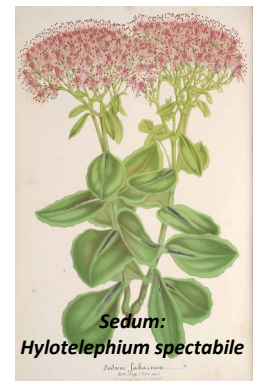




The Village GARDEN CLUB of Sevenhampton & District



SEP / OCT 2017

NEXT MEETINGS

Thursday 7th September - Sally Gregson, "Hydrangeas"

Thursday 19th October - Paul Hervey Brooks, "Trade Secrets: Behind the Scenes at Chelsea"



GROWING PEONIES FROM SEED

My interest in propagating species peonies from seed (some would say obsession) was triggered in the late 1980's by annual visits to the gardens of Walpole House on Chiswick Mall, which were opened to the public under the NGS. The gardens occupied approximately one acre and were surrounded on three sides by high brick walls, providing a horticultural oasis only yards from the A4. They were lovingly tendered by Jeremy Benson (no relation) & family and featured many varieties of mainly species peonies, both herbaceous and tree, among many other flowers and shrubs. At each opening an impressive collection of seeds (& occasionally seedlings) collected from the garden and the Bensons' Gloucestershire property would be available for sale including *Paeonia cambessedesii*, *P. mascula*, *P. mlokosewitschii* & *P. veitchii* together with the tree peony, *P. lutea ludlowii*.

Whilst the propagation of herbaceous peonies by division and tree peonies by layering is more straightforward (and gives more immediate results), the challenge of growing new plants from seed is far more satisfying. I have tried buying in seed from commercial suppliers but with minimal success and I now rely entirely on seed harvested from my own garden. Relying on home grown seeds can, however, be frustrating. For example, following this year's late April frosts & seeming lack of pollinators, there has been an unusual dearth of seed pods on all the varieties I am growing, even though they're usually very productive.

The seed should be gathered when fully ripe. The best time to harvest them is when the pods have just begun to crack open. Seeds of tree peonies are purplish black whilst herbaceous peony seeds are more brown/black. Do not worry if some of the seeds are still yellow: they will quickly darken if laid out in the air in a tray to dry. Having discarded any which are imperfect, the seeds collected should be sown in the late autumn either into a nursery bed or 6 inch pots with compost enhanced with leaf mould to help retain moisture. Peonies have double dormancy which means that their seeds need two winters separated by a summer before producing their first leaves in the second summer. Root growth begins during the first summer but do not be tempted to disturb the same until potting on, which should be done once the leaves are well established. With the exception of *P. cambessedesii* which is a native of the Balearics and requires some protection up here in the Cotswolds, a greenhouse or cold frame is unnecessary as species peonies grown in this country are fully hardy. You will, however, need to protect them from inquisitive squirrels!

Once established, seedlings will need potting on every few years, preferably when in full growth, and you can look forward to their reaching maturity after a minimum of 5 to 6 years, at which point they can be transplanted into a border. Remember that given the right soil conditions, some of the tree peony species can grow 8-10 feet in both height and spread! For me, the most successful germination rates have come from the tree peonies, *P. lutea ludlowii* and *P. delavayi* (although I have had occasional success with *P. suffruticosa*) together with the herbaceous peonies *P. cambessedesii* and *P. mlokosewitschii*.



Factfile: SEDUMS — see over.

The Chelsea Chop

The **Chelsea Chop** is usually carried out at the end of May, about the time of the Chelsea Flower Show—hence its name. It is a pruning method used on many tall herbaceous plants such as *Sedum herbstfreude*. It benefits such plants as they will not be so 'leggy', need less staking and whilst the flowers are smaller, they are more numerous. The plants given 'the chop' need to be cut back by one third to a half. The degree of cutting back is specific to each species but the closer to flowering time you prune, the greater the delay in flowering. If performed, the Chelsea Chop will delay the flowering until later in the summer and plants will be shorter and more compact.

To prolong the overall flowering time of groups of the same plant, try cutting back a few, but leaving others. Another trick is to cut half the stems at the front of the clumps & leave those at the back. This method of control, however, does not suit all plants but those that do respond well to the Chelsea chop include:

Anthemis tinctorial

Echinacea purpurea

Phlox paniculata

Sedum (upright, strong-growing forms)

Solidago

Helenium

MEDICINAL PLANTS

Last month the world's largest yew hedge (*Taxus baccata*), which is on the Bathurst estate in Cirencester, was clipped. It took almost two weeks to complete trimming the 300 year old hedge. Maybe of more interest though, is that the clippings are used to make a cancer drug - docetaxel. A similar drug, paclitaxel, is made from yew tree bark. Both drugs can now be made synthetically in the laboratory but the yew's needles are still collected in this country and used as part of the process for docetaxel. Some may also have seen BBC's Countryfile report showing fields of opium poppies (*Papaver somniferum*) grown in the U.K. which will be processed for codeine, morphine and other opiates.



Over 7000 conventional medicines are directly derived from plants. For example the willow (*Salix*) produces aspirin, the foxglove (*Digitalis*) produces digoxin for heart conditions & whilst the latter can be synthetically made in the lab, the plant remains the main source of this drug in the U.S. In March next year the Garden Club's speaker will focus on '*Wild Medicine & Herbal 1st Aid*' - an aspect of gardening that has been practised for centuries. From medieval monasteries, humble cottage gardens, stately homes through to modern day, plants have retained their importance in providing a source of well being.

If you would like to visit a garden dedicated to medicinal plants, London's [Chelsea Physic Garden](#), founded in the 17th century as an Apothecaries' garden is very worthwhile and have special events throughout the year.

Member Cherrie Handy has moved from Brockhampton but hopes to continue membership of the Garden Club. Prior to the move she gave various garden pots away asking recipients to donate something towards the Club rather than pay her for them. Many thanks Cherrie for the kind support.

SCULPTURES



The *Garden Club* visit in May was to [Cerneley Gardens](#). Those unable to join us missed a delightful viewing of the grounds which offers formal gardens with

extensive borders (many plants were labelled), walled vegetable gardens and woodland walks set within 40 acres. There was also a number of sculptures, including this pair of boxing hares.

Made of many different materials, eg wood, metal & stone, sculptures can add an extra dimension to a garden and have the bonus of being appreciated all the year round. They can be particularly attractive when incorporated into water features or as a planting focal point.

Garden centres, reclamation yards and the internet are all good places to buy a treasured sculpture. In addition, inspiration may be found at Showborough House near Twynning, where an [Affordable Garden Art Exhibition](#) is held each year in late Spring. Also The Old Rectory at Quenington, provides a venue for the [Fresh Air Sculpture Show](#); a biennial sculpture exhibition which offers a creative mixture of work in a stunning outdoor setting. The next exhibition will be held in June 2019—some way off yet, but well worth a diary entry.

JOBS FOR THE GARDEN:

- *Divide Herbaceous perennials *Plant/Move shrubs and trees *Collect seeds for sowing
- *Clear dead leaves promptly - as they can be a source of disease *Dig up potatoes - before slug damage occurs
- *Prune climbing roses once flowering finishes *Divide rhubarb *Net ponds *Turn the Compost
- *Plant Bulbs *Plant Spring Cabbage *Check ties & stakes and prune late flowering shrubs to prevent wind rock

Phew!

Factfile: SEDUMS, also called stonecrops and iceplants (eg *Hylotelephium spectabile*), belong to the Crassulaceae family of plants and



Sedum acre
(goldmoss stonecrop)

there are over 400 different species. They are hardy succulents with fleshy foliage and thus xerophytic, i.e. able to withstand dry environments—ideal for Cotswold gardens. Often blue/grey in colour, the foliage can also be variegated as found in the crimson stonecrop (*Sedum spurium* 'Tricolor'). They prefer full sun but can tolerate partial shade. If their position is too shaded or the soil too fertile, plants have a habit of flopping outwards, particularly the taller varieties and they may benefit from the *Chelsea Chop* if this is the case (see above). Their colourful flowers provide long lasting autumn colour and are much favoured by bees and butterflies. Easy to propagate by division, collecting seed and layering (or in my case flower arrangements!) they are a useful addition to any garden.