

Deck the Halls (or not)

The festive season always presents me with a dilemma: should I have a Christmas tree or not? I spend much of the Christmas and New Year period away from home, so while I love to decorate my house, I often forego the tree.

The mantelpiece and staircase are hung with green foliage decorated with lights and small ornaments. I always have a basket of pinecones on the hearth which are supplemented with bundles of cinnamon, clove-studded oranges with my Christmas flowering cacti completing the picture.

This year I plan to use whatever I have in my garden to produce a suitable centrepiece; a quick foray outside identified likely candidates. There is



an abundance of Ivy in full flower on the back fence which needs to be pruned back anyway. The blackbirds have concentrated on stripping the higher branches of Holly berries, leaving plenty for me at lower levels. There are flowers on the Viburnum which could also stand a little pruning. One plant that I will be certain to include is the Sarcococcus; evergreen and covered with insignificant white flowers but wafting its sweet honey scent throughout the room. I'm hopeful that any visitors will be so distracted by my abundance of greenery that they don't notice the absence of a tree, but when visiting in Aberdeen I will enjoy my grandson Matthew's tree.

Kathryn Pitts

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Scottish Gardeners' Forum Newsletter

PROMOTING SCOTLAND'S GARDEN CLUBS



The Welcome Team at the Winter Gathering: Mike Rossi, Anne Vincent and Andrea McDowall

Winter 2025

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Letter from the Chair

As the days grow shorter and the autumn leaves carpet our gardens with a golden glow, I have been taking a moment to reflect on the wonderful season we've had this year. From the first shoots of Daffodils to appear in spring to the vibrant blooms of the Paeonies and bountiful apple harvests of summer, it's been a true delight to watch our gardens flourish. The long warm days and evenings lessened the sense of urgency; there seemed to be endless time to plant and prune. The mild weather disguised the fact that the light was fading but here we are in December. Now suddenly it is winter and the snow and ice have driven me indoors.

I have attended my last show of the year, magnificent Chrysanthemums grown with care and exhibited with strict attention to detail. My spring bulbs are all planted sitting in a sheltered spot waiting for the signal to send up their first shoots and my thoughts are turning to bringing foliage into the house.

It has been a busy year attending shows and events on behalf of Scottish Garden-



ers Forum. The Trellis Conference gave me the opportunity to try new crafts and the Garden Fair at Scone sparked new ideas to try in my garden. I love meeting with our members, hearing their news and take great pleasure in their enthusiasm and ambition for their clubs. I know how difficult it can be to keep things going and finding those willing to lighten the load.

So, whether you've grown the tallest sunflower, discovered a new favourite plant, or simply enjoyed a quiet moment amidst the greenery of a favourite garden, I hope that the past year has given you pleasure and a sense of fulfilment.

Though the tools may be packed away for now and the beds put to rest, let's look forward to next season with excitement. Until then, may your compost be rich, your bulbs dream sweetly beneath the soil, and your wellies stay dry.

Wishing you all a restful winter and looking forward to another blooming marvellous year ahead!

Kathryn Pitts

Can you help?

On 22nd August 2026 Largs & District Horticultural Society will be celebrating the 185th anniversary of the first Largs Flower Show. The show dates back to 1841 and was held in the Brisbane Arms Inn on Main Street, Largs, now called "The George". We have been researching the history for some time and will be producing a publication next year.

Largs Flower Show is the oldest event still being held in the town. Research has shown that it is the oldest Flower Show still being held in Ayrshire. There

were older flower shows and older societies in Scotland. However, some Societies have either folded or are still going but don't hold a traditional flower show any more. It would be interesting to learn of any Scottish flower shows that predate 1841 and are still being held. Do you know? Let us know by contacting me.

Etta Strachan

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President/Secretary

Largs & District Horticultural Society



A press clipping from 1986 of our prize-winners with Hugh Gibson front left and I Halbert on front right

Largs Flower Show 2025

The sun shone on the busy August Bank Holiday weekend as Largs Flower Show opened its doors to visitors.

Visitors were treated to a colourful spectacle of flowers, pot plants, vegetables and crafts. The vegetables astounded the visitors with their size and variety and Cut Flowers with sweet peas, dahlias and roses entranced. The Floral Art exhibits lit up the church together with the allotment/community garden baskets of vegetables and flowers which gave a feeling of the approaching harvest festival. Baking included the specially crafted cakes in the Bake-off classes. Budding talent was evident in the variety of exhibits in the Schools, Nurseries and Junior sections and in the Viking Festival class

with swords made from flower, foliage, natural and recycled materials.

The tearoom, raffle and home-grown plants for sale drew the crowds. Collecting top prize was local gardener, Hugh Gibson, who won six trophies in all.

It is great to see so many people enjoying the show and indeed participating in it. Such a wide range of talent and age groups!

The Flower Show is a bit more than the entries on the bench – it is about bringing people together meeting old friends and making new ones; sharing stories, hints and tips; encouraging people to have the confidence to grow their own and those who want to enter the show. A celebration of Horticultural and Crafts indeed.



Hugh Gibson overall winner



Sweet Pea Society 125th anniversary Medal and Rosette – I Halbert

Fungi in the garden

You will be familiar with mushrooms or toadstools popping up in the garden, most of which are (unfortunately) not edible. Whether they are good for your garden depends on the species.

Fungi in general cannot produce their own food as they do not photosynthesise. The common view is that they cause damage when they break down roots and other plant material for their nutrients. Although this might seem like a disadvantage in your garden if it kills one of your prize specimens,



Wood rotting fungus on a larch log glowing in UV light

without fungi helping material to rot down, our gardens would be full of debris that piled up unchanged. The toadstools are the fruiting bodies of the fungus which produce spores and are very obvious. Some glow in UV light, though it is hard to imagine what benefit this brings!

The less obvious part of the fungus are the fungal threads that grow underground, called the mycorrhiza (*myco* means fungus and *rhiza* means roots). It is the mycorrhiza of some species that have a beneficial relationship with roots, and enable trees to communicate and pass nutrients between separate trees. It has been termed the “Wood Wise Net” and if

you want to learn more about it, *Entangled Life* by Merlin Sheldrake gives an interesting account of recent research. The mycorrhiza are underground and link individual trees to other trees in the vicinity. The fungus



Fly agaric in the garden

benefits from the trees and the trees benefit by having a connection and communication with their fellow trees.

Are there any gardening implications of this knowledge? It seems to me that it is one argument in favour of “no-dig” gardening as it would minimize disruption to the established mycorrhiza. You have probably seen gardeners on television sprinkling mycorrhizal granules around the roots of newly planted trees to encourage the formation of the fungi to help growth. I asked the Organic Gardening Association whether it was necessary to clean pots to sterilize them before reusing and the answer was no. Just brush out the debris as then any mycorrhizal fungus present would remain in the pots and promote germination and growth. So that’s one job you can ignore with a clear conscience!

Sue Thomas

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Hardy Plant Society (Scottish and Northern Borders Group)

As we move into the winter months, we can reflect on another year of interesting garden visits, plant sales, lectures and our annual five-day garden trip.

With members from throughout Scotland our monthly garden visits are arranged in different parts of the country, occasionally with the option of an overnight stay. A record of these visits can be found on our website.

We visit a wide variety of gardens, both large and small, many of them part of Scotland's Garden Scheme, usually open by arrangement for us, but we also visit private gardens not otherwise open to the public. We are grateful to the owners who have been so welcoming, introducing their gardens, providing tea, coffee, cakes, and scones.

Plant sales with contributions from our members are a regular event; an opportunity to buy something new, perhaps a less common plant variety at a very reasonable price. Despite the profusion of plant on display, few are left at the end



Gresgarth

of the day!

This year our annual five-day coach trip took us to gardens in the Wirral and North Cheshire. The trip was as popular as ever. Ten gardens were visited and somehow, on the return journey, all the plants purchased were found a place in the coach.

This year, in the winter months we are offering a monthly series of four online talks from November through to February, given by speakers from around the UK. We hope this will facilitate member participation and bring some interest to the grey days. Currently this is only open to HPS members.

Membership of our parent society, The *Hardy Plant Society* is a prerequisite to membership of our group.

www.hardy-plant.org.uk

The Society hosts Special Interest Groups: Galanthus, Hardy Geranium, Peony, Pulmonaria, Ranunculaceae, Shade and Woodland and Variegated Plants. There is a Conservation Scheme, and a Seed Distribution Scheme, 1,500 different varieties of hardy plant seeds are on offer to members in December of each year.

Planning for next year's Group programme, which starts in February/ March, is well underway. As a group of enthusiasts for gardens and hardy plants – some more knowledgeable than others and easy company – we always welcome new members. A guide to joining the Group can be found on our website.

Margaret Roberts
Group Secretary

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tors, and structured support to identify local needs, pool expertise, and share best practice. A coordinated national presence was viewed as a unique contribution the Forum could offer, helping raise awareness, advocate for funding linked to health and wellbeing, and increase visibility for the wider movement.

In-person connection remains important. Participants proposed regional meetings, winter gatherings, garden visits, and club-to-club hosting as ways to strengthen solidarity and learning. Practical steps like easing online access barriers, providing seed-sharing or plant-sharing initiatives, and promoting cross-club participation would help build momentum.

There was a clear appetite for a Forum that acts as both a national voice and a grassroots support network; enhancing communication, reducing duplication, modernising how clubs connect, and enabling collaboration that individual clubs cannot achieve alone. The in-person Winter Gathering is a positive.

Fyfe Blair
Alison Murison



Tom Campbell's
'Jeelie Pan'
brightened the
top table.

Dalkeith Horticultural Society

After a decade as Dalkeith Horticultural Society President, Sheena Lamb, has retired from the post. Here she receives a token of our appreciation from our incoming President, John Jack.

Barbara Harris is the new Treasurer, Tim Rideout continues as Secretary as does Helen McMurchie as Membership Secretary.

All are welcome to join us for the rest of the winter talks and an exciting set of excursions in Summer 2026.

The Annual Coffee Morning will be from 10am till noon on Saturday 9th May at the Dalkeith Library and Art Centre

Tim Rideout
Secretary



Café Lite

At the Winter Gathering, the meeting was entertained by this event which Fyfe Blair organised. People were broken into groups of three or four. There were three stages, with different questions for discussion. In between each stage everyone moved around again. It certainly enhanced social mixing and a large variety of experiences were captured and collected.

While the SGF Council is considering the voluminous responses in detail, here is a very short summary of Fyfe's report.

What are Clubs' current problems?

Clubs across Scotland are facing significant challenges related to participation and sustainability. Many report a shortage of volunteers and an ageing membership base, with difficulty attracting and retaining younger members. This contributes to reduced committee capacity, declining attendance at in-person meetings, and concerns about the long-term viability of clubs. Venues closing, rising costs, and financial pressures such as insurance further add to operational strain.

Despite these challenges, there is strong appetite for collaboration and innovation. Clubs see clear potential in working together to share speakers, coordinate events, and jointly access online resources such as 'Zoom' talks. Digital tools and social media are recognised as important engagement channels, though many clubs would benefit from shared training and infrastructure to use them effectively.

A central hub or coordinated support function, including an organised speaker directory, shared advertising space, and communication network, is seen as a key enabler of better connection and collective action.

Clubs are also suggesting that it may be worth exploring more flexible, informal formats and rebranding approaches to appeal to new members and modernise the image. There is continued enthusiasm for shared outings, open garden days, and creative programming to draw community interest. With structured support, increased collaboration, and a focus on inclusivity and modern communication, clubs can build on existing passion and community roots to strengthen their resilience and broaden their reach.

What should the SGF provide?

Participants saw the SG Forum as a key connector and enabler for gardening clubs/groups across Scotland. The strongest theme was the need for shared digital infrastructure and improved skills, including a modernised SGF website, training in social media, and a common online platform for sharing speakers, resources, and club information. A centralised Speakers and Judges list, maintained and updated by the Forum, was seen as highly valuable, along with shared access to 'Zoom' for winter talks and hybrid connection.

Central coordination and communication were also emphasised. Clubs would benefit from a dedicated point of contact, such as regional coordina-

Winter Gathering at Scone Palace

This year, we were delighted to be holding our Winter Gathering at the crowning place of Scottish Kings and the original home of the Stone of Scone. Over the centuries, people have come to attend parliaments and coronations at Scone Palace; this time the SGF were privileged to gather in these historic surroundings.



On arrival, representatives were welcomed with tea and coffee and we assembled in the drawing room for the formal business of the AGM. This was followed by the first session which focussed on raising the next generation of horticulturists. It was interesting to hear how Lynne and Jayne from Dundee and Angus College had themselves become engaged in horticultural education. In addition, we learned about the various courses available to students and their subsequent employment.

After lunch, in the impressive surroundings of the Long Gallery, we were pleased to welcome back M.T.

O'Donnell, Editor of *Scotland Grows* magazine. She gave us an insight into the challenges of judging the Pallet and Planter Competitions, an increasingly popular feature at the Scone Garden Show.

The next session was *Café Lite* which provided an excellent opportunity for group discussion and the sharing of ideas between all the representatives. Responses from the individual groups have been collated and this has provided the SGF Council with much material to consider. (See also page 12.)

Our final speaker was Brian Cunningham, Vice-President of SGF, and a presenter on Beechgrove. He shared his enthusiasm for the history of the gardens at Scone, including David Douglas who started his horticultural career at Scone Palace. As Head Gardener, Brian discussed the challenges associated with the management of 100 acres of gardens, which include the Victorian pinetum, Murray Star Maze, and the walled garden restoration project.

This was a highly successful gathering which was enjoyed by all who attended.

Anne Vincent



Dollar Gardening Club with Dollar in Bloom



Our main focus this year was on our entry to the Keep Scotland Beautiful award scheme, for the second year in a row. The pressure was on to repeat last year's success. We were aided by groups and individuals in the town who have taken on responsibility for their own local patches or for wider general public areas. Much hard work went into keeping the town looking smart: many residents helped with weeding pavements and gutters, along with litter picking and maintenance of cared-for areas prior to the judges visit on 4th August. The two judges were not the only arrivals that day – they were



accompanied by Storm Floris. The trip around the various maintained sites in Dollar and the subsequent social gathering was rather quicker than planned as concerns about the wild weather were growing.

On the 16th September, at the on-line award ceremony, we heard the great news that, once again, we had won a gold medal in the Small Town category, the Best Small Town, a Community Horticulture Award, and The Young Peoples Award. We would like to thank all those who contribute their time and energy to keeping Dollar beautiful.



The annual Horticultural Show in September was very well supported; entries to the flower and vegetable categories were higher than expected following the dry summer. Enthusiasm for the crafts, baking and preserve classes continues to grow and we were pleased to see many more entries in the children's classes.

This was also the time of the Scottish Enlightenment which championed reason and rationality, and so gardens were expected to be places for enjoying nature within a controlled environment. With its carefully constructed river and woodland paths set out between the Grotto and Teahouse, Newhailes Estate epitomises those principles and it is easy to imagine people such as the philosopher David Hume and economist Adam Smith (both of whom were known to the family) appreciating its surroundings.

The family must have enjoyed showing off their pleasure garden to visitors with its sweet smelling lilac and dog roses, but we know from the Dalrymple's records that this estate was also well used and greatly loved by the family itself. Their letters and diaries frequently mention spending time around the estate.

Sadly, as the fortunes of the Dalrymple family declined in the 20th century, Mother Nature took an increasing toll on the landscape and its structures; the family also found it impossible to guard against the depredations of thieves and those who had little care for the estate's history.

Since acquiring Newhailes in 1997 the NTS has worked hard to rediscover the garden's 18th century treasures and planting, create a working kitchen garden that now sells its produce to visitors, and to progress the task of re-establishing time-appropriate planting such as Portuguese laurel and sweet chestnut. Looking ahead, this work will continue. Thought is being given to how new techniques might help visitors gain a better idea of how the estate looked in its heyday while ensuring it remains a place of contemplation and pleasure for



The Grotto

future generations.

None more so than the estate's original walled garden. With its 18th century heated wall, an icehouse with a decorative circular pathway on its roof and an ornamental wall based on an ancient classical design, it must have been an amazing sight. Towards the end of the 18th century it became a flower garden, once again following the latest fashions, and pictures from the Edwardian era show a space full of amazing blooms. It must have been a beautiful place to visit.

That's why exciting plans have just been announced by the National Trust for Scotland to bring the garden back to life. As the Trust looks towards its Centenary in 2031, work is starting on creating a garden that honours the past of this amazing estate while also looking to its future, including plants that can cope with climate change. Subject to sufficient funds, this Centenary Garden will become a stunning space once more – a place to connect with nature, learn new skills and simply enjoy the peace and beauty that has captivated visitors for over 300 years.

**Jan Polley
NTS Guide**

Newhailes House and Gardens



Newhailes House and Gardens is a fascinating example of early 18th century Scotland. While the House is justifiably known for its original décor and furnishings from the early 1700s, fewer people have recognised that the grounds of this National Trust for Scotland estate provide a similar time-capsule experience of garden design from the 1700s.

Unlike many of Scotland's grand estates, the grounds of Newhailes were never 'victorianised' and so offer a rare insight into the wonderful design of an 18th century Scottish pleasure garden. A new outdoor tour of the estate has recently started that shares this story with visitors.

The Dalrymple family, who acquired the Newhailes estate in the early 1700s, were influenced by early French gardening design, introducing innovations such as a Ha-Ha and Cabinet Garden surrounded by what may be Scotland's first Holm Oaks and that are still there today. The 1st Baronet, Sir David Dalrymple, bought *La Théorie et La Pratique du Jardinage*, the international gardening 'bible' of its time, and was even one

of the subscribers who paid for its translation into English.

The Dalrymple family also had the gentry's fascination with all things classical - ancient Greek and Roman myths and Italian renaissance architecture. The 2nd Baronet, Sir James Dalrymple, who is

probably responsible for much of what we see today, went on the Grand Tour of Europe in the early 1700s as a young man. These classical themes can still be found in the estate, including the remains of a complex shell Grotto and a Teahouse which mirrors the Palladian architecture for which the House is so famous.

Indeed, experts have suggested that the Teahouse, which is thought to be the only one of its kind in Scotland to be built over water, holds a remarkable resemblance (albeit much smaller) to the internationally acclaimed Palladian bridge at Wilton House, Wiltshire. We certainly know its builder, Henry Herbert 9th Earl of Pembroke, spent time with Sir James on the continent.

The Dalrymple family clearly put a lot of effort into the design and development of their estate throughout the first half of the 18th century. We can see that they followed the pan European move from geometric, structured gardens to an emphasis on a more natural, pastoral-inspired landscape.



We held a flower imprint workshop in August which proved a great success and which we will hope to repeat, the popular wreath making class will be held again this year in late November.

A recently adopted piece of unloved land, abandoned by the council, is progressing surprisingly well, with the plants managing to survive the tricky conditions against all odds. We have, so far, planted about half of the area. The annual bulb sale took place on a cold and windy Saturday, but we managed to sell a great number of bulbs. We donated daffodil bulbs to be planted by residents in public areas around the town. The large tubs on the main street have been planted with tulip bulbs and winter pansies which will provide a welcome splash of colour in the Spring.

Fiona Roe



SOCIETY	EVENT	VENUE	DATE
Friends of Cruickshank Botanic Garden	Horticulture of Commonwealth War Graves	Info at https://tinyurl.com/War-Graves	December 11th
The Caley (RCHS)	Spring Show	Saughton Gardens	April 4th & 5th
The Caley (RCHS)	Auricula & Primula Show	Saughton Gardens	May 3rd 12noon to 4pm
Dalkeith Horticultural Society	Coffee Morning and Plant Sale	Dalkeith Art Centre	May 9th
Pathhead and District Horticultural Society	Annual Plant Sale and Coffee Morning	Callander Pavilion, Pathhead	May 9th, 10am-12noon
Dalkeith Horticultural Society	Annual Coffee Morning	Dalkeith Library and Art Centre	May 9th, 10am-12noon
The Caley (RCHS)	Cacti & Succulent Show	Saughton Gardens	June 7th 10am to 4pm
Auchtermuchty Horticultural Society	Auchtermuchty Open Gardens 2026	Various streets in Auchtermuchty	June 27th & 28th
Pathhead and District Horticultural Society	Annual Flower Show	Community Hall Main Street, Pathhead	August 31st 2-4pm
Brighter Bervie	Gardens Open Daily to the Public	Montrose Road, Inverbervie, Montrose	Daily

Friends of the Cruickshank Botanic Garden

Since 1983, the Friends have worked to promote and support the Garden. Through various fundraising and educational activities, we help to elevate the profile of the Garden and its collection. Members of the Friends support the Garden directly through a yearly membership.

What we do

- * Host biannual plant sales, raising money for the Garden by selling plants, generously donated by the Friends, to the local community.
- * Provide free houseplants to incoming 1st year students in the School of Biology Fund internships and other horticultural training within the Garden.
- * Organise an annual lecture programme, featuring monthly talks on all manner of horticultural and environmental topics.

Those lectures occur on the 2nd Thursday from October to May each year, from 7.30 to 8.30pm at the University of Aberdeen's Zoology Building.

Lectures are open to the public, but non-members of the Friends are asked to provide a £3 donation to support the lecture series and the Garden.

Find our events at:

www.fcbgaberdeen.org.uk/lecture-programme

Dr Taylor Coffey
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Lichens in your garden

Many of you will have noticed green growths on the branches of the trees in your garden. I'm not talking about leaves but small leaflike growths that hug the bark.

What are they? Are they damaging your trees?

The short answer is that they are probably lichens and, no, they are not harming your trees.

But what are these overlooked bits of nature? Lichens are not just one organism, but a combination of a fungus and an alga, that together produce the structure that you see. The fungus provides a home, and the alga provides the food as it can photosynthesise.



Sue Thomas
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