



Alpine Garden Society Norfolk Group Winter 2022 Newsletter

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A happy New Year to all our members and welcome to the Winter 2022 newsletter. Sadly we still trundle on in less than usual conditions but hopefully this year will see us getting back, as near as possible, to normal life. I hope you will enjoy what you are about to read below. I have to say that it becomes more difficult to produce each issue and as always we do need you, the members, to help us fill the pages otherwise the regular newsletter would have to cease. That would be a shame. Nevertheless I would like to thank all our contributors who since I took on the publishing of the newsletters have helped me fill the pages. I didn't want to name names but I would particularly like to thank Ray Mitchell who is always open to penning something for us and also Richard Hobbs who is always able to offer me pieces that are usually informative and educational for us all. I would like to encourage all of you to write something - it does not have to be long. Indeed a paragraph along the lines of that sent in by Margaret Burman, as you will see below, is most welcome and can usually be supported by photographs, either your own or some I will find. So please think about contributing and as someone once said; 'Come along! Let's be having you!'

Chair's Comments Rosie Ward

For those of you unable to attend the AGM in December, it may be a surprise to see a different name attached to the Chairman's column! Ian Black, who has been our Chairman for the past ten years, gave notice last year that he wished to stand down at the 2021 AGM.

On behalf of the Norfolk Group, I would like to thank him for going the extra mile during his tenure as Chair. He was most definitely a 'hands on' Chairman, taking an active role in the organisation and running of the East Anglian Show (along with his wife, Tess); organising the very successful one day conferences at the Abbey Conference Centre and coping so admirably over the last two years with the technical challenges of running meetings via Zoom. The latter being something that could not have been foreseen prior to Covid but,

without it, I think that many groups could have ceased to exist. Without doubt, all of these challenges entailed team work but Ian was heavily involved in them all.

I am pleased to say that Ian has said that he will continue to attend meetings and help at events but he is no longer Chairman or a member of the committee. I think after ten years, he deserves to step back and sit on the other side of the table. Thank you, Ian, for your dedication.

For those of you who do not know me, I have been a member of both the AGS and the Norfolk Group since the mid 1980s. I come from a horticultural background (father, uncle, grandfather) and, for my sins, married into horticulture! However, the magical moments of seeing alpine plants growing in a mountainous setting or exquisitely displayed at an AGS show or in an enthusiast's garden never fail to excite me and lift my spirits. I have agreed to take on the role of Chairman for one year as now is not the time to be without one. Following the sudden passing of our Vice Chair, John Foster, last summer and the subsequent resignation of Brenda, there are now just five people left on the committee: Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Show Secretary and just one committee member. This is really not a healthy or viable state for the Group to remain in, although I do appreciate that our members have always stepped up to help when things need doing. I'm particularly thinking of the East Anglian Show but, with an ageing membership, there is no certainty that even that help can be guaranteed long-term. We need to have a plan of action!

I am more concerned than I have ever been about the future of the Group. As a group, we are all growing older and, although we are attracting some new members, we need to attract more. We need to encourage both existing and newer members to become more involved, either from within the committee or with offering their ideas, skills or time. We are always open to suggestions and are currently trialling holding *some* meetings in the afternoons, rather than the evening. However, we are well aware that there are 'winners' and 'losers' in any changes we try to make.

One thing that we could all do is to encourage at least one person to join us at a meeting or at the East Anglian Show. I do sometimes think that the name 'Alpine Garden Society' has the potential to be off-putting to prospective new members as it can possibly suggest to newcomers a limited range of small and difficult to grow plants. Whereas there are so many examples of alpine plants that are well known garden plants, of all sizes and from varying habitats, from meadows to woodlands as well as the 'true' alpines from higher altitudes and harsher growing conditions. Just think, for example, of aquilegias, dianthus, geraniums, lathyrus, pulsatillas and trollius to name just a few.

If you would like to comment on or discuss any of the points that I have raised please, don't hesitate to contact me. My email address is: rosiewardspixworth@hotmail.co.uk or you can telephone me on 01603 427807, evenings are the best time to catch me at home.

AGM - Chairman's Report Ian Black (Previous Chairman)

Wednesday 15th December 2021

Many of us will be welcoming the end of 2021, mainly looking forward to waving good-bye to all the ups and downs associated with the pandemic, to date. I wish we could be welcoming the start of a new era but, at today's date, we are coming to terms with yet another phase of the same virus but, as of a couple of weeks ago, with a new name - Omicron. Sadly, this variant and its predecessors have impacted on this year's activities, both in AGS, nationally, and in the local Norfolk Group.

I won't repeat all the detail which I related in my mid-year note to the Group, other than to say that the impact on indoor and outdoor meetings has been significant. Being a generally optimistic and positive group, we tried to shake off the constraints of lockdowns and cancellations and, successfully, organised a couple of live meetings. Our thanks go to Peter Mallett and Richard Hobbs for helping us to break out of the Zoom mode. These two meetings and this month's AGM saw AGS Norfolk Group moving to a daytime format which has worked well and, perhaps, encouraged a few members to attend where night-time meetings would have precluded this.

The noises we heard around Christmas 2020 are unfortunately, however, starting to make themselves heard once again as we approach Christmas 2021 - were we right to hold onto our Zoom subscription? I think we were. We proved over the past year that we can maintain an excellent online presence by running our own Zoom meetings, finding ways to share presentations with other AGS groups and, as of this year, with the Norfolk and Norwich Horticultural Society (NNHS).

Your Committee has tried to optimise the opportunities to maintain a programme through these challenging times and is now planning for the coming year to do the same. Our thanks must go to Diane, ably supported by Phil, for keeping a rolling programme of events available to the Group. I offer my personal thanks to Diane for keeping the business of the Committee and the Group running effectively and efficiently throughout 2021. We owe a debt of gratitude to Roy for not only managing the financial affairs of the Group but also hosting our Zoom meetings. Peter Lyle has, admirably, stepped up to the plate by taking on the management of the East Anglia Show; a job he took on from John and Brenda Foster who had run the event, to the acclaim of the AGS, over many years.

In my July report and following the sad and sudden death of John I paid tribute to him and offered our collective condolences to Brenda. Their massive contribution to the Group should, at the close of the year, be remembered once more. In losing John, we lost our Vice Chairman and now, for understandable reasons, we are losing Brenda as a valued member of the Committee. Thank you, Brenda.

My thanks go, also, to the rest of the Committee who, even in the dark days of lockdowns and cancellations, have continued to manage the business of the AGS Norfolk Group. My thanks extend outside of the Committee to all those in the Group who offer their services

in support of the membership. One of these, David King, valiantly attempts and succeeds in persuading members to contribute to our all-important Newsletter - thank you, David.

Finally, on a personal matter, may I recount that many, many years ago, I re-joined the AGS Norfolk Group, having previously been a member when meetings were still held in the Central Library. A couple of years in and at some, off-guard moment, I must have volunteered to join the Committee. For a number of reasons, there was a 'juggling round' of personnel during which our then Chairman, Tony Goode, offered to take on the role of Treasurer if I would take over chairmanship of the Committee. It has been a privilege to Chair the Group for several years and I shall be forever grateful for the support and guidance which I've received from my fellow committee members throughout my tenure.

For a number of reasons, I have now tendered my resignation from the Committee. Much of this has to do with family commitments and involvement with a number of other groups - most of them closer to home in West Norfolk. I have always tried to be fully committed to the role but, on reflection, feel that I can't continue to serve the Group to the fullest extent - hence my decision. I hope that, amongst those reading this report, there might be someone who would be keen to join, what is becoming, the diminishing ranks of our Committee.

I am not walking away from the Group and intend to continue to attend meetings and events as frequently as I can. Thank you again for your support. Here's hoping for a much-improved season in 2022.

Early 2022 Lecture Programme

Hoping to have all meetings at Hethersett Village Hall 2 - 5pm unless otherwise stated.

Feb 16	Richard Green	China beyond the Crowds - A Zoom presentation
Mar 26	Group Show	
Apr 23	To be confirmed	
May 28	Kit Strange	'Alpines of the Western Pacific Coast of the USA'
Jul 2	Liz Livermore	'Chile - A Botanical Adventure'

Subscriptions

These are now due - £5 per person. Please note the bank details have changed to the Nat West. Notification of the bank numbers to use were sent out earlier this month.

The schedule for the Norfolk AGS show: March 26th 2022

Beginners section 19cm pot maximum:

Class 1 3 pans rock plants distinct

Class 2 1 pan rock plant in flower

Class 3 1 pan foliage plant, sempervivum or cushion plant (not in flower)

Class 4 1 pan bulbous plants

Class 5 1 pan rock plant from seed or cutting (date of propagation to be stated)

Open section 36cm pot maximum:

Class 6 3 pans rock plants distinct

Class 7 1 pan rock plant in flower

Class 8 1 pan dwarf shrub (includes conifers)

Class 9 1 pan bulbous plant

Class 10 1 pan foliage plant

Class 11 1 pan primulaceae

Class 12 1 pan cushion plant

Class 13 A display of one or more cut alpine flowers not to exceed 20cm square

Exhibitors are allowed 2 entries in each class.

Exhibitors cease to be eligible for the Beginners section if they have won the beginners section on 2 occasions or have won the Open section at the group spring show.

Definitions:

For the purposes of the competition an "Alpine Plant" is any type of plant that might be seen in an AGS Show or in the Bulletin. Lack of altitude is no bar!

The following article was found by Diane Blyth. It was written by the late Mike Smith. Mike was a member of our group for many years and Chairman for several. Along with Dot his wife they ran the Alpine Nursery, Hythe Alpines at Methwold Hythe.

What is an alpine?

As a specialist nurseryman I am asked this many times.

The classical answer is a plant that grows above the tree line in the mountain ranges of the world. As these plants grow in very inhospitable climates they are often ground hugging forming neat cushions which allows the winds to blow over them. Close to the ground over the long winter months they are covered with deep snow. In England especially East Anglia we don't get this long snow cover so many true alpins are difficult to maintain through the winter without

overhead protection from the wet. This doesn't allow them to go really dormant. This is why they need to be planted with plenty of grit for rapid draining.

Some choice alpines are best grown in an alpine house or frame with plenty of ventilation. Many alpines are well suited to your rock garden or scree bed. A raised bed with sleepers, rocks or stone with large amounts of grit dug in for drainage. Rocks add a further dimension and give the possibility of planting crevices or a bit of shade for plants that prefer not to be in the full sun.

A trough or container can provide plants with special soil or shade. As a lot of plants are true species and not hybrids the latin names are used to make them universal in all languages.

Some of the choicest alpines are Androsaces, the best ones for a rock garden are *A. lanuginosa* a trailer with umbels of pink flowers. *A. sempervivoides* mat forming with deep green rosettes producing heads of rose pink flowers on 2" stems. *A. studiosorum* 'Doksa' has grey leaves and white flowers on short stems. There are many dwarf Aquilegias, the best are *Aq. bertolonii* 4" tall and deep blue, also *Aq. flabellata* var. *pumila*, similar in height and pale blue and cream flowers.



Many companulas are perfect for the rock garden giving late summer colour. Notably *C. pulla alba* with pure white bells. *C. tymonsii* is mat forming with sky blue open faced flowers. *C. wockii* has purple bells. Dwarf clematis like 'Lunar Lass' or a more vigorous *C. Cartmanii* 'Joe'.

There are many small shrubs like Daphnes, Salix, Deutzia, Euonymus and Forsythia. Dianthus, cushions Drabas and deep blue trumpet Gentians. Be aware that Autumn Gentians usually need acid soil.



Miniature bearded Iris ranging from 4" to 10" in a range of colours. Origanums grow in a wide range of shapes and sizes. Phlox and miniature Penstemons from N. America gives a splash of colour in summer and Ranunculus are well worth the space but some can be invasive.

Sempervivums form low neat mats of various colours. Finally in this brief selection are Saxifrages, a huge range of alpine plants. These can be divided into 2 groups, the

"kabschias" and the "encrusted". The former being early spring flowering on tight cushions. The flowers range from white to deep red and all shades in between including some choice salmon colours. These forms prefer some protection from hot midday sun. The encrusted forms will tolerate sun and are late flowering. Most have rosettes of broad green leaves and carry dozens of white flowers on stems up to 9" which lasts for weeks. The one group of rock garden gems that I have not covered are the miniature bulbs which are essential for early spring interest but they are a subject on their own.

Alpines - A life-long interest Margaret Burman

My interest in Alpine plants began 73 years ago when I used to visit the rectory in the village where I lived. The rector's wife was a tall, ethereal woman, very slim and she appeared to me to float around her sunken Alpine Garden. I think she was probably as interested in me as I was in her. A young girl interested in plants and where they came from was very peculiar in the village!



My first love was her Gentians (her oldest daughter was called Gention), the vivid blue really attracted me. I used to go home with cuttings and bits of plants for my little garden which made my gardening parents quite annoyed as they were never offered any and they certainly got none of mine!

I think the neatness of lots of Alpines attracted my personality! However it wasn't until 40 years later that I was able to have an Alpine bed and then join the AGS and make lots of new friends, both people and plants.



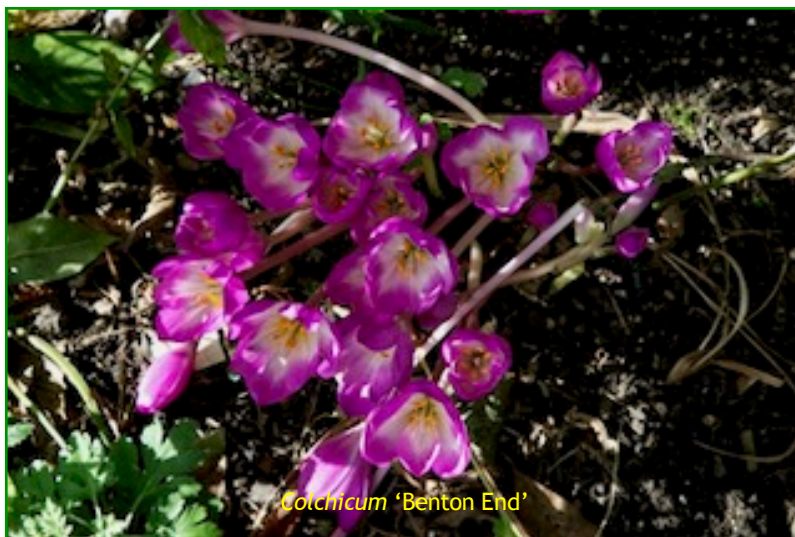
Useful poisonous plants! Ray Mitchell

A few months ago a friend sent me some photos from his garden, showing early galanthus (snowdrop) species, beautiful colchicums and one of the nicest fuchsias I've seen for a long while, not one of the big blousy modern hybrids. The colchicums set me thinking about some of the medication I have to take.

Several years ago I had a bad gout attack and my GP put me on an intense course of Colchicine for four days. He told me this was an extract from the colchicum plant and went on to tell me of his holiday where he had seen them in the wild.

The first thing I discovered was that the bulb is highly poisonous which is why I was only given a four day course, he also told me gout wasn't necessarily due to over indulgence thank goodness.

Contrary to popular thoughts colchicums are not Autumn crocus, which is a completely different plant, family name is Colchicaceae in the order Liliales. Another common name is



naked ladies as the flowers appear before the leaves which is the main reason a lot of folk aren't keen on them as the leaves can look untidy, it doesn't bother me.

Our colchicums started blooming at the end of September with *C. 'Rosy Dawn'*, followed by *C. 'Waterlily'*, my favourite, succeeded by *C. autumnale 'Album'*. *C. 'Waterlily'* is a fully double pinky mauve which is slightly top heavy when rained upon but still very worthwhile growing.

Most of ours grow in a semi-shaded 'woodsey' bed although *c. 'The Giant'*, is in the open in the front garden as are several unnamed varieties. They all seem to increase well, in the past we have only been able to afford one or two at a time but given a few years we now have some quite good patches of the little beauties.



Colchicums tend to be trouble free but the true Autumn crocus however is a member of the Iridaceae family and as far as I am aware is not poisonous, if so we wouldn't

have the amount of mice and squirrels in the garden snacking on my bulbs. In fact now we tend to grow Autumn and Spring varieties and species in wire covered pots except *Crocus tomassinianus* which tends to multiply faster than the creatures that eat them.

Early galanthus (snowdrop) species were also in my friend's photos which I mentioned to my doctor asking if they had any health benefits. He told me apart from their beauty, (another galanthophile!) their poison would probably not kill you but a bad stomach upset will follow ingesting them.



Apparently a lot of research is going on with the alkaloids present into helping Alzheimer's sufferers and, if you are unfortunate enough to be targeted by foreign spies, it's useful in the treatment of nerve agents.

We grow several different foxglove species and I am sure most of us know how they are medically useful to us. Digitalin is an extract from them which helps thin blood for a lot of people, myself included as I

have had to take an anticoagulant for a long while.

All parts are poisonous and most species are easy to grow, my favourite species is *Digitalis canariensis*, not quite hardy but beautiful. There are lots more species and varieties, some

short, some tall, all lovely especially in a woodland type bed but will grow almost anywhere.

Although we cannot grow rhododendrons or azaleas here, other than the dwarf plants in pots, my beekeeping neighbour tells me it is possible to be poisoned by honey collected from them, *R. ponticum* is the main culprit. Most humans just suffer gastric problems but in 2008 nine hungry Korean children sadly died after eating azalea blooms.

I know that in Victorian times when natural history collections were popular the best way to kill moths, butterflies and other insect specimens was to put the creature in a jar with crushed rhododendron leaves, which killed it but preserved the moth's colour. When we lived in Sussex I found out the hard way that rhododendron leaves were no good in compost, I should have realised as nothing grew under the bushes. We are told to wash our hands a lot these days but I'm even more cautious now after looking at these plants.

Snowdrops David King

Snowdrops have been out in our garden since September but we are fast approaching the peak of the season and they are coming into flower thick and fast. Here are a few pictures of some of those we have seen so far and now seeing in early January.





Gardens open in 2022

CHESTNUT FARM WEST BECKHAM
HOLT, NORFOLK, NR25 6NX

Garden Openings 2022

Sunday	27 February	11.00am–4.00pm	National Garden Scheme
Sunday	6 March	11.00am–4.00pm	St John Ambulance
Sunday	22 May	11.00am–5.00pm	National Garden Scheme

Enquiries Judy Wilson 01263 822241

judywilson100@gmail.com

GABLE HOUSE
Halesworth Road,
Redisham, Beccles
Suffolk
NR34 8NE

SNOWDROP DAY

Sunday February 13th
11am to 4pm
£4.50 entrance
National Garden Scheme