



# ALLOTMENT & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

## NEWSLETTER - APRIL/MAY/JUNE 2022

This time last year I was talking about the second lockdown on my birthday in March but this year with all restrictions lifted my wife and I will be able to go for a nice meal.

So far in the Trading Hut we have been very busy and although we still have seed potatoes, onions, shallots, and garlic they are selling very quickly so don't miss out and pay us a visit.

I have given up two of my three allotments on the London Road site this year as I am more involved with the relocation of the allotment Trading Hut to Fisherton Farm allotment site and helping to open a Dementia Hub and Day Centre in Scots Lane for Alzheimers Support where I am a trustee.

I am hoping that people who took up allotments and started growing veg in their garden will continue this year and others will take up the challenge and get allotments as inflation rises, with energy and oil prices increasing.

Harry Theobald editor.

### 16<sup>th</sup> Summer Horticultural Show

The show will be held on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August. The schedule is now available in the Trading Hut and on the website.

### Talks

We will not be having any talks this spring/summer. We have put details of other talks being arranged by some local gardening clubs on the website [salisburyallotments.co.uk](http://salisburyallotments.co.uk) and face book.

### Outings.

We are hoping to go on three outings in 2022. The first trip is to the Arundel Castle Tulip Festival on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April. The ticket prices are £28 per member and £28 for 1 quest and £33 each for non-members. The price includes coach travel, entrance to Castle and Gardens and the driver's gratuity. The coach will leave from Harnham Cricket Ground at 8am and the Coach Station at 8.15am. Leaving Arundel at 4pm. Tickets can be purchased from the Trading Hut on Saturday or Sunday between 9.30am to 12.30pm.

The second is to Bicton Park Botanical Gardens on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July. Prices to follow nearer the date. The third is yet to be decided but will be in September.

### SNIPPETS

The Tower of London will be encircled by millions of flowers this summer as part of the Queen's Platinum jubilee celebrations. A total of 20 million carefully selected seeds will be sown in the Tower's famous moat creating a sea of flowers, which will evolve from June to September, changing colours and patterns throughout the summer. With planting scheme designed to attract bees, pollinators and seed-eating birds, the display will provide a biodiverse space to support wildlife Entitled Superbloom, it will be the first stage of a permanent transformation of the famous 14,000 sqm moat into a new natural landscape in the heart of the City of London. Superbloom will open to the public from June 2022. Visit [www.superbloom.hrp.org.uk](http://www.superbloom.hrp.org.uk)

Potting compost used to grow cannabis plants at an illegal factory in a Wiltshire town has been donated to local gardening and allotment clubs. Police raided the factory in January, where three floors of a disused storage facility in Westbury were being used to grow plants under lights, all powered by cables from a local pylon. In total 121 bags of compost were distributed to various local groups, including town and parish councils, gardening and allotment clubs and schools. Around 340kg of food and other items found at the site were donated to the Warminster Food Bank.

Although ravaged by fungus the original 'Bramley' apple tree in Nottinghamshire is still valiantly clinging to life. After 200 years, the end, possibly just a few years away, is inevitable after the spread of honey fungus emaciated half its root system, causing substantial dieback of branches, the rate quickening in recent years. Even so it still manages to produce a few new leaves and small crops of the eponymous fruit, that have been the mainstay of the UK culinary apple industry since Edwardian times. Recent scientific work includes studying its genome, aspects of fruit development and why its apples store so well. Nursery stock from clonal cuttings taken from the tree are already well established in the trade thanks to work undertaken in the 1990s. Clonal tissue has also been deep frozen for the future. **The Bramley Rise To Greatness: 1809-1813** raised by Miss Mary Anne Brailsford of Church Street, Southwell. **1856** - house and garden owned by local butcher Matthew Bramley.

**1865** - 'Bramley's Seedling' introduced by nurseryman Henry Merryweather. **1883** - exhibited and promoted at RHS Fruit Congress. **1890** - first Bramley planted commercially in Kent. **1944** - two million trees grown in English and Welsh orchards.

For the first time in 116 years, a rare cycad at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin has coned cultivated plants of Wood's cycad *Encephalartos woodii* growing today came from a single clump discovered by John Medley Wood in 1895. Sadly, it is now extinct in its native KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. Cones should remain until March. For more info visit: [www.botanicgardens.ie](http://www.botanicgardens.ie)

The finals of the Britain in Bloom competition are to return following a two-year hiatus, with 46 community gardening groups looking to wow judges with their efforts to improve their local area this summer. All will compete in one of eight categories and finalists will be judged according to updated criteria that will help them to consider sustainability issues. Results and winners will be announced in October. For more info visit [www.rhs.org.uk/get-involved/community-gardening](http://www.rhs.org.uk/get-involved/community-gardening)

A comprehensive guide on garden plants that are potentially harmful to both humans and pets has been published online by the Horticultural Trades Association. Working with plant toxicologists and the Veterinary Poisons Information Service, the *Guide to Potentially Harmful Plants* presents information on 222 genera, including plants grown for food and edible fruit, an increase from 114 for the last edition in 2000. The new version includes risks to pets, including dogs, cats, rabbits, rodents, tortoises, caged birds and poultry, categorising them as A, B or C according to the severity of the hazard. Only poison ivy, or Toxicodendron, is listed in category A. Category B has 39 genera, including some with large numbers of species, such as euphorbia and solanum. Category C, the largest, has 130 genera. The increase in listings reflects a significant number of cases and poisoning statistics published since the last review. The Guide is an industry standard reference outlining the risks associated with a small number of plants grown in gardens and as houseplants.

The National Trust is encouraging people to join in with its Blossom Watch Day on 23<sup>rd</sup> April and share images of native flowering trees on social media using the hashtag #BlossomWatch. The event emulates the Japanese celebration of *hanami* (flower viewing), where people relish the sight of its famous cherry (Sakura) trees in blossom.

A new exhibition is set to explore the social, and cultural influence of the nation's favourite flower. *Wild & Cultivated: Fashioning the Rose* is the Garden Museum's spring-summer exhibition and will explore the use of roses in fashion from the Victorian era to today, with designs from Alexander McQueen, Ashish and Comme des Garçons, among other historic and modern collections. supported by David Austin Roses. The exhibition at the museum's converted church of St Mary-at-Lambeth, London is a collaboration between guest curator Amy de la Haye and famed set designer Simon Costin. The event runs from March 16 to June 19. For more info visit [www.gardenmuseum.org.uk](http://www.gardenmuseum.org.uk)

The Strawberry tree *Arbutus unedo*, could have been introduced to Ireland by Neolithic copper miners, and is not native to the island, a new study has indicated. Long considered a native in Southwest Ireland the shapely evergreen tree, popular in gardens for its flowers and fruit is not found native elsewhere in the UK, but mainly found around the Mediterranean Sea and the Iberian Peninsula. A recent genetic study by researchers at the National University of Ireland, Galway, suggests that it could have been introduced to Ireland directly by expert workers from northern Spain and planted around a mine at Ross Island on Lough Leane in County Kerry, from where it spread as the early copper industry expanded.

## **Gardens**

The National Trust is behind a plan to create a bold new sky park in Manchester and breathe new life into the city's industrial past. Works about to get under way on the £1.8million project, on a Victorian viaduct in the Castlefield area, with the first phase hopefully being completed by July. The Trust is aiming to turn the imposing 330m steel viaduct, built in 1892, into a temporary park in the sky and create a meeting place to benefit people and nature that celebrates the industrial heritage of Castlefield. Originally built to carry heavy rail traffic in and out of the Great Northern Warehouse, the station closed in 1969. Since then, it has stood unused. Trees, flowers, and shrubs will be planted to soften the grey steel work of the industrial structure to help attract wildlife.

A multi-million-pound, three-year project to transform the garden at Chatsworth, Derbyshire, one of the UK's most iconic stately homes and gardens, has reached fruition. More than 3000,000 plants, including hundreds of trees, were planted across a previously underdeveloped 15-acre area now known as 'Arcadia'. Major works also saw a further 10 acres revamped, including a remodelling of the famous Rock Garden and new Maze Borders by landscape architect and garden designer Tom Stuart-Smith. Designer Dan Pearson refreshed the Ravine, Trout Stream and Jack Pond. The overall plan for Arcadia saw 15-acres cleared for tree planting and four meadow-like glades connected by woodland walks. A major new art installation called 'Natural Course' has been created by Derbyshire artist Laura Ellen Bacon using more than 100 tonnes of local stone to build a monumental sculptural centrepiece. For more info visit: [www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org)

A decommissioned oil rig is to be transformed into a public art installation, complete with gardens. From this summer the enormous 35m tall structure, towering over surrounding buildings, will have pride of place on the seafront at popular Somerset

resort Weston-Super-Mare. Visitors will be able to travel up and inside, passing behind a 12m waterfall, experience unpredictable displays of British weather, from rainfall to a playful collection from clouds. Opening for around two months, the free-to-visit installation, brought to life by Leeds based creative studio NEWSUBSTANCE, supported by North Somerset Council, will feature places to meet and be a fun and educational space focussing on weather, climate change and green technologies. Afterwards all trees and plants used will become part of a legacy garden in town. For more info visit [www.unboxed2022.uk](http://www.unboxed2022.uk)

A project to transform a prestigious London square into a vibrant, modern, social hub is edging nearer to reality. The plan for Mayfair's Grosvenor Square, underpinned by the principles of biodiversity, accessibility, and high standards of execution, will see the 2.5ha public space embrace the original 18<sup>th</sup> century design of oval turf, this time including wildflowers. Features will include a shaded garden with biodiverse planting and floral entrances, all providing wildlife habitats. Waterfall canopies, wetlands and channels will capture and store rainwater for reuse, while owners Grosvenor Britain and Ireland plan to deliver and operate the scheme as carbon neutral. New spaces for play and social activity and an education centre are also planned. To maintain the high standards of horticulture, the square will have a dedicated gardener with a workshop for demonstrations. A green-roofed, purpose-built building will stage themed events, especially for schools. To view the scheme, visit [www.grosvenorsquare.org/designs-2/submitted-designs](http://www.grosvenorsquare.org/designs-2/submitted-designs)

A new garden filled with unusual trees, shrubs and plants opens this week at Exbury Gardens, near Southampton. Five years in the making, The Connoisseur's Garden features an expertly planted glade in the 200-acre woodland garden filled with a selection of plants that perform throughout the year, starting with a large collection of camellias. Other feature plants include magnolias, rare rhododendrons such as *R. hemsleyanum*, summer flowering, white bloomed *Maackia amurensis*, evergreen *Eucryphia intermedia* and autumn colour with crab apples, including red-berried malus 'Laura' and the species *M. mandshurica*, with pale fruit, along with Chinese wonder tree *Idesia polycarpa* 'The Connoisseur's Garden' is a self-contained area full of rare and unusual trees and shrubs, predominantly summer flowering but of interest all year round and connected by grass paths with seating to soak up the atmosphere. For more info visit: [www.exbury.co.uk](http://www.exbury.co.uk)

A new 55m long living artwork exploring the role of pollinators will bloom at the Eden Project, in Cornwall, from June. Created by Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, the 'Pollinator Pathway' planting is part of Eden's 'Create a Buzz' programme that tells the story of UK native pollinators, their vital role, their current plight, and their restoration. At the same time a new pathway in the Mediterranean Biome's South Africa Garden has created a stunning new vista for visitors, helping showcase the biodiversity of South Africa's Southwest Cape. For more info visit [www.edenproject.com](http://www.edenproject.com)

Visitors will soon be able to see a collection of historic camellias - one of which is thought to date back to 1792, making it one of the oldest in the west. The derelict Camellia House at Wentworth Woodhouse in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, is being restored and opened as a teahouse later this year allowing visitors to get up close to the 19 varieties growing there.

### **Products & Services**

With sales of new petrol and diesel cars set to be banned in the UK by 2030, could petrol-powered gardening tools be next? Unlike cars, petrol-powered gardening machines don't have catalytic converters to reduce the number of pollutants that enter the atmosphere. This is likely due to the costs involved in installing them and how heavy they would make the machines. Plus, current regulations in the UK aren't as strict for garden tools as they are for cars. With the days of petrol power looking increasingly limited, many garden machinery manufacturers now appear to be focussing their attention on cordless tools. Cordless tools produce zero emissions and are quieter, offering a better option for the environment and our health. Plus, as proved when tested at *Which Gardening*, they're now rivalling and, in some cases, outperforming their petrol-powered rivals.

The UK's first carbon-neutral spuds are being sold at Waitrose. Called Root Zero, they're grown using sustainable methods to remove carbon dioxide, create healthy soils and increase local biodiversity. To gain carbon-neutral status, growers measured their carbon footprint, including the power used to grow, store, and transport them.

When you open a packet of seeds brought from a UK supplier, it's easy to assume they were harvested from plants grown here. Well-known suppliers, such as Mr Fothergill's and Kings Seeds, have historically collected seeds in areas such as Suffolk and Essex, where summers are warm and dry, providing ideal conditions for producing good quality seed. However, to meet demand, most seed sold in the UK is now grown in parts of the world where costs are lower, and the climate is even better for harvesting. These include countries in Africa and South America, as well as China and India. Multinational seed companies also supply smaller UK-based firms. These include names such as Burpee, Hazera and Tozer. Of course, seed harvested in the UK is still available to buy. Smaller suppliers, such as Higgedy Garden and Pennard Plants offer a range of UK grown seeds. Plant societies such as the Hardy Plant Society, also distribute UK harvested seeds to their members.

**Which Best Buys: Best buy spades and forks: Burgon & Ball Square Digging Spade, GoodHome Durum Spade, Spear & Jackson Neverbend Digging Fork, Spear & Jackson Select Stainless Steel Digging Fork.**

**Best buy hedge trimmers: Makita DUH502Z, Stihl HAS 66 Set**

**Best buys and recommended Dahlias from seed on test:** 'Bishop's Children', 'Cactus Hybrids, Double Mixed', 'Redskin', 'Cactus Mix', 'Giant Decorative Hybrids', 'Yankee Doodle Dandy'.

**Best buy and recommended compost for sowing seeds on test:** Fertile Fibre Seed Compost, B&Q Verve Seed & Cutting Compost, Homebase Multi-Purpose Compost, Westland John Innes Seed Sowing Compost.

**Best buy Compost for raising young plants on test:** Homebase Multi-Purpose Compost, B&Q Goodhome Enriched Multi-Purpose Compost.

**Best buy and recommended Plastic-Free Labels on test:** Alitags A6 aluminium labels, B&Q Verve slate labels and pen, B&Q Verve copper T labels, Haxnicks bamboo labels.

**Best buy and recommended Cos & Romaine-type Lettuce on test:** 'Chatsworth' green, 'Thimble' green, 'Little Leprechaun' flushed red, 'Moonred' red, 'Xanadu' green.

**Best buy sweet potatoes varieties:** 'Beauregard', 'Beauregard Improved', 'Carolina Ruby'.

**Best buy tasty apple varieties:** 'Pixie', 'Laxton's Superb', 'Charles Ross', 'Ashmead's Kernel'.

**Best buy and recommended Penstemons on test:** "Alice Hindley" purple and white, 'Andenken an Friedrich Hahn'/'Garnet' red, 'Firebird'/'Schoenholzeri' red, 'Osprey' white and pink, 'Pensham Just Jane' purple, 'Rich Ruby' purple, 'Blackbird' purple, 'King George V' red, 'Harlequin Lilac' lilac.

**Best buy and recommended Beefsteak Tomatoes on test:** 'Big League' F1, 'Burlesque' F1, 'Beefsteak', 'Bountiful' F1,

**Best buy Growing Bags on test:** Dalefoot Wool Compost for Tomatoes, Dalefoot Wool Compost for Vegetables & Salads, Melcourt SylvaGrow Peat-free Planter for Organic Growing,

**Best buy and recommended Marigolds on test:** 'Firebird' red, 'Konstance' red/yellow, 'Tiger Eyes' yellow/red, 'Naughty Marietta' yellow/red, 'Red Knight' red, 'Elevate Orange' orange, 'Honeycomb' yellow/orange, 'Lemon Gem' lemon.

**Best buy and recommended Pop-Up Greenhouses on test:** Smart Garden Gro Zone Max, Gardman Grow it Premium Walk in Growhouse 2 shelves, Gardman Grow it Premium 4 Tier Extra Wide Growhouse, Dakota Fields Bertha 4.5x4.5ft Greenhouse.

### Science and Research

Lorna's Seeds, an innovative scheme that naturally extracts heavy metals from garden soil has entered the next stage of its development. Dozens of Which Garden members took part in a trial for Lorna's Seeds. This involved sowing a bag of seeds, harvesting them after six weeks and then returning the clippings for 'mining' at Brunel University's Experimental Techniques Centre. The university said that the interest shown by the people who responded proves they are very interested in healthy soils. For more info go to [www.lornasseeds.co.uk](http://www.lornasseeds.co.uk)

UK scientists have found a way to graft together two species of grass-like plant, including banana, rice, and wheat, using embryonic tissue from their seeds. The breakthrough by scientists from the University of Cambridge could pave the way to help to solve global problems, such as the devastating Panama disease of bananas. Until now it was thought impossible to graft grass-like plants in the group known as monocotyledons because they lack a special tissue type, called the vascular cambium, in their stem. The technique was effective in a range of crop plants, including pineapple, banana, onion tequila agave and date palm.

### Plant Pests and Diseases

The RHS has decided to no longer class slugs and snails as pests, because of the crucial role they play in a garden's ecosystem. Even though they're top of most gardeners lists of pet hates, the gastropods are being looked on favourably by the RHS. The RHS is all too aware of the role that gardens have in supporting biodiversity and as such will no longer label any garden wildlife as 'pests'. Instead, there will be greater consideration of the role that slugs, aphids and caterpillars play in a balanced garden ecosystem, along with more popular wildlife, such as birds, hedgehogs, and frogs.

Milder, wetter winters could lead to dramatic changes to British woodlands, says the National Trust. Changed weather patterns are creating ideal conditions for pests and diseases to spread, and drought and flood are weakening trees natural defences. The Trust is set to fell 30,000 diseased ash trees this winter.

British flower populations are becoming less unique and increasingly similar, according to a new study from the University of Konstanz in Germany. The research suggests this is due to the presence of 'super-invader plants' such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam. In the study published in the journal *Nature Communications* researchers compared the composition of 658 regional flora from around the world. They found that naturalised alien plant species are the main driving force behind a global decline in diversity.

A new fungal disease, *Phytophthora pluvialis* has been identified in Devon and Cornwall by the Forestry Commission and Forest Research. It affects several tree species, including pine, causing leaves or needles to fall out, shoot dieback and lesions on the stem, branches, and roots. Control measures are being taken.

Use of metaldehyde a key ingredient of many slug and snail control products for decades, became banned in the UK from March 31. The new ban announced by the DEFRA in September 2020 was influenced by the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides

and the Health and Safety Executive. They highlighted the risks posed to birds and mammals. Public concern had also grown, spurred on by lobbying from environmental groups, such as growing charity Garden Organics. The 18-month delay on implementation of the ban gave time for growers and gardeners to use up stocks of metaldehyde products and switch to alternative control measures.

### **Environment**

With the government survey on the future of peat use in commercial horticultural and gardening now closed and under deliberation, 35 key environmental organisations and more than 150 high-file names, have released a joint statement urging the UK government for faster, more effective action. The National Trust, The Wildlife Trusts, Alan Titmarsh, Green Party MP Caroline Lucas, and top garden designer Tom Stuart-Smith are all part of the group encouraging gardeners to go peat free now rather than wait for the proposed government ban in 2024. The industry is striving to invest in and introduce new peat-free products, supported by the roll-out of initiatives such as the Responsible Sourcing Scheme, which tests the carbon footprint of material in growing media. Behind the scenes, leading manufacturers are testing new products scientifically, with Westland having the performance of its materials evaluated at the Institute of Agricultural Botany, near Cambridge. Evergreen Garden Care, which includes the MiracleGro and Levington brands, is investing £7 million this year in new production processes and technology to create a new range of peat-free products more efficiently. It is testing compost products in locations around the world from Levington near Ipswich to Leon in France, and Sydney Australia. Issues over the consistency and processing of suitable alternative materials remain a concern for manufacturers. Coir is proving a valuable option as it's able to store reasonable levels of nutrients. However compressed coir blocks transported from Asia is an industry wide challenge. One cubic metre of compressed coir requires three cubic metres of water to rehydrate it. It also contains variable amounts of salt and sand slurry, so sourcing clean stock needs care. Other issues, such as the inadvertent importation of diseases and pests on bark products, is also a concern. Milled bark and pulverised wood fibre provide the structure and drainage in peat free composts, but the UK cannot produce enough to meet demand, so it needs to import from overseas. Composted green waste and mushroom compost are key peat free compost ingredients for some producers, providing additional nutrients and nutrient retention. But manufacturers say they need government help over licencing to be able to utilise this resource - as a designated waste product companies are not allowed to store more than 50 cubic metres on site.

Garden centres and retail outlets are the focus of a concerted industry campaign this spring to raise awareness on the environmental impact of peat use in growing media. The move is a part of a series of actions planned by the horticultural industry's 'Growing Media Taskforce' to help remove peat by 2025-2028 in retail and 2028-2030 in plant and tree production. The Responsible Sourcing Scheme will help consumers establish how responsible a growing media product is through clearer labelling on bags. It provides a scoring system that rates criteria such as water use and pollution, to give an overall rating for each product-much like energy ratings for domestic appliances-A for the most sustainable to E for the least. The following products have the ratings: Miracle-Gro peat-free premium all-purpose compost **A**, Miracle-Gro peat-free houseplant potting mix **A**, Miracle-Gro peat free premium Ericaceous compost **A**, Bulrush Peat-free Ericaceous Compost **B**, Happy All Purpose Compost **B**, Levington Essentials Multi-purpose Compost **B**, Levington Peat-Free Seed and Cutting Compost **B**, Coco Bloom All Purpose Compost (100 per cent coir) **C**, Levington Ericaceous Compost **C**, Levington John Innes No2 **D**, Miracle-Gro Premium Houseplant Potting Mix **D**, Levington Original Multi-purpose Compost **E**.

Skeletal remains of Nottingham's Broad Marsh shopping centre will remain after the first phase of demolition this month as part of the redevelopment of the area. The frame will become integral to a major reimagining of 20 acres in the city centre with trees, plants and a 'green heart' to bring life back into the site. Plans from Thomas Heatherwick Studio for the green heart should be realised by spring 2023. For images visit [www.heatherwick.com](http://www.heatherwick.com)

Succulent plants rescued from poachers after being ripped from the wild are being supported by funds from a UK plant society. The British Cactus and Succulent Society has provided £25,000 from its conservation fund to help care for plants being given sanctuary at Richtersveld National Park in South Africa, a country where poaching species from native habitats is rife with the plants being sold to collectors around the world, particularly Asia where they have cult status. Once removed without a known location, rescued plants can't easily be returned, so they are cared for in a climate-controlled polytunnel. A strategic plan is being devised to return some species to the wild. For more info visit [www.society.bcsc.org.uk](http://www.society.bcsc.org.uk)

Climate change is causing plants in the UK to flower a month earlier on average, a new study has found. Using a citizen science database with records going back to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, research led by the University of Cambridge found the average first flowering date from 1987 to 2019 was a full month earlier than that from 1753 to 1986. The same period coincides with accelerating global warming caused by human activities. Researchers used more than 400,000 observations of 406 plant species from Natures Calendar, a database maintained by the Woodland Trust and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. If global temperatures continue to increase, UK springs could eventually start in February, with many of the species we rely on experiencing serious problems

A series of wildflower meadows are to appear in the Lancashire town of Morecombe. The 12-acre sowing is part of an ongoing initiative by the Eden Project, which now runs the National Wildflower Centre. Sown this month, sites in and around the town include Sunny Slopes in Heysham, The West End Gardens and Happy Mount Park. Morecombe was chosen as it's due to be

home to Eden Project North, a new visitor attraction designed to re-imagine the British seaside resort for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Granted planning permission in January, Eden Project North is expected to open in 2024. The new habitat will support local wildlife, aid biodiversity and connect local community to the natural world. For more info on the National Wildflower Centre projects, visit [www.edenproject.com/mission/our-projects/national-wildflower-centre](http://www.edenproject.com/mission/our-projects/national-wildflower-centre)

Our island nation could grow enough food in our towns and cities to help supplement local dietary requirements, with gardeners leading the way. That's the conclusion of a new landmark study from Lancaster University, which looked at 26 urban conurbations across the UK with the aim of discovering if there was sufficient green space, such as private gardens, parks, and other recreational areas, to support the possibility of doing so. In a move reminiscent of the wartime 'Dig for Victory' campaign, researchers estimated that if all urban green spaces were converted to efficient food production, creating a system of market gardens, it could boost current UK fruit and vegetable harvests eight-fold. But the team recognised achieving this would be an 'extreme upper limit', as factors as availability and suitability of land, variable growing conditions, skill level and knowledge, and resources would influence yields. Researchers noted experienced gardeners on allotments and community gardens would play a critical role in helping foster and teach novices growing skills. They felt what was needed to develop more local food production was policies and initiatives, tax rebates and growing subsidies promoting and enabling people to grow food in their gardens, food growing spaces to be included in new developments, development of education schemes and advice networks and a launch of promotional campaigns for urban growing.

One of our members recently received some manure that they thought had tiny pieces of paper in it but on further investigation they found that it was tiny fragments of plastic. They did some research and found a link that members may be interested in. We have opened it and there are no virus problems. <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/plastic-planet-how-tiny-plastic-particles-are-polluting-our-soil>

### **Wildlife**

New research has found garden size is not the most important factor for pollinators. Insects being able to forage over many gardens in which a range of plants grow and bloom throughout the year is what makes the difference. Nick Tew an RHS funded University of Bristol PHD student gained a better understanding of the value of plants by weighing nectar sugar from individuals in 59 urban gardens in Bristol, from March to October. Differences between gardens were dramatic and have been published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*. In 472 surveys across 59 gardens, more than 600 plant types were recorded. Gardens in affluent areas tended to produce more nectar sugar but larger gardens did not. For the list of recommended plants visit [www.rhs.org.uk/plants](http://www.rhs.org.uk/plants) for pollinators.

Researchers at the University of Reading have discovered that air pollution confuses insects such as bees and butterflies and leaves them unable to sniff out the plants they feed on. The change of floral scents caused by pollution significantly reduced pollination, and the research found there was up to 90% reduction in individual flower visits. Overall, pollination success was reduced by up to 31%. The findings could have significant impacts for crops, such as apples and strawberries.

Rare, chequered skipper butterflies, which died out 46 years ago due to changes to woodland management, can be spotted again in the UK after being reintroduced. Adult butterflies from Belgium have successfully re-established themselves in Fineshade Woods in Northamptonshire.

The RSPB *Birds of Conservation Concern* report has seen more birds than ever before placed on its red list. The greenfinch, swift and house martin all moved on to the list of 'greatest conservation concern' due to population declines, joining the likes of puffins and cuckoos. Birds that migrate to Africa for the winter seem to be faring less well, and more farmland and waterbirds have joined the list.

Rare honeybee colonies are claimed to have been found in the ancient woodlands of Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire. The forest honeybees appear to be the last wild descendants of Britain's native honeybee population. The bees are smaller, furrier, and darker than the honeybees found in managed beehives. Some bee experts have questioned the claim. However, Oxfordshire Natural Beekeeping Group said the pristine nature and extent of the woodland, and absence of modern bee management from the estate means it isn't surprising.

Half of all flowering plants, spanning around 175,000 plant species either mostly or completely rely on pollinators to make seeds to reproduce, a new study has found. The breakthrough study from South Africa is the first to provide a global estimate of the importance of pollinators for plants in the wild. The study involved 21 scientists affiliated with 23 institutions from five continents, was led by scientists from Stellenbosch University. The researchers found that, without pollinators, a third of flowering plant species would produce no seeds and half would suffer an 80% reduction in fertility.