



# ALLOTMENT & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

## NEWSLETTER APRIL/MAY/JUNE 2026

After all the rain that fell in January and February, I am hoping that the floods have subsided on the allotment sites close to the rivers and you have started to plant in readiness for a bumper harvest this year.

Harry Theobald editor.

### **20<sup>th</sup> Summer Show**

The show will be held on Saturday 22nd August 2026. The schedule and entry form are available in the Trading Hut and on our website, [www.salisburyallotments.co.uk](http://www.salisburyallotments.co.uk)

### **Talks**

We will not be having any talks in 2026. We have put details of other talks being arranged by some local gardening clubs and the NVS in our newsletters and on our website.

Stratford-sub-Castle Garden Club Reading Room 7.15pm entry £4, 30<sup>th</sup> April, Ruth Kerr 'A wander without wellies. May 28<sup>th</sup> Gwynne Davies 'History & development of the daffodil', 25<sup>th</sup> June AGM and plant sale.

NVS Talks: 14/04/26 Guy Deakins 'How to commit the Perfect Murder and put the body to good use afterwards', 09/06/26 Leigh Johnstone 'The Benefits of Gardening on Wellbeing'. Talks held at Sherfield English Village Hall SO51 6BR at 7.30pm.

**Non-members welcome - free entry**

### **Outings**

We are hoping to go on three outings in 2026. The first trip is to The Arundel Tulip Festival on Sunday April 12<sup>th</sup>.

The second outing is to RHS Badminton Flower Show on Sunday July 12<sup>th</sup>. Tickets for both trips can be purchased from the Trading Hut on Saturday or Sunday between 9.30am to 12.30pm. We are looking to plan a further trip later in the year.

### **Trading Hut**

Continuing to be a member of the Association makes a lot of sense especially when you compare the prices of our products with local stores in and around Salisbury. Our Shop Manager Keith Lawrence is forever planning and looking at bargains to pass onto our members. Our membership figures are on the rise compared with this time last year and we need current members to help pass on to non-members on their site the advantages and benefits of membership as with more revenue we can get better deals from our suppliers. Just to remind you all to bring along your membership cards which need to be shown before you can purchase any of the products on display.

We trialled opening on a Wednesday evening between 6pm and 8pm back in 2024 to give all members, especially the ones who work, the chance to visit the shop and purchase goods. This was very successful, and we will be continuing this again in 2026 starting on Wednesday April 22<sup>nd</sup>.

This year after a break in 2025 Keith is again selling his pots of sweet peas with an average of 30 to 40 plants per pot. The price is £4.50 per pot and the proceeds go to the Salisbury Hospice which is one of the charities we support.

### **Allotment and Scarecrow Competitions**

The Best Salisbury Allotment and Scarecrow Competitions are going to continue in 2026. These popular competitions are again being run by A&GAS. The Association want to continue to make it a fun event while encouraging experienced gardeners, and those new to growing their own, to share their achievements. Both competitions are free to enter and open to anybody with an allotment on any Salisbury City Council (SCC) site. The Scarecrow Competition is open to children, adults of all ages and groups and the scarecrow must be on a SCC allotment site or displayed on Black Crow Meadow (opposite the allotment shop) to be eligible. Entry is free and the judging of both competitions will take place from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, you can enter either or both competitions. The closing date for entries is 1pm on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2026. Entry forms and the judging criteria are available on the A&GAS website at [www.salisburyallotments.co.uk](http://www.salisburyallotments.co.uk) with paper copies available during opening hours from the A&GAS Trading Hut. Winners will be notified in July, and presentations will be made at the A&GAS Summer Show on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2026. If you require more information, please ask in the Trading Hut or contact Lindsey Bellringer by email at [bellringer77@btinternet.com](mailto:bellringer77@btinternet.com).

## **SNIPPETS**

### Garden Shows for 2026

Harrogate Spring Flower Show 23-26 April. RHS Malvern Spring Festival 7-10 May, RHS Chelsea Flower Show 19-23 May, BBC Gardeners World Live 18-21 June, Blenheim Palace Flower Show 19-21 June, RHS Badminton Flower Show 8-12 July, RHS Sandringham Flower Show 22-26 July, Harrogate Autumn Show 18-20 September, RHS Malvern Autumn Show 25-27 September.

NVS 2026 Events 1-3 May BBC Gardeners' World Spring Fair Beaulieu (Stall with good quality plants for the veg patch and flower borders for sale),

9 May Plant Sale 9am-12pm, Wellow Village Hall SO51 6BR. (Quality value for money plants expertly grown by NVS members)

RHS Super Seeds and RHS Clever Cacti are two new titles in the RHS Plant Fun series. They help 5 - 7-year-olds learn, about plants and the natural world, covering topics such as plant growth, habitats and life cycles in a fun way. Author Susie Williams says "I hope children will love finding out about amazing plants from around the world and be inspired to discover more about nature where they live. RRP £12.99 each from all good bookshops.

Most gardens need tough plants. However, this book discusses planting the structure of a tough garden, with recommendations for trees and shrubs before going into the importance of foliage, fragrance and movement. A directory of 40 tough plant forms the main part of the book. The examples are well chosen, and each is described accurately, and their behaviours and garden requirements discussed in a useful way. The real beauty of this book is that the plants suggested aren't just tough, there are all superb examples for most gardens that just happen to be resilient too. Tough Plants. Published by Welbeck, RRP £16.99, Author Val Bourne.

Author Frances Tophill's book *A Wildflower Year* is a delightful book which 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. Finally, one of the book's great attractions is its simple accessibility. Each page gives a stand-alone insight into a particular wildflower and taken as a whole; it's a beautiful reminder of the bounty of nature. Published by Kyle Books. RRP £18.99

As the dark clouds of war on the horizon drew closer in 1930s, a handful of celebrated gardeners were preoccupied with something dramatically different: the fate of England's old roses. In a world of their own, unbothered by the political turmoil around them, Vita Sackville-West, Constance Spry and others obsessed over antique flowers in heady, decadent days before the outbreak of war. As well as sometimes heartbreakingly personal insights into these gardeners' lives, the author expertly conjures up the rare and beguiling charm of blooms that were nearly lost to history. Author Janelle McCulloch. Published by Pimpernel Press. RRP £25

If you're among the 557k following Instagram's @thebeardedplantaholic, Jonny Balchandani's jungle-like home and infectious enthusiasm will be familiar. Even if not, this book will hook you with his honest, practical advice on houseplants as he shares everything he's learned so we can avoid common pitfalls and 'absolute nonsense care' tips on plant labels. It's cleverly structured into chapters that guide you from Level 1: Plant Noob through to level 6: Plant Curator, and eventually into the lofty realm of Jungle Boss. Jonny helps you choose the right plants for your lifestyle. You're Overwatering It! Published by Ebury Press, RRP £25

If your tomatoes ever have hard white centres this is caused by stress, such as heat, excessive sun exposure, irregular watering or low potassium levels. Try to keep the greenhouse ventilated, shade the glass with netting or shade paint, and feed and water regularly. The Which Magazine 'Best Buy' Quadro which has a tank connected to wicks in the tomato pot, is useful as it keeps the compost moist and avoids other problems, such as blossom end rot and fruit splitting too.

1.191kg weight of grapes from 475 vines of 'Phonix' and 225 vines off of 'Orion' cultivars grown at RHS Garden Wisley and pressed to make 900 bottles of RHS sparkling wine.

All RHS members are welcome to join this year's AGM at 6pm on 1 July 2026 in the Lindly Hall, at RHS Headquarters on Vincent Square, London. Find out more at [www.rhs.org.uk/agm](http://www.rhs.org.uk/agm)

## **Products**

A garden gnome gone walkabout might not grab your attention but repair a wrecked shed or replacing a stolen lawnmower can make a big dent in your wallet. You might assume that your home insurer will cover your garden as it would in your home, but *Which?* Money's analysis of 75 policies has found that isn't always the case. Almost all (1%) of policies covered theft and damage to contents in the open and in outbuildings. But some insurers will require evidence of forced entry and insist anything

that could have been locked up was. Indoor items left outside may be excluded, as might outdoor furniture. The value of the item could also prove a stumbling block. For very cheap items, you could find the excess on your insurance (what you must pay towards a claim) makes it pointless to claim – keep this in mind when selecting the voluntary excess when buying insurance. On the other hand, items worth over a certain amount (often £1,000) must be declared when taking out the insurance or they aren't covered. Also check the limits imposed by insurers. While 95% of insurers offer 'garden cover'. For example, insurance for trees and plants – the maximum value you can claim for varies, from an unlimited sum, down to £250. Sometimes plants won't be covered unless they are stolen, and often potted plants aren't covered at all. When it comes to damage caused by storms and floods, cover wasn't just lacking it was almost entirely absent. They found just one policy, **M&S Premium** that would pay out for fences, gates and hedges damaged by storms and floods. So double check that the policy you buy is the right one for your needs

### Which Best Buys and recommended

**Spring Flowering Shrubs on test:** *Ribes odoratum* yellow, *Osmanthus delavayi* white, *Forsythia x intermedia* 'Lynwood Variety' yellow, *Ribes sanguineum* red, *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* 'Mariesil' white, *Ceanothus* 'Cynthia Posten' blue, *Oemieria cerasiformis* white, *Choisya ternate* white, *Forsythia x intermedia* 'Spectabilis' yellow, *Berberis darwinii* orange, *Viburnum x caricephalum* white, *Amelanchier lamarckii* white.

**Choosing the right lawnmower:** Stihl has recalled its RMA 235 lawnmower following the discovery that the blades on some models continue to move after the operator control has been released, leading to a risk of injury. More information and the serial numbers affected can be found at [which.co.uk/Stihl-rma-235](http://which.co.uk/Stihl-rma-235).

**Best buy and recommended Wellington Boots on test:** Le Chateau, and Barbour. Both have product guarantees or warranties and return policies. Best value brands were Joules and Marks & Spencer.

**Best buy and recommended composts for sowing seeds on test:** Fertile Fiber Original Multipurpose Compost, Coco & Coir Little Big Compost All Purpose, Fertile Fibre Original Seed Compost, Moorland Gold Seed & Cutting Compost. Westland John Innes Peat Free Seed Sowing Compost. Thompson & Morgan incredcoir All-purpose Compost. Melcourt SylvaGrow Seed Compost, You Garden Multi-Purpose Compost. (DO NOT BUY) Levington Peat Free Seed & Cutting Compost with added John Innes, Miracle-Gro Peat Free Premium All Purpose Compost.

**Best buy and recommended compost for patio pots on test:** Fertile Fiber Original Multipurpose Compost, Melcourt SylvaGrow Multi-purpose. Melcourt Sylvagrow Tub & Basket, Easy Grow Peat-Free Compost, Thompson & Morgan incredipeatfree, Treasure Gardening Wonderfuel Stage 2, (DO NOT BUY) Miracle-Gro Peat Free Premium Moisture Control Compost for Pots and Baskets, Wickes Peat free Multi-purpose Compost, PlantGrow Multi-purpose Compost.

**Best buy and recommended compost for raising young plants.** Melcourt SylvaGrow Seed Compost, Fertile Fire Original Multipurpose Compost, Thompson & Morgan Incredipeatfree. Melcourt SylvaGrow Multipurpose Compost, Miracle-Gro Peat Free Premium Seeds, Plugs & Young Plants Compost, Thompson & Morgan Incredcoir All-purpose Compost, Eazy Grow Peat Free Compost, Westland John Innes Peat Free No1 Young Plant Compost. (DO NOT BUY) Levington Peat Free Seed & Cutting Compost with added John Innes, PlantGrow Multi-purpose Compost, Harmony Gardens Multipurpose Compost.

**Herbs for pots on test:** *Origanum vulgare* 'Aureum', *Origanum vulgare* 'Compactum', *Chamaemelum nobile*, *Thymus serpyllum* 'Pink Chintz', *Satureja montana*, *Mentha requienii*, Basil 'Pluto', Basil 'Queen of Sheba'.

**Best buy Robot Mowers on test:** Ecovacs O800 RTK

**Best buy and recommendations Jacket Potatoes on test:** 'Java', 'Sherman', 'Cara', 'Picasso', 'Damask', 'Valor', 'Orla', 'Rosegarden'.

**Best buy and recommended Alstroemeria on test:** 'Inca Holland', Orange, 'Inca Marmalade', Orange/yellow, 'Inca Ruby', pinky red, 'Indian Summer', Orange, Yellow, 'Summer Chic', pink, purple, 'Duc d'Anjou Nicolas', yellow/peach, 'Summer Breeze'

**Best buy and recommended Tomatoes for Salads on test:** 'Akron' F1, 'Bauna' F1, 'Bodyguard' F1, 'Lemonita' F1, 'Marglobe', 'Rose Crush' F1, 'Diplom' F1, 'Maisey' F1, 'Pannovy' F1, 'Rose de Berne'. 'Y Ddraig Goch' (Red Dragon) F1.

### Pests and Diseases

Cat repellents, the most humane ways to dissuade felines from making a mess in your garden. No method was foolproof, and most had limited success, but these are the best suggestions. 1. Dogs OVERALL SCORE 80%, 2. Chicken Wire OVERALL SCORE 77%, 3. Barrier to cover young plants OVERALL SCORE 66%, 4. Prickly Stems OVERALL SCORE 63%, 5. Motion-Activated sprinkler / Water Pistol OVERALL SCORE 54%/56%, 6. Ultrasonic Cat Deterrent OVERALL SCORE 46%, 7. Shooing OVERALL SCORE 44

Researchers have discovered that apple sauce can be used to attract vine weevils. Reporting in *The Journal of Applied Entomology*, the research group used a range of doses to test which was most attractive to the insects in laboratory conditions. The scientists also used apple sauce in baited refuges in a greenhouse and monitored the numbers of vine weevils in the baited stations versus non-baited ones. A spokesperson from the Natural Resources Institute at the University of Greenwich said 'this work could lead to the development of an attractive bait for traps to monitor and control vine weevil'

## Environment.

Other greenhouse gases are available, but the main cause of climate change is the CO<sub>2</sub> released by burning fossil fuels such as coal and gas. But although too much CO<sub>2</sub> is certainly a problem, it's not all bad news from the plant perspective. That's because plants are essentially made of air - all the carbon in plants comes from CO<sub>2</sub> fixed by photosynthesis. So far as plants are concerned, CO<sub>2</sub> is basically food, which means that more CO<sub>2</sub> should allow them to grow faster. Knowing the answer is crucial, because this 'CO<sub>2</sub>-fertilisation effect' is one of the factors in calculations of the future likely course of climate change. If more CO<sub>2</sub> means that trees grow faster, that will slow the rate of increase of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, potentially putting a (small) break on global climate change. It certainly looks as though more CO<sub>2</sub> has enabled trees to grow bigger - maybe by around 10% over the past 50 years. But it's extremely hard to be sure, because lots of other things influence tree growth in the real world, so the only way to be certain is to do an experiment. This is where life starts to get complicated, because what we really want to know is whether more CO<sub>2</sub> will make forests full of big, mature trees grow faster, and experimenting on big trees is difficult. It's easy to study seedlings or saplings in short-term lab experiments, but that doesn't necessarily tell us how large trees will behave in the long term. In fact, there are only two really big experiments looking at the effect of elevated CO<sub>2</sub> on mature woodland. One looks at an old eucalyptus forest in Australia, and the other is in Staffordshire. Run by the University of Birmingham's Institute of Forest Research (BIFoR). The BIFoR experiment bathes 30-metre-diameter plots of old oak forest in elevated CO<sub>2</sub> levels. The experiment is planned to run for 10 years, or longer if the money can be found. But the results from the first seven years are now available, and the good news is that the 25-metre-tall, 175-year-old oaks increased their rate of photosynthesis by up to a third in response to the CO<sub>2</sub> levels we expect by about 2050. This kind of increase in the rate of photosynthesis in response to elevated CO<sub>2</sub> is quite common, but the increase is short lived, often because something else limits the rate, such as a shortage of nitrogen. But so far, BIFoR's oaks show no sign of this happening, and their leaves still contain plenty of nitrogen. In the Australian eucalyptus experiment, photosynthesis also increased, by around a fifth, but the trees didn't grow faster. BIFoR's oaks are different, so far at least: more CO<sub>2</sub> means more leaves, more roots and more wood. So how are they doing this without the soil and making better use of the nitrogen they already have by managing to extract more from their leaves before they fall in autumn. Trees soaking up more CO<sub>2</sub> and storing it in wood is certainly good news but doesn't count for much if we keep chopping them down. But it is a ray of hope, if we protect existing forests and encourage more trees to grow especially in the tropics. One of the few places that planting trees does make sense is in the garden. If only because you generally want a specific tree that's very unlikely to turn up on its own. In fact, the ability of trees to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, the impact on local climate, and value for wildlife mean that planting a tree is just about the best thing you can do for the environment.

In November, the government announced that a new national forest is to be created in the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor as part of its pledge to plant millions of trees in three new national forests. The plan is to integrate nature recovery and green spaces alongside housing, jobs and infrastructure.

All the plants on sale at Royal Botanical Gardens Kew shops are now grown in peat-free compost helping to support a horticultural sector that safeguards ecosystems, biodiversity and contributes to a more sustainable future.

Researchers at Nottingham and Kansas universities have studied whether soil microbes can help plants in a drought. Microbes were taken from soils that have been dry in the past and grown with native prairie grasses and maize in drought conditions. The grasses fared much better with the microbes, but the maize did not benefit.

## Plants

The Atlas of Deadly Plants by Jane Perrone and published by Greenfinch takes readers on a fascinating world tour of 50 dangerous plants and fungi which have intrigued and beguiled people throughout history. The new book also features stunning artwork by illustrator Alice Smith. We would not dream of drinking an unnamed liquid in an unlabelled bottle - and for the same reason it's inadvisable to eat an unfamiliar plant. One of the key things Jane has learned through research and writing the book is that many poisoning cases start with a forager mistaking a plant - any part - for wild garlic. One of the deadliest plants in the UK is Lilly of the Valley. All parts are toxic, the roots most of all, though children are often tempted by the shiny red berries. It was one of Queen Elizabeth II's favourite flowers featuring in her Coronation bouquet and Catherine Middleton's wedding bouquet. Its assigned meaning in the language of flowers invented by the Victorians where it signifies a return to happiness. In Helston in Cornwall every 8<sup>th</sup> May, where lily of the valley is a key symbol of an ancient celebration known as Furry Day - when young men and women wear the flowers on their chest as they dance through the streets to welcome in spring. The flowers also became symbolic in the Christian religion, stemming from the idea that lily of the valley sprang up where Mary's tears dropped on the ground at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ hence its common name Our Lady's tears.

New Plants with their star ratings (5 being the best) 4\* Cosmos Atrosanguineus 'CHERRY CHOCOLATE'. 5\* Rose 'METEOR', 5\* Sorbaria Sorbifolia, 'CRIMSON FEATHERS', 5\* Sweet Pea 'GRANDAD MYERS', 5\* Lavatera 'LILIA TWIRL', 4\* Escallonia 'SHOWSTOPPER', 4\* Allium 'BUBBLE BATH', 4\* Sedum Spurius 'SPOT ON DEEP ROSE', 4\* Rose 'SCENTIFALL LEMON'.

A new rose has been named for the Princess of Wales, to highlight the importance that spending time outdoors plays in supporting our, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing.' Catherine's Rose ' - a pink floribunda bred by Harkness Roses - is priced at £29.99, and £5 from the sale of each plant will go to the Royal Marsden Cancer Charity. The charity aims to establish a unique training programme for clinical teams across the country to help patients needing intensive support to live well with cancer.

Researchers at the John Innes Centre have used gene editing to increase the production of pro-vitamin D3 - precursor to vitamin D - in fruit and leaves of tomato plants. The leaves could be used to make a vegan supplement, while the tomatoes are now part of the study to evaluate whether consuming these biofortified tomatoes will boost vitamin D levels in 76 UK volunteers during the winter month. Vitamin D is essential in maintaining bone health and immune function, with the government recommending that everyone take a 10mg supplement between October and March.

Visitors voted for their favourite begonia varieties at the Fleuroselect Begonia trial at RHS Hyde Hall last summer. Almost 150 varieties were on show, with some in the ground and others in pots. The most popular in a bed was 'On Top Sun Glow', which has large picotee flowers in golden yellow and rich red tones. Second prize went to 'I'Conia Portofino Dark Orange', and 'Nonstop Rose Picotee' took third place. The favourite varieties for pots were 'Bossa Nova White', 'Starshine Appleblossom' and 'Groovy Salmon Bicolour'

Some new plant best buys for 2026: Festuca Glauca 'SUNRISE' an eye-catching perennial grass. Dahlia 'JONATHAN BUCKLEY', its gorgeous colours are a fusion of pinks, creams and apricot with semi-double flowers, perfect for picking and pollinators.

Best dahlias for pots are 'Dahlegria Bicolore' (red and yellow), 'Excentrique' (a rich pink), and 'Pride One' (red). All have single flowers, so pollinators love them.

Two new unusual varieties are on sale this year. They are tomato 'Meltaway' described as virtually skinless and seedless. The cherry tomato was bred by Thompson & Morgan. The texture is soft and gummy and tastes pure and sweet. The other new plant from Suttons is petunia 'Allegra' F1 that can grow up to 1.5m tall with large double flowers measuring up to 12cm across which can be harvested for cut flowers.

Evergreen which owns the Miracle-Gro and Levington brands has gifted the final 31.4 hectares of peatland at Hatfield Moors to Natural England. This gives the conservation body full ownership and control over the restoration of the site. Forming part of the Humberhead Peatlands, the land is the largest area of raised bog wilderness in lowland Britain Evergreen ceased peat extraction at the site in 2004 and transitioned its Miracle-Gro range to fully peat-free in 2023. This was supported by a £7m investment in peat-free development

## **Wildlife**

Come the spring, despite their size, wrens are one of the loudest songbirds in our gardens. They also have a complex sound - a flurry of notes, rattles and trills. You may not always see the wrens in your garden, but you can certainly hear them; It's unusual for them to use feeders - they are most likely to be pecking around under plants, in borders and possibly around under flower pots, picking up any remaining seed heads and hopeful they'll find a spider or small insect. If you are keen to attract wrens to your garden, ensure you have lots of cover - large leaved shrubs and climbers offering shelter whilst they search for food. A nearby woodpile will also be a draw, attracting the small invertebrates which wrens like to eat. They'll use nest boxes as well, both to roost and breed.

Bees are just vegetarian wasps. And as vegetarian and vegan readers will know, if you switch from foods containing meat, you need to take a little more care to make sure your diet contains all the nutrients your body needs. In fact, in switching from a carnivorous wasp diet, bees have a problem that you don't have - and it concerns sodium. All animals including us, need quite a lot of sodium, for a long list of metabolic uses. For example, sodium is the main cation (positively charged ion) in bodily fluids and is essential for maintaining blood volume, water balance, cell membrane, acid base balance and nerve conduction. It's generally assumed that needing lots of sodium is a legacy of the remote marine ancestry of all animal life. These days, of course, it's unusual for humans to be short of sodium, and in fact some people worry about consuming too much. But here's the problem: plants don't have much use for sodium and therefore don't contain enough sodium, and vertebrate herbivores have evolved a long list of behaviours designed to increase their sodium consumption. These include the use of dry or wet 'salt licks', drinking of sea water (if available), eating soil and a preference for eating sodium-rich aquatic plants. Insects, faced with the same problem, often display 'puddling' behaviour - drinking from puddles of stagnant water, moist soil, carrion or even animal poo. And the flies and other insects that bother you while you're gardening in the summer, what are they after? Well, very often they're after your tears or sweat - both rich in sodium. In the wild, bees have often been reported to drink the tears of everything from deer to crocodiles, and one large family of bees is commonly known as 'sweat bees.' Experiments where salt has been deliberately manipulated tell the same story. Researchers who have watered plants with salty water have found increased levels of creatures eating them, while honeybees, offered water or salt solution to drink, much prefer salty

water. But probably the most revealing experiment was carried out a few years ago by US researchers in a meadow in Vermont. Fake 'nectar' containing just sugar, or sugar plus salt, was carefully applied with a tiny pipette to the flowers of *Achillea millefolium* (yarrow), *Echinacea purpurea*, *Geranium sanguineum*, *Monarda didyma* and *Penstemon difitalis*. The results were clear; across all five species of plant, twice as many bees, and twice as many species bees, visited the flowers whose nectar had been spiked with salt. Much of this research is recent, and researchers that work on pollination are only just starting to think about what it all means. Specifically, is there any evidence that plants naturally enhance their nectar's sodium content to compete for or attract pollinators? This is a difficult question to study because nectar naturally varies in many other ways, including sugar and amino-acid content. However, sodium content of nectar in different species varies a lot so, combined with the obvious preference of pollinators for sodium-enriched nectar, it seems to be a distinct possibility. It's not just about nectar, though. Developing bees need the protein and other nutrients provided by pollen, and foraging bees are known to select pollen with nutrient contents. But has selection by pollen-collecting insects encouraged plants to increase the sodium content of their pollen? This is another unanswered question, but the sodium content of pollen is particularly variable, so again it is possible. Are there any lessons here for gardeners? You probably already provide water for wildlife, in the form of a pond or a bird bath. A shallow dish of water with a few pebbles in it will also appeal to thirsty pollinators, and there's no harm seeing if a salty version of that attracts any customers. Mind you don't be too surprised if it does not make a difference. More than two million tons of salt are spread onto UK roads every winter, and the world is probably saltier now than it has ever been, so your local wildlife may already have enough sodium. But one thing is for sure: if you've a soft spot for salted caramel fudge, there are plenty of pollinators in your garden that share your fondness.

As well as the RSPB Garden Birdwatch which you may have completed in January, why not take part in the year - round Garden Birdwatch survey, run by the British Trust for Ornithology? You'll be asked to make a list of the different breeds of birds you see in your garden each week, and report that to the BTO online, Find out more at [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

A pair of Hoopes has raised three chicks in farmland in Leicestershire and Rutland, according to the independent body, the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Hoopoes originate from southern Europe and have bred sporadically in the UK for around 200 years but have been absent as a breeding species since 1996.

Three rare mole fortresses have been found at RHS Garden Bridgewater near Manchester, giving visitors a rare glimpse into the lives of one of nature's most secretive engineers. Two of these unusual structures, which were recently discovered by RHS horticulturalist can be found in the Worsley Welcome Garden. Fortresses are made by both female and male moles and outside of the breeding season when females may rear their young inside, each provides refuge to just one adult. Here are some Mole facts: **1.** Adult moles live alone in a network of tunnels, with territory spanning at least 400sq m - the equivalent of two tennis courts. **2.** Moles eat worms as well as larvae such as chaffer grubs and leatherjackets. **3.** A mole can dig 4.5m of deep tunnel per day and much more at the surface. **4.** The moles velvety coat helps it slip through soil. **5.** An extra bone in each hand, called the radial sesamoid, makes for more efficient digging and pushing of soil. **6.** Females have a rare, masculinised biology, producing high levels of testosterone, making them as aggressively territorial as the males.

## **Gardens**

18 new RHS Partner Gardens join the scheme in 2025 13 are in the UK and they are as follows: **1.** Caerau Gardens, North Wales, **2.** Cusworth Hall Walled Garden, South Yorkshire. **3.** East Lambrook Manor Garden, Somerset. **4.** Eden Project, Cornwall. **5.** Glamis Castle and Gardens, Scotland. **6.** Goddards, North Yorkshire. **7.** The Laskett Garden, Hertfordshire. **8.** Merriments Garden, East Sussex. **9.** One Garden, Brighton Sussex. **10.** Raby Castle, Park and Gardens, County Durham. **11.** Sefton Park Palm House, Merseyside. **12.** Walmer Castle and Gardens, Kent. **13.** York Gate Garden, West Yorkshire.

From 9 May, Kew Gardens will host Henry Moore: Monumental Nature - an exhibition that will look at how the sculptor was inspired by nature. Thirty of his largest bronzes will be positioned around the gardens and more than 90 of his other works, including drawings, prints and carvings will be shown in the Shirley Sherwood gallery

Oriental Eden, inspired by Eden Project Cornwall, has opened in Qingdao, China. The site covers 200 acres of environmentally damaged land originally used for salt production and prawn breeding. There are five other Eden locations in the pipeline as part of the project's mission to inspire positive action for the planet.

Conservation Charity Plan Heritage will have its first ever garden at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show. It will feature 'living libraries' of plants already safeguarded by National Plant Collections, alongside those still in need of a missing collector.

The Heritage Seed Library is celebrating its 50th anniversary by growing heritage seeds in a number of gardens open to the public. You can see a range of unusual varieties at Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens, Down House, Hampton Court Palace, Kenilworth Castle, National Botanical Garden of Wales, Museum Wales, and Nant-y-Bedd among others. Visit [www.gardenorganic.org.uk](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk) for more details.