



ALLOTMENT & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

NEWSLETTER - JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH 2026

The Committee would like to take this opportunity to wish you a Happy New Year and enjoyable gardening in 2026
Harry Theobald Editor.

The 19th Annual General Meeting of A&GAS took place on Thursday 23rd October 2025 7.30pm at Dennis Marsh House. The Chairman, Harry Theobald thanked everyone for attending.

He thanked all Committee members and Associate members for their hard work and support throughout 2025.

We had 330 members sign up for 2025

The Trading Hut remained the main source of income for the Association during 2025 and was ably run by the Committee, volunteers, and Keith Lawrence the Manager. We still have the exterior of the containers to paint.

The Trading Hut will be reopening on the weekend of Saturday 17th /Sunday 18th January 2026.

The Committee have agreed to keep the 2026 annual membership subscription at £5.

The Summer Show was held on Saturday 16th August at the United Reformed Church. It was very successful, thanks go to Harry Theobald and his team, the Committee and volunteers. The date for the show in 2026 is Saturday 22nd August.

We went to Bowood House & Gardens on Saturday 8th May. Followed by the Broadlands Garden Show at Romsey on Sunday 8 June, and lastly RHS Wisley on Sunday 31st August.

We will not be starting up talks during 2026 but will continue to advertise talks by local gardening clubs and the NVS. The website continues to be run successfully by Anna McBride.

We had the second year of the Best Allotment and Best Scarecrow Competitions and thanks go to Lindsey Bellringer and her committee for making it a further success. A 'Summer Apple Pruning' event took place and this will be followed up with an 'Apple Day' in October both supported by Mike Bacon and John Marshall.

The Chairman outlined the discussions we have had with Debbie Cox and Marc Read reference the proposed rent rise of 25%. With the help of Matthew Vass, we have been able to stop the rent rise and look at ways we can help the SCC to save money by bringing unused plots into cultivation. Also, the new Councillor for allotments, Sharon Rideout, has been working with us on this matter.

The Treasurer Jenny Coleman said the bank balance at the 30th September 2025 was £9,870.26. Thanks Jenny.

The Auditors Munro's were re-elected. The accounts for 2023/24 were adopted.

The following Officers were elected: Chairman Harry Theobald, Secretary Helen Gibson, Treasurer Jenny Coleman. The following Committee Members who stood were re-elected, Louis Statham, Lindsey Bellringer and Graham Williams. There were two Committee members who stood down Anna McBride and Rob Read. The Chairman thanked them for all their help and support, and they have been presented with cards and a voucher each. Two new committee members were voted on namely Neil Fox and Clive Williams.

The 20th AGM is scheduled for Thursday 22nd October 2026.

Trading Hut

The Trading Hut will open on the weekend of the 17/18th January 2026.

The varieties of **potatoes** we hope to have when we re-open in January are: **First Early:** Casablanca, Foremost, Maris Bard, Red Duke of York, Rocket, Winston and Caledonian Pearl, the replacement for International Kidney, **Second Early:** Charlotte, Estima, Kestrel, Marfona, Nadine, Wilja and Jazzy. **Main Crop:** Cara, Desiree, King Edwards, Maris Piper, Picasso, Valor and Sentanta and Rooster. All the potatoes come in 2.0kg nets, and the prices will be marginally up on last year, but still the cheapest in the Salisbury area. **Onion** varieties are Centurion, Red Barron, Sturon, Stuttgart Giant. **Shallots:** Golden Gourmet and Red Sun. **Garlic** Vigour(white) and Germidore (pink)

SAA Annual Outings

We will be organising some outings in 2026 with the first being a trip to the Arundel Tulip Festival on Sunday 12th April. The second trip will be to the RHS Badminton Flower Show in Gloucestershire on Sunday 12th July. Prices for both trips will be circulated in January.

The following is a list of local companies that offer a discount on production of a valid 2026 A&GAS membership card: B&M Windows & Doors, B&R Textiles, Blind & Track Services, Brewers, C&O Tractors, Darren MacDonald Funeral Directors,

Fisherton Mill Gallery & Café, Henry Stanley, The Hat Shop, Johnstones Decorating Centre, Salisbury Garden Machinery, Shirley Snell Florist, Suck it up Salisbury, Timpsons (opposite Library), Travis Perkins.

SNIPPETS

As the A&GAS committee have decided not to have a programme of talks in 2026, we have decided to continue to supply details of other local societies where you can listen to their programme of talks. These will be in our newsletter also on our website and on our shop notice board.

Alderbury & Whaddon Gardening Club: Meetings are held in Alderbury Bowls Club, Rectory Road, Alderbury SP5 3AD on the 3rd Wednesday of the month and start at 7.15pm with refreshments; talks and demonstrations starting at 7.30pm. Fees are £15 annually due in January or £3 guest fee.

Jan 21st AGM followed by talk.

The Stratford-sub-Castle Gardening Club: Meetings are held on the last Thursday of the month 7.15pm for 7.30pm September to June at Stratford -sub-Castle Reading Room SP1 3LL with free parking. Membership is £18 per year and visitors £4 per meeting.

Jan 29th Ray Broughton 'Seed sowing and propagation', Feb 26th Marcel Floyd 'Climbers', Mar 26th Dr Jonathan Banks 'Trees in the Garden (Bartlett Tree Experts), 30th Apr Ruth Kerr 'A wander without wellies' May 28th Gwynne Davies 'History and development of the Daffodil'. 25th June AGM & Members Evening.

NVS Hampshire District Association: Meetings are held at Sherfield English, Village Hall, Salisbury Road Sherfield English SO51 6F at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated. Non-members welcome - free entry.

10th Feb Mark Porter History Behind NGS Open Gardens. **10th March** Gillian Taylor My Greenhouse Year. **14th April** Guy Deakins How to Commit the Perfect Murder and put the Body to Good use Afterwards. **1-3 May** BBC Gardeners' World Spring Fair at Beaulieu. Visit the NVS stand. **9th May** Plant Sale 9am-1pm at Wellow Village Hall, West Wellow, SO51 6BR. **9th June** the Benfits of Gardening on Wellbeing. **28-30 July** The New Forest & Hampshire County Show. **13th Sept** Hants DA Annual Show 1pm Wellow Village Hall, West Wellow. SO51 6BR. **13th October** Four Acre Farm. **10th Nov** Andrew Tolman Off the Beaton Track Hidden Gems. **8th Dec** AGM and quiz

The best books of 2025

The Contemporary Garden by Phaidon Editors, published by Phaidon RRP £44.95. A game changing directory of contemporary garden design, which includes 300 examples from across the globe. They are accompanied by stories of the owners, makers and their processes, with sensitivity to planting and place, inspirational escapism.

How to Design a Garden by Pollyanna Wilkinson. Published by DK, RRP £22. Plan a beautiful garden redesign with this chatty, confidence-building guide to finding style and untapping potential, from wish lists to water features, planting to play areas.

The Kindest Garden by Marion Boswall, publisher Frances Lincoln, RRP £25. This hands-on guide to regenerative gardening encourages us to adopt the mindset and practices that increase biodiversity from soil to gut. Underpinned with wisdom and kindness, advice, case studies and practical projects to help gardeners to improve the health of the planet.

Literary Gardens by Sandra Lawrence, publish by Frances Lincoln, RRP £19.99. Consummate story-telling and exquisite illustrations make this collection of 30 writers and poets imaginary gardens an emotional discovery where all our favourite plots are memorably rekindled.

Garden People by Ursula Buchan, published by Thames & Hudson, RRP £19.99. A horticultural who's who post-war Britain captures life through the lens of photographer Valerie Finnis (1924-2006). She reinvented garden photography. Highlights include Roald Dahl, Vita Sackville-West and candid portraits of hundreds of other luminaries.

Diary of a Keen Gardener by Mary Keen, published by John Murray RRP £20. Mary Keen a renowned writer and garden designer moved to a plot considerably smaller than her former rectory garden. This book is a lively month-by-month diary that captures this new garden as it develops and is peppered with no-nonsense advice, Keen's writing is useful for seasoned gardeners and beginners alike - her List of the Plants I Currently Grow, laid out by season, is an essential read.

A Wildflower Year by Frances Tophill Published by Kyle Books, RRP £18.99 This delightful book has a clear and simple concept: wildflowers, both rare and common, are each celebrated with concise and accurate botanical information and a charming watercolour portrait. These feature alongside personal anecdotes from Frances about her love of nature, the changing seasons and the flowers themselves.

RHS Fungi for Gardeners by Jassy Drakulic Published by DK. Buy from www.rhs.org.uk/books

A Kent gardener has grown *Victoria amazonica* - a giant waterlily with leaves that can reach 3 metres in diameter - from seed. Chris Bowers has germinated the waterlily seeds in a sterile tank. He nurtured the one resulting seedling until it was large enough to transplant into a specially made heated pond inside a greenhouse. Chris's 100 sq. m 'Pocket Rainforest' garden boasts 'swamp ponds' and several hundred tropical plants and trees. He hosts open days in aid of the Worldwide Fund for Nature

Fans of Which trials may wonder what happens to all the veg we harvest once it's been assessed and taste tested by their experts. Well, whenever possible and practical, we donate it to a food redistribution charity, the Felix Project, which has a depot near our Capel Manor trial site. At the end of September, we donated 150kg of carrots from our trial to the charity.

Six new world records for giant veg were set at the Canna UK National Giant Vegetable Championship at this years Malvern Autumn Show. Gardener Joe Atherton grew the longest radish, measuring a staggering 7,848m, while the tallest luffa plant, grown by Graham Barratt, was 11,672m. The longest marrow, raised by Mark Baggs, measured 1.454m, and narrowly missed out on being the heaviest at the show. Peter Glazendale, who holds 30 world records for giant veg, added to his collection with two new ones - the longest aubergine at 49cm and tallest runner bean plant, stretching to 8.006. The longest, sweet pepper was 26.7cm, carefully tended by Kevin, Gareth and Jamie Fortey. The heaviest celeriac, cultivated by Chris Marriot, weighed in at 8.01kg, while the heaviest tomato - 4.39kg grown by Douglas Smith -also set a new European record.

Gardens

Two new learning gardens will benefit the next generation of horticulturists and visitors to RHS Gardens when they open this autumn. The Greener Skills Garden at RHS Garden Wisley opened on 17 October 2025 and the RHS Garden Bridgewater Growing Skills Garden in January. Both will provide vital spaces for people aged 14 plus on the RHS New Shoots initiative, designed to inspire more people to choose a career in horticulture.

Hestercombe House and Gardens has fallen into administration because of declining visitor numbers and rising costs. The unique landscape highlights three centuries of garden design including a formal garden by Sir Edwin Lutyens and a planting scheme by Gertrude Jekyll. The estates remain open to the public while administrators explore options.

The trial of dog-friendly days at RHS Garden Rosemoor is being extended by six months. The Devon Garden will welcome dogs on short, fixed leads on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays until 26 March 2026. Dogs must continue to follow a strict paw on paths policy and will be allowed to explore the formal gardens, Stream Field, lakeside, arboreums and woodlands with their owners

Wildlife

England's rarest bumblebee has been found at RHS Garden Hyde Hall by a BeeWalk volunteer for the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. The shrill carder bee (*Bombus sylvarum*) was spotted foraging appropriately on *Salvia 'Royal Bumble'* in the Hilltop Garden's Herbaceous Border. The carder bee named for its distinctive high-pitched buzz, emerges relatively late in the season. New colonies are established by a single queen around late May, and workers are active June to October. Gardeners can attract it by including a diversity of plants that flower from April to October, such as white deadnettle and bird's foot trefoil, and by providing undisturbed nest habitat, such as rough, long grass.

How to befriend Robins: The robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) is a member of the passerine - perching - group of birds. It has a largely insectivorous diet along with other members of its family, the flycatchers (*Muscicapidae*). It's mostly a resident UK species with numbers swollen in winter by migrants from eastern and northern Europe. Two factors seem to be making robins in British gardens so willing to interact with People. The first is their feeding technique. They follow other animals that dig through soil, to snap up exposed worms and other invertebrates. In the past this would likely have been wild boar, but gardeners now play that role. The second explanation is the lack of historical persecution here. In contrast, residents' robins on the continent are generally shy birds, sticking to woodland undergrowth. Not all will become tame, but with patience and a few titbits you can enjoy a wonderful wildlife experience with a friendly robin. Look for an attentive individual as you go about chores such as turning compost or digging. A robin may start by darting in only after you have finished, so take a few breaks and stand back to allow it time to nip in for a snack. If that goes well, place a worm or grub to one side for the bird to collect. You can supplement with dry or live mealworms from pet food suppliers. Avoid loud noises or sudden movements to build up trust. Pretty soon it may be willing to take food from your hand. (do remember to wash your hands after). Three ways to attract robins to your garden. 1. Minimise use of garden chemicals to encourage insects. 2. Let shrubs and climbers grow densely to offer natural nesting spots. 3. Put open-fronted nest boxes in sheltered spots facing north or east

Hatfield Forest in Essex saw its highest butterfly numbers in 17 years in spring of 2025. The site is home to 24 species, and there were particularly high numbers of marbled-white and small heath butterflies. The population of the usually elusive purple emperor is also on the increase. Wardens say they now cut wildflower-rich grasslands in late July or early August, rather than June. Leaving more nectar-rich flowers for pollinators.

New research by ecologists at Southern Illinois University and Oklahoma State University has shown that birds sing for nearly an hour longer at dawn or dusk in areas of high light pollution. Using audio recordings matched with species identification and mapping websites, the researchers were able to pinpoint where different species of birds were located and how they behaved. Birds with larger eyes, such as European goldfinches were more affected by high light levels, extending their singing time by more than average. Sparrows, which have smaller eyes seemed to be less affected. Birds that nest in the open also had longer singing times around artificial lights compared with those that nest in cavities. It's unclear whether extended singing time is a good or bad thing - it may make birds more tired with less energy to find food, or it may be an advantage in attracting a mate.

With the right trees you can add a high-rise dimension to bee-friendly planting and help these vital pollinators thrive. Plus, you can enjoy blossom, structural interest and often, colourful autumnal fruit. Trees can help with habitat loss from potted patio plants to floriferous giants, that fill hungry gaps when little else is in flower and pack a punch in terms of nectar and pollen per square metre. The following list of trees are the best to plant: *Arbutus unedo* (strawberry tree), *Salix cinerea* (grey willow), *Tilia tomentose* (silver lime), *Prunus avium* (wild cherry), *Acer platanoides* (Noray maple), *Pyrus communis* (common pear), *Malus domestica* (apple), *Tilia cordata* (small-leaved lime), *Salix caprea* (goat willow), *Tetradium daniellii* (bee-bee tree), *Crataegus monogyna* (Common hawthorn), *Prunus domestica* 'Warwickshire Drooper' (plum).

Don't forget the big Garden Birdwatch run by the RSPB. It takes place on 23-25 January. For more info go to www.rspb.org.uk/whatshappening/big-garden-birdwatch

Little arboreal ladybirds have been recorded in the UK for the first time following this year's hot summer. These insects usually live in France and other parts of continental Europe but have been found in most traps in the New Forest. It will now be recorded as a species new to Britain.

The results of various citizen science surveys show how wildlife is responding to climate change: Visit the following websites for full details on the surveys and help to sign up to take part. 1. Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust 01202 391319 www.arc-trust.org 2. British Hedgehog Preservation Society 01584 890801 www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk 3. British Trust for Ornithology 01842 750050 www.bto.org 4. Buglife www.buglife.org.uk 5. Bumblebee Conservation Trust 01786 594128 www.bumblebeeconservation.org 6. Butterfly Conservation 01929 400209 www.butterfly-conservation.org 7. Buzzclub www.thebuzzclub.uk 8. Durham Wildlife Trust 0191 584 3112 www.durhamwt.com 9. The Freshwater Habitats Trust www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk 10. Lancashire Wildlife Trust. 01772 324129 www.lancswt.org.uk 11. RSPB 01767 693680 www.rspb.org.uk 12. UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme www.ukpoms.org.uk

Products & Services

Which Best Buys:

Best buy and recommended Roses for Patio Pots on test: 'Absolutely Fabulous' yellow, 'Birthday Wishes' red, 'Festival' red, 'Little Angel' white, 'Pearl Anniversary' pink, 'Queen Mother' pink, 'Anna Ford' orange, 'Snow Bunny' white.

Best buy and recommended Winter-Weight Gardening Gloves on test: 'Showa 451 Thermogrip'. 'Town & Country Mastergrip', 'Gold Leaf Dry Touch', 'Kent & Stowe Sure & Soft Leather Gloves', 'Sealskinz Anmer Waterproof All Weather Ultra Grip Knitted Gloves', 'Showa 350R Thornmaster'. 'ClipGlove Shock Absorber', 'Niwald Winter Gloves'.

Best buy and recommended Leeks on test: 'Batter' F1, 'Jolant', 'Lancaster' F1, 'Sprintan' F1, 'Below Zero' F1, 'Bandit', 'Oarsman F1'.

Best buy and recommended Dazzling Plants for pots on test: *Begonia boliviensis* 'Starshine Orange' orange, *Begonia* 'Dragon Wing' red, *Bidens* 'Double Sun Drop' yellow, *Tagetes* 'Tiger Eyes' red, *Pelargonium* 'Giant Galaxy Violet' purple, *Petunia* 'Bees Knees' yellow, *Begonia* 'Illumination Apricot Shades' yellow, *Impatiens* 'Beacon Select Mixed' F1, multishades, *Lantana* 'Calippo Tutti Frutti' yellow/pink, *Tagetes* 'Naughty Marietta' yellow

Best buy and recommended Wildlife Cameras on test: 'Browning' Recon Force Elite HPS', 'NatureSpy' Helarctos Solar Trail Camera, 'NatureSpy' Ursus Nova Trail Camera, 'Browning' Dark ops Pro X 1080, 'Zeiss' Secacam 5 Wide Angle, 'Browning' Defender Pro Scout Max Solar.

Cordless Leafblowers on test: STIHL BGA 50 (£229), STIHL BGA 30 (£150) Both recommended

Hedge Trimmers on test: Bosch UniversalHedgeCut 18V-55 (£160), Hyundai HY20CHT (£80) Both recommended

No one wants to feel short-changed, but Which have discovered that some compost bags don't contain as many litres as claimed. Last spring they measured the volume of compost bags they bought for their trials to check they contained the stated amount. They tested 41 brands and found seven containing less than 80% of the declared volume. Moorland Gold Multipurpose Compost only had 73% of the stated 40L. Plant Grow Multipurpose bags were only 75% full, while Wicks own brand compost and Westland Raised Bed and Vegetable Soil both only contained 76%. FertileFibre Original Seed Compost had 78%. A further 9 compost brands had between 80% and 90% of the claimed amount. They also found that several brands showed significant variation between the volumes in their bags. They retested all bags that contained less than 85% of the stated volume with a fresh bag. This showed that while one bag might contain just 77% of the declared amount, another would hold 100%. Overall, 28 of the 41 products had more than 85% of the stated quantity and 24 had over 90%. They would expect a much higher proportion of composts to contain the correct amount and will discuss their findings with manufacturers.

Melcourt SylvaGrow Houseplant compost triumphed in the growing materials category at this year's new product awards at the Glee gardening trade show. The brand is frequently given Best Buys in our compost trials. The prize for best new growing accessory went to Tulip Flower Alert - a moisture sensor with an LED light in the shape of a tulip. It shows green when the plant has enough moisture and red when it needs water. Two new plants shared the top spot in the plants, bulbs and seed category, *Euphorbia x martini* 'Walberton's Little Treasure' has lime green leaves with a pink tinge and forms a compact plant'. We've been growing it in our new plant trials and have been impressed so far. *Salvia* 'Strawberry Melba' is a shrubby salvia.

We've been growing another colour in the series, 'Peach Melba', for our new plants trial. And found that it put on a good show this summer.

Science and Research

Actively noticing things such as birdsong, plant textures and scents can improve wellbeing significantly, according to research conducted at RHS Garden Wisley. The study, led by the University of Sheffield in collaboration with the University of Sheffield and RHS scientists, asked 79 participants to respond to natural or man-made elements in the garden. The group listened to birdsong, touching plants and admiring the view reported better wellbeing levels than those asked to notice buildings, paths and man-made sounds such as traffic noise, and the control group that received no prompts. Engaging with natural elements can unlock deeper restorative benefits, which has powerful implications for how we design and manage public green spaces. Participants focussing on nature felt calmer, more connected to their surroundings, with slower breathing and reduced stress. The findings will feed into a new RHS blueprint for wellbeing gardens, due to launch in 2026. Using scientific research and real-life examples, it will help people make gardens to support wellbeing at home, in the community or for organisations.

Plants

The Orchid Review yearbook 2025-2026 rounds up 12 months of breeding, plant hunting and research in the orchid world, alongside a calendar for next year's best events. Practical tips, including growing from seed, accompany articles on such beauties as *Dendrochilum* and *Lepanthes*, plus exciting introductions which make orchids so intensely interesting with their near unparalleled diversity. Published by www.summerfieldbooks.com RRP £17.95

The December issue of the quarterly magazine the Plant Review is packed with botanical treasures. Featuring some amazing recent introductions in the ivy family, a lovely assortment of shrubby willows, a retrospective of the Wollemi pine after 20 years in cultivation, and a lost Cedric Morris iris that's finally given a name. An annual subscription is £29 for UK members. Visit: www.rhs.org.uk/theplantreview

Best Hardy Chrysanthemums

'Picasso' small pink flowers, 'Mrs Jessie Cooper' Hot pink, 'Ruby Mound' double flowers deep red, 'Beechcroft' large biscuity pink flowers, 'Mei-Kyo' semi pompon pink flowers. 'Poesie' cream semi-double blooms maturing to white. 'Dixter Orange' bright orange pompon blooms, 'Sweetheart Pink' subtle peachy-coloured double flowers, 'Etna' striking loosely double blooms tangerine/fiery gold, 'Mavis Smith' large magenta flowers, 'Ahlemer Rote' scented single blooms in bold pink red, 'Ruby Raynor' old-gold and bronze flowers.

The winners of the annual Rochfords International Rose Trials have been announced. The 2025 trials comprised of 59 new varieties submitted by amateur and professional rose breeders and was judged by a panel of industry experts. The top prize went to a rose bred by German breeder Kords. Yet to be named, it has clusters of mid-pink, semi-double flowers. Kords also won a gold award for a scented orange rose, plus the award for the best new climber- a variety that has a mass of pinky-orange blooms. 'Arose4all' from Lens Roses, which changes from orange to pink, also won gold. The Peter Seabrook award, introduced this year, is for the most novel rose on trial. This was won by Kordes' 'Lollipop' which was praised for its show of orange and yellow stripes blooms that attracted pollinators. The RHS has agreed to give an Award of Garden Merit to any winning variety that is released commercially.

Drought tolerant plants will be increasingly important for pollinators in coming years according to the RHS. In this year's dry summer some summer flowering favourites, such as ox-eye daisy, rudbeckia and phlox, only reached roughly half their average size, with fewer flowers. Many also bloomed for less time, providing less pollen and nectar to insects. The RHS has recently extended its Plants for Pollinators list to include more than 10,000 plants, with evidence-based choices to benefit all kinds of pollinators. It now recommends salvia, lavender, sea holly, euphorbia, helianthus and marjoram, as well as cherry, spurge and bellflower.

Five good all-round squashes; 1. 'Bonbon' outstanding with a very sweet flavour. 2. 'Crown Prince' It has a good nutty flavour and stores well. 3. 'Sweet Dumpling' sweet, delicious pale orange flesh and each fruit is small enough for one person. 4. 'Red Kuri' its deep orange flesh has an outstanding chestnut flavour and is perfect for risottos and curries. 5 'Honey Bear' bush cultivar with deep green skin and orange flesh with a nutty taste.'

A collection of more than 100 rosemary plants at Great Comp Garden in Kent is one of the latest National Collections named by Plant Heritage. The gardens curator, William Dyson, is an expert on salvias (rosemary has recently been reclassified as *Salvia Rosmarinus*). And Dysons Salvia Nurseries is based at the garden. The collection was originally owed by Simon Charlesworth of Down Derry Nursery which has now closed.

There were some interesting new varieties on show at Fothergill's press event in the summer of 2025. Which were particularly drawn to petunia 'Pendolino', which comes in blue, pink and white, and is said to be the earliest flowering petunia with good tolerance of cold and frost. They also liked *Melinis* 'Silver Queen' - a perennial grass with huge pink plumes of flowers that will appear in its first year. Cabbage 'Crokil' is said to have a mild flavour suitable for eating raw or cooked, and leaves that have a texture of iceberg lettuce. At the Four Oaks Trade Show, which was held in Cheshire in September, there were almost 11 new plants on display. The award for the best new perennial went to *Misanthus* 'Lady in Red', which has red autumn foliage and white flowers. We are currently assessing it in our new plants trial. The best new shrub was *Mahonia* 'Meteor'. The best new plant overall was *Sundaville* 'Topper Red Yellow Eye' - a compact flowering houseplant.

Pests and Diseases

Simple measures to get ahead of an outbreak of Honey Fungus, Honey fungus is common in UK garden, where it causes a potential lethal root rot in a large range of plants. Eradicating it is unrealistic, but you can get ahead of an outbreak by spotting the disease early and slowing its spread through the soil. When a woody plant dies unexpectedly, always check the roots for signs of honey fungus. A whitish layer of fungal tissue forms under the bark of the roots, which prevents them from absorbing water and kills the plant. Dead or dying roots may sprout beige-brown mushrooms in late autumn. Get a diagnosis via the RHS Advice Team www.rhs.org.uk/myadvice Rotting roots can sustain the fungus for years while it waits or grows in search of new roots to infect. You can slow its spread by carefully removing and disposing of as many infected roots as you can. Plants that are stressed or too deeply planted are easily infected, so choose ones that suit your site and plant at the correct depth. Find a list of some plants that are less affected by the disease at www.rhs.org.uk/honeyfungus

Environment

The RHS State of Gardening Report has been produced by Dusty Gedge, co-founder of habitat-mapping firm Gentian who has used AI to assess the state of British gardens. Here are his conclusions. Data doesn't save the planet on its own, but it can tell us where to focus our work. AI can't replace ecologists but used responsibly it has the potential to multiply their impact and automate some of the more tedious parts of the job, allowing them more time in the spaces where they can make the most difference. Britain is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, according to the State of Nature 2023 report. Used well, this AI technology could help us link gardens, parks and wild places into a real living network. If we get this right, by the time of the next RHS State of Gardening Report, we could see fewer paved gardens, more ponds and a growing network of green spaces harnessing their full potential as vital habitat in the fight against species decline. Read the full report at: www.rhs.org.uk/stateofgardening

A Kent nursery, Grow Fruit Trees, donated over 1,000 trees to more than 80 schools in 2024 and community groups across the UK. Individuals and corporations, keen to reduce their carbon footprint, sponsor the trees, all of which are grown at the family run nursery dedicated to conserving Britains rare and heritage fruit tree selections from the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale. They respond to each school's priorities supplying small dwarf trees because they were easier for wheelchair users to reach. For pupils with impaired vision, cultivars such as 'Knobby Russet', with their distinctive lumps and bumps and furry skinned 'Egremont Russet', help engage other senses. Other schools may request apples for juicing, cooking or suitability to the local soil and climate. The UK imports 90% of its fruit and vegetables so the company is one of the few places where you can obtain certain cultivars of apples, pears and plums. They offer 2,400 different apples, from the ancient Roman 'Decio' to the old fashioned 'Violette'. Learn more: www.growfruittrees.co.uk

Microplastics are everywhere - in drinking water, oceans, soil, crops and even in us. Current removal methods use synthetic chemicals with their own environmental implications, but research published by the American Chemical Society shows there may be another way. Okra and fenugreek extracts removed up to 90% of microplastics from ocean water, freshwater and ground water. Both plants contain long molecular chain polysaccharides that capture microplastic particles, causing them to clump together and settle out of the water.

The Association for Public Service Excellence's latest allotment survey shows that they're as popular as ever. It found that 63% of councils have a waiting time of more than 18 months, while 76% have reduced the size of standard allotment plots to create smaller more manageable ones. In keeping with concerns for the environment and access to nature for all, 80% of councils set aside parts of allotment sites for wildlife, while 57% have facilities for people with disabilities, such as raised beds and accessible paths.

Forestry England has opened a new centre for processing tree seeds in a bid to restock forests and create new woodlands that are better suited to our changing climate. The list of species it will be growing has yet to be announced, but they will all be sources of sustainable, high-quality timber in drier, hotter conditions, and play their part in storing carbon, improving air quality and mitigating flooding. The new centre is located in Delamere, Cheshire, next to one of Forestry England's tree nursery sites.