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## NEWSLETTER February 2022

*Grow Friends, Grow Fit ... Grow a Garden!*

This month we welcome members to our Annual General Meeting. Additionally, we are also welcoming Melanie Aspey, who will talk to us about the Rothschilds who, for over two centuries, have been dedicated horticulturalists and conservationists.

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The Agenda for this evening is as follows:

1. President and Chair's welcome
2. [To confirm minutes of the 2021 AGM].
3. To receive Chair's review of the year.
4. To receive Treasurer's report of the year.
5. To elect officers and committee for coming year.
6. [To present Show Table cup.]
7. Any other business

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A reporter in St. Louis has gone viral for his descriptions of February, which he describes as 'an honest month', on the basis that it doesn't hold up life any better than it really is', makes no promises and doesn't pretend to be anything other than bleak. I wonder what gardeners think about this? There are swathes of snowdrops everywhere and aconites have flowered. Plus iris and camellias are in bloom in gardens in south-east London. Pots of crocus and narcissi sit on tables outside windows. Anna's piece below sums it up perhaps. As we approach the end of February, could it be that hope is in the air?

### February Plant of the Month chosen by Anna: Snowdrop

Beginning in January we can start to anticipate the appearance of snowdrops from the very first week and the excitement of these lovely bulbs continues through February. *Galanthus nivalis Atkinsii* is one of the first hybrids to flower in the new year and has just recently gone over in my garden, having appeared around 3rd January. Due to its vigour and stature and handsome foliage and flowers, *Atkinsii* was awarded the RHS Award of Garden Merit, so it comes highly recommended.

Margaret T. has a fine collection of snowdrops and *Galanthus* 'Trumps' is one that stands out. This hybrid was found in a garden in 1999 by the snowdrop expert, Matt Bishop. A handsome specimen with green markings on both of the inner and outer segments, flowering in early February.

Also in Margaret's garden are clumps of *Galanthus plicatus* 'Diggory', found in a garden in Norfolk in 1993 amongst clumps of *G. plicatus*. In my mind this is the most handsome of all snowdrops, with a lantern-like shape and puckered seer-sucker-like outer petals that are instantly recognisable. A highly sought-after specimen.

In Pat's garden, another handsome snowdrop, *Galanthus* 'S Arnett', shines amongst the evergreens. This hybrid was discovered in Samuel Arnett's garden which he then went on to cultivate. A tall, vigorous plant with gorgeous honey-fragrant flowers and worthy of any garden.

All snowdrops like moist, cool conditions in winter but require a long, dry dormancy period in the summer months, so planting under trees or shrubs is ideal. Some gardeners use aquatic baskets to protect the bulbs and stop them straying. And although they tolerate being grown in containers and repotted annually, snowdrops much prefer being in the ground.



*Galanthus* 'Trumps'



*Galanthus* S. Arnett



*Galanthus plicatus* 'Diggory'



*Galanthus nivalis* Atkinsii

### Gardening notes

- **The Gardens Trust** is offering *Gardens of Delight*, 22 February, 1 March, 8 March and 15 March. Individually each talk costs £5.00, or all four for £16.00. Incredibly good value. Another talk in their series of *Unforgettable Gardens* is on Gertrude Jekyll's garden in Sussex on 23 February, with Castle Howard to come on 2 March. The website has a wealth of information.
- Also at the **V&A**, *Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature* includes some lovely images of gardens.
- Keep an eye on the lectures (in person and online and free!) offered by **Gresham College**. There is one in May 2022 on 'Averting the Insect Apocalypse'. With the current focus on sustainability this looks like compulsory viewing!
- **Kew Orchid Festival**, with orchids from Costa Rica is on until 6 March, and the Sherwood Gallery has a wonderful art installation "Natural Reserve" by Zadok Ben-David featuring a field of etched flowers. On until April 22<sup>nd</sup>. Members Kathy & Sharon visited and highly recommend it. Free with garden entry ticket (book in advance though).
- *Fabergé in London: Romance to Revolution* exhibition at the **V&A** includes The Basket of Flowers Egg commissioned by Tsar Nicholas II as an Easter gift for his wife. The exhibition continues until May.
- "Reflecting Greenwich" an exhibition of watercolours from the Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust Archive, showing what the area looked like 200 years ago. On display at the **Old Royal Naval College** visitor centre (opposite the Cutty Sark). Free.

### Anna writes:

On a sunny, calm morning recently, I visited Chelsea Physic Garden to see the snowdrop collection and to admire the gardens in winter. The first noticeable flowering shrub to stand out when we entered the grounds was *Rosa x odorata* Bengal Crimson/Bengal Beauty which I wrote about last month. It is huge and smothered in crimson flowers and buds and looking utterly spectacular.

The Chelsea Physic Garden was established in 1673, being a four-acre, south-facing site adjacent to the embankment in Chelsea. Surrounded by high walls, and protected by adjacent buildings and mature trees, the garden has its own micro-climate where extremely rare Mediterranean, Asian and Australasian plants flourish.

At this time of year the snowdrops can be seen from various pathways and the north-south winding woodland walk now has raised mounds, so the snowdrops can be seen and admired up close. An additional snowdrop walk has been created on the southern border and this area, with its meandering path, has been well designed and is quite enchanting. It was worth kneeling down on the pathway to get up close to the common snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*), in order to detect its honey fragrance, which on a calm day was all the more intense and very much worth the effort!

Even on a winter's day there is much to admire: Mahonia shrubs and various Salvias in flower, garden rooms, the vegetable garden and especially the greenhouses, housing exotics, Pelargoniums and tender plants that we all love. There is a nice cafe and benches where you can soak up the sun and have a snack and admire the grounds. Tickets cost £8.50, with the gardens opening Sunday-Friday, 11-4pm located at 66 Royal Hospital Road, SW3. But choose a sunny, calm day in which to enjoy your visit as you will detect the flower fragrances in the air. It makes all the difference!



A view of the snowdrops on the southern boundary walk



*Rosa x odorata* Bengal Crimson/Bengal Beauty

### Pat's 10 jobs for February:

1. Prune winter flowering jasmine as soon as it finishes flowering and remove all dead and diseased wood and tie in to its support.
2. Keep winter flowering containers weeded and deadheaded and make sure they don't dry out. Top dressing with a mulch or gravel helps.
3. Prune late summer flowering summer clematis i.e. Group 3, mostly viticella types, now by cutting back all stems to about a foot above the ground and cut just above an emerging shoot. Sprinkle a little

- food around the roots towards the end of the month and try to mulch with compost too as clematis are very greedy feeders.
4. Sprinkle a high potash food around fruit bushes and fruit trees and again provide a mulch where possible.
  5. Split large clumps of snowdrops when they have finished flowering into groups of about three bulbs making sure to plant at the same height as before. If you have precious varieties do remember to label well so you don't risk digging them up when the foliage dies down. Mulch with leafmould if you have any.
  6. Do exactly the same for overcrowded clumps of winter aconites (eranthis). I saw a lovely bank of them with snowdrops in Maryon Park.
  7. Look out for unusual flowers on hellebores and mark them to save seed for later on.
  8. Make a dead hedge (it need only be small) by putting in two rows of upright in chestnut or hazel and laying your prunings in between. It makes a lovely habitat for wildlife and if you're lucky some nesting bees.
  9. Hold off direct sowing of annuals and vegetable seeds until you warm up the soil by covering it for a while. You can even use old compost bags if you have them.
  10. Pots of primroses and crocus from garden centres provide food for bumble bees roused early from hibernation.

### Object of the month



Bouquet of Lilies Clock (Fabergé egg).

Included in the fabulous Fabergé exhibition at the V&A currently is this lovely Bouquet of Lilies clock. Made in 1899 in the workshops of Peter Carl Fabergé for Tsar Nicholas II it was an Easter gift to his wife the Tsarita Alexandra Fyodorovna.

Happy gardening all and mind your back!

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