

How to open your garden for charity



When you think about what's involved with opening a garden to the public for charity, you probably think Plant Perfection is the key, and to a large extent you'd be right. But, and it's a big But, there is so much more involved, that in the final couple of days leading up to Open Day the last thing you are thinking about is your garden!

We've been opening our garden for the National Garden Scheme for seven years now and as soon as you close your gate on your last visitor, you start thinking about next year's event! Having registered your entry with the NGS for publication online, in the London Guide and The Yellow Book the previous September, preparations for the big day begin as early as March. As National Garden Scheme Assistant County Organiser for

Hampstead Garden Suburb, I hold a new season launch party for my group of garden openers, announcing the previous year's fund raising results and informing them of the new year's initiatives and targets. As well as sharing out all the literature that they will use to advertise their Open Day and promote the charity, it offers them the opportunity to meet other local garden openers and compare notes.

The most popular months to open are June and July, and so from the moment you first set foot in your garden after the long winter it's a countdown to the Big Day. You can't help it: everything you do, every decision you make to prune a shrub or alter a colour scheme, will henceforth lead you to success or failure! I can guarantee from

experience that there is always a two-week variation either way as to what will be in flower on the day; it varies every year. Up until about a fortnight before you open, your main focus is indeed the garden itself, but as you get nearer the event your attention turns to all the logistics involved. Signage, posters, guides, tickets, badges, balloons, book marks. Contacting your local press, leafletting your neighbourhood, distributing London Guides.

Cakes! The first thing new garden openers ask me once they have been accepted into the Open Garden scheme is not, as you would imagine, how much of the garden needs to be in flower or should I rearrange the patio planters, it's how many cakes will I need? I would estimate that you should expect double the turnout of visitors if

you are offering Home Made Teas. A new garden will often attract over 150 visitors so that's a lot of cake.

If, like me, you go for it belt and braces, you might like to sell plants and hold a raffle. Propagating perennial divisions starts as early as March, storing them takes up valuable space, nurturing them into flower takes love and attention, labelling and pricing them up, hours of dedication. You need a bit of chutzpah when collecting raffle prizes, but the fact that it's for charity is a huge positive: Local restaurants and nurseries are often only too willing to offer vouchers as a gesture of goodwill, and to attract new customers: Nothing Ventured Nothing Gained I say!

But none of this would be possible without the help and



The cake team

support of family and friends. As many as eight volunteers may need to be drafted in to help out, but the team spirit creates a very welcoming atmosphere for visitors.

Before I opened our garden for charity I might just have sniffed at hosts who dashed to the garden centre the day before to plug a gap or add more colour. But oh boy, the spectre of bare earth is a great leveller! So Buy, Buy, Buy, is my motto now, after all it is for charity. And whilst you are out on your shopping spree, it's off to the Pound Shop to buy paper plates and napkins, plastic cutlery, sugar, milk, juice. Oh and don't forget to pop in to your fellow Garden Openers to borrow their mugs and tea urn. And make sure you collect your float money from the bank before it closes for the weekend. By the time the Open Day dawns there is no time to even go into the garden!

Not when you have to set up tables and chairs for teas, trestles at the entrance for ticket sales, pin up information posters, put up the gazebo, row with your partner...

And don't even get me started on The Weather. At least ten days prior to Open Day I track the weather forecasts at least three times a day. But we've had every type of weather that nature can throw at us over the years, from torrential rains of almost biblical proportions to such baking sunshine that I've had to water the borders throughout the afternoon. But in the end, the visitors come, the cake is eaten, the garden is admired and loads of money is raised for charity. Would you do it again, you bet!

A very big "Thank You" to those of you who visited our HGS Group Open Day on 25th June and supported the National Garden Scheme.

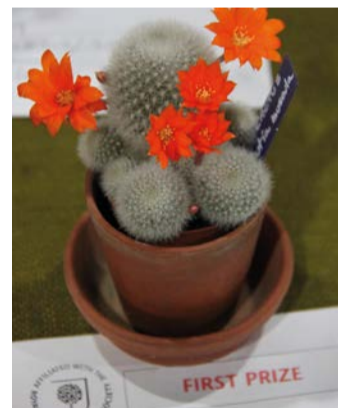
CAROLINE BROOME



The allotments

Horticultural Society News

June has been a busy month for the Horticultural Society. On Saturday, June 17th the Summer Flower Show was held at the Free Church Hall. The warm, dry spring had brought many roses on early, and windy weather the week before finished them off, so entries were lower than usual in this hotly contested category.



The hall was still filled with all manner of floral delights with special commendations for Yvonne Oliver's beautiful flowering cactus and Diana Iwi's succulent gooseberries.

The children's fancy dress competition was as popular as ever, with no fewer than four 1st prizes this year.

On Sunday 25th June, nine Suburb gardens and one allotment site opened as part of the National Gardens Scheme to raise money for charity. We had more than 400 visitors over the course of the day, who were able to enjoy the gardens at their peak as well as great cake and beautiful plants for sale at Fellowship House. The Horticultural Society raised more than £5000 pounds on the day.

Thank you to everyone who took part - as a host, volunteer

or a visitor, we couldn't do it without you.

This month you can enter your garden in our prestigious 'Suburb in Bloom' competition. For more details and the relevant entry forms you can

email patsy_larsen@yahoo.co.uk or paulinemurphy16@aol.co.uk. The prizes range from the coveted The Millennium Cup to £10, £15 or £25 garden vouchers. Judging Day will be on the 26th July.

JAMES ROBBINS



Suburb rainfall

The rainfall column in the last Suburb News concluded that the very sunny days at the time of writing were much to be enjoyed. At the time of writing now (June 20th), people may be having very different ideas as to whether this is still true. Some of us may be finding it rather overpowering. It has, however, inspired a little delving into past copies of these records. They are not sufficiently accurate to be used with any real conviction but could give some light-hearted relative insights. Apparently, there were 16 consecutive days, from June 23rd - July 8th, 1976 with maximum temperatures of over 27 degrees C (or 80F as it was then recorded). On August 10th, 2003, the records show over 36 degrees C (98F). This sort of weather does not seem usual now. By the time this is read, it will be known whether in 2017 we have come anywhere near that. Did we, or did we not, enjoy it, if it happened?

However, this column is really supposed to be about rainfall. At the moment, there is a singular lack of it and no reliable hope in the forecasts that there will be any soon. So far this year we have had 8.7 inches. Due to early publication of Suburb News, this total cannot properly be compared with the average for the period of just under 14 inches, but it does seem extremely unlikely that we will have another five inches in the last ten days of the month. Although there was a very average 2.4 inches in May, the well below normal amount in the first three months of the year (5.2 inches compared with just over 7inches), means the ground is very dry and gardens cry out for water. Amazingly, plants seem to cope with it. With minimal watering, the roses are splendid. Perhaps we feel we need to pamper our gardens too much?

DIANA IWI
FROM MEADWAY

Northway Rose Garden



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