



# *Newsletter 22/3 Summer 2022*

## *President's Report*

This month we are saying a very sad farewell to a dear old friend who has been a part of Open Gardens/ Jardins Ouverts since its conception.

Laurent Willig passed away at the end of April and will be very much missed by the team. He was motivated from the start by a passion to help others in whatever way he could. His garden style was refreshingly different, championing the lazy gardener, making gardening accessible to all ages and abilities. Regularly appearing in the local press and on radio he was always happy to share his techniques and his enthusiasm with others.



At the Chateau de Chantilly working with us at the "Journées des Plantes" over the years he was in his element, chatting up the stall holders for potential links and sponsorship and explaining to the general public what our association is about. With a twinkle in his eye and a ready smile, his particular style was well received and much appreciated.

The photo was taken at Chantilly, Laurent on the left and Mick Moat who founded the Association on the right.

His Family have, in line with Laurent's specific wishes, made the very generous donation from his collection to Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts and this will therefore be used to help children just as Laurent would want.

Our thoughts are with Laurent's family and we wish them all the love and courage we can to get through these difficult times and a huge thank you to a special man who helped to make our Association what it is.

Best wishes,

Karen.



***Karen Roper***  
***President***



## ***In and around our regions.***

As I write this, we are approaching the end of May and as per normal things have started to escalate at Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts!

This year we have seen the opening of several new gardens, and some have sadly been lost on the way. Our dear friend and colleague Laurent Willig will be greatly missed, but we are delighted that one of his newer garden openers has offered to coordinate (for this year at least!) the group of gardens that opened with Laurent, in and around Ahun 23150.

We thank Kevin Weedon for his past work as a coordinator in his part of the Dordogne 24390 and for all the money he and his group of garden openers have raised on our behalf. This group will now temporarily be looked after by me until a new coordinator can be found for this area. If this position should be of interest to you, please let me know.

We are delighted to welcome a new coordinator in 17400, Charente-Maritime. Her name is Ony Bright. Ony is keen to start to build a group of garden openers near her. This is a new area for us, so if you live near her and have considered opening, please contact me and I will put you in touch.

Our coordinators have been coming up with new ideas for their garden openings. In the Lot three garden openers held a mini-festival, each garden was open on the same day and each garden offered not only a lovely garden to visit but something else to see in the garden such as ceramics, paintings and sculpture.

Two of our experienced garden openers from the Aveyron have encouraged four new people to open their gardens together on the same day in mid-June, so we hope they all have fun and enjoy a successful first opening.

Meanwhile, here in La Creuse, myself and two other garden openers from this region welcomed L'association Horticole Quercy Perigord to our gardens in May. Unbeknown to me until the day, three of the visitors either had in the past or were about to open for Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts. No pressure then! Anyway, they will have seen three very different gardening styles and I hope they enjoyed meeting us as much as we did them.

Having shown them two new, fairly expensive, shrubs I had recently bought for my garden, one of their members delighted in showing me straight away a cheaper version online! We all laughed! Another member showed me a photo of a huge ceanothus flowering beautifully in her garden, compared to my slightly lesser specimen! But moments like these are what opening your garden are all about. I probably learnt as much, if not more from them as I hope they did from me.

I have continued to visit some lovely gardens of potential new garden openers and hopefully have persuaded them to join us in our cause. One man, after having been inspired by visiting Trebah Botanical Garden in Falmouth England which has a beautiful waterfall, thought why not come back to France and create his own. I hope he will share it with his new visitors near Aubusson in July!

Mick and I did manage to escape for a short break to England in April and had a day out to visit Beth Chatto's Garden near Colchester. For our French readers who may not know, this is a garden made famous by a lady who turned what had been an old car parking space at the front of her property into a very famous Gravel/Dry Garden. It is renowned for never having been manually re-watered since the plants were put in. As we are all coping with climate change and many of us experience water shortages now, I was keen to see this part of the garden in particular. I was delighted to say I have several of the plants in and around my garden that Beth used so hopefully I am on the right track!

Until the next time.



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

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

## ***A new birth, to a 'Maison Remakable'***



***This garden is  
opening for the first  
time in 2022***



The property was built around 1650, and then later developed around 1750 to double it in overall size. It is in a small hamlet of Douzillac, Dordogne, built in local stone and pierre apparent, with wonderful structural beams and the original stone fireplace. Sadly, because it was virtually abandoned for about 30 years before we began the renovations in 2012 - much of the rest

of the interior could not be salvaged. It was a total ruin, but as they say, 'it had potential' and we fell in love with the idea of bringing it back to life.

La Font Peyre appears in the local history books as a 'Maison Remarkable' and, as the name suggests, has a continuously running water source (Font) supplied by at least 4 underground water sources. Due to the levels, it runs away to a stream and pond and the river Isle which is about 250 metres from the bottom field. In fact, 80 years ago, it was a functioning port used to transport tobacco. We are blessed with many visiting birds, resident red squirrels, deer, foxes, a family of pheasants and some large wild boar. It's a wonderful habitat for all sorts of pond creatures, goldfish, and wild river fish, and some very noisy frogs.

We have approx. 10,000 m2 of land, (2 acres) and a variety of different growing conditions. When we bought it, there were four dilapidated

buildings one of which was the main house, open to the elements with a resident bird of prey and three outbuildings.

We have turned one into guest accommodation, there's a garage and a large barn. It was surrounded by grass, brambles and lots of slopes and levels to contend with. Aside from a tatty old vine, a magnificent Magnolia Grandiflora and a mature lime tree in the courtyard every bit of vegetation is new to the site. Quite a challenge!



There are a number of different soil conditions and micro-climates - the four buildings are enclosed in a walled courtyard giving an almost Mediterranean hot zone, whereas, beyond the walled garden there are a number of boggy water areas, plus some shady spots. Much of the soil is very sandy and free draining on a bed of calcaire.

We have developed various flower beds - some quite natural and wild and others more conventional, both within and outside the courtyards. Borrowing from what was already there, we make use of lovely old stone walls with climbing roses, wisteria and vines. We've planted some fruit trees, fig trees, and a small arboretum featuring various conifers.



We use lots of pots and planters to provide summer colour though we try to keep these on the large side to prevent them drying out. Sadly, with the severe spring frosts we keep losing the fruit crop, and it has devastated the beautiful wisteria blooms that were just making an appearance this year.

The vegetable plot is enclosed to keep the rabbits off the plants, and most plants manage to grow there well. The soil needs to be nourished of course, so we keep vegetable scraps and fill up the composter to help us when we plant out, which tends to be mostly summer crops.

To try to create some shade and peaceful spots to relax in, we have built a walled meditation garden with a fountain at the back of the barn, in what used to be a cow shed before we took the roof off and opened that area up.

We have a well, that used to supply the house, numerous fields, and stone walled courtyards with various beds on different levels. The original water source or font, we think is fed from between 3-7 different underground sources, there is now a newer version Font 2. We are surrounded on all four sides with grassed lawns whilst the inner courtyards are contrasted with gravel and flower beds.



The property is on multi levels, and we have developed wide steps and various terraces to take advantage and turn this from a problem to an interesting feature. It helps to zone the areas and create a series of linked external 'rooms' which have a distinct different purpose, different temperatures, and different appearances.

The rear of the house and grounds benefit from the south facing sun for most of the day with some welcome shade in the later afternoon and evening. We have tried our



best to work with the sun, shade and different micro-climates that the heat and water present, but despite our best efforts – as all gardeners will know, it is still and



ongoing experiment to see what will survive and thrive, and no two seasons are alike.

Because we were starting from scratch and putting in brand new water and electricity, services etc., we were able to sort out pipework to help us keep up with the extensive watering across the whole site. We have a submerged pump system to help us draw up water from the font which is both practical and of course saves money on water bills!



Whilst most of the hard work is done and the infrastructure is now well established, we still keep very busy with ongoing maintenance: this year we will need to repair the fountain area as a wall has cracked with the recent frost, we have a rogue giant alium which has popped up unexpectedly when we thought they were all dug up - so we will need to relocate with the others at the end of the season, there has been extensive cutting back of some canna lilies which were just too happy down by the pond area, and the veggie plot has just been dug over and planted up, so hopefully we are keeping the weeds at bay for a while.

It's been an enormous project both the building work and the garden, but we think it has been worth it to bring it back to life again and despite all the hard work, we are so pleased we took on the challenge.

***Bob and Meryl Evans, Dordogne***

[https://www.opengardens.eu/garden-detail/?gard\\_random=quT8tBpnxumrjql&lang=en-GB](https://www.opengardens.eu/garden-detail/?gard_random=quT8tBpnxumrjql&lang=en-GB)

This garden is opening on 16th and 17th July 2022 for the first time for Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts. Opening times are between 10.00-12.30 and 14.00-16.30. Check the website page for more details.

## ***For the love of Gardening!***

We arrived in the Périgord Vert 30 years ago. We fell in love with an apple orchard and a very old farmhouse which we have renovated. The house is surrounded by 40 hectares of land with 12 hectares of woodland and 25 hectares of apple trees. Over the years we have reduced the orchard and now have only 3 hectares in production.

On the site of the garden we started very quickly clearing the

1000 m<sup>2</sup> behind the house. We planted ornamental trees: Albizia, Acacia rose, Liquidambar, Cornus kousa, Viburnum (lanarth and watanabe), Lagerstroemia, many climbing and shrub roses, together with Hydrangea for shade.



In our temperate climate we are fortunate to be able to use a large variety of plants - with more or less success! The different borders offer many varieties of perennial plants - Tracescentia, Hemerocalle, Alstromeria, Perowskia, Thalictrum with its delicate bells that swing in the wind, Iris Sibirica and Ensata and many varieties of Sage and some annual flowers which come centre stage during the summer.

Each area of the garden has its constraints: located on an alluvial plateau of sandy soil the soil is easy to work but requires a lot of compost or manure, and regular watering. We installed a semi-automatic system with microjets all over the garden. In addition, the soil is constantly covered with compost or mowing to reduce evaporation in summer or heavy rain in winter.

We have enlarged the south side of the garden and planted on 7000 m<sup>2</sup> different regional trees; some exotic trees such as sichuan pepper and eucalyptus; fruit trees (cherry, peach, walnut) and many other shrubs (caramel tree or katsura, charcoal alata, vitex)



There is a 60 m<sup>2</sup> pond with a central island to attract wildlife. Care must be taken that the vegetation there doesn't get out of hand the different rushes, water lilies, pontederia, iris, horsetail equisetum can be very invasive. The Gunnera spreads its leaves on the border.

The pergola built with the bamboos from the garden serves as supports for different climbing cucurbits (Butternut, zucchini, calabash) Finally a tunnel of 6 m / 3 m completes the small vegetable garden to produce tomatoes and peppers in summer and is very useful to shelter buttercups and anemones in early spring as well as some annual flower springs



Gardening is a very pleasant hobby and the charity Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts gives us the opportunity to share this passion with others in a very useful way. Visits to other gardens are always warm and informative.

***Marie-Odile and Jean Noel LeFranc, Dordogne***

## Charity Profile



*Pour prendre soin de la vie, de  
l'enfance et des rêves*

<https://www.sourirealavie.fr/>

Early in the summer Richard and I went on holiday to Marseille. While we were there, we took the opportunity to visit one of the charities that Open Gardens/Jardin Ouverts supports – Sourire à la Vie. This was only a short visit to the Phare des Sourires in Plage de l'Estaque, a suburb of Marseille. During our visit we spoke to some of the staff and viewed the premises which face the sea. This Phare des Sourires is the first such establishment in France, which brings together in one place and at the same time, a leisure centre, a respite space, a sports centre, a place of care and a place of functional and social rehabilitation. They work with the children on the Sourire à la Vie programme, to prepare and support each child on their journey through cancer using the tools from high-level sport. At the Phare des Sourires, as in hospital, the programme combines relaxation, mental imagery, physical preparation, sleep, osteopathy and nutritional follow-up, to allow children to have a maximum of resources at the times when they need it most – during their treatment.

Under this program, the children stay in better physical and psychological shape, lose less weight, maintain better autonomy, and they learn to manage their anxieties and regain confidence.

This charity was founded by Frédéric Sotteau, who as a young man in 2004 was working with children who could not go home for Christmas, telling them stories in sterile rooms during care. He noticed that they were able to escape from the pain and anguish of their illness and join him in his stories. He continued this work for several months and an idea began to formulate. Eighteen months later, after many trials, reflections and pilot stays outside the hospital with children undergoing treatment, the association Sourire à la Vie was born. It seemed that it was simple things, a global approach, and a strong team united with a common goal, the child, that worked. The children expressed the benefits, "because when you come here, you find the desire to live, and you just smile."

Sourire à la vie works alongside children with cancer by offering a complete sports programme, educational and creative games, and gives respite times to allow parents to breathe. The programme starts as close as possible to the diagnosis of the child in the hospital room and continues throughout the child's journey by promoting their development and allowing them to stay active. The team of staff ensures a constant presence close to the children and their families. No space is forgotten within the hospitalisation service - protected area, day hospital, surgical department, and transplant unit. On the programme, sports sessions, games, laughter, and many beautiful activities to give each child an element of ownership of their health and allow them to recharge themselves by offering a distraction from the daily treatment. This programme is designed to allow everyone to practice adapted physical activity in a fun and varied way.

Since the opening of the first unit within the Timone hospital in Marseille, the association Sourire à la vie has duplicated its model in Nice University Hospital, Besançon University Hospital, Dijon University Hospital, and Montpellier University Hospital.

***"To take care of the life of childhood and dreams"***



***Ronnie Ogier***  
***Secretary***

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