



Newsletter 21/1

Winter 2021

President's Report

A belated Happy New year to you all.

January is the start of the gardening year when we indulge ourselves in much planning and preparation for a fresh start. Gardeners know very well that even a wild and natural looking garden invariably has benefitted from a degree of organization upfront. External forces, the unpredictability of the elements will shape the outcome to a certain extent, but we gardeners will always adapt and make the best we can with what we are given.

We are in a similar situation this year at Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts at the start of 2021. We are putting in the preparation and the planning so that if everything falls into place, we will have a great show of gardens again this spring and summer. We have the protocols in place to keep everyone as safe as possible. Much behind the scenes work has been put in over the last few months, with an updated website coming on-line by March. Now we can all look forward to sharing each other's fascinating and inspiring gardens through the coming months as circumstances permit.

Despite the sparsity of events or openings last year we were still able to donate 3000 € to help children and young people. In total we have donated over 96 000 Euros since the Association was formed and this year, we would love to exceed the 100 000 € mark.

Please get involved with whatever aspect of the Association takes your fancy, whether it's visiting, opening your garden, holding an event or plant sale or helping someone else to do these things. Together we can improve the lot of many ill or disabled youngsters and have great fun in the doing of it.

Take care, one and all.



***Karen Roper
President***

Linking with your community.

As Garden Development Manager for Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts, I have several roles, one of which is to think about the variety of different ways in which people might use their gardens to raise money to support us.

In my own garden, in both the vegetable garden and the flower borders, I practice the "No-Dig" method. This is sometimes of interest to people who

have heard about the system but have never seen in use. Some years ago, I became friends with a college lecturer who teaches English at my local Agricultural College. Her students might be hoping to become farmers, or perhaps work in the water industry. Maybe some will go on to study horticulture or garden design.

Having visited my garden on one of my Open Days, both of us could see the advantage of her bringing her students for a guided tour; and then as part of their oral exam, having to think of questions to ask me in English, about the No Dig method. As a result of our discussion it is possible that once or twice a year, she will bring a new group of students and we discuss why I make compost, why I don't use pesticides and why I never dig my vegetable beds over in the winter! For this the college kindly makes a donation to Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts. The students learn about Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts and have the opportunity to speak in English. I have fun challenging young adults to think 'outside the box', and the association has more resources to give to the children and young people who need our help. A win, win situation!

Some of our members have had their own ideas as to how they might put their garden to good use on our behalf, besides holding their normal Open Day.

- One example was a Jaguar Enthusiasts Club held an event in the garden of one of our coordinators. The Club made a very generous donation to Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts.
- Another of our garden openers held a Fish and Chip Event with live music and a proportion of the cost of the tickets was in turn donated to us.
- Others have held private lunches at a set price, with the proceeds passed to our cause.
- Yet another couple held a Plant and Seed Swap in their barn, which was extremely well received in their community; and some of the money raised from sales of refreshments was donated to us.

At all of these events our trifold leaflets were on display and maybe someone who had never heard of our association before went away knowing a little more about us. This is how the word will spread.

Perhaps some of our knowledgeable garden openers could share their knowledge and enthusiasm with local schoolchildren by offering gardening workshops or open days just for them. Maybe some of their parents might then come back to visit you on your normal open day! There are many ways your garden might be used to help our name become more widely known, whilst at the same time linking to your local community.

As an "all-weather gardener," who loves working in and visiting gardens during all seasons, I am keen to see our garden opening calendar extended into the latter part of the year. Had we been able to mix in larger groups this winter, it was my intention to hold a Carol Concert in my garden in December. I have a beautiful blue fir tree and I had imagined it decorated and festooned with lights, us providing mince pies and hot chocolate, with friends and neighbours singing French and English carols in an act of friendship with my local community. People would get to see my garden in winter, and I would have raised some money for the association in return! Will any of this be possible this year, who knows? Time will tell, I'm sure. If not this, there's always next year.

Perhaps you may now be asking yourself is, "How can we possibly do anything like this in the middle of a major health crisis?". Maybe we can't do some of these things at the moment, but as gardeners used to planning ahead, maybe you can think of a fun way to link your garden to the wider community in the future, when we return to a semblance of normality. Do share your ideas with us and we'll help support you as best we can. For those of you reading this that do not open their garden but perhaps have other ideas as to how we can link with the wider community, please don't

hesitate to get in touch. Who knows what exciting things we can do together in the future!



Sue Lambert.
Garden Development
Manager

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A Spring garden, inspired by a William Wordsworth poem, in the heart of Brittany.

Spring has got to be one of my favourite times in the garden as mother nature starts to wake. The hours of work you put into the garden last Autumn starts to show and all your ideas and dreams now begin to bear fruit. Early mornings for me, as I walk around the garden, with a coffee in hand, is a time to see the delicate bulbs pushing up, piercing



the soil, bursting with energy to get that flower out to the world. It is also a time to say to yourself "Ah! the sweet smell of Spring". Spring is such a refreshing time, as the countryside starts to warm up and it melts away our winter blues. So, for us here in our garden, it is also the start of our preparations to ensure the garden is ready for garden visitors wishing to see our Spring garden.

Our garden is 1.14 hectares on a north facing slope and we began to develop and design the garden in September 2012. The land was just two bare fields, so we had a blank canvass to work on with no constraints. Our main goal for the future garden was a garden of three seasons, or at least as close to that as possible. The first works were to set the bones within the fields so we could call it a garden. We decided that we would separate the fields, one for the main garden and the other for production of fruit and vegetables. By Summer 2015 we were satisfied with the progress in the main garden and were ready to start dividing the garden into seasons. It was time to start the Spring garden.



To me, Spring is all about flowering bulbs Snowdrops, Crocus, Tulips (in pots) and my personal favourite, the Daffodil. One of my frequent and fond memories of school life was learning to recite William Wordsworth poem 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' (also commonly known as Daffodils).

It is a poem about a swathe of daffodils that he encountered whilst out walking in the English countryside with his sister Dorothy, and the feeling he encountered at that moment. To this day I can still recite the poem and I wanted to reproduce that 'host of golden daffodils' feeling in the garden for visitors.

Our garden design is very open by the very nature of the land so to get that maximum impact of Spring bulbs we were always going to have to think and plant BIG. A few bulbs here and there was never going to look good so I was happy to replicate the scene that Wordsworth would have encountered that day on his walk. After a good search of bulb growers,



we eventually settled with Peter Nyssen bulbs and we have stayed with them ever since. That Autumn we planted over 3000 daffodils and 500 crocuses.

The Spring of 2016 was a success with our first swathes of Crocus and Daffodils

inviting Spring into our garden and invoking the words of the poem:



'When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils.
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the
breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly
dance'.

Spurred on by the success of the daffodil and crocus planting we decided it definitely gave the garden a real impact, a feeling of hope and new beginnings. Exactly what we had envisioned how the garden should look. So much so that we decided to increase the Spring feel all around the garden with more swathes and pot planting closer to the house. The Autumns of 2017 and 2018 saw another 3000 bulbs planted. The Spring garden was now becoming so alive with renewed signs of life everywhere you turned and the spirit of starting anew.

In the autumn of 2019, we ventured into another planting programme of spring bulbs planting over 1500 daffodils in our willow wood for more impact. This time we used three different bulbs of white and yellow all multi headed to give a



better contrast and a fuller feeling to the view. Now you would think that planting so many bulbs in the woods would be easy. No! unfortunately not as Head of Design decided that it would require some deep planning and coordination between the different colour bulbs. After weeks of working out where each clump of bulbs had to go with colour coded sticks I finally got the go ahead to plant them! In Spring 2020 it was with excitement that I looked forward to seeing the finished work! And indeed, all the effort was well worthwhile. It was a stunning show of Spring at its best.

Unfortunately for us it was not going to be the outcome we wanted for our hard work! About a week before we were going to open France introduced a total lockdown. Still, we got to enjoy them in their full glory and as I said at the time there is always next year!

Our Spring garden for 2021 will be ready and open for visitors (weather and Covid permitting) and if William is looking down on the garden I hope he is taken aback as he was in 1802 when he saw his daffodils and 'then his heart with pleasure fills and dances with the Daffodils'.

Bryan and Jackie Carrick, Finistère

Needs, Wishes and Dreams

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We are talking about Gardens here....

The first stage of design has nothing to do with horticulture and everything to do with making space work in a visually satisfying way....

John Brookes MBE



When I arrived at our new home in France the “garden” was in fact an area of rough grass surrounding three sides of the property and leading to an even rougher bramble filled field. Just over half an acre in total.

Yes, I had space but how to make it work?

I cheated a bit on the survey by using my cadastral plan – saved a lot of walking. I then drew up a list of the areas I knew I needed –

- An area for the dogs – We had 7 Siberian Huskies
- A vegetable garden
- An orchard – I had the space
- A big pond (or two)
- Areas to sit – sun and shade
- Lots of trees plus mixed shrub and herbaceous borders.



My Wish List would come later.

It took a lot of physical work to firstly clear the field and lay out the structure but then we could see where we were going.

A lot of things changed as the garden evolved – the initial vegetable garden began its life in the only area of ground that had already been dug over, quite close to the house. It is now at the far end of the “field”, and much larger. The Orchard was moved from its original site because the neighbours insisted on letting their hedge grow tall, creating too much shade. We made this into a bonus for us by allowing us to plant Hostas and other herbaceous plants there instead.



The big Pond placement was strange. When I drew the original plan, the situation of the Pond turned out to be where an overflow of rain from the village produced a small lake in the middle of the field. We didn't realize this until the rains came. We complained to the Maire and

Commune paid to have the flow redirected around the field to effectively dry it out. Result! Jim dug the 6m x 6m x 1.2m hole (by hand!) for the intended Pond, then left for a short break in the UK, on his return it had filled with rain – a natural pond. We had to wait for it to dry out to put the liner in!

We have gradually added to the original plan with pergolas, another pond nearer the house, a drift garden, a chicken run, and a small parterre originally using 150 Box plants. I grew these from cuttings and then replaced with Golden Marjoram after the Box was decimated by the dreaded moth. Doesn't have the same height as the box, but its effective and easy to



propagate.



Iris germanica, in many colours, has been split and spread around the garden but always in groups for impact. I really don't like 'dotty' planting.

We intend to use more groups of the same plants this year for ease of maintenance and as focal points. I also like to have something in flower throughout the year.



The first Summerhouse has a deck between it and the big pond. The second smaller Pond can be seen from my office - a converted outhouse - and a courtyard garden, between is home for two large Acers in pots - in the shade.

We have built (well Jim did) a paved Courtyard garden to the back of the house

We have used a great number of plants, bringing some from the UK, buying offers from the local Supermarkets, the wonderful Ripaud Plant Nursery and growing on many many cuttings and seedlings. I brought one medium sized Miscanthus Morning Light from England and we now have around 18 large ones, and I gave 9 away!



Going back to the Wish List - one of them was to use a 5m long wooden ladder, we found in the loft of one of the Barns, as the top of a Pergola. Jim did this for me two years ago and we are training roses up and over it. He is planning to build a second Summerhouse/Gazebo on the right-hand side of the field garden in amongst the shrubs - a real sun trap



and this has a very large copper and brass Dragonfly, which was used as part of my first show garden at Hampton Court Palace. It is "planted" on its wire stem in between some grasses and looks good. We use this area to serve Breakfast to our Chambre d'hote guests and occasionally Dinner, with the area lit up by fairy lights.

The best part of this large garden is the fact that you cannot see the whole of it from any one part so there is always a surprise around the corner. I have some bits of old farm machinery found on site and a few statues which I have placed around the garden but would dearly love a big statement piece - Jim placed a 200-year-old Rhododendron in EuroDisney when he worked on the build, but I don't think I could run to that - he is, however, working on a large topiary cloud Olive - a Wish and a Dream.

Happy Gardening - some freedom in your own little world.

Cherry Burton, Vendée

And Finally - it's Snowdrop time again!!!



Once again Sheila and Ian Cole opened their garden in support of Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts, the first opening in 2021. Despite the Covid restrictions, and typical February weather, they found a way to share their magnificent collection of snowdrops with others

Their openings, on 6th and 7th February, were 'events offering pre-booked half hour slots, between 10.30 and 11.30 and 13.30 and 16.30, of no more than 6 persons, masks were worn, hand sanitiser was available, and it worked!!



Thank you to Sheila and Ian for showing the way to provide an opening, even if a little more limited than they usually experience, but those of us who were fortunate enough to be able to attend had a feast for our eyes.

Here's to more openings in 2021, it can be done.

Sheila and Ian Cole, Haute Vienne

Stop Press !!!!!

Good News - Our new website - opengardens.eu - will be launched from Monday 22nd February 2021

During the period of lockdown in 2020, behind the scenes a great deal of work has been undertaken to update our website. A team from the Conseil has worked on this led by Tim Roper and Mike Hammond our external Consultant and web designer. The website now has two

separate sections one completely in French, the other completely in English.

Our thanks, in particular, go to Mike Hammond for his hard work, diligence and determination to get the design we wanted. It hasn't been easy but it will be worth the effort!

Now it's YOUR turn to look at the changes!!!

Go to www.opengardens.eu and SEE the changes

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