



Newsletter 22/1 Winter 2021/2

President's Report

So why do we garden?

- Create,
- Control,
- Nurture
- Share

These were the first four words that came to my mind. There are many other reasons, but it struck me that gardening is a little similar to what happens when we have children. We start out with the desire to create something new from our own spirit and energies. OK, the control element is as impossible with children as it is with nature, but the unconscious will to exercise some control from time to time is still present. We then put in huge amounts of effort to nurture what we have created, encouraging, and adapting, allowing it to develop its own personality, setting out the limits where necessary and clearing the way for limitless growth where possible. Then comes the sharing of the private intimate moments and the pride that goes with sharing your creation with the wider world. Ring any bells?

Essentially, what is similar is our desire to improve the present and build for the future. So, when we care for our gardens, share them with others, collect funds that can be directed towards improving the present and future conditions of children and young people we are all working towards the same goals in our own very individualistic ways. That at least gives us some structure to our lives, especially in very chaotic times. It's a great thing to be a part of and I thank everyone who has contributed to our shared successes this year.

Our donations from money raised in 2021 actually total 20 000 Euros and we have chosen to distribute it amongst the following charities.

• À Chacun son Everest.	4 000€
• Quelques Chose en Plus.	4 000€
• À Bras Ouverts.	2 500€
• Reseau Bulle.	2 500€
• Le Rire Médecin.	2 500€
• Sourire à la Vie.	2 500€
• Actions Autism Asperger.	2 000€

I've said before that we don't measure our success entirely by the amount of funds raised, there are so many more nuanced benefits from our activities, but it gives us a great deal of satisfaction to be able to help in the way we do.

For 2022 here's hoping for a happy and healthy and very active new year.

Very best wishes to you all



Karen Roper
President



Wintery Thoughts

As I sit here writing, I am sipping hot chocolate and looking at the snow-covered landscape outside my window. Not a good time to be thinking about opening gardens you may think! However, this week I have been to visit a potential garden opener and had fun trying not to be blown away by the wind whilst walking round her lovely garden. Hopefully she enjoyed hearing about what we do and to which charities we donate money and will feel enthused enough to become involved next year. Fingers crossed.

During the quieter winter months if someone contacts me who is within travelling distance, I will go out on garden visits. I love looking at new gardens any time of year! However, France is a big country and I cannot be everywhere, so if there is a coordinator that lives closer, I will contact them and hopefully they will visit on behalf of the Association.

This leads me to say, that as a growing organisation, it helps to have coordinators around the departments who can be the personal face of Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts. Whilst one of my jobs is to support people even where we don't have a coordinator, there is nothing like face-to-face contact.

"What exactly does a coordinator do?" you may well ask. Our coordinators work in many different ways. Some prefer to help organise three or four gardens very near to them, whilst others are happy to take on more. Some stay in contact with their garden openers by email, others might organise a get together, from time to time, with the gardeners on their list. Some tell me they prefer to not travel too far to visit new gardens whilst others are happy to go further. This is entirely their choice.

A coordinator will initially contact a potential new opener, visit the garden and show them all the paperwork, including the items they will need to complete on an open day, and immediately afterwards. They will give advice on the best way to promote their open day locally. If they find they have two or more gardens near to each other, it is possible to suggest a joint open day to attract people to travel from a little further away when there is the opportunity to visit more than one garden. Coordinators might be linked to local "Friends of Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts" who are happy to help a garden opener by selling tickets at the garden gate, supplying them with plant cuttings to sell, or even help them by baking a cake! Some coordinators might offer to help an opener themselves if they are free on their open day. Sometimes a coordinator will arrange to have a stand at a local plant fair to help promote us or give a talk to a local garden group. We are very flexible and appreciate any help a coordinator can offer!

As an Association, we are quite well known on the western side of France but are hoping to gradually develop eastwards. To have new coordinators helping our cause in these areas would be wonderful.

So, if becoming a coordinator in 2022 is something that might appeal to you, please don't hesitate to contact me, Sue Lambert at gardendevlopment@opengardens.eu and during these wintery months I can help you get ready for the coming season. We need all the help we can get!



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

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

On Being a Coordinator

I first became involved with Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts in 2014. Our founder, Mick Moat, having had his first successful experience of opening his garden, was looking to broaden the range of gardens open in 2015 and advertised in our local google group network for volunteers to help find and coordinate gardens for the following year.

I met with Mick, Linda James and Linda Redman-King and together we discussed ways of drumming up support, advertising garden openings and ideas for how best to organise a garden opening. I'd had experience of opening my garden in the UK for the National Gardens Scheme for something like 25 years, so I suggested various possibilities based on that, though I've come to realise over the years that France is a very different kind of beast and what works in the UK has no guarantee of working here. At that time, I had a holiday home in France, so wasn't here full-time, which could be frustrating when I found myself unable to attend garden openings or meetings. I've now become resident and bought a new property, the garden of which I hope to open in the years to come, once I've knocked it into some kind of shape.

A few years ago, Linda James, who had been a tour de force in getting new gardens on board, resigned from her post as coordinator, which left Linda Redman-King and I sharing an area of responsibility which includes the south Charente and northwest Dordogne. Over the years, we have had garden owners come and go, as well as a reassuring nucleus of supporters who have been stalwart in opening regularly. People open their gardens for a variety of reasons, all of them valid: some folks will open for a year or two, feeling then that they have done their part and bowing out; others, unfortunately, find age, ill-health, family problems etc mean that they must withdraw from opening, and some years the weather plays such havoc in our gardens that some need a year or two to recover. As a result, the picture changes constantly and we must be continually on the lookout for new gardens to add to our 'portfolio'.

Until the dreaded Covid reared its ugly head, we used to have a meeting of all garden owners in spring, originally to distribute the owner packs, as well as to allow people to meet, to share ideas and experiences. This usually took place in the home/garden of one of our number, which was another bonus, as it gave everyone a free peek at a nice garden. The fact that tea and delicious cakes were also provided didn't of course hurt at all! Having had the Covid break, we're hoping to re-establish this in 2022. We keep in touch with our owners by emailing everyone, usually at the end of the opening season to say thank you and before the beginning of the following one. We are also always available for help and advice at any time. We have recently been pleased to welcome Rosemary Raine on board as a fellow coordinator (and garden opener) and one of us at least tries to visit every garden on an open day. We are also lucky in that we have a small bank of volunteer helpers who will do everything from helping garden owners get ready for an opening to attending on the day to help manage the gate, the refreshments, car parking etc.

When I reflect on what I most enjoy about this role, I must admit that, as an avid gardener, for me the greatest thrill is still in the garden visiting. It is such a treat and honour to be allowed inside someone's personal outdoor space and I love seeing how people's gardens reflect their interests and personalities. As a plantsman, I also love finding new

plants, new plant combinations and new planting ideas on my garden visits. Meeting new people is, of course, rewarding; in my experience, most gardeners are lovely, kind, and generous people! It has been so heartening to see the year-on-year increase in donations which Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts has been able to make to so many worthwhile causes. Some of our garden owners even found alternative ways of raising funds during lockdown and when they were unable to open their own gardens, which reflects how much to heart they have taken our causes. I always think that the "Jardinage et Générosité" on our logo is the perfect expression of what the scheme is about.

The greatest challenge still lies in finding new garden owners: as mentioned above, because some garden owners prefer to open only a couple of times, or must drop out, we need to keep our numbers healthy by sourcing new gardens. I'm very pleased to report that we will have some new gardens opening for us in the Charente/Dordogne in 2022. I am disappointed that, although we do have a few gardens with very supportive French owners, in our areas we have far fewer French-owned gardens than I feel we should have. I suppose that garden visiting for charitable causes is still a relatively new thing in France and I hope that this situation will improve.

I have found the role of coordinator to be hugely rewarding and I would certainly urge anyone who is thinking about taking this on to give it a go.

If you think you could offer something to help Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts please contact Sue Lambert - gardendevlopment@opengardens.eu



Ian Warden
Coordinator, Dordogne

Our Life with 'Birdsong'



Just over twenty years ago we bought our little stone cottage , with a huge unattached barn, and 5000sq meters of land surrounding the property. We bought it because it was cheaper than a parking space in London at that time! Little did we know that one day it would evolve to become our permanent home.

So, for the following eight years nearly all our holidays were spent re 'everything' our cottage, and making the beginning of a garden. The land was sloping south westerly, and when we first viewed it, I deliberately noted that the very old hawthorn tree was upright and felt cheered that it was not windy. Wrong. It didn't take long to learn that the wind howls across the garden. So why the tree doesn't lean backwards is a mystery. Apart from the Hawthorn there were brambles,

nettles and a huge box. Much of the garden is sheet rock and what soil there is, is extremely sandy which does have its advantages, many plants survive wet winters with the well-drained terrain. We began by creating a small bed outside the back door and planted a cherry tree. Larger areas were covered with weed suppressant.

The years passed and the garden began to take shape, governed by the terrain, budget and a huge learning curve. We planted over thirty trees for shade and fruit, and small Christmas trees from our festive celebrations in the UK. One of which now is over 30 foot high. Due to being part timers I lost count of the rose bushes and clematis that didn't survive the summers in our sandy soil.

On taking early retirement twelve years ago, just after an interest in snowdrops was developing, we moved into our forever home. That's when the real work began. Soil was improved with homemade compost, leaf mould, and any manure our neighbour would give us and this continues to this day.



Ian created the vegetable patch and we're self-sufficient year-round, our diet is driven by availability. We adore eating seasonally. He experiments with different ways of growing the vegetables, and loves to try different varieties of tomatoes, often sending to America for an assortment of seeds. In the last few years, he has put in a pond which has encouraged the wildlife. He even saw a snake taking a dip in the heat of the summer.

To aid the task of summer watering Ian put up stand pipes which have been an absolute joy. This meant I could get the pots watered in an hour as opposed to moving 350 litres by watering can most of the day.

In the ornamental garden, as the weed suppressant was removed, a cottage garden evolved. We aim to have something in bloom every day of the year. This is where the snow drops come in. They encourage, nay demand, that I get into the garden daily. From October to April, I am in a state of either complete delight as they flower, or in the depths of despair if they don't. Sometimes they go missing but come



back a few years later. This is because the narcissus fly has eaten the bulb but if a piece of basal plate is left the bulb will regrow.

We heard of Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts five years after we moved over permanently and offered to open, usually in June. We felt the garden deserved a name, and after deliberation decided on Chants des Oiseaux/Birdsong because when working in the garden that's all we can hear! As the snowdrop collection grew, we saw the opportunity to do something different, so began hosting snowdrop events which to our amazement were popular.

This summer has been a particularly difficult one for gardeners in our region, tomatoes hit by blight and many crops not performing well. To our horror the many box hedges that we planted seven years ago for structure were struck by box blight. We sometimes have box caterpillars, but the known devastation that the blight causes had me resigned to the eventual removal of the hedges thus completely changing the garden overnight. As the spores are carried on footwear it was not possible to open last spring. But Ian doesn't give up so easily he

sprayed every inch of the 750-metre length of hedges with Bordeaux Mixture and amazingly they appear to have recovered. Today there is fresh new growth.

We are currently working on reducing the garden workload as it has been an extremely labour-intensive hobby, but not one that is completely sustainable as we age; the ten-hour working days are over. The veg patch is perhaps not so pristine as it was. I'm not propagating so many plants or having so many pots. Once the count was over a hundred. The small lawns previously mowed and edged by hand have gone and at last I have learnt to grow what does well such as salvias, asters and of course the 250 different species and hybrids of snow drops in our collection.



So, from starting with nothing we now have a patio, and, up the slope on a gravel pathway there is pergola covered eating area. Beyond that is the barn, the well, the greenhouse and a small polytunnel. Far left is the main ornamental garden and further left is the veg patch with a large poly tunnel. Right of that is the orchard. Walk upward and turn right and you'll find

the summer-house in a parterre; my personnel need to challenge my freestyle gardening.

A dear friend asked if, making the garden 'easier' will it feel like a step backward? The answer is no - but more of a chance to get enjoy it.

Sheila and Ian Cole, Haute Vienne

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

***Check the Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts website
www.opengardens.eu for oopenings of this garden.***

Primroses galore!

The Primula genus is one of the largest in the plant world with over 480 species and thousands of hybrids in existence. It is hard to imagine for some people, who may only know primroses as the little yellow flowers they see growing in the hedgerows, or the few gaily, dare I say gaudy coloured flowers in the supermarket.

Primroses - acaulis, polyanthus and double form.

Primrose is the word commonly used for all varieties that derive, originally from the common species in Europe, that we know such as P. vulgaris (the common primrose) or P. veris (the cowslip) and P. juliae (the Juliana pink form from Eastern Europe). All these varieties like similar conditions of semi-shade and thrive in humus-rich, well-drained soil. They will struggle in the summer heat if they are not given sufficient shade and moisture but are very hardy plants that do not mind temperatures that can go down to -15°C. They will burst into colour from February to April, often flowering in the autumn months too before the frosts.

We often distinguish the 'acaulis' forms from the 'polyanthus' forms. The acaulis produce one flower per flower stem and flower abundantly



The 'polyanthus' forms have several flowers on a longer stem (15-20cm). There are many hybrids available from pinks, blues, oranges, white, purples etc. The Juliana primroses have slightly different foliage with rounder, darker leaves and a more creeping habit. All these varieties will cross with each other to self-seed in different colours in the garden.



The double forms have several petals in the centre of the flowers that make them resemble miniature roses. In fact, the reproductive organs have mutated into petals, a genetic anomaly that occurs occasionally in nature and has been bred in over many generations to keep this characteristic. They do not produce seed so are best multiplied by dividing the plants manually every couple of years.

Asiatic primula. The majority of Primula species are found in the Himalayas.



A lot of species will not adapt to our garden conditions, but many of them will thrive if planted in the right place. The candelabras and belled Primulas are magnificent when grown in large clumps. They will produce tall whirls of flowering stems that can grow up to a metre high. Best planted in bog garden conditions

streamside, or a very damp place in the garden that never dries out, they will self-seed to profusion.

Like most of the Asiatic species they will flower later from May to July and go dormant in late summer, losing all their leaves and retreating to a resting bud under the soil over the winter. This means they are very hardy plants that can withstand very low temperatures.

In this category, we also place the Japanese primroses or *Primula sieboldii* (Siebold's primrose). Producing wonderfully delicate, lacy flowers, there are now hundreds of different cultivars, mainly in pastel tones of white, pink, and mauve. They are revered in Japan where they flower in May at the same time as the cherry trees, and there are many plant societies dedicated to this single plant, who hold competitions where they are displayed in plant theatres. Best grown in shady, well-drained slightly acidic soil but also beautiful grown in pots



Alpine Primula and Auriculas

Some of the other species of Primula originate in the Alps and as mountain-dwellers, they prefer a very well-drained, cool spot and can be grown in a gritty soil



in a trough, pot or rockery. *P. marginata* is a good example of this, which has beautiful powdery leaves and dainty mauve flowers.

Auriculas have a special place in many people's hearts and especially in the UK where there are still many collectors and societies that grow these addictive plants. However, there are also many historical links in France to these plants as shown in the paintings, on china plates, or even the tapestries in the Chateau of Chantilly where we do a plant fair every year. You can date the origins of the hybrids back to the 16th century when the yellow *Primula auricula* was crossed with a pink *P. hirsuta*. Now there are thousands of different named cultivars in every shade and

hue. Some of them will grow well in the garden in very well-drained conditions, in a shady rockery or trough, but most people will grow them in pots where they can be a bit more looked after and displayed to their full advantage when they flower in late spring. Some cultivars can be challenging to grow. Drainage is essential and they need to be kept in a shady place in the



summer and if possible protected from excessive wet in the winter. We have over 600 cultivars in the collection now so there are plenty to choose from. They are easy plants to divide as they produce offsets (small offshoots that can be taken off and repotted) which is why it is fun to swap them with other people.

Sowing from seed

Many primroses can be grown fairly easily from seed, with no need for a heated greenhouse or special conditions. We recommend sowing seed from January to May and leaving the seed trays outside in a shady place to germinate. Prick the seedlings out into small pots when they are showing four leaves, and plant them in the garden when they are large enough to establish well. They will flower the following spring.

Barnhaven Primroses

Barnhaven Primroses has been growing many different types of *Primula* for over 85 years. The nursery was first founded in the 1930s in the United States by Florence Bellis and having passed through several owners is now based in Brittany and run by Rob and Jodie Mitchell. We have an on-line webshop and are present at several plant fairs in France and the nursery is also open from February to May.

Barnhaven Primroses, Côtes d'Armor

More information and opening times for this nursery may be found on their website

<http://www.barnhaven.com>

Around the regions.

Our garden openers continued into the autumn to find new ways to raise money on our behalf.

One lady held two "Dividing Perennials" days and invited people to join her on a journey of discovery as to how to increase perennials by division, cuttings, and scaling. By offering free coffee and biscuits during the introduction, and a light lunch of soup with a selection of cheeses, she kept her visitors happy and well fed! Although technically free, people were asked to donate, if they wished, to Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts. Their response after these events was lovely. Both she and her coordinator thought this might be something others might enjoy during the coming spring or indeed next autumn.

Three non-gardening related donations were made to our association when firstly two of our garden openers held a house clearance, donating the proceeds. Secondly, when a club linked to two of our

coordinators recently closed and donated some of their remaining funds to us. Yet another garden opener held a free Swap Shop inviting people to come along bring an item to swap and choose anything from the items available to take home. Tea, coffee, and cake was also available and all attending simply donated. Three very different but equally valuable approaches to supporting Open Gardens/Jardins Ouverts.

Our sincere thanks to all these people and the many others who thought of us and found a variety of different ways to help us this year. Do let us know what is happening near you.

And Finally.....Congratulations!



Our congratulations and best wishes to Vlasta Dudych, one of our garden openers in the Lot. He entered a photograph of his garden at Moulin de Cazes, Duraval, 46700 in a photographic competition in the magazine *L'Ami des Jardins et la Maison* and was awarded fifth prize.

His winning picture may be seen in the November 2021 issue of the magazine and on our website:

https://www.opengardens.eu/garden-detail/?gard_random=6S8BB1mQXOg37Jr&lang=en-GB

This email was sent to {{ contact.EMAIL }}
You received this email because you are registered with Open Gardens
www.opengardens.eu

[Unsubscribe here](#)



© 2020 Open Gardens