualised and effortless watering.

I grow vegetables and fruits, flowers are for Madame, but it's much too difficult for a lazy gardener like me.

I hope the description of my garden will have given you the desire to come to see it and learn all the things that I "forgot" to tell you. My garden and I will be delighted to welcome you.

Laurent Willig, Creuse

STOP PRESS!!!!!! Journées des Plantes de Chantilly 9-11 October 2020

The organisers of this event have offered recipients of this Open Garden/Jardins Ouverts Newsletter a reduced entry price of 10 euros, as opposed to the normal entry price of 18 euros. This will be available on-line until 8 October 2020.

If you would like to take advantage of this offer you will need the promotional code available from ***secretary@opengarden.eu***

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