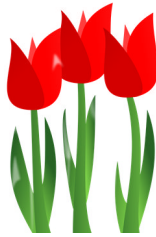


Issue No. 45

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Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



State of the Nation /State of the Membership

Hello everyone. May I take this opportunity to wish everyone a Happy New Year. May you also enjoy our lovely gardens on many occasions through 2017.

I would also like to say a very big thank you to all of you who have enclosed a stamped addressed envelope with your membership applications and renewals. I fully realize that this is an extra cost for you but it saves us a significant amount in postage (well over £100 so far) and you would not BELIEVE how much time it saves me! It means I can pop your card or cards in the envelope straight away and post it the next day (sometimes the same day) but I can delay doing the computer inputting to a time which suits me, and when I have a few to enter simultaneously. Indeed, just think how much time it takes to address 200 or so envelopes by hand. So: thank you.

Those of you who were at the AGM will have heard me say how important our membership subscriptions are to our continued financial well-being and to the maintenance and development of Thwaite Gardens. The subscriptions are our main source of income, followed by our takings at Open Day. In the year 1 Nov 2015 – 31 Oct 2016 we had about 400 households registered, probably about 600 individual members. Three months into the current year roughly half of those have renewed.

It is hard to be precise about numbers as people are joining and renewing all the time. Most weeks I process a few applications, sometimes it is several. As you know, new members who join at Open Day get 18 months' membership. Hopefully you all still feel it is VERY good value for money and also a way of contributing to an excellent cause. The partnership between the Friends and the University means that we can go on extending and renewing a beautiful place which is a great resource in our community.

The Friday volunteers continue to be a group of about 17, and on any one Friday we usually have about 14 people (I make the coffee so I count the mugs, as the volunteers usually spread themselves round the grounds, making them difficult to count). We were very sad to hear of Erica's sudden death at the

end of last year. She had volunteered for many years and, although quite frail latterly, she would still come in to help, even for half a session.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read about the new classroom. It will be great for both students and local schoolchildren, will be a good teaching resource, will provide modern facilities (including for our own refreshments at Open Day!) and so enable even greater use to be made of the gardens.

Annie Bourton Card (Treasurer)

17.01.17



Thwaite Hall Access

I have been asked by the manager at Thwaite Hall to remind Members of the Friends of Thwaite Gardens that access to the Gardens is via the Botanic Gardens entrance on Thwaite Street and not via Thwaite Hall.

Normal access hours are Monday to Thursday from 10am to 3.30pm and 10am to 3pm on Friday.

(except on Bank Holidays and at other times when the University is closed)

Risk assessments have been carried out by University staff with the result that the whole issue of dog walking and general access to the Gardens from a security and student wellbeing point of view was a big concern.

We do not want the few to spoil the enjoyment of the Gardens for the majority of the members.

Vic Swetez

School of Environmental Sciences

Diary DATES

Winter Walk

Saturday 18th February, 11am – 1pm
Entry £1 (including members)

Talk

7.30pm, 21st March
An Introduction to Exotic Gardening
By Paul Spracklin, Garden Designer

Open Day

Sunday 21st May, 11am to 4pm

Open Evening

Wednesday 21st June

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*We welcome any contributions from members, of articles, photographs, letters etc. to future copies of the Newsletter, so if you would like something including, please contact the Editor, whose details are at the end of this Newsletter*

## TREES OF THWAITE

### LAWSON'S CYPRESS (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*)



This is one of the commonest conifers in Thwaite gardens and overall, in many of its variations, probably the commonest and most widespread conifer in British gardens.

The 'type' original wild tree can be recognised as a columnar slightly shaggy looking evergreen tree with foliage in pads of tiny overlapping scales, which has a vaguely parsley – like scent. The cones are reminiscent of wrinkly peas when unripe – becoming brown when the seeds are ready to be released. Seedlings spring up fairly frequently on undisturbed bare ground, rubble, leaf heaps etc. but seem to establish themselves only infrequently for very long in East Yorks., perhaps because they are insufficiently competitive under local conditions. However, if nurtured they readily grow into new trees.

On the whole Lawson's Cypress grows well in Britain. It originates from Northern California and Oregon, where it is known as the Port Orford Cedar – Port Orford being a coastal town in Oregon where from such locations the tree extends inland to the mountain ranges behind. This part of America is noted for its very high rainfall and under these conditions the species attains a height of 60m. For this reason no doubt, the best examples of Lawson's are to be found generally in western Britain, places like Snowdonia, where climate is most similar to the Pacific north-west and where British specimens so far have

attained around 40m – thus quite impressive trees. Like most of the trees from this geographical area however, Lawson's was introduced only in the mid- 19th century, so ultimate British performance is unknown. However, with its timber potential in mind, commercial plantations have been established in Britain.

Western British conditions might be close to ideal, but those further east – as in East Yorks. – are rather less so. Yet here the tree still flourishes, sometimes quite handsomely. But not always so and some of our specimens are more spare than they might be. In such condition, they easily acquire a decidedly dreary aspect. Undoubtedly though, this melancholy demeanour adds to the gothic atmosphere of many big Victorian villas and mansions where they are a trademark feature of the surrounding gardens.

The type tree is less common in small suburban gardens. Yet the chances are that if you or one of your neighbours has "conifers" in the garden, at least one of them will be a form of Lawson's Cypress. No other conifer has produced such a wide range of variations and 'sports' as this species. These vary widely in shape, texture, colour and speed of growth, though most, including many of those marketed as 'dwarf' eventually become too large for comfort in the average garden. The number of varieties named seems so large as to be almost implausible and in "Plantfinder" around 200 are listed, many of which are variations on variations. No doubt many of these differ in ways that are only noticeable to the obsessive collector – or even more so perhaps, the trade marketing departments of the nursery industry – which has a vested interest in producing ever more 'novelties' for the public to buy. More fool you!

In this short article it would be impossible to make a meaningful excursion of the range of varieties available – one can only give a generalised account of some of the qualities on offer. Shapes vary from small and globose 'Minima' to tall slender 'Columnaris'. Colours from blue 'Greyswood Pillar' to bright gold 'Winston Churchill' and textures from soft feathery 'Pottenii' and fuzzy 'Fletcheri' to threadlike 'Filiformis' and twisting 'Wisselii'. There are even a few, somewhat blotchy looking, variegated types. Certain varieties, for no obvious reason are found everywhere, others are rarely seen. Many of the slower smaller varieties are in fact juvenile forms – that is they retain immature

foliage (spikey, unlike the scaly adult foliage) and growth for many years. Some of these revert eventually - with a subsequent abrupt change in appearance and habit- and start to produce cones.

Thwaite gardens have a small but diverse collection of conifer cultivars in beds at the back of Green Wickets. Although many of these are very overcrowded now, they do give a reasonable idea of what is on offer, many of which (though not all) are Lawson's cultivars.

There are good reasons why Lawson's conifers are so popular, besides being diverse. They are very hardy and utterly easy to please requiring almost no maintenance until they become too big. Then they can, up to a point be clipped, even tightly formally. Certain varieties can also be made into a hedge. Although not native, they are very good for wildlife. Often the dense dry interiors of the cultivars are infested with spiders, hibernating ladybirds and birds' nests. Mature trees provide sheltered roosts and seed for many birds in winter

John Killingbeck

January 2017

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER

***Annual subscriptions were due on 1st November 2016.
They are £8 per person or £12 for two people living at the same
address***

***Anyone who has not paid by the Open Day 2017 will be
removed from the database.***

***Cheques should be made payable to "The Friends of
Thwaite Gardens" and sent to the treasurer, whose
contact details are on the last page of this Newsletter.***

***Please note: new members who have joined on, or
after, the Open Day in May 2016 do not have to renew
their subscriptions until November 2017.***

PLANT OF THE MONTH

STACHYRUS (*Stachyrus praecox*)



This is certainly one of the lesser known late winter/early spring flowering shrubs and does not even have an English name, or at least one that is used regularly. It used to be quite rare but now crops up from time to time in ordinary garden centres, although, unless seen in bloom, it is unlikely to attract the attention of the typical garden centre visitor. But then the same could be said of a host of other far more popular shrubs like Forsythia or Flowering Currant.

It is something of a conundrum why certain plants become popular universally whilst others, like *Stachyrus*, just as good are rarely seen. It cannot be said to be that people are uninterested in the novelty of trying something different because they seem happy to buy endless varieties of Fuchsias or roses or Hostas, many of which scarcely differ from one another. Nor could *Stachyrus* be condemned as being more 'difficult' than such as *Budlieja* or *Philadelphus* - it is vigorous and generally untroublesome to grow. Though its flowers are far from 'loud', it is no more subtle than popular *Garrya*.

Stachyrus is a fairly large (potentially to 3m or so) deciduous shrub of arching habit. It is not particularly interesting to look at during the summer, but once leafless, it begins to acquire more character. Although, actually, it will not

bloom until early spring, the flower buds are visible as intriguing thin catkin - like stiffly pendulous spikes all through the winter, lining the dark purplish twigs. Actual blooming commences usually in March, though in very mild years may be even earlier. The individual flowers are very pale yellow and appear abundantly in short strings as the catkin spikes expand. In certain light, it seems almost as if the entire bush were bedecked with little strings of pearls and the charming effect this presents is unique, unmistakable for any other shrub – thus often eliciting the question – what is that plant called?

Stachyrus is not fussy as to soil and will grow in sun or moderate shade. Like seemingly every plant though it does have one weakness. In this case that weakness is that its display can be cut short by late frost, which because it blooms so early, is always a threat. For this reason, the best situation for it might be fairly sheltered but cool, so as not to bring it out too early. Some light overhead tree cover also might be ideal.

Our *Stachyrus* at Thwaite grows in the Winter Border. It grows well and blooms heavily here but it is sometimes caught by the frost when in flower, though the plant in itself and while dormant is totally hardy.

J Killingbeck Jan 2017

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*Gardens Opening Times Reminder*

*Monday to Thursday 10am to 3.30pm*

*Fridays 10am to 3pm, except on Bank Holidays and at  
other times when the University is closed.*

## **GARDENER'S QUESTION TIME: WHY and HOW SHOULD WE PRUNE ORNAMENTAL TREES AND SHRUBS?**

At this time of year, my letter box receives a succession of fliers from assorted landscape companies informing me that now is the time to give my trees and such like, the pruning that they “need”. But in what way can it be said that any such plants “NEED” to be pruned? After all, in nature no one goes around pruning them, yet for thousands, if not millions of years, trees and shrubs have flourished seemingly unaided. So, wherein lies the “need”?

Often the flier also invokes another source of anxiety – one’s garden is in danger of “getting out of control”! Herein lies the clue to the real source of the need – it is that of the gardener and of course that of the landscaper who by invoking this fear, hopes to cash in on it.

In spite of common belief to the contrary, generally trees and shrubs can manage without any pruning and any so done is rarely to their unqualified benefit. But the truth of gardens is that they exist for the benefit of man, rather than plants and it is the will of man imposed on nature, rather than the reverse that rules. In other words, it is the subjective will of the gardener that dictates what should be done or is ‘right’. One might even speculate that it is the feeling of exercising one’s personal will (note: not usually that of someone else) that is the basis of what many gardeners find satisfying about gardening.

Why is all this of the slightest use when deciding about pruning, I hear you ask? Well the second burden of the title question is “how should” we prune? What is the ‘right’ way to do it? – a subject on which entire books have been written and upon which substantial careers have been built. Yet if pruning (from the plant’s point of view) is not right – how can there be a ‘right’ way of doing it?

Here is where the will of the gardener comes in. The right way to prune your own plants is the way that gives you the most pleasing result. For some gardeners, clipping everything into near identical blobs is pleasing. For many such gardeners, tidiness is the ultimate aim – a need (however illusory) for total control, and even more so perhaps, to be seen by visitors and neighbours

to have it. The plants are given no chance whatsoever to express their own nature. So be it.

Other gardeners, to varying degrees and motives, seek a more subtle appreciation of natural form – the ‘personality’ of the plant - and will endeavour to decipher it. They thus abhor the ‘lollipop’ style above. Yet often even these gardeners will attempt, or are encouraged to try to ‘improve’ or enhance whatever desirable qualities the plant is perceived to have. Whether they succeed depends on their individual skill and judgement (which is subjective). But learning and knowledge may also be part of their pleasure. So, this where all the textbooks and ‘experts’ come in, with techniques suggested which seem sometimes very hard to follow. With lamentable regularity, one’s own tangled plants rarely seem to resemble the clear cut examples demonstrated. But take comfort – aesthetic ‘success’, in the end remains largely subjective, unless one is aiming for something definitely quantifiable like abundance of fruit etc.

Bear in mind a few other things before you reach for the loppers (or the book). Plants are mostly amazingly forgiving and often come back from devastation. But equally, far more plants are ruined by inept pruning than by no pruning at all and a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. So in answer to the original question – first, ‘know thyself’ – then learn to know your plants!

JK 2017

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Open Day 2017
Sunday 21st May

There will be a plant stall again, with a wide variety of plants for sale. Donations of plants from Friends would be welcome. There will be the usual refreshments served from 11 am in the new classroom, and we would welcome contributions of home baking to this stall, as it usually goes down very well!

Other ways in which you can help to make the day a success are:- Welcoming visitors, assisting with refreshments, handing out brochures, signing up new members, manning the plant stall or taking admission fees

Please indicate your preference and the time which would suit you best on the accompanying loose leaf form and return it to Vic Swetez or drop it in to the greenhouse block at the Botanic Gardens.

Admission to the Open Day is free to members on production of their membership cards and for non-members is the very reasonable price of £3.00 with accompanied under 16s free, so please tell all your family and friends about the event and let's try and make this year's Open Day even more of a success than last year.

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## University of Hull New Environmental Classroom



The new classroom at the Gardens has now been completed. It is a self-contained unit with toilets and a large classroom/laboratory.

Its purpose is not only to enhance the University's teaching but it will also be used by local schools and other external bodies covering a wide range of activities.

It is also available to The Friends of Thwaite Gardens for their events and functions. Further information as to its use will be given later.

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