



The Village GARDEN CLUB

of Sevenhampton & District



MAY / JUN
2018

Runner Beans
(*Phaseolus coccineus*)
For FACTFILE see over

NEXT MEETINGS

Thursday 17 th May	Chris Cronin	- The Walled Garden at Croome Park
Wednesday 6th June	Evening visit to Miserden Gardens and pub supper (see booking form for more details)	

The BBC gardening website proclaims ... **"DIGGING THE SOIL IS ESSENTIAL FOR GOOD PLANT GROWTH"**. Visiting kitchen gardens of National Trust (NT) properties where serried ranks of carrots, cabbages and leeks grow healthily, in weed free soil suggests that this is so **but** there is evidence that it may not be true.....

Why is this "traditional" method of digging, raking and planting adopted so slavishly? We dig to remove weeds, to aerate the soil. We rake to a fine tilth to prepare suitable seed beds. We plant at specified times of the year and at recommended distances because that's the advice on the packets and in gardening books. It gives plants plenty of room to develop their root systems and to spread their foliage. Followed with regular weeding and watering, our chosen plants emerge from otherwise bare soil. Eventually we crop and then do it all over again. Digging may be a pleasurable activity for a few masochistic souls, with nothing better to do than spend an afternoon getting backache. To my mind it is one of the most onerous tasks in gardening and for years I have done it because I could see no alternative.

Why do we use a system that is so far away from what happens in nature? There is no digging in nature, plants establish and grow without any human interference. They were here long before us and probably will be after us. Is there another way and does the "traditional" method stand up to scrutiny?

Digging is physically arduous, it releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, it destroys the aeration and drainage systems created by earthworms and other soil invertebrates. It removes the homes of ground nesting bees, the homes of toads and small mammals which live in soil. It creates new sites for the growth of weeds and can damage the structure of the soil, especially if done at the wrong time. The reasons for not doing it are many and very convincing. The reduction in physical effort being only a minor consideration.

Most plants do not need fine seed beds and those that do can be started off in seed trays. Spaces between plants allow for the regrowth of weeds. Regimental rows may have an aesthetic value but make no real sense.

Charles Dowding bought a house with a quarter acre of land in 1983. It was in a terrible state, overgrown, full of weeds and with terrible soil. He decided to restore it but not in the traditional way. He developed a no-dig method of gardening, using compost, cardboard and plastic sheeting to remove weeds and prepare the ground. He planted seedlings near each other and cropped and replanted and kept at it. He has shown that his organic, no-dig method not only works but significantly reduces the input of hard physical work and, more importantly, increases yields to a marked degree.

He sells produce from his no-dig garden called "Homeacres" and has written nine books, made many radio and TV appearances, including Gardeners World, and teaches both at home and abroad. On his web sites and YouTube there are videos that explain his method and show the amazing results. Look at <https://www.charlesdowding.co.uk>



and become convinced that the old ways may not be the best ways. If it removes digging, then I for one, am in favour of giving it a try. The secret appears to be the availability of quantities of good quality compost, a subject about which you can learn on his videos. It is April, my garden has not been dug, what am I going to do?

Photo of a section of Charles Dowding's garden, all produced without digging. Not a weed in sight & produce to make even the National Trust envious!

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

Our meeting and AGM on 18th April was the first meeting of our 16th year; it is good to see the Club is still thriving. The attendance was one of the highest for a while and they heard Georgie Newbery give a highly enjoyable talk and demonstration on growing and using cut flowers. There were old friends and some new members amongst the audience but, with a membership of 33, the Club has a constant need of new members so please continue to spread the word and encourage new people to come to our meetings.

The Club is well served by its committee whose initiative and judgement in the selection of speakers and energy in organising both meetings and trips is marvellous. This year Victoria is retiring after 15 years. She has played a big part in the Club's success and we thank her most sincerely for her immense contribution. We are delighted that she will remain a member and also a speaker - she is giving us a talk next March on "Practical Propagation"! Two members are joining the committee - Joanna Ruddock and Sue Tallents - I am sure they will make a significant contribution to the future success of our Club. Happy Gardening, John

GOOD HOME needed for WATER BUTT

Member, Lesley Harman, has a spare 190 litre water butt made from recycled plastic with a lid, tap & stand. It is new but surplus to requirements. She does not want any money for it but would appreciate a donation to the Garden Club instead. Please contact directly on 01242 821479 / 0796 242 1946 to negotiate.

Many thanks for your support Lesley.

Saving water: Using water butts in the garden instead of tap water can save 1000s of litres of water each year; and your plants will thank you for rainwater rather than treated tap water. You can also cut water use by 33% by watering plants manually instead of using automatic sprinklers. During dry weather give the soil around your plants a good water twice a week rather than a little each day, this will help reduce overall evaporation. Pots and baskets should be done daily.



PLEASE LOOK at the [Gloucestershire Federation of Gardening Societies](http://www.glsf.co.uk), to whom we are affiliated, for a lot of information, including articles, news, details of local shows and gardens to visit.

PLEASE NOTE that the trip to the Bishop's Palace in Wells is on **Thursday 5th July**, not Wednesday as suggested on your membership card. Also don't forget the discounts which are available from the outlets identified on back of your card.

PLEASE REMEMBER that recent copies of The Village Garden Club newsletter, as well as other gardening news & local information, can be seen on Sevenhampton Parish Council's website at: www.sevenhampton.org/clubs/the-garden-club/



BLUEBELL WATCH

The Woodland Trust are asking people to help them record the UK's bluebells. Between now and the end of May, please look out for bluebells and place your sightings on their [on-line map](http://www.woodlandtrust.co.uk/bluebell-watch). They want to record native and non-native species and their site explains the differences (see also newsletter May/June 2017).

TOO TALL If it's one thing you should be doing now it's staking tall plants, especially perennials, before they grow too tall and bushy. Get those supports in SOON!

Dates for your Diary

Thurs 10th - Sun 13th May. RHS Malvern Spring Festival WR13 6NW Cost: Varies depending on which day (under 16s free) www.rhsmalvern.co.uk

Sat 19th May 10.30am-5pm, Barnsley Village Garden Festival. Rosemary Verey's home, (now Barnsley hotel), open gardens & more to see. Cost: £7 (under 14s free) More info at www.barnsleyvillage.co.uk

Sun 20th May, & Sun 24th June 2-5pm. Stowell Park, Yanworth, Near Northleach GL54 3LE. Lord Vestey's home; 50th year of opening for the NGS. Cost: £6 (under 16s free). More info at www.stowellpark.com

Sat & Sun 16th/17th June. 10am-6pm Open Gardens at Eckington, Nr Pershore, Worcs. WR10 3AN. Over 30 gardens open throughout the village. Cost: £6 (children free). More info at [www.eckingtoninfo](http://www.eckingtoninfo.co.uk)



FACTFILE: *Phaseolus coccineus* (aka runner beans/scarlet runners/stick beans) are indigenous to Central & South America. Members of the leguminous plant family Fabaceae, they usually have red flowers although sometimes they can be white. Pods are typically green but some newer varieties, such as *Aeron Purple Star*, have purple pods. They differ from 'green beans' (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) as they have **hypogeal germination**, which is when the cotyledons remain below soil level.

In Britain they were originally grown ornamentally but in the 18th century Philip Miller, of the [Chelsea Physic Garden](http://www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk), promoted their edible qualities. In most countries people just eat the beans alone, unlike in British cuisine where the whole pod is usually consumed. Regardless of choice, **it is important not to eat the beans uncooked** as, in 1957, it was discovered that raw beans contain the toxins hydrocyanic acid & phytohaemagglutinin, which can cause nausea & vomiting. Cooking of course, renders the whole beans harmless (& delicious!).

Runner beans like their roots kept moist & will benefit from a trench of semi-rotted compost. Whilst generally enjoying heat, if air temperatures are above 25°C the flowers have difficulty setting. Spraying with water will help alleviate this effect.

 * Have you anything of interest that can be included in the next newsletter? If so please contact Di Cook (editor) at *
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