



ALLOTMENT & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

NEWSLETTER - JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH 2025

The Committee would like to take this opportunity to wish you a Happy New Year and enjoyable gardening in 2025, Harry Theobald Editor.

The 18th Annual General Meeting of A&GAS took place on Thursday 24th October 2024, 7.30pm at Dennis Marsh House. The Chairman, Lindsey Bellringer, thanked everyone for attending.

She thanked all Committee members and Associate members for their hard work and support throughout 2024. We had 310 members sign up for 2024.

The Trading Hut remained the main source of income for the Association during 2024 and was ably run by the Committee, volunteers, and Keith Lawrence the Manager. The Environment Agency had a lease on their containers until September 2023, so we had to raise funds to purchase replacements, which we managed to do via donations and applying for grants from Wiltshire Council and Salisbury City Council. The next thing to tackle was getting the three containers on site and with the help of a leafleting campaign and amazing support from the residents we managed it in August during the school holidays. We re-opened within a week after support from the Committee and our members. We still have the exterior of the containers to paint.

The Trading Hut will be reopening on the weekend of Saturday 18th /Sunday 19th January 2025.

The Committee have agreed to keep the 2025 annual membership subscription at £5.

The Horticultural Show was held on Saturday 17th August at the United Reformed Church. It was very successful and a big thank you goes to Paul Onstenk and his team, the Committee and volunteers. The date for the show in 2025 is Saturday 16th August.

We went to Toby Buckland's; 10th Flower Festival at Powderham Castle near Exeter on Saturday 4th May.

We will not be starting up talks during 2025 but will continue to advertise talks by local gardening clubs and the NVS. The website continues to be run successfully by Anna McBride.

The Chairman outlined the Environment Agency/Wiltshire Council's planned River Park Project and how it has affected the Trading Hut to the extent that we have now permanently relocated onto a site in Fisherton Farm A with the support of SCC. The Treasurer Jenny Coleman said the bank balance at the 30th September 2024 was £8,086.97. Thanks Jenny.

The Auditors Munro's were re-elected. The accounts for 2022/23 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, Anna McBride, Rob Read, Louis Statham and Graham Williams. There were two Committee members who stood down Jo Tapper and David Spaven. The incoming Chairman thanked them for all their help and support, and they have been presented with cards and a voucher each.

The 19th AGM is scheduled for Thursday 23rd October 2025.

Trading Hut

The Trading Hut will open on the weekend of the 18/19th January 2025.

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 and Wilja. **Main Crop**: Cara, Desiree, King Edwards, Maris Piper, Picasso, Valor and Sentanta. 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 Baron, Sturon, Stuttgart Giant and Turbo. **Shallots**: Golden Gourmet and Red Sun. **Garlic** Vigour and Thermidrome.

SAA Annual Outings

We will be organising some outings in 2025 with the first being a trip to Bowood House and Garden to see the Azalia and Rhododendron display on Sunday 18th May (there are only 25 places). To pre-book your tickets contact Jenny Coleman at jenny7coleman@gmail.com

The second trip will be to the Garden Show at Broadlands, Romsey on Sunday 8th June. Prices for both trips will be circulated in early January. We are also looking to go to Wisley in the Autumn.

The following is a list of local companies that offer a discount on production of a valid 2025 A&GAS membership card: B&M AT Windows & Doors, B&R Textiles, Blind & Track Services, Brandon Tool Hire, 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, Timpsons (Blue Boar Row), Travis Perkins.

SNIPPETS

As the A&GAS committee have decided not to have a programme of talks in 2025, 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 19.15 with refreshments; talks and demonstrations starting at 19.30. Fees are £15 annually due in January or £3 quest fee.

Jan 15th AGM followed by talk from Alabare Charity about their Garden Centre. **Feb 19th** Social Evening with food and a fun quiz. **Mar 19th** Chris Bird An interactive talk about Propagation. **Apr 16th** Patricia Elkington, A Garden in Spring. **May 24th** Plant Sale - Village Hall 10.30 - 12 noon. **June** Garden Visits. **July 19th** Village Show in Village Hall and Garden Visits. **Sept 17th** Glenn Duggan 'Rose Rustlers' - Helping to keep antique or Heirloom Roses Alive. **Oct 15th** Wildlife of a Working Forest. **Nov 19th** Bryan Madders Chrysanthemums and Dahlias. **Dec 10th** Janette Merillon A Calendar of Colour.

The Stratford-sub-Castle Gardening Club: Meetings are held on the last Thursday of the month 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 30th Clare Hart, 'Square Metre Gardening', **Feb 27th** John Trim 'Growing Veg in the Garden', **Mar 27th** Susie Bright Seeds 'Wildflower Seed Collection & Processes', **24th Apr** Gillian Taylor 'More Colour, Less Work - Fact or fiction?' **May 29th** Lucy Thorpe 'Horatio's Garden', **26th June** AGM & Members Evening.

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

11th Feb Jo Woodland from Direct Bulbs -Summer Flowering Bulbs. **11th March** Maggie Haynes gives an insight into a garden created to educate children about food, Tuppy Barn. **8th April** Barry Newman Preparing for Your Show - Veg, fruit and other Horticultural Classes. **2-4 May** BBC Gardeners' World Spring Fair at Beaulieu. Visit the NVS stand. **10th May** Plant Sale 10am-1pm at Wellow Village Hall, West Wellow, SO51 6BR. **10th June** Steve Oats RSPB Birds in the Garden. **29-31 July** the New Forest & Hampshire County Show. **14th Sept** Hants DA Annual Show 1pm Wellow Village Hall, West Wellow. SO51 6BR. **14th October** Ben Hope who currently lecturers at West Dean College and The Chelsea Physic Garden presents 'Making the most of what you have'. **11th Nov** Chris Bird lecturer at Sparsholt College on Sparsholt Show Gardens at Chelsea. **9th Dec** AGM and quiz

Bath has been awarded the top honour at this year's Britain in Bloom UK finals - 60 years after winning the first ever competition. It was recognised by the judges for its outstanding community engagement, horticultural excellence and environmental credentials. The Bath team saw off stiff competition from 51 other community gardening group finalists from across the UK. They achieved a Gold award and were also crowned Small City category winners. See the full list of winners at www.rhs.org.uk/bloomawardsresults.

A set of botanical studies by Claude Aubriet (c1700) are on loan to the Science Museum, London from the RHS as part of *Versailles: Science and Splendour* (12 December - 21 April 2025). Aubriet was a painter for French Kings Louis XIV and Louis XV and he's believed to be one of the first artists to travel with a botanist to record plants in the field. His illustration on vellum features a gold border typical of those from the French Royal Collection. The exhibition uncovers the pursuit for knowledge at the Palace of Versailles via spectacular artworks and objects, many on display in the UK for the first time, including Louis XV's rhinoceros. For details visit: www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/see-and-do/versailles

Garden Centre group Dobbies plans to close 17 sites across the UK - including all six of its Little Dobbies high-street stores. The Scottish based firm, which currently operates 77 stores and is the UK's largest garden-centre chain, says the closures will 'address historically uneconomical rent costs' and help it return to profitability. It's also seeking rent reductions at a further nine sites. The restructuring plan was to be considered by the Court of Sessions in Edinburgh at the end of October and due to be finalised by 13 December. If approved by creditors, stores will close by the end of this year, leaving 60 Dobbies garden-centres in operation. One surprising inclusion in the list of proposed closures is the flagship super store in Antrim, Northan Ireland. The £10m new build, which was the chains largest store, only opened last October. The closures will affect 465 staff members, out of a total of around 3,600 employees. Other garden centre operators, including Blue Diamond, have reportedly expressed interest in the sites threatened with closure.

What follows are some of the best books of the 2024: *A Year Full of Pots: Container Flowers for all Seasons* by Sarah Raven the maestro of pots. The ultimate container bible. Published by Bloomsbury, RRP £27.

Tree: Exploring The Arboreal World by Phaidon Editors. What is a tree? This coffee-table tome presents 300 photographic responses from the iconic to the ingenious. Published by Phaidon, RRP £44.95.

A Flower Garden for Pollinators by Rachel de Thame. Help reverse pollinator declines with this call-to-action to plant nectar- and pollen-rich flowers for foraging, and plants for larval food. Published by Greenfinch, RRP £25

Compost: Transform Waste into New Life by Charles Dowding. Compost making, the steamy science of turning garden waste to valuable mulch, is the heart of a health garden. Published by DK, RRP £14.99.

The Garden Against Time: In Search of a Common Paradise by Olivia Lang. This reflective memoir about restoring a Suffolk Garden has universally delighted readers. Published by Picador, RRP £20.

Parched: 50 plants that survive and thrive in a dry garden by Philip Clayton. The contents of this book reduce the guesswork for virtually any dry gardening situation. Published by Kew/Welbeck RRP £16.99.

A Short History of Flowers: by Advolly Richmond. The book would make an ideal starting point for anyone wanting to know more about the origins of the plants in their garden. Published by Frances Lincoln. RRP £16.99

Edible Garden: by Vicky Chown. The engaging style, accessible guidance, excellent photography and many high points, all well indexed, makes this a desirable book for all interested in starting to grow food and encourages gardeners to develop in their own way. Published by Frances Lincoln. RRP£12.99.

Two new RHS books, *RHS Greener Gardening: Vegetables* by Sally Nex and *RHS Greener Gardening: Containers* by Ann Trenaman have essential and environmentally-sound tips and advice to help you grow edibles sustainably and wildlife friendly gardens in pots and raised beds. Published by RHS Books. RRP £18.99 each.

Watching Monty Don's *Spanish Gardens* on BBC in 2024, was as good as taking an Iberian holiday. This accompanying book leaves you with the same sun-soaked feeling. As much a travelogue as a book filled with garden inspiration. Published by BBC Books. RRP £39.99

The RHS Daffodil, Snowdrop and Tulip Yearbook is back with a bumper 2024 edition. Get the book from RHS Garden Wisley or direct via John Gibson at gibbojohn@ntlworld.com

Newly digitised from the RHS Lindley Library and available to view online is a fascinating 16th-century pictographic guide called *Herbarum*, Produced by Christian Egenolff in Frankfurt in 1562, it's full of colourful plant illustrations. The picture labels and indices are multilingual. This was a canny way to appeal to a larger audience, who may not have understood Latin or Greek. It's a lovely example of an early work of popular science. To view go to www.collections.rhs.org.uk/collection/191061

Gardens

An historic collection of more than 900 snowdrops owned by Rt Hon Lord and Lady Hesiltine has been awarded National Plant Collection status by conservation charity Plant Heritage. The snowdrops (885 cultivars and 15 species) are naturalised in an arboretum at their home in Thenford, near Banbury, Oxfordshire. Thenford Arboretum Snowdrop Days are held in February with quest speakers. Early booking is recommended. For more info visit www.thenfordarboretum.com

Wildlife

The RHS has joined forces with more than 30 other organisations to create the National Hedgehog Strategy to halt the decline of hedgehogs in the UK. It identifies threats and how everyone from farmers to gardeners can help. Making a whole in or under a garden fence to connect neighbouring gardens, providing water, or making leaf and log piles, are all great ways to start. For more info visit www.rhs.org.uk/hedgehogstrategy

The Big Garden Birdwatch survey run by the RSPB will take place between the 24-26 January. Grab a cuppa and record the birds you see within an hour in your garden, from your balcony or in a local park, then log them on the RSPB website at www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch

Numbers of silver-studded blue butterflies at a Dorset nature reserve have increased by 2,000% since 1976. The insects were counted at Studland and Goglingston Heath, and their rise is down to careful management of their habitat. They need low-nutrient heathlands, with open patches of short vegetation.

A pair of cranes at Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve in Cambridgeshire has successfully reared a chick. The pair have been trying to raise a chick since 2019. Although their eggs have usually hatched, it's thought that this is the first time that a chick has fully fledged in the area in about 400 to 500 years.

The State of Garden Wildlife. What the latest results from citizen science surveys tell us:

40% more **bumblebees** in suburban than urban gardens. **Butterflies**, the lowest count in 14 years. **Other insects** 78% fewer insects counted compared with 2004. **Birds'**, new virus affects blackbird numbers. **Amphibians & reptiles**, Garden Dragon Watch recorded 6.400 amphibians and reptiles. **Hedgehogs'**, Rural hedgehogs down 35% in 25 years

Ways to help

Provide food: Grow a wide range of leafy, flowering fruiting and vegetable plants, including ones that flower at different times of year. Leave autumn leaves to rot on borders and use natural fertilisers, such as well rotted compost or leaf mould. Put out a mix of seeds, mealworms, nuts and fat for birds. Leave water and wet dog and cat food for hedgehogs, but not milk or bread.

Provide habitat: Create a pond, even if it's a small one. Let your lawn grow slightly longer and allow wildflowers to grow in it. Create a small pile of logs and leave seedheads and stems on plants over winter for wildlife to feed on.

Plant a Hedge: Set up bee hotels, bird nest boxes and hedgehog houses. Avoid using any pesticides or herbicides, especially on flowering plants

How to take part.

The citizen science surveys and projects that have been mentioned, and other projects that might be of interest, are run by the following organisations:

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust 01202 391319, www.arc-trust.org

British Hedgehog Preservation Society 01584 890801, www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

British Trust for Ornithology 01842 750050, www.bto.org

Buglife. www.buglife.org.uk

Bumblebee Conservation Trust 01786 594128. www.bumblebeeconservation.org

Butterfly Conservation 01929 400209. www.butterfly-conservation.org

Buzzclub. www.thebuzzclub.uk

Freshwater Habitats Trust. www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk

Royal Horticultural Society. www.rhs.org.uk

RSPB 01767 693680. www.rspb.org.uk

UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme. www.ukpoms.org.uk

Products & Services

Help to identify local tree problems with new online tool TreeAlert, from Britain's top dendrology organisation, Forest Research. Your reports will help researchers understand what's happening to trees, and to spot both old and new threats. For more information go to www.forestresearch.gov.uk/trealert

Which Best Buys:

Best buy and recommended Dwarf Frech Beans on test: 'Cupidon' green, 'Montano' green, 'Ferrari' green, 'Stanley' green.

Best buy and recommended Heuchera on test: 'Lipstick' red, 'Marmalade' cream, 'Paris' pink. 'Silver Gumdrop' pink, 'Timeless Night' pink, 'Walnut' cream, 'Cranberry' white, 'Forever Purple' pink, 'Silverberry Pink' pink, 'Terracotta Warrior' orange.

Best buy and recommended Liquid Feeds on test: **Miracle-Gro** Performance Organics All Purpose Concentrated Liquid Plant Food. **Miracle-Gro** All Purpose Concentrated Liquid Plant Food. **Westland** Boost All Purpose Liquid Plant Food. **Phostrogen**, All Purpose Plant Food. **Wilko** Organic Concentrated Plant Food. **Vitax** Q4 All Purpose Plant Food Soluble. **Doff** Liquid Growmore 7-7-7, **Miracle-Gro** All Purpose Soluble Plant Food,

Best buy and recommended Hardy Hibiscus on test: 'Pink Chiffon' pink, 'Sugar Tip' pink, 'Woodbridge' dark pink, 'Starburst Chiffon' white/red, 'Red Heart' white/red.

Best buy and recommended Mushroom Kits on test **Fat Fox Mushrooms**, Tea & Coffee Recycling Kit, **Fungi Foods** Grey Oyster Grow Kit, **Merit Mushrooms** Large Pink Oyster Ready -to-grow Kit, **Merryhill Mushrooms** Ready Growing Shiitake Mushroom Kit, **Urban Farm-It** Yellow-gold Oyster Mushroom Growing Kit, **Fat Fox Mushrooms**, Blue Oyster Ready-to-grow Kit, **Merit Mushrooms** Large Lion's Mane Ready-to-grow Kit

Best buy and recommended Brussels Sprouts on test: 'Bitesize' F1, 'Marte' F1, 'Maximase' F1, 'Nautic' F1, 'Brodie' F1, 'Crispus' F1, 'Windsor F1'

Winter Flowering Shrubs on test: *Erica x darleyensis* 'Furzey' pink, *Mahonia x media* 'Winter Sun' yellow, *Daphne bholua* 'Jacqueline Postill' white/pink, *Viburnum x bodnantense*, 'Charles Lamont' pink, *Viburnum farreri* 'Candidissimum' white, *Chimonanthus proacox* 'Grandiflorus' yellow, *Lonicera x purpusii* 'Winter Beauty' cream, *Garrya elliptica* 'James Roof' grey green, *Mahonia japonica* 'Hivernant' yellow, *Viburnum x bodnantense* 'Dawn' pink.

'Which' Members Plant Trials 2024

The results are in for the 2024 trials with more than 800 replying to the survey.

Each year 'Which' give away three packets of veg seeds and three of flower seeds, and invited members to grow them alongside 'Which'. This enhanced our results, so it is always interesting to hear how your trials fared. The past summer wasn't a great one for vegetables, so some in the trial didn't thrive, Members feedback about tomato "Tumbling Tom Red" was that the plants were hampered by growing in a hanging basket and that the fruit were pleasant but not as tasty as other cherry tomatoes they have tried. Similarly, not many members had a great crop of dwarf French bean 'Faraday'. Cucumber 'Peticue' also wasn't a huge success. It was possibly one of the poorest in our which cucumber trial and only 17% of members said they would grow it again. We also sent members marigold 'Tiger Eyes', Amaranthus 'Foxtail' and Coreopsis 'Early Sunshine'. The marigold was a big hit and 67% said they would grow it again. Members had less success with the amaranthus and coreopsis and struggled with poor germination and weak plants.

Charles Dowding the no-dig expert reveals the essential garden tools he relies on. A strong metal **wheelbarrow** enabling you to move large amounts of compost, crop debris, mowings, leaves and all the other materials needed to run a garden. In olden days, farmers carried a long stick for diverse uses and my equivalent tool a **long-handled wooden dibber**. I use it chiefly to

make planting holes rapidly and with little bending, also for drawing the lines of bed edges and middle so I know where to make the planting holes. I use two **sieves**. One has 12mm metal squares like a bed frame and is propped at a 45-degree angle. I dribble old woodchip down its slope, and the larger pieces drop in front, then we add the smaller pieces to the compost heaps. The second sieve is made from an old basket with 4mm finer holes. I use it to sieve fine compost for propagating. I find the **PKS Castor trowel** easy to use for planting potatoes and tomatoes, and for extracting roots of bindweed and couch grass. These copper trowels have curved metal for extra strength where the handle joins to the working end, and smooth non-rusting blades which are thin, light and stay sharp. What I look for in a **watering can** is comfort in the hand-from weight of water being balanced to shape of the handles - and a fine rose, which is vital for propagation, so the compost surface is not disturbed. A **swivel or oscillating hoe** can slice through weed roots both forwards and backwards with minimal effort, at 1cm depth. Copper swivel hoes have a thin yet strong blade, and the high price is worthwhile if you have a large area to maintain. Light, frequent and rapid hoeing is better than an occasional 'plough' through large weeds. A **manure fork** compared to a digging fork has thinner, longer and curved prongs. They slide easily into heaps of compost and manure to lift and load them. Don't use this tool for digging or loosening soil. Keeping a clean edge to your plot makes a huge difference, both practically and psychologically. I use a **sharp half-moon edger** to take the edge back a little two to four times a year. When harvesting anything. I carry **two buckets**. One is for vegetables; the other is for weeds. The weed bucket also receives any decaying leaves, tops of root veg and bolting plants which are then tipped out into the compost heap. If I'm in the garden without a **penknife** in my pocket, I always miss it. It's helpful for so many jobs, from cutting cabbage and string to trimming leeks, impromptu plant pruning and undercutting of weeds. I lightly sharpen the blade once a week on a synthetic, 220-grit, medium-fine silicon carbide.

Science and Research

A University of Maryland study has identified a genetic mechanism responsible for variations in leaf structure and it plays a crucial role in how plants adapt to different environments. Scientists found that strawberry plant leaves with serrations were more resilient to cold, while smoother leaves were adapted to warmer climates.

Scientists at the University of Warwick's Crop Centre have been looking at the effect of earlier spring seasons and wet weather on wildlife, plants and crop pests. Spring is now calculated to be 8.7 days earlier than in the period 1891 to 1947. Insect life cycles are mainly determined by temperature, and the warming springs lead to earlier emergence. Professor David Chandler says that bees are at risk as they exhaust their food supplies before the first plants flower in the spring. He adds: wet weather is also very bad for bees, as they don't fly in the rain. Bees that need to venture out early in spring to look for food for the colony, are faced with lots of rainy days, and could struggle.' He asked gardeners to plant more spring-flowering plants particularly those that flower very early. The department also looks at the emergence of pests, producing weather-based forecasts for growers to predict when pests will affect vegetable crops.

Amateur gardeners in the US can now bring an ethereal glow to gardens with the Firefly Petunia. Tech firm Light Bio took genetic material from luminous mushrooms and inserted it into petunias to create bioluminescent plants; the molecule responsible for light emission is used when plants make cell walls. The blooms are white in daylight and emit a green glow at night, with the new buds glowing brightest.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge have discovered that bees are more attracted to larger bullseye patterns in flowers and are 25% faster at visiting these blooms. The study looked at petal-pattern development at cellular level and used hibiscus flowers to investigate how the central bullseye pattern forms. Researchers then explored the impact of different sized bullseyes on pollinators, using artificial hibiscus blooms, and found that bees preferred the larger ones. It suggests an evolutionary path that enhances the survival of both the plants and pollinators. Flowers with larger bullseyes are visited more often and pollinated, while bees flying to these flowers can collect nectar more efficiently.

Feeding edible hydrogel to bees can boost their chances of surviving exposure to pesticides. Earlier studies had shown that hydrogel, a non-toxic, highly absorbent material can trap neonicotinoids. Led by Julia Caserto at Cornell University, New York, researchers mixed microscopic hydrogel particles - small enough to enter a bee's digestive tract but go no further - with sugar water and fed it to bumblebees. The bees were then exposed to a high pesticide dose. Bees that had eaten the gel had a 30% higher survival rate.

Did you know that slugs are right-handed? Or that white flowers receive the most visits by bumblebees in spring? Or that the number of calories burnt from 30 minutes of gardening is comparable to playing badminton, volleyball or practising yoga? Find all this and more in the new and improved science hub on the RHS website. It brings together all the projects that the RHS science teams are working on and includes research into hedges for urban environments, peat-free composts, plants to help pollinators and the wellbeing benefits of gardening. Plus find out how to get involved in citizen science projects See: www.rhs.org.uk/science.

Plants

Winners of the annual Rochfords International Rose Trials have been announced, with 'Perfume Siluetta' taking several awards. Grown by German breeder, Kordes Rosen, it won rose of the day, best climber, best pollinator and an order of merit. It's a

repeat blooming rambling rose, that's claimed to have good disease resistance and is ideal for growing in pots or in smaller gardens. The breeder also won gold for 'Spotlight' and 'Simsalabim'. All three are available to buy from Kordes Rosen, which ships to the UK.

Irish breeder David Kenny was named amateur rose breeder of the year. He also won the Amateur Rose Breeders Association Award for KENabba - this rose doesn't yet have the variety name under which it will be sold.

The trial, which is based in Hertford, is for roses that aren't yet commercially available. Breeders from across UK can enter new varieties to be assessed by a panel of 20 judges. The roses are grown by Rochfords for two years before the final judging takes place in August.

How to get the best from cacti and succulents: Cacti and succulents have incredible diversity as a group, offering texture and coloured foliage throughout the seasons. They're long-lived, perfect for a bright and sunny windowsill, and can decorate a patio during the summer. Most cacti and succulents have a growing and resting period. While they're growing (which is usually from May to September), water once a week and give a cacti fertiliser. During the resting period (usually October to April), growth is slow so water sparingly as the biggest killer is overwatering during this time. It's easy to revive a dry cactus, but impossible to revive a sodden one. High light levels and a dry atmosphere suit them well. Kitchen windowsills that are cool and bright are ideal spots. Pop cacti and succulents outside from May to September as this will reduce pest levels, give good air circulation and protect them from extreme temperatures in greenhouses and conservatories. A mixture of horticultural grit and peat free compost at a 50/50 ratio will provide a free draining potting mixture that will suit most types of cacti and succulents.

Top tips for keeping indoor cyclamen growing: Buy a plant with plenty of buds coming up under the foliage. Avoid any with yellowing or limp leaves or fuzzy mould in the centre of the plant as they might have been overwatered. Choose a bright spot away from radiators. Temperature of 10-15°C will help prolong flowering. A north, east or west-facing windowsill or cool conservatory is ideal. When the compost feels dry as you push your finger into the surface, stand the pot in water at room temperature. Once the compost surface is damp, drain and return to a decorative pot. Remove spent flowers at the base by twisting the stems and giving them a tug. Remove dead or damaged leaves to prevent disease such as grey mould (*Botrytis cinerea*) spreading. Feed once a month with liquid houseplant food. After flowering finishes, continue watering until the leaves begin to yellow, then keep barely moist. In July remove as much old compost as you can and repot into the same or a slightly larger pot with fresh compost, covering half the tuber. Water after planting.

Autumn is the traditional time to plant spring flowering bulbs, but for some, such as snowdrops, early spring is a better time to do it. They don't like to dry out completely, even when dormant so buying them in packets off the shelf can be a gamble. Buy snowdrops in the green. (which simply means before the foliage dies away) from garden centres, nurseries or by mail order from late winter onwards. Plants normally arrive in pots or bundles with bare bulbs and roots wrapped in soil or compost to retain moisture. Plant them out as soon as you can, and water well to settle them in. Remove any faded flower stems to divert more energy into growth for next spring. If you already have snowdrops in your garden, increase your stock by lifting and dividing them after flowering. Carefully dig up a clump, divide into sections and replant elsewhere. They'll soon spread to provide carpets of white nodding flowers. Other bulbs to plant in the green are Winter aconite, Wood anemone. Spring snowflake and English bluebell.

Pests and Diseases

Slugs (and snails) are the bane of many gardeners' lives but a new book, ecologist and life-long gardener, Jo Kirby, suggests ways to work with them and maintain a fruitful garden without using pesticides. *The Good Slug Guide* (£12.99, Pimpernel Press) aims to change the way we think about gardening and help us create pest-resilient spaces.

Environment

The National Trust is to create vast new areas of temperate rainforest in Devon. More than 100,000 trees will be planted to create humid woodland that will be home to plants facing extinction. John Deakin, head of trees and woodlands at the National Trust, said 'The rare specialist plants that depend on this habitat now desperately cling to the remaining fragments for survival, with some of the woodlands we care for in north Devon containing nearly the entire global population of some of these species, such as the Devon whitebeam.'

A new garden for people living with dementia and their carers is being built in a south London park. The Sanctuary Garden will be in Thrive, London's Main Garden in Battersea Park. It will support Thrives Garden Thyme programme, where trained practitioners help people living with dementia or memory loss to engage in gardening activities and nature-based crafts to enhance their wellbeing and quality of life. Studies have shown that older adults who spend time gardening have better cognitive function in later life than those who don't

Discover how an essential ecosystem sustains all the life in an exhibition at Somerset House, London, 23 January - 13 April. Curators for *Soil: The World at Our Feet*, delved into books and artworks at RHS Lindley Library to inspire the gardening section. See more than 50 works by artists including environmental activist artists, Something & Son, who dig beneath the

surface to educate visitors about the power of soil. Get tickets and more details from www.somersethouse.org.uk/whats-on/soil.