



ALLOTMENT & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

NEWSLETTER - OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

Just a reminder that the **Trading Hut** will remain open throughout October on both Saturdays and Sundays from 9.30am to 12.30pm to allow you to collect or return your order form for the **Kings Discounted Seed Scheme**. We will not be open on a Wednesday evening. We will also open on weekends in November for the collection of the seeds ordered through Kings and the last chance to buy garden sundries as we will not re-open again until late January, 2025. Date to be confirmed. Lastly let me offer our best wishes for a **Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year in 2026** to all our members and supporters from all the Committee.

Harry Theobald. Editor

19th Summer Horticultural Show

The results from the show are as follows: **John Burden Cup** most points overall - Adrian King, **The Mayor's Challenge Cup** most points vegetables & fruit - Adrian King, **Bowen-Davis Cup** most points cookery and preserves - Tina West. **Bert Shergold Cup** most points flowers - Anne Morris, **Galpin Challenge Cup** most points photography - Lindsey Bellringer, **Small Challenge Cup** most points in fun classes - Adrian King, **Jenny Humphries Memorial Cup** mixed coloured sweet peas class 44 - Alex Raws. **A&GAS Wine Trophy** - Melanie Booth, **Darren Blick Cup** winner long carrots class 3 - Eddie Watts, **Derek Jay Dahlia Cup** winner class 34 - Mary Lanyon, **Mole Valley Country Stores Cup** best in show - Adrian King, **RHS Banksian Medal** most points in Horticultural Sections Adrian King. **Top Tray** vegetables - Sandra Ellis, **Top Vase** flowers - Tina West.

A&GAS Best Allotment Competition 2025

Coldharbour 1st Francis Bray plot 7, **Jnt** 2nd Andy plot 16 **Jnt** 2nd Maggie Crowther plot 17, 3rd Tessa Bugden plot 6

Cow Lane 1st Carol & Keith Gunner plot 7, 2nd John Allnutt plots 26&27, 3rd M Cox Plot 35A.

Fisherton Farm A 1st Debbie Neale plot 51 & 50B 1st Steve & Lorna Jeffrey plot 92A&B 2nd Clive Williams 38

Fisherton Farm B 1st Ricky Watson plot 13

Warres Acre 1st Richard Shaw plot 4B

Tunnel 1st Mary Reardon plot 38, 2nd Stephen & Carol Day, 3rd Diane Youngman 30A

Butts 1st James Story plot 32B. 2nd Amelia & James plot 48 3rd Mike Bacon plot 13B

2025 Overall Winner Mary Reardon, 2nd Francis Bray, 3rd Richard Shaw

Best newcomers Steve and Lorna Jeffrey Fisherton A plots 92A&B

Best entries award Cow Lane (7 entries)

A&GAS Best Scarecrow Competition 2025

ADULTS RESULTS **Coldharbour** 1st Anna McBride & Luke Futchter with 'Crow': **Fisherton Farm A** 2nd Sarah Ward 'Crowman': **Fisherton Farm A** 3rd Andrew 'Waving Lady': **Fisherton Farm C** Highly Commended Kerry - Leigh 'Doris'.

CHILDRENS RESULTS **Black Crow Meadow** 1st Noah with 'Dingley Dangly' **Coldharbour** 2nd Grace 'Freddie Farmer' **Fisherton Farm A** 3rd 14th Beavers Group 'Scary Beaver Boy' **Black Crow Meadow** Highly Commended Freya 'Grinning Greg' **Black Crow Meadow** Highly Commended Lyra 'Rosie'

A&GAS Annual General Meeting

The 19th AGM will be held on Thursday 23rd October 7.30pm at Dennis Marsh House, Westminster Road, Salisbury SP2 7DG. The Committee look forward to seeing you there. We are always on the lookout for new Committee members or members to do the odd shift in the Trading HQ at weekends. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Harry Theobald on 01722 415880 or 07717 337612

Trading Hut

The latest newsletter for the Salisbury Riverside project has just been published and can be viewed on their website at www.salisburyriverparkphase1.com

At present we are well stocked up with bags of manure (£3 a bag), Violet Farm reduced peat multi-purpose compost at (£6.80p a bag), white and red onions, shallots, also broad beans Aquadulce and Suttons to plant now and grow through the winter to get earlier crops.

The varieties of potatoes we hope to have when we re-open in January are: **First Early**: Casablanca, Foremost, Swift, Red Duke of York, Rocket. Caledonian Pearl, Winston. **Second Early**: Charlotte, Kestrel, Marfona, Nadine, Wilja. **Jazzy (new)**

Main Crop: Cara, Desiree, King Edwards, Maris Piper, Picasso, Valor, Sentanta. **Rooster (new).** All the potatoes come in 2.5kg nets. Prices to be announced in the January newsletter.

The following potato varieties will not be available due to crop failures Arran Pilot, Carolus, Epicure, Home Guard International Kidney (Jersey Royal), Sherine, Ulster Sceptre, British Queen, Golden Wonder, Pink Fir Apple.

Varieties of onions, shallots and garlic to be planted in the spring are onions Centurion, Red Baron, Sturon, and Stuttgart Giant. shallots Golden Gourmet and Red Sun garlic Vigour (white) and Germidour (pink).

What's on

The following talks by the Hants branch of the NVS over the next three months are: 14th October: Talk on Making the most of what you have by Barry Newman, lecturer at West Dean College and Chelsea Physic Garden. November 11th a talk on Designing and Creating the Sparsholt College Show Garden by Chris Bird. 9th December AGM followed by evening of entertainment. All talks are held at Sherfield English Village Hall, Salisbury Road, SO61 6FL starting at 7.30pm and are free to members and non-members.

Christmas Books

A new book that explores garden wildlife from a fresh angle. After 10 years of dedicated work, nature photographer Andrew Fusek Peters has shown how gardens, hedgerows, urban parks, cemeteries and allotments can give us all exciting and fresh wildlife experiences. He is developing a photographic technique to stop time so that he could get images of birds and butterflies mid-flight. The book called Garden Safari is published by Graffeg Books price £30. Visit www.graffeg.com

In the third book of this gorgeously illustrated quartet on the changing seasons, renowned printmaker Angela Harding follows the progress of autumn in the gardens, rivers and woodlands that she loves. Drawing inspiration from plants and animals around her, Angela brings them to life through her engaging prose and exquisite linocut and silkscreen prints. Falling into Autumn is published by Little, Brown Book Group, 28 August 2025 RRP £12.99

Neurodivergent, by Nature is a book by Joe Harkness touches on many stigmas that surround neurodivergence, from initial diagnosis to the pressure to mask differences in the workplace, and the non-judgemental solace of the natural world. As such, it is a serious read. But Joe's witty, self-deprecating style gives warmth and means, his conclusions - that people with diverse perspectives are key to the planet's future because of the crucial work they do - is all the more powerful. Published by Bloomsbury July 2025 RRP £18.99

Roger Phillips' classic book, *Trees of North America, Europe, the UK and Ireland* have been revised with the details of more than 650 tree species and cultivars, with 150 added to the 500 that appeared in the original 1975 edition. The book has 1,200 photographs, including additional images taken by Sarah Cuttle. The price is £35 from Waterstones online with free delivery.

Online gardening brand sarahraven.com is being restructured. It follows post-covid financial difficulties which forced the business into administration. It has been bought back by Sarah Raven and a management team who aim to provide a stable platform for the brands future while honouring all existing customers orders. The website will stop selling young plants to concentrate on bulbs, seeds and gardening accessories. The restructuring is necessary to guarantee the ongoing viability of the business

SNIPPETS

A centre fostering substantial ways to produce food through teaching, art and cultural engagement has opened new facilities in North London after seven years in the making. Billed as 'the UK's first centre for food ecology and creativity', OmVed Gardens (OVG) takes its name from 'om', a universal vibration encompassing all sounds, and 'ved' meaning 'knowledge' in Sanskrit - encapsulating its desire to look, listen and learn from its surroundings and multi-cultural community. New architect design facilities within the existing two-acre hillside garden in Highgate include multi-purpose events space, the Barn, the Kitchen with its accessible rooftop garden, a dedicated Seed Library and the Greenhouse, a striking space maximising passive solar gain and natural ventilation. The new development costing over £1million, will enable OVG, which is registered as a Community Interest Company to stage a year-round programme of exhibitions and teaching modules for visitors and students for its various open days. The facility is also part of the London Action Hub for the UN World Food Action Programme and Chefs Manifesto, a global community of more than 700 chefs from 77 countries who want to deliver quality food more sustainably, reflecting a commitment to addressing global food challenges. For more info visit www.omvedgardens.com

A new Girlguiding gardening badge developed with the RHS will teach Rangers, age 14 - 18, how to sustainably plan and maintain a garden. To achieve the badge Rangers must learn gardening methods such as starting a compost heap, and practice planting at home or in a community space. For more info visit www.rhs.org.uk/girlguidingbadge

A new free-access exhibition at the Science Museum in London explores how science is creating more sustainable ways to grow, buy and eat food. It will run from July 2025 to 4 January 2026.

Researchers at Sichuan University in China have discovered that by inactivating a gene found in tomato plants the fruits build up more sucrose, making them sweeter. The technique also made tomatoes firmer and less vulnerable to attack by fungal diseases.

Mail-order gardening company Thompson & Morgan has given a grant to MindSpace Stamford to enhance its garden's planting scheme. It will also help to improve its sensory areas designed to support emotional health and wellbeing through nature and gardening, and help to fund free gardening classes for local people.

Which Gardening Best buys and top recommendations:

Novelty Tulips on test: **PARROT:** 'Negrita Parrot' Purple, 'Power Parrot' Pink, 'Rasta Parrot' Red/Yellow/Green 'Rococo' Red. **MULTIHEADED:** 'Antoinette' Yellow/Pink, 'Blue Heaven' Lilac, 'Flaming Club' Red/White. **FRINGED:** 'Brtisbane' Orange/Yellow, 'Lemon Beauty' White, Yellow, 'Drakensteyn' Pink/White. **BEST OF THE REST:** 'Go Go Red' (Lily-Flowered) Red, 'Orange Marmalade' (Viridiflora) Orange, 'Virichic' (Viridiflora) Pink/Green, 'Crown of Negrita' (Crown) Purple

Primroses on test: 'Belarina Lively Lilac', 'Balarina Necturine', 'Balerina Valentine', 'Barnhaven Double Camaleu', 'Belarina Beaujolias', P. Vulgaris 'Carrigdale'.

Garlic on test: 'Maddock Wight', 'Mersley White', 'Messidrome', 'Provence Wight', 'Rhapsody Wight', 'Solent Wight', 'Thermidrome'.

Secateurs on test: 'ARS VS-BXZ Professional Secateurs Medium, Felco Model 2 Large Standard Right-handed Secateurs, Okatsune 103 Bypass, Darlac Professional Left-hand Pruner, Kent & Stowe Surecut Light Bypass, Wolf-Garten Comfort Plus Bypass Secateurs RR2500, Fiskars Solid Bypass Secateurs.

Robot mowers on test: Best buys **Segway i105E** (£950), **Segway Navimow H800** (£1,500) It was brilliant at navigating steeper slopes and moving across inclines. **Worx Vision M600** (£900). Recommended **Husqvarna Automower 310E Nera** (£1,800), **StihliMow 5** (£1,600)

Latest results for Lawnmowers on test: Best Buy was the cordless **EGOVL2236E-SP 55cm Self-Propelled Lawnmower Kit** (£1,100)

Echinacea on test: 'Big Kahuna', 'Delicious Candy', 'Fountain Red', 'Marmalade', 'Purple Emperor', E.purpurea', 'Leilani', 'Parrot', 'Sunseekers Rainbow'

Plant identification Apps on test: 'Plantify', 'RHS Grow', 'LeafSnap', 'iNaturalist', 'Plantidentification', 'Picture This', 'Flora Incognita'.

Chainsaws on test: **Stihl MSA 80 C-B** (£340), **Makita UCO256Z** (£323)

Solar Lights on test: **STRING LIGHTS:** Lumify USB Solar Vintage Bulb Lights set of 20 (£50), Powerbee Endurance Solar String Lights 200 White (£34.99). **POST LIGHTS:** Solarcentre 365 London XT Solar Led Post Light (£19.99), Solarcentre 365 Dartington Solar Led Stake Light. (£25.49), Nipify Led Solar Lights. pack of four (£25.99)

Bulb Suppliers Rated: Peter Nyssen, Bloms Bulbs, Farmer Gracy, De Jager Bulbs, J Parker's, Crocus/RHS plants.

Best-tasting vegetable Varieties: Runner bean 'Stardust', Cucumber 'Hopeline' F1 and 'Paska' F1, Dwarf French bean 'Cupidon', Broad Bean 'Giant Exhibition Longpod', Brussels Sprout 'Maximus' F1, Beetroot 'Red Ace', Sweetcorn 'Amaize', Climbing French bean 'Blue Lake', Kale 'Black Magic' F1, Carrot 'St Valery', Sprouting Broccoli 'Green Sprouting', Sweet Pepper 'New Ace' F1 and 'Gypsy' F1.

The best bulbs for scent: Dwarf Narcissus 'Scarlet Gem' and 'Pipit', Narcissus 'Golden Echo', Narcissus 'Geranium' (worth a look), Tulip 'Secret Perfume', Hyacinth 'Blue Jacket' and 'Gipsy Queen', Hyacinth 'Carnegie' (worth a look), Oriental Lily 'Firebolt' Oriental Lily 'Labrador' (worth a look). Tree Lily 'Conca D'Or', and 'Frisco'.

Compost Bins on test: **HOT BINS:** Garantia Thermo-Wood Composter, Great Green Systems Green Johanna, **PLASTIC BINS:** Garantia Eco King, Strata Ward Ecomax Compost Bin. Garantia Eco-master. KCT Garden Compost Bin. Vonhaus Black 360L Composter. **TUMBLER BINS:** No best buys. **WOODEN BINS:** Suttons Modular Wooden Compost Bin, Grange Medium Composter, Lacewing Easy-Load Wooden Compost Bin Small.

Hedge trimmers on test: Recommendations: **Makita UH0216Z** (£172), **Makita UH0206Z** (£172) **Makita trimmer UN0016Z** (£383)

The best power tools for an autumn tidy-up: **GARDEN SHREDDERS:** Draper 2800W electric garden shredder (£250), Powerbase 2800w quiet shredder (£160) (great value). **LEAF BLOWERS:** Ego LB7650E (£221), Mac Allister MBV18-L1-2 18V 2.0AH blower. (£85) (Best buy and great value). **PRESSURE WASHERS:** Karcher K5 Premium Smart Control (£429), Nilfisk Core 125-5 UK. (£120) (great value). **HEDGE TRIMMERS:** Stihl HAS 40 (£184), Titan TT1827HDC (£60) (great value)

Asters on test: A. amellus 'King George' blue/purple, A x frikartii 'Monch' purple, S. novae-angliae 'Betel Nut' dark pink. S.novae-angline 'James Ritchie' dark pink, S. 'Prairie Purple' purple, S 'Coombe Fishacre' pink, S. 'Jessica Jones' pink, S novae-angliae 'Andenkeen an Paul Gerber' pink, S novae-angliae 'Ivy Patterson' violet.

Plants

A unique apple with multi-coloured bark, gold splashed leaves, and colourful tasty fruit was launched for sale in August. Apple 'Rainbow', also known as 'Eric's Rainbow', was bred by brothers Milan and Marijan Prepelic in Croatia, unveiled at the BBC Gardeners World Live show, Birmingham in June and looks set to be a hit with UK gardeners as every part is ornamental. Fruit of the late, scab and disease resistant variety has snow-white, non-browning flesh, pink and red skin and a crisp tart taste, sweetening after winter storage. Not self-fertile it sits in Group 2 and can be pollinated by other varieties in Groups 1,2 and 3. It is available on a variety of root stocks, including dwarfing kinds for pots, from www.frankpmatthews.com and garden centre stockists.

Plant Heritage has launched its annual Missing Collections campaign to highlight plants without a National Collection and encourage keen gardeners to start them. They also want to create collections based on plants bred by Gertrude Jekyll, Valerie Finnis and Marjorie Fish. For the full list of missing collections, go to www.plantheritage.org.uk

Here are the 10 new RHS AGM winners from the Aconite trials in Cornwall over the last two years. *Aeonium arboreum*, *A. arboreum* 'Atropurpureum', *A. arboreum* 'Variegatum', *A. balaamiferum*, *A. cuneatum*, *A. leucoblepharum*, *A. sedifolium*, *A. 'Pomegranate'*, *A. 'Velour'*. *A. Voodoo*

Ten best *Crocodylia* varieties: 'Debutante' rounded orange-peach blooms, 'Zambesi' orange upward facing flowers. Honey Angels' lemon flowers, 'Bright Eyes' burnt orange flowers with a dark red blotch at the throat. 'Star of the East' large caramel-orange flowers, 'Firestars Scorchio' dark orange flowers, 'Bressingham Dark Fires' pleated bronze leaves with scorching maroon and orange flowers.

Flowering cherry 'Japanese Lantern' was the overall winner at this year's Horticultural Trades Association New Plant Awards. Grown by tree nursery Frank P Matthews, it has a double flower that emerge cream with a tinge of green. These turn deep pink as they age, giving several colours in each cluster of blooms. The best new shrub was hydrangea 'Zeta Noir' - a dark leaved plant with bright pink flowers. Dahlia 'Labella Grande Chocolate Rose' won the best new annual plant category. Like Zeta Noir it has dark leaves and pink flowers. It's part of a series of 'Labella Grande Chocolate' dahlias that also come in amber, apricot, pink and red. The best new flowering houseplant was cyclamen 'Dragon Deep Blue'. And the best new perennial was Hosta 'Silly String' which has very narrow leaves in a glaucous green. Which are growing this in their New Plants trial and will report on it next year.

Mophead hydrangeas can be Ph sensitive, so those with blue flowers keep their colour best on acid soils. If the flowers have purple and pink shades. A hydrangea colourant containing aluminium sulphate can help restore the blue colour. Apply according to the instructions on the pack. To help maintain blue flower colour in containers, use ericaceous compost and repot your plants in fresh compost in spring every 2-3 years. Ideally only water with rainwater, as calcium deposits in tap water can also affect the flower colour.

Seed germination can sometimes be a problem, and the simplest solution is to store all seeds in a fridge. Some must have cold treatment, but it'll do no harm to give it to them all. However, tree and shrub seeds generally take a long time to germinate and before they can do so, a hard seed coat or some other dormancy mechanism must be eroded. Simply place the ripe seeds or fruits in shallow pans of coarse sand burying the seeds about 2.5cm below the surface. Then leave the pans outdoors in a sheltered place over winter. In spring, place the pans in the slightly warmer conditions of a cold frame, and germination should then begin, slowly and erratically. There are, however, a number of other common types of seed that can prove tricky. So here is a list of them, together with the conditions that are fairly reliable at persuading them to cooperate. **Bergonia**: Sow seeds on the surface of the compost and keep them at minimum temperature of 21C with good light. **Cyclamen**: Soak the seeds for 24 hours in water at 40C, then sow them 2mm deep and keep them at a temperature of 15-19C in the dark. **Impatiens**: Sow the seeds on the surface of the compost and keep them at a minimum temperature of 12C. **Meconopsis**: Keep the seeds for 21 days in a refrigerator and then, after sowing, at a maximum temperature of 24C. **Viola (including pansy)**: Sow the seeds 3mm deep and keep them at a minimum temperature of 21C in the dark. **Primula**: Sow fresh seeds on the surface of the compost and keep them at a maximum temperature of 20C. **Sweet pea**: Chip dark-seeded varieties on the side of the seed opposite the 'eye' and then keep at a maximum temperature of 20C.

Scientists have pinpointed the gene for blackberry thorns. This should help them develop even more thornless varieties in the future, making picking the fruit a less painful process. If you don't want to wait, try Apache or Quachita, which best buys. Autumn is a great time to plant them, as the ground should be moist.

Wildlife

A Kew Gardens outstation is researching bee interaction with trees. 'The Buzz About Trees' project at Wakehurst in Sussex uses non-invasive monitors and bioacoustics technology to monitor bee abundance. Acoustics technology and environmental sensors by AgriSound listen for the buzz of bees' wing beats and interpret the sound into heat maps for crucial ecological data. Eight trees both native and non-native, are housing three monitors each. They include chestnuts and lime trees which were selected because of their known benefits to pollinators. The technology allows researchers to listen

in on the hidden world of bumblebees, helping to understand which trees support the highest abundance. The findings will be key to creating greener urban spaces that provide a future for our wildlife. Wakehurst also runs Trees for Bees, where 41 trees are part of a wider 'bee safari' for visitors to count pollinators and submit the information. For more info visit www.kew.org/wakehurst

The European hornet (*Vespa crabro*) is the UK's only native hornet species and is our largest social wasp. With yellow, patterned abdomens, they look like giant common wasps (*Vespula vulgaris*), however, instead of a black head and thorax are a chestnut brown. Despite the fearsome appearance and reputation, they're no more dangerous than ordinary wasps and are usually much more docile. If left alone they will not sting. They are also garden helpers pollinating flowers and hunting plant-eating caterpillars. Queen hornets can be 3.5cm long and are first seen in April as they emerge to start new colonies. They do the primary nest building (tree hollows are preferred nesting spots), producing a first brood of worker hornets (sterile females) that then take over food gathering and construction so the queen can concentrate on laying eggs. By late summer numbers reach their peak, and they're often spotted foraging on flowering ivy. New queens hatch in late summer and early autumn then go dormant in winter, ready to start a new colony in spring. They prefer to overwinter in tree cavities but will take advantage of sheds and birdboxes.

Hoglets born from second litters sometimes struggle to put on enough weight to get through winter and mothers might abandon them. If you find young hedgehogs without an adult especially during the day, you should put out food. You might also need to take them to a sanctuary. Check the RSPCA website for full advice and information.

www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/hedgehogs/baby

If you've thought about getting a hedgehog house or making your own, now is a good time to do so. Hedgehogs won't be hibernating yet, but it's been found that they're more likely to use a house they're familiar with than to go into something that has only just appeared. The hedgehog Street website www.hedgehogstreet.org has advice on the best houses and where to put them.

Whether you enjoyed taking part in the Big Butterfly Count recently, or if you missed it, you could still help Butterfly Conservation monitor their populations in gardens. The charity has been running the online Garden Butterfly Survey since 2015, where volunteers can log butterfly sightings at any time of the year. You'll also be asked to record some details about your garden so it can relate sightings to the habitats available. See www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org for more information.

If you want to make your garden more attractive to bees, birds, butterflies and more, the refreshed RHS website wildlife hub has everything you need to know. Among the new features is trail Cam footage of wildlife at RHS Rosemoor, including otters and hedgehogs. There are easy projects like turning fence posts into bee homes. Visit: www.rhs.org.uk/wildlife

Now that the breeding season is over for birds you can take down nesting boxes and clean them. Remove old nests and use boiling water and a scrubbing brush to clean the box. This is enough to kill off parasites, so you don't need to use disinfectants or pesticides. If you find unhatched eggs, they can only be removed between September and January and legally must be destroyed. If you stopped feeding birds during the summer months, October is a good time to start putting out bird feeders again. High-protein food, such as fat balls and peanuts is ideal, and try to stick to a regular routine of filling your feeders.

From October to March ladybirds will be in hibernation in places such as cracks in tree bark, but they're also attracted to sheds, garages and houses. If you do come across them in your house, it's best to leave them undisturbed until spring.

It's hard to walk around the garden in autumn without encountering spiders' webs, so why not take part in a spider survey? The British Arachnological Society runs the spider and harvestman recording scheme, which is trying to encourage recording of easy-to-recognise spiders. Sightings and preferably photos should be reported to area organisers who can verify the identification. For more information and to register go to www.srs.britishspiders.org.uk/portal.php/p/species+surveys

The first ever Wilding Gardens Conference will be held early next year at the University of Manchester. The two-day event will bring together anyone who is interested in learning ways of creating a dynamic habitat for wildlife with greater resilience to climate change. Top gardeners and designers will be speaking, including Fergus Garrett, James Hitchmough and Tom Stuart-Smith. The event is on the 15 and 16 January 2026. For more details visit: www.wildinggardens.co.uk

Environment

The National Trust has announced a new mission to bring nature to towns and cities across the UK that will benefit millions of people in urban neighbourhoods over the next decade. Working with Natural England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Nature Towns and Cities project aims to help at least 100 UK places to become greener, healthier, healthier places for people to live and work. At least five million more people will gain access to green space a short walk from home and one

million children will have the opportunity to play outdoors in nature. Thousand of existing green spaces will also be improved for communities and wildlife.

Defra has released the latest figures for peat use by gardeners and professional nurserymen. The figures – taken in 2023 – show an overall decline in peat use in 2022. Bagged compost sold at retail was mostly peat free. And from a combined total of all the ingredients that make up compost, only 16,6% was peat. Wood fibre is the most used ingredient in mixes and is used in both peat and peat-free formulations.

The responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS), which rates composts for how sustainable they are, is introducing several new innovations. Perhaps the most important for gardeners is an assessment of all composts covered by the scheme to determine whether they are fit for purpose. The RSS wants there to be a quality standard on a compost bag, based on the fact that the products actually work and are tested independently. It will become a fundamental part of being an RSS member. Tests will be carried out, but the outcome will be a simple pass or fail. Those that fail won't be able to show the RSS logo on their bags. This is usually found on the front of compost bags, or there is a QR code linking to the RSS website www.responsible sourcing.org.uk elsewhere on the bag. Here you can find out how sustainable a compost is. All composts covered by the scheme are given an A to E rating, based on seven measures. It's hoped that the beefed-up rating will encourage retailers to only stock those composts that pass the 'fit for purpose' test. The RSS is also working on better understanding the sustainability of coir, and other materials. Coir is currently rated as C, whereas green compost usually rates as an A and peat as an E. The RSS is sending a researcher to southern India to audit coir factories. Which will publish RSS scores with their next compost results in February and March magazines.

Pests and Diseases

Is there a reliable way to keep squirrels out of your garden? Basically, the answer is no with the RHS agreeing There is some information on the RSPCA web site at www.rspca.org.uk. If you are thinking of trapping them, always seek advice on how to trap and dispose of them humanely.

Privet (*Ligustrum*) is highly susceptible to honey fungus, but recent RHS studies showed some species are more resistant than others. To help understand this, the RHS is asking gardeners to take part in a survey on the distribution of three privet species in UK gardens. To take part go to www.rhs.org.uk/helpourresearch

Gardens

The RHS has acquired 20 hectares of land to the south and west of its flagship garden at Wisley, Surrey, in order to expand and help protect its future. Three years of roadworks on the nearby M25/A3 junction have hit the garden hard, with visitor numbers down 19% between 2023 and 2024. The society is currently seeking compensation from National Highways for losses, which are estimated to reach £11m by 2026.

Tom Stuart-Smith Studio is creating a new garden at the front of the Tate Britain art gallery in London. At the heart of the new Clore Garden will be an outdoor classroom for school children, designed by architects Feilden Fowles. Sculptures by British artists will be set among the planting and there will be an interactive water feature and plenty of seating for visitors

The National Trust has built a replica of the Victorian greenhouse at Benthall Hall in Shropshire. The structure measures 12 x 4.5m and has cold frames running along its length. It will be used to house many of the plants found on collecting trips by George Maw, who was a tenant at Benthall Hall, from 1860-1890. Maw brought back more than 3,000 plant species from the Mediterranean, the Atlas Mountains and Eastern Europe. These include many crocus and alpine plants, which will be planted in the greenhouse.

The new RHS Gardens of Great Britain & Ireland: Your guide to 100 of the Most Beautiful Gardens is a sumptuous compilation for garden lovers. Exquisite photography, maps and expert commentary bring the gardens to life. Buy at: www.rhs.org.uk/books RRP £25.

The Royal Botanical Gardens Kew has received £5m from the Julia Rausing Trust. The donation will be used to help restore the historic Waterlily House and contribute to the Palm House renovation project. The trust was set up in 2024 to honour philanthropist Julia Rausing, who was part of the family that own Tetra Pak food packaging, supporting causes she was particularly passionate about. It aims to give away £100m each year to UK charities.

A new permanent feature garden has opened at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew. The Carbon Garden traces the flow of carbon through our natural world, from its release when fossil fuels are used to its recapture via fungi and plants. The planting colour scheme is based on the University of Readings 'Climate stripes', which represent global temperature rises over two centuries, ranging from the blues for cooler years to orange and red for hotter ones.