



National Sweet Pea Society

Registered Charity No: 226802

2022 Spring Bulletin

*Including important information
regarding the forthcoming AGM
to be held online on the 5th March*



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NATIONAL SWEET PEA SOCIETY

Registered Charity No: 226802

SPRING BULLETIN 2022

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The opinions expressed by contributors are their own and may not necessarily coincide with the opinions of either the Society or the Editor

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Dates for your 2022 Diary

[correct at the time of editing]

Sat 5 March	NSPS AGM On-line via Zoom *See pages 7 & 8	All paid up members
Sat 11 June	130th Royal Windsor Show York Club, Great Park, Windsor	Display & Bureau
Weds 29 – Thurs 30 May	RHS Malvern Spring Festival	Display & Bureau
Weds 29 – Thurs 30 June	Early National Exhibition RHS Wisley Gardens	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Sunday 10 July	Chiltern Sweet Pea Society Show Lacey Green Bucks	Members' Competition
Sat 9 – Sun 10 July	Late National Exhibition RHS Harlow Carr Gardens Harrogate	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Sun 17 – Sun 24 July	RHS Tatton Show	Display & Bureau
Fri 29 – Sun 31 July	North West Regional Show Astley Park, Chorley	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Thurs 19 – Sun 22 Aug	Southport Flower Show	Open Classes Display & Bureau

Erratum

In Prof Shreeve's article on alternative staging methods, as published in the Autumn 2021 Bulletin, I have been asked to clarify that when staging in sand, you can top up without the stems shifting.

Introduction/Editorial

Once again thank you very much to all those of you who have contributed to this publication. It is very gratifying to be able to include such a diverse range of articles from so many of you. However, there are many of you who do have equally valid thoughts, opinions and so forth, on subjects that you have read, have concerns about or maybe affected you; possibly even some wider issues (such as the environment for example) are worth airing. Then there are the exhibitor's concerns, especially surrounding shows, venues and the vexed question of staging materials. I see on Facebook (I only very occasionally contribute, especially if a particular comment is stating something erroneous that may need putting in perspective or correction) that there has been some dialogue between members.

Please don't leave it too late to start your articles, from experience I find that typing the first sentence is the hardest but once you have that done you quickly get into your stride and it becomes easier. It is also there for you to revisit, update etc, before forwarding on. I often have to send round reminders after the published deadline, which means that instead of spreading out the workload, it is concentrated into a few days just prior to my final deadline, when the proof-read finished article is sent to the printers.

Thank you also to those of you who have sent through kind messages about the quality, variety and interesting material that I have been able to include in recent editions, which is most welcome. I can only work with what I receive, so the high quality is down to you, the contributors.

Long may you continue to do so and then I will also be interested enough in doing my part of the role. If the copy dries up, so will I!!

Deadline dates:

2022 ANNUAL was by **30th January** to Caroline, (*however she may be still able to deal with the odd late article after you receive this Bulletin*)

2022 Autumn Bulletin by **4th September** please.

2023 Spring Bulletin by **31st December** please.

2023 ANNUAL by **30th January** to Caroline please.

Annual General Meeting 2022

Notice is hereby given that the ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Members of the National Sweet Pea Society which will be held on Saturday 5th March 2022, **online, starting at 10.30am** for the purpose of receiving Reports and the Balance Sheet as of 31st October 2021.

Mrs Carole Tate
General Secretary NSPS
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AGENDA

1. Chairman's welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of meeting held on Saturday 14th March 2020
4. Minutes of meeting held on Saturday 6th March 2021
5. Matters arising
6. Committee Reports (the Chairman's and Secretary's Reports are printed in this Bulletin)
7. Election of Office Bearers and Members of the Committee
8. Election of Independent Examiner
9. Any Other Business (that has been sent, in advance, to the Chairman and Secretary)

It is to be noted that Phil Johnson is retiring as Chairman but wishes to remain on the General Committee. All other office holders are willing to continue in office for another twelve months. In the event that one or more of the officer positions are contested, the Committee will address how best to conduct an election.

The following Members of the General Committee retire under the three-year rule and are eligible for re-election:

Janet Bulstrode
Gill Hazell
Julia Beardmore

There are currently two vacancies on the General Committee and nominations please must reach the General Secretary by Saturday 26th February 2022.

The Society's accounts will be published on the website by 26th February and any questions or representation on them must be received by the General Secretary by 5pm on Thursday 3rd March 2022.

Annual presentation of the Jack Davis Award (and any other relevant awards) which normally occur at the AGM will be postponed until a suitable occasion when members have the opportunity to assemble. It is hoped that this can be done (as in 2021) at the National Exhibitions, which will be held in June/July 2022.

The planned Plant Competition will not take place in 2022.

PROGRAMME

- 10.15. Registration
- 10.30. AGM
- 11.30. Discussion on use of staging materials at Exhibitions
- 12.00. Questions (submitted in advance)

To join the meeting, fully paid-up members only must email the General Secretary on caroletate10@gmail.com well in advance of 5th March, and the Zoom registration details will be sent to you. (It is important to keep this email to hand) You need to already have the Zoom software (application) downloaded and installed on your internet enabled device.

All attendees will remain muted unless invited to speak by the Chair or Secretary.

If you wish to speak, please raise your hand, either physically or by using the Zoom icon.

All questions to be sent in advance to the General Secretary by 26th February 2022.

Some points for clarification/explaination

Phil Johnson

As you will see from the official notice convening our Annual General Meeting, we are using a different format again this year, due to concerns over the spread of the Coronavirus. I would like to highlight and explain a few points.

This meeting will be held over the internet via Zoom. This application (app) is easily downloaded and even for a technophobe, like me, is straightforward to use. The meeting is open to all fully paid-up members who have contacted our General Secretary, Carole Tate by email on caroletate10@gmail.com in advance. She will email you a link, enabling you to join the meeting. You must have downloaded and installed the Zoom app in order to join. If you are unable to take part, a report will appear, as usual in this year's Annual. (If you haven't used Zoom previously, it would be advantageous to have a trial run between friends/families before the 5th of March).

If you would like to take part, there are a few details that you need to bear in mind:

All members will remain muted unless invited to speak by the Chairman or Secretary.

If you wish to speak, please raise your hand, either physically or by using the Zoom icon.

All questions regarding items on the agenda or any other business, must be sent in advance to the General Secretary, Carole Tate by 26th February 2022.

There are currently two vacancies on the General Committee for 2022. Nominations for these vacancies and for any of the officer positions must also reach the General Secretary by the same date, Saturday 26th February 2022. Nominations will not be accepted on the day, although co-option may be possible before the 2023 AGM.

The majority of Committee meetings are now held via Zoom and so travelling long distances for meetings need not be an issue. Your Society needs an active Committee to continue the work of the National Sweet Pea Society, so please contact a committee member for an informal chat if you think you may be interested.

General Secretary's Report AGM 2022

Carole Tate

I am pleased that 2021 saw both National shows and various regional ones, including the North West taking place, along with many other local events, in spite of the various Covid regulations. It has been a challenge deciding, first of all, whether we run the show, then the indecision around will we be okay or will we be locked down again.

I decided I would plant my seeds as if everything would happen and hope for good weather and a bit of luck on my timings to ensure I had blooms for each show. I was glad I did and was rewarded with a few places, a couple of perpetual trophies and some beautiful crystal glassware.

There is always the nervous anticipation of will we have enough entries to make a good display. A big thank you to all who persevered and exhibited or assisted at the shows. Without you there is no show, so I thank you all.

I also had the opportunity of meeting friends new and old at the shows, and seeing the exhibits presented by other competitors. It is useful to see which cultivars are on display, collecting and passing on hints and tips and taking away ideas for home and garden decoration.

The shows were well attended and lots of interest shown in the sweet pea flower, including the species and decorative exhibits. We signed up a few new members and spread the word about our beautiful flower. The sight and glorious perfume of the sweet pea brings back many happy memories of times, places and people from our past.

2022 will be another challenging year and we are considering a Zoom AGM so that more members can attend safely. The National Shows are scheduled to go ahead and I have started to prepare my beds ready for planting out. Being from up't North (Lancashire) I find it better to sow in January with underneath heat as the ground will not be warm enough 'till April.

It is not just the physical exercise I enjoy when gardening, but the mental health benefits of preparing and nurturing the seedlings, the daily pottering to check on nature's progress and the excitement of soaking up the perfume whilst picking the blooms ready to display or pop in a jam-jar.

If you want more information about sweet peas, please join our Facebook page "For the love of Sweet Peas INC The National Sweet Pea Society", check our website www.sweetpeas.org.uk or contact your District Representative to see what is going on in your area. Details can be found in the Annual.

Wishing you all a successful season ahead. May you find much happiness growing the glorious, sweet pea.

Chairman's Report 2022 AGM

Phil Johnson

2021 was in many ways a year like any other for lovers of Sweet Peas – the highs and lows, winning a prize at a show; moaning about the weather. However, has living with Covid become the norm? It was a joy to be able to attend both the Early and Late National shows; to enter and see all the wonderful exhibits; to meet up with friends old and new. But, were there fewer exhibitors than normal? Was this just the effect of the weather and exhibitors deciding not to enter or was there another cause? I had a niggling feeling that there was a reluctance on the part of many to leave home, get out and meet people due to Covid. This may well be an issue that we should consider and its impact on our face-to-face meetings.

Last year's AGM was a short affair, restricted to committee members, just to keep the Society functioning. We had hoped and planned to hold the 2022 AGM at The Chase, Nuneaton, but concerns recently expressed, suggested that we should hold another Zoom AGM. However, this time around we hope to open it to many more members. Details of the event and how to join are published elsewhere.

I must mention the passing of our President, Reverend F. J. Carrier, known to all as John, on 29th October. There will be a full obituary in this year's Annual. Your Society was represented at a service of thanksgiving by Caroline Ball and Roger Parsons, who jointly spoke of John's love of Sweet Peas. Brian Thompson and I also attended and we were pleased to be able to send a few Sweet Pea blooms to Marjorie for John's funeral. I cannot overstate how much we will miss John, his ready smile and sage guidance over so many years.

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As you know, the National Sweet Pea Society usually makes its award presentations at the AGM, but this was impossible in 2021. Again, I am sure there will be further details in the Annual, but John Carrier was delighted to award a John Bishop Memorial Medal to Graeme Hollingdale at the Early National and later in the day, that rare occurrence, the award of a Henry Eckford Memorial Medal to Mary and Jim McDonald. At the Late National, Tom Atherton read a citation for the Jack Davis award to Julia Beardmore and I presented a further John Bishop Medal to Jane Atherton. All of these acknowledgements by our Society are so richly deserved and warm congratulations to all.

I am pleased to highlight that NSPS trials will again be grown at Askham Bryan and Sparsholt colleges in 2022. Darren Everest will be taking a lead role with assistance from Jim McDonald. The two-year trial at RHS Wisley has its first year of assessment and we plan to link this to our Early National show. Well worth a visit and also to see the new Hilltop building.

A few keen exhibitors have expressed serious concerns about the need to use alternative staging materials at our shows at RHS gardens in 2022. An article is published elsewhere and a discussion will be held at the Zoom AGM.

In the commercial world of Sweet Peas, a poor year for seed production, climate change, continued reduction in growers willing to produce a crop and much higher demand following lockdowns have all led to a shortage of seeds. So, make sure you order early for next season!

At this point, I must tell you that I have reluctantly made the decision to stand down as Chairman. I had hoped to continue in the role for several more years, but pressures at work mean that something has to give. I hope to continue in a prominent role with the Society if you will have me, but I cannot devote the time necessary to be an effective chairman. My tenure of just two years has been very eventful, the effects of the Covid pandemic being the most challenging aspect. I am very pleased to say that a volunteer has come forward to take on the position and they will have my full support.

Finally, I would like again to record my thanks to all members, who continue to support the National Sweet Pea Society in so many ways and especially your committee for their hard work and commitment during another trying year. I look forward to an even better year for the Sweet Pea in 2022.

Sowing with peat-free compost

Prof Alison Shreeve

I have used peat free compost for years, not wishing to contribute to habitat annihilation. I have never previously had any problems, but last year I couldn't find my usual brand and I bought another well-known make and used that. However, my sweet peas were a disaster area!

I sowed in late November with a bit of heat to start them off and then into a cool greenhouse with good ventilation. As usual there were a few that didn't germinate, but the rest seemed fine until they were at the four-leaf stage and then they stayed and didn't appear to do much more. Some withered and died and a handful were robust enough to plant out and did manage to make good cordon. However, I didn't have enough to show properly, and as a small grower of 100 cordon any poor plants make a big difference. The root systems appeared to be healthy enough so the conclusion that I, and those I consulted with, was that the compost was the problem.



Syd Dunscombe in bought in compost



Seedlings in my own compost

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So, this year I am trying a small experiment. I have purchased the brand of compost I used in the past, but the company has been bought out and the compost material is definitely very different. I have sown into this and also made up a mixture of my own which is one third soil from the vegetable patch, one third leaf mould and one third compost from my own heap, all sieved and then perlite added. I sowed one batch on November 4th (a little earlier than normal) and placed 12 seeds of each of 7 varieties of Spencers in the bought and the home-made compost mixes in 7-inch roottrainers.



Seedling beginning to sicken



Seedling in bought in compost with 2 shoots

They were all watered on sowing and have had no water since then. On 22nd of November and 13th December I counted the number germinated and there were equal numbers in each compost, though not equal in each variety. In the bought compost I had an additional 8 seeds which had germinated but rotted. I counted again on 6th January and found a few more had germinated but more had rotted. On this date one variety, Syd Dunscombe, sown into the peat-free bought compost had lost 5 out of the 12 germinated. They appeared to have some kind of fungal rot. In my own mixture they appeared to be fine and healthy.

However, this is an ongoing experiment and not very scientific! I will continue to monitor their development and will not pinch them out this year in case that caused disease to enter the plants last year. I will also sow again later in the month and see if a late sowing is any healthier. On the face of it though, it would appear that the bought peat-free compost is causing a few problems. However, I have also sown old fashioned and grandifloras in the bought compost and they don't appear to have been affected by any mould or rot. Perhaps they are more robust? I would be very happy to hear from members who have similar problems and have found good solutions.



Rotted!



Old Fashioned and Grandiflora

The Oasis Debate

Phil Johnson

A discussion will be held online, after the Zoom AGM on 5th March. In order to set the scene the Committee have asked me to outline the debate that took place surrounding this issue to provide background and hopefully answer a number of questions.

Several keen exhibitors have expressed serious concerns about the need to use alternative staging materials at our shows at RHS gardens in 2022. The RHS has previously instigated a ban on the use of traditional Oasis at all its shows and in its gardens. Having spoken to a member of RHS staff, the issue is not so much one of the product being biodegradable, but rather of its breakdown into microplastics and consequent damage to the environment. It was suggested that our shows would be under NSPS control and not RHS, but this was not acceptable to them as the shows would be held on their property and their overall responsibility.

So, it became a question of whether to go ahead with shows at Wisley and Harlow Carr in 2022 and accept, that certainly for this year, we would have to be innovative and use alternative staging materials or seek other venues. Bear in mind that this issue raised its ugly head only recently, giving very little time to seek alternatives. We have an offer on the table to go to a Squires Garden Centre in 2023 for an Early National. We might have been able to bring the Squires Early show forward to 2022 but that was untested (and it is not certain that Colin Squires would have been happy with us using Oasis anyway, given he was non-committal either way when we met him). There were no other options than Harlow Carr for the Late show. Suggestions were offered that we look at Driffield or Chorley, but both were thought to be too late in the season. As discussed over many years, the major issue with our shows is the lack of willing Show Managers with local teams to assist. It has been suggested that we employ someone from outside the Society to take on this role. However, I would be very much against this option as it is fraught with danger and would still entail the need to have an experienced NSPS member present to offer constant guidance.

Committee members have had a great and lengthy debate regarding this issue. Opinions were also sought from several prominent exhibitors from beyond the Committee. It has been said that RHS is penalising Societies like ours over its ban, whilst continuing to use plastic in other areas. I am not able to comment on this opinion with any authority, but I am sure that the organisation is working towards reducing its use of plastic and becoming more environmentally friendly overall. I appreciate that this cannot be accomplished overnight and that all changes take time to implement. As the nation's foremost gardening charity, I do think it incumbent upon them to take a leading role in this direction. However, as with any venue that we attend we have to abide by the rules set by that organisation, the RHS, garden centre or other.

All this said, it is a very great pity that we have ended up in this situation before a suitable Oasis type product has become available. The ‘FloralFibre’ option has been allowed for use by the RHS but has been found to be quite unsuitable for the staging of Sweet Peas. Another version, ‘TerraBrick’, has been launched in the US, but at the moment is not available here. Hopefully this will change very soon and we will be able to trial it. From watching the videos, it looks potentially much more suitable.

A number of members have experimented with various materials and the most successful for use in vases have been rushes (reeds, as we used to call them) *Juncus effusus**, the seed stems of grasses and Sweet Pea flower stems. Tom Atherton has been demonstrating their use and a video may be available. I, for one, will be using these options this year. The use of Oasis only became widespread at NSPS shows with the demise of reed usage around twenty to thirty years ago so well within living memory of some.

After several weeks of debate and opinions sought from further afield, your committee voted by seven votes to five (with three abstentions for various reasons) for NSPS shows to be held at RHS venues in 2022.

I appreciate that this will be an unwelcome change for some exhibitors and I sincerely hope that before long a suitable new Oasis will be available. But I remain confident that the love of our flower and the competitive urge to show will overcome this change.

I believe that the National Sweet Pea Society also needs to move forward with changing times and look at its impact on our environment for the sake of future generations. This issue will have little impact in the world as a whole, but if we do not look at a change of mindset in these matters, nothing will improve.

Should you feel strongly about this issue or others, please put yourself forward for election to the committee to help with the work of the Society. Also, please let Carole Tate have any questions in advance of the AGM, so that we can attempt to provide authoritative answers, where possible.

* See Roger’s article on pages 32 - 34

Sweet Pea Cultivars, Fame and Longevity

Andrew Beane

Certain exhibition Spencer sweet peas appear to have a longevity about them, while the majority have fallen out of favour within 10 to 15 years of their release. Three come to mind, Carlotta, Noel Sutton and Honeymoon.

Carlotta [1937] a Magenta, is the earliest of these and can be found in Bernard Jones sowing list for 1947. It was still in the National show audit for 1978 and replaced by Bolton's Corinne which certainly did not last as well as Carlotta.



Carlotta



Noel Sutton

Noel Sutton [released 1966] was still shown at the National of 2001. Other mid blues to challenge this in the audit where Blue Danube [1981] Alan Williams [1986] and Our Harry [1987] but none of these achieved the success of Noel Sutton. Two newish mid-blues are Just Julia and Dalesman, it will be interesting to see if either achieve longevity.



Southbourne



Anniversary

Honeymoon, a Lavender flush, was first seen at the National 1972 and can be found in the National show audit for 2003. This colour does not appear to have any challengers during this period.

Two other sweet peas that fall into the longevity category are Eclipse [1975] a Mauve and Southbourne [1973] a Pale Pink on white ground. These differ slightly as Eclipse was re-selected by Brian Thompson and Southbourne re-selected by Andy Hubbuck. Interestingly Percy Thrower [Honeymoon x Noel Sutton] and Sea Wolf [Honeymoon x Eclipse] are not in the same league as the parents.

Anniversary [1986] a Picotee on white ground and consistently in the audits to the present day; a remarkable 28 years. No challengers have come forward in this colour and this may be due to the difficulty of breeding good picotee's, however there is no denying that this is still a quality sweet pea.

Jilly, a Cream, first shown in 1988 and was still well placed in the National show audit in 2014, a period of 26 years. Challenges by Doreen and Mary Mac are just beginning.



Jilly



Mrs Bernard Jones

Mrs Bernard Jones [1981] a Rose Pink on white ground, is one of the best sweet peas bred by Bernard in 10th and 19th place at the National show audits 2014, 33 years in the topflight.

Lastly, not my favourite pea and a bit of a surprise is Marion [1983] a Lavender, which saw 3 vases staged at the Early National in 2014, managing 31 years. I suspect its bud drop resistance has something to do with its longevity. Will Gwendoline [1999] another Magenta (pale) still be as good in the next few years?

Therefore, is longevity in the genetic makeup of a sweet pea or is there just very little competition in particular colour categories, as with Anniversary. Why are exhibition picotee's difficult to breed? Alternatively, could it be a popular name that keeps it at the top for so long. With the exception of Carlotta, no exhibition sweet peas have lasted more than 35 years! Any cultivar that I may have missed, please write about it in the next Bulletin.

Ed Andrew followed up his article above with a further comment that of course the common factor with Carlotta and Gwendoline is that they are both Magentas, albeit slightly different shades. At the present time and showing no signs of losing its popularity, Gwendoline is equally popular with exhibitors and non-exhibitors alike; can it last more than 41 years (who is going to be still showing in 2041?)

Letters to the Society

(Please send your correspondence through to Julia [Membership Secretary] Carole [General Secretary] any of your committee members, district reps and/or me for this section of the Bulletins. We also welcome follow-up answers, suggestions etc from all of our members.)

Ed – The following letters and article were initially between Nicky Edwards (committee member with responsibility for the North West area activities publicity) and Barrie Eckford (District Rep, Cheshire) who gave permission for the important discussion points raised (prompted by articles in the Autumn Bulletin, to be aired for the entire membership as they clearly express and discuss view probably held by many, who are reluctant to share them. Thank you, Barrie and Nicky.

After reading the NSPS bulletin, I feel that as the National Society have fallen into line with the ban of Oasis on their premises & exhibitions, that we are to have difficulties of exhibiting sweet peas in vase form.

I admired the examples of various types of organic compounds in a bid to set the cultivars for display, unfortunately none were satisfactory.

So, what is to be done to overcome this ban of Oasis and Reeds* at RHS events, as I feel many growers of exhibition sweet peas will not attend their shows, unless a suitable alternative is available.

Regards, Barrie Eckford

You raise a very good question regarding the RHS ban of Oasis at shows held on its premises. I feel that your concerns are no doubt echoed by many committee and society members. It was a subject debated at length by the committee but when put to a vote a majority felt this was inevitable and better faced now rather than later. For now, I will try to provide further detail on the matter and we will see if other suggestions are forthcoming from the other members of the committee.

We must remember that the North West region staged two gold medal winning displays at RHS Tatton and Chorley Flower Show in 2021, both Oasis free. We are learning about the alternatives to Oasis and it is possible to stage flowers successfully without it.

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Many veteran exhibitors remember the time before Oasis was available. They remember the techniques used to exhibit vases and decorative entries without Oasis and how to use rushes*, chicken wire, glass beads, rose bowl mesh and other methods in its place. In fact, they remember when Oasis was the not-very-popular “new kid on the block” and Rushes* etc. were the display medium of choice!

As mentioned in the bulletin, the producers of Oasis are working on finding suitable alternatives to their current product and once they have developed a good environmentally friendly alternative this can be used. Reeds* and rushes are not banned by the RHS however and many members in the North West feel that this would be a viable alternative until a new product is developed.

Tom Atherton demonstrated the use of rushes at our October social last year and a vase of these was available for the members attending to try out. I remember that you were sadly unable to attend but hopefully we will be able put on a similar demonstration at the next social in March. We hope also to put up some “how to” videos showing how to arrange without Oasis on the NSPS website.

For shows in the North West, including the Late Show at Harlow Carr, there is the possibility of making reed bundles in advance and making them available to exhibitors for their vases for a small fee, just as we did with Oasis. People will be on hand at the shows to help exhibitors use or learn to make the bundles. Other regions are trying out different materials and may have different suggestions.

Remember also that the ban only affects RHS shows and that other shows, including the North West regional show at Chorley, the Chiltern in Bucks and no doubt many others, will still allow the use of Oasis as normal. A ban will surely come at some point, however.

I know that change is never welcome, but I think the only certainty in life is that things will change, to quote a friend. We need to be able to adapt to this. Perhaps we can re-learn the techniques of old and revisit our heritage at least until a good alternative to Oasis comes to market.

With best wishes, Nicky Edwards.

Thank you for your comprehensive reply. Yes, I am one who used Reeds* as the "norm" for the setting of peas in vases, which I found a very effective means of retaining the form of the display, from setting table to the show bench.

My fear though, is that the National Society needs to convince those (unlike myself in recent years) who exhibit in 9 & 12 vase classes, that their displays will not be down pointed, should their exhibits not have the perfect form as assured in previous RHS shows. Southport too may fall into line with the RHS edict on the use of floral wet &/or dry Oasis, we'll see.

What I do not want to be doing, is travelling around the countryside, asking farmers who have reed beds for permission to cut and use. The old maxim of necessity it the mother of invention, I do like the use of apple to set the peas, however, this could be "messy" if the "wrong" type is chosen. Golden delicious would be too hard albeit cheap to purchase.

The season of setting seed is now upon us & I know that when growers meet this new realization, it will be greatly discussed.

Regards, Barrie E.

* See Roger's article on pages 32 - 34

Thanks for your reply Barrie. I'm going to forward it on to Graeme again as the points raised are excellent and need discussing.

I totally understand the issue of picking rushes*. Julia Beardmore is investigating this and will hopefully put an article in the bulletin about this. This is one reason why making reed bundles in advance of the shows would be a good idea. The Society could then obtain permission to pick and use correctly sourced reeds*. Maybe a North West member has land which they would like us to remove the reeds* from – I gather some farmers regard them as a weed to be got rid of? It is all up for discussion.

Your expertise and experience of using all these display media would be invaluable to our members. I hope you will consider passing this on at the socials and shows. I have heard about the possibility of using apple to exhibit. Could you possibly write a short something to go in the bulletin about your views on the various options? We would all be extremely interested. Thank you for your thoughts on this.

Kind regards, Nicky.

Oasis, some personal views

The subject of Oasis will keep rearing its head until a new product is developed to equal it. In my opinion I feel the RHS should have waited until a replacement was found before banning Oasis. The amount of plastic in the product is minimal, compared to the amount of plastic products used by the RHS, for example, packaging in their shops, restaurants and many other examples, so why pick on Oasis?

In regard to the NSPS's position, did we need to use RHS venues for our shows when venues allowing Oasis are available? I get phone calls from members in my area asking what to use to stage peas in. Being one of the old brigade who learnt to stage in fans to present the flower at its best, I would have to see 15 stems in a circular method, as sweet peas are judged from the front, but I may have to accept change. A few members have informed me that they intend to cancel their membership until a suitable staging option is available.

These are my own personal views, and I would not want to upset anyone, but it seems a shame to be forced into using an alternative product. Does the RHS have plans in the future to ban Oasis use in their member society shows? I would hate to think it is a case of 'the tail wagging the dog'.

Andy Hubbuck

I write to express my disappointment and disagreement with the committee's decision to hold the 2022 shows on the RHS properties and gardens. Without going into any great discussion on the why's and wherefores regarding the RHS decision to ban the use of Oasis (although I do wonder how many cups of tea will be served made from teabags containing micro plastics, in plastic beakers or food served on plastic plates with plastic utensils or food sold in plastic packs and various items sold in plastic carrier bags, kettles and frying pans, spring to mind here!)

I think that the decision to hold the NSPS shows on any RHS property should have been put to the members of the NSPS especially to the showing members. I know that it may be a very contentious point that I make but let's not forget that without the showing fraternity there would not be any shows. I think that the decision to hold the shows on RHS property may be the start of a slippery slope for the NSPS and may in the long term loose a number of members.

Bryan Jepson

Ed – Thank you very much for committing to print what many members are privately thinking (and discussing?) There is much in this and similar articles that cannot be disputed; however, what we need are members to step up, join the committee and help shape our Society's future.

By printing these articles - including the next one from Darren (which I hope will promote further considered debate) and from my impartial standpoint, I need to emphasise one fact which is often overlooked; an NSPS show (or for that matter, any local or regional one) cannot happen without a manager (and team) in place, who is/are willing to do all the work involved. We are also constrained in the lack of suitable alternative venues available. It is a fact that for 2021 and 2022 there were no viable alternative show venue offers on the table (this includes having the managers in place). If there were, then they were not presented to the committee for consideration. The committee debated long and hard over the decisions to stick (in the case of the Late) at RHS Harlow Carr and change (for the Early) to RHS Wisley in 2022

I can reassure every member that the RHS has no authority over any Affiliated Society to dictate what staging material they use anywhere else, other than on their premises. However, as Phil points out in his clarification article, as the nation's foremost gardening charity, the RHS does have a responsibility for the future and environmental impact. I am sure that the vast majority of shows will allow Oasis to be used for the present time, however, we are promised suitable and more environmentally friendly alternatives from the manufacturers, as it is in their interests as well, that we do have something to use. For those of us with a stock of both the original green and the supposedly more friendly brown coloured version (not the old dry type) let's go to loads more shows this season and show off our blooms!

Floral Foam and other related ramblings!

By Darren Everest

There has been a lot, and I mean a lot, of debate about the use of floral foam following the RHS ban on the use of it at all of its sites.

My opinion, and this is only my opinion, is that on one hand I agree that we should all be making an effort to help save the planet and seek alternatives to plastics. However, on the other hand it would appear to me that the RHS has picked on an easy target to make them look greener than green. You only have to look at the back of the garden centre at Wisley to see just how much plastic packaging is used and you will realise that the amount of floral foam we use is just a tiny piece of the problem.

SPRING BULLETIN 2022

I find it quite surprising that there appears to have been little communication between the RHS and the manufacturers of floral foam in regard to banning the product and allowing more time to at least try and develop an environmentally friendly alternative. What has been developed, in rapid time, is a product that is not that great for our uses. Fingers crossed that a more suitable alternative will be developed in time.

The National Dahlia Society had the pleasure of having to use the new floral fibre products at their show at Wisley in September 2021. Feedback showed that it is very expensive, you end up using either more product or additional packing materials to help support the stems and it doesn't absorb moisture in the way the previous incarnation of floral foam does.

Having used it myself, I can confidently say that I don't believe it will be suitable for staging Sweet Peas and we will need to look at alternative staging materials. I did try, very late in the season, with a few stems staged in damp sand. This seemed quite successful but will need further testing. I know back in the day reeds* were used but even their use was banned many years ago and I doubt there are many growers around today that remember using them. *Ed – I believe technically that it is the harvesting of them from the wild is the main issue here; however please see Julia's article on page 35.*

There has been a device invented that sits inside the top of bikini type vases and I do believe that one has been devised for a 2-inch size which is very similar to our own aluminium vases. The design consists of a series of 18 equally spaced holes in a plastic disc. However, having seen the design I don't personally think it will work with sweet peas due to the fine, precise margins needed to obtain a perfect balanced display. Not all stems are of the same thickness and there is no way to make any fine adjustments. As I understand it, the cost of manufacturing a mould is very expensive and therefore I can't see it working.

Having read many comments over the last few weeks and months I couldn't help but notice that many suggested just putting our prized stems loose in a vase. Now call me old fashioned if you like, a dinosaur even, but I'm somewhat of a traditionalist and I like to see the blooms staged the way they have been for many, many years. *Ed – if you go back further in history (before our time) you will find that the fan-shaped vase displays that we have come to view as traditional, were once the new-fangled way.*

We, as a Society, already cater for different exhibiting styles, from the formal to the informal, and there is a place for both. However, as exhibitors we are all looking to show off our blooms to their full potential in either section, and in my opinion the formal arrangement is the perfect way to do this. It is true that sometimes we can be a little guilty of not thinking outside the box and maybe we should be looking at alternative ways to showcase our wonderful blooms. However, I think we should begin by looking at alternative ways to stage our blooms to create the stunning displays that we are all used to seeing.

The simple fact of the matter is that by holding our shows at RHS venues we have to abide by their rules and must therefore adapt quickly if we are going to make the shows a success. Having exhibited at the National Dahlia Society shows held at RHS Wisley since 2012, I will be honest and say that I have mixed views on the venue. I hope that the NSPS will not make the same mistakes that the NDS made when they first went there. The NDS focussed all their attention on the visiting public and hardly gave the exhibitors a second thought. When you are organising a show the most important people there are the exhibitors, as without them you don't have a show. This is no different whether it is a local village, regional or National show, exhibitors need to be made to feel welcome and accommodated.

I only hope that we all enjoy our experience at the shows this year and that we can all find a way to overcome the hurdles placed in our way. Happy growing in 2022!

* See Roger's article on pages 32 - 34

Ed – I think Darren sums up very passionately the feelings of many of us who exhibit sweet peas. His experiences at RHS Wisley and the NDS, especially with regard to attempting to use the acceptable (to the RHS) alternative product to our familiar Oasis, is worth noting. Whilst I hold views from an exhibitor's perspective, however as editor and in the interests of impartiality I am not expressing them in print.

Plans are already very advanced for an excellent alternative venue (new for us but very used to holding National Society exhibitions) for the Early in 2023. The Late may prove to be more problematic, which is a shame because the NSPS, previous Show Managers, exhibitors and visitors have enjoyed a superb working relationship with RHS Harlow Carr. If you have any thoughts/comments, offers of help etc, then please contact any one of the committee, including me (especially if you have some comments that would be suitable for putting into print for the membership to be made aware of).

After some passionate debate, a reminder about what it is all really about:



Rows of perfectly grown cordons as grown by Darren Myers, summer 2021

New National Sweet Pea Society Website

Nicky Edwards

There is exciting news regarding the society's website. The National committee is hoping to totally revamp the NSPS website giving it a new look and many more possibilities for members. It is hoped that it will be the go-to place for members to find information and inspiration for varieties and cultivation. Hopefully, in addition to the usual up-to-date Society events and news it will allow for discussion and advice. It should also make becoming a member and renewals much easier so all in all a huge benefit of membership. Watch this space for further news on this, later this year.

Royal Windsor 130th Show

Chiltern (CSPS) Sweet Pea Society

The NSPS is planning, through the CSPS membership, to erect a display at the 130th anniversary show, held by one of our affiliated societies (Windsor) on Saturday 11th June 2022. As with any project like this, we will need many helpers, staging equipment and of course flowers! Committee members Caroline Ball and Alison Shreeve are co-ordinating everything, so anyone who has the inclination and/or kindness to offer help in anyway, please get in touch with either of the aforementioned or myself as soon as possible. Thank you.

Comment on the National Exhibitions 2022 Schedule

Graeme Hollingdale (Editor)

For those of you who, like me, require glasses for some aspects of your day to day lives, for example reading or driving, then I have to offer you my apologies for the 2022 Exhibitions publication, which does seem harder to read than my previous editions. I have gone back to my workings and drafts and have concluded that the font sizes are exactly the same for 2020 and 2022, as is the general layout (there were a few subtle changes due to the schedule alterations and other information, which should have had no bearing on the finished publication).

I intend asking the committee's permission to allow me to include an extra sheet of paper in the 2023 edition, this would allow for up to four additional pages of text and so by spreading everything out I might be able to increase the font sizes by 1 or 2 points without significantly adjusting the layout to which we have all become accustomed. It is a fact though, that there is a great deal of information needed for many classes/sections/divisions and unless we move to an A4 sized publication, there will always be compromises.

If anyone has significant difficulty in reading the small print then please email me a request and I can forward a either a PDF or a Word version for you to enlarge and print as you wish. Similarly, if you only wish to have certain pages enlarged, then again in request I can forward you those.

THE WEM SWEET PEA FESTIVAL 2022

Phillippa Cooper

(on behalf of the joint ESPS and Wem Town Hall Committee)

When writing my article for the Autumn Bulletin I referred to the fact that the Eckford Sweet Pea Society Show would (hopefully) be taking place in 2022. In fact we had not actually held our first joint committee meeting with the staff at the Wem Town Hall at that time! On 12th November we held the inaugural combined committee meeting and it was decided that the event would be called “The Wem Sweet Pea Festival”.

I am delighted to say that the show will be held on Saturday 25th June at Wem Town Hall, 28-32 High Street, Wem, Shrewsbury, SY4 5DG. The venue will be open throughout the night of Friday 24th June to allow for staging to take place.



Old Fashioned “Eckford” sweet peas as staged at Wem

As in previous years the schedule will include classes for both Spencer and Old Fashioned types along with a Floral Art section. At the time of writing the 2022 schedule is not in its final form, however, the classes will be remaining almost exactly the same as in previous years (with the possible exception of the 9 vase class in Division 1). The committee feels that it is better to keep things familiar this year as some of us have very little experience of organising a show!

If you have exhibited at Wem in previous years you will be receiving your schedule in the post. We do hope that as many growers as possible will be able to exhibit at Wem to make this venture a success. We look forward to seeing you in June.



Spencers as staged at Wem

Trials

Darren Everest

You may, or not, be aware that I am in the process of taking over the role of Trials co-ordinator from Jim Mcdonald. Jim has done a sterling job over the years but has decided that it's time to retire from this position. Please bear with me over the coming weeks and months as I find my feet. It's fair to say that I have trouble organising myself let alone anything else so please be patient with me!

I believe Jim used to contact breeders in September re their new raisings. Some of you will know that I grow one or two Dahlias and will be up to my neck in blooms during September so I may have to adjust my correspondence timings accordingly. If you would like to contact me regarding the trials, please do so on 07808 793 862 or via email, darreneverest@ymail.com

A short report from Essex

Brian Harwood (District Rep)

During the last two years our local summer shows have been cancelled due to the pandemic, however, fingers crossed that the 2022 summer shows will go ahead. My nearest one in Essex is the Elm Park Horticultural Guild show which is based in Hornchurch; it will be held on Saturday 18th June. This particular guild holds another three shows along with the summer one; in Spring, Autumn and Winter.

The summer show is a popular event attracting many exhibitors and visitors, the main attraction being the cream teas provided and served by committee members and other volunteers.

To exhibit you must be a member of the guild which is only £2 for a year. There are 6 sweet pea classes ranging from a vase of 3 stems to a vase of 12 stems.

So, if anyone is interested in exhibiting or just attending, then please contact me and I will arrange a schedule and details of the exact location to be sent to you, my contact details are in the annual.

Hopefully other shows in Essex will take place this year. All the best for 2022.

Ramblings from Suffolk

Chris Dale (District Rep)

Nothing much to report from this neck of the woods: we have none of the local sweet pea shows remaining in Suffolk, and the membership is pretty quiet.

I still grew 120 plants for 2021, just in case, but lost 118 of them. Never seen anything like it in 40 years. They started looking pale in the frames but went yellow almost as soon as they were planted out, so I removed the lot to compost. Was it because lockdown meant I had to use different suppliers/brands and sources of compost and manure? Was the soil still too cold and wet when I planted out? Had the lack of light in February and March weakened the plants in the frames? Or that short but intense cold spell? Too many variables to decide.

I then sowed some old seed to try and get some late blooms. They were severely restricted and were put out in the same place from which I'd removed the failed crop (in May, 2 months later than usual in these parts). They thrived! Blooms were cut from July until just in to October. Only had a short period of good 4's with long stems though, but for the first time I can remember, not one pollen beetle. Wonderful! Maybe the late start of flowering missed the migration of beetles from the fields, as rape flowering would have passed a few weeks prior?

So, the soil has been prepared again, the cold frame is full of healthy-looking plants (a bit forward as it's been ridiculously mild), and I hope that 2022 will be better for us all. It looks as though Elm Park will provide an early exhibition opportunity, then fingers crossed for a National. I have a talk lined up at a local Society in June, when I hope to be able to take some decent flowers for their members.

In Suffolk we've recently lost Sudbury, Woodbridge and Ipswich summer shows. Essex lost Copford and now Colchester. Thankfully Elm Park survives and hopefully that will be well supported. (I recommend the cream tea after setting up!)

Ed – you and Brian do think alike!

Growing your own Rushes

Roger Parsons

Looking for a replacement to Oasis has caused me to revisit an article I wrote for the 1996 Autumn Bulletin on growing your own Rushes. I am reproducing it here but will then add some current thoughts at the end.

Reeds or Rushes

by Roger Parsons

I have often been puzzled why so many exhibitors refer to the staging material in their vases as “Reeds” and have yet to come up with a satisfactory explanation.

Both our own publication “How to Grow Sweet Peas” and Charles Unwin in his book (1986 edition) correctly refer to “Rushes”. Bernard Jones, in his Complete Guide..., refers to bulrushes but then goes on to say the best are pencil thick. He was therefore clearly not thinking of the Common Bulrush, *Typha latifolia*, nor I suspect any of the other species referred to by botanists.

Use of the term “Reeds” can be very confusing to novice growers. I remember some years ago deciding to try “Reeds” as I was going to Shalford for the first time and wanted to make a good impression. I went to cut some Common Reeds, *Phragmites australis*, and cut my hand on the sharp stems so badly that it required hospital treatment. Arriving at the show the next morning, Jeff Brande informed me they were no good and Keith Brewer came to my rescue with some spare Rushes.

The plants most exhibitors use are species of *Juncus*. There are many different species in Britain and some are more suitable than others. Perhaps the best is the Soft Rush, *Juncus effusus*. Many of the species are too narrow and little better than grasses. I once tried using a species of Bulrush called *Schoenoplectus*. These are the right diameter but are of triangular rather than round cross-section which prevents them from packing together adequately in the vase.



A vase all prepped with Rushes and ready for the Peas!

With restrictions on collecting plants from the wild, it is becoming increasingly difficult for some people to obtain suitable Rushes. We created a garden pond two years ago which now provides a happy home for newts and other animal life. The Waterlily, Water Hyacinth and Marsh Marigold all give a good display, but I am sure the reader has worked out which plant has pride of place in the pond margin. Seedling Rushes commonly appear as weeds in sedge peat-based composts and this is the best source for those wishing to grow their own staging material.

Twenty-one years ago, we moved to a new house so I bought seeds of *Juncus effusus* from a specialist wild flower seed firm. The seeds were tiny so were just sprinkled on the top of a fine compost. These germinated and grew very easily and I planted them out in various damp places such as a redundant ditch that runs along the front of our property. They struggled to compete against coarser weed species and did not thrive in that particular location. By that time, I had finally got used to staging in Oasis so the Rushes got neglected and have died out.

Looking to the future, I am going to try again to grow my own Rushes. 2021 showed me that the outflow from my polytunnel drainage will be a suitable place to grow these because the ground floods in heavy rain and rarely, if ever, dries out. Since these will take time to grow and establish, I am also looking forward to trying other alternatives in 2022. Gardener's Gaiters, *Phalaris arundinacea*, look like an option worth trying and Sweet Pea flower stems will also be on my list. I will be trying potatoes as staging material, following John Pratt's advice that they are good, but suspect some varieties are better than others for their texture. I usually have courgettes by the time of the shows so they are something else I shall try.

Information regarding Rushes

Julia Beardmore

I have seen posts on the Facebook group and heard conversations about Rushes and Reeds being banned, so I have been searching for any information I can to substantiate this belief. It is a concern for those who might wish to use them for staging their Sweet Pea vases at exhibitions, that they will not be able to get hold of the Rushes. Information that I obtained from a couple of Members who entered classes before Floral Foam (Oasis) was introduced, that it was Rushes that were used in the past and not Reeds.

I cannot find anything which informs me that Rushes are banned. There are Conservation areas which you need to be aware of, also habitats of birds and wild fowl especially during nesting season. I have copied the Government website which gives some information about Rushes and Sedges.

[Manage rushes in grassland - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/manage-rushes-in-grassland)

Being brought up on a farm, and now owning that farm with my brothers, I know how much most farmers dislike Rushes, they would be more than happy if someone was to voluntary mow them. Rushes grow mainly in wet areas and poor soil structure. Of course, if you are going to gather from a farmer's field, please ask before you do so. There are many public footpaths where you will see rushes growing, I come across them many times on my walks.

It is disappointing that Oasis, have not yet delivered an environmentally friendly product to purchase in the UK, but I understand there is one being developed. In July 2021, The National Sweet Pea Society were awarded a Gold Medal at RHS Tatton, for our display stand, and also at Chorley flower show.

At Tatton we used a product which the RHS allowed, this was a Rock wool manufactured by Agrawool; whilst I would not be keen on using this product again, it was possible. It required a lot of patience and something slim with a point, such as a knitting needle or long nail to guide your stem with. At Chorley Flower show, we used wire netting, glass beads and water crystals in vases and bowls.

Whilst I have been guilty of using Floral Foam for flower arranging, and unwittingly thinking it was a 'green' product, put it in the garden recycling bin. It is a horrible dusty product, which some believe to be carcinogenic.

I will be gathering some Rushes as soon as I have some Sweet Peas to arrange. A number of us in Lancashire had a demonstration of arranging Sweet Peas in Rushes by Tom Atherton at the beginning of Autumn, he made it look so easy. I'm sure we will discover various methods of arranging our Sweet Peas at the shows and so long as it is environmentally friendly. My main concern is, will my flowers be up to show quality standard and will the weather be kind.



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Wind (Poly) Tunnel

A few thoughts about under cover cultivation for the amateur gardener from Dr Chris Henry

The last few weeks (November) have been spent on and off, in my 15-foot polytunnel. The last of the old plants, weeds, canes and strings have all been removed. The ground has been roughly dug over in preparation for the earliest planting out of winter flowering varieties of sweet peas, planned for some time in late December. I have grown sweet peas for many decades, mostly as an outdoor crop, but in recent years have enjoyed growing plants under cover. It is much more pleasant to work in a protected environment especially when it is too cold, too wet and/or too windy to work outside. This seems more important with advancing years and increasingly unpredictable weather.



Many people, sweet pea enthusiasts and others, already grow their plants with some sort of protection – in greenhouses, under temporary roofing of various designs or in polytunnels. There are many advantages including a far greater control over heating, ventilation, frost protection, snow showers and heavy downpours of rain. There can also be greater control over pests and maybe some diseases. However, there are disadvantages too.

Many off-the-shelf structures are limited in height and can get very hot very quickly and can present difficulties in ventilation. I also appreciate that not everyone has room for a tunnel or may not wish to have one as they are not the most attractive structures.

Most standard, domestic polytunnels lack sufficient height to grow cordon plants, having a headroom of just 6 or 7 feet and the best of that is in the middle path area! This might mean having to layer 2 or 3 times or more during the season and could involve a lot of extra work. Or one might choose to grow one of the varieties which are semi dwarf or even very dwarf. It is possible to buy domestic tunnels, for example, which are 'standard' but with extra length ground tubes, consequently giving extra height in the growing area.

Positioning is important. As a life-long grower of vegetables, I have always tried to grow rows of plants with a north/south orientation to allow maximum exposure to sunlight. My tunnel was positioned in the same way but the prevailing wind created quite an efficient wind tunnel! Needless to say, doors at either end of the structure are essential to allow control over ventilation to prevent it massively overheating and to prevent excessive moisture from building up, leading to mould and condensation problems.

Keeping a poly tunnel frost free is not difficult but is becoming increasingly expensive. It does, however, allow the production of earlier blooms (if not exactly winter flowering). First picking can easily be achieved in March/April using "winter flowering" or early cultivars. As the days lengthen and the sun increases in strength, the plastic soon holds too much heat which can cook and scorch the plants. Rain damage is no longer an issue and attacks by pollen beetles are less likely. Molluscs are easier to control also, as the drier soil surface does not suit them.

Crop rotation is not so easily achieved in a permanent structure. I have found that small amounts of well-rotted manure, a little fresh compost (bagged or my own) plus a small amount of fertilizer seems to keep the soil in good condition. The time may well come when some of the soil will need to be replaced or the tunnel repositioned. Neither seems very practical as one gets older. Alternatively, it is quite possible to grow sweet peas on one side and early potatoes, flowers for cutting, or tomatoes, for example, on the other. The following year the crops can be reversed.

My main crop of Spencers are still grown outside in informal rows, mainly for cut flowers and decoration, but having a warmer, covered, sheltered place in which to work is increasingly welcome.

Showing *Lathyrus* species

Roger Parsons

Publication by the RHS in 2021 of “*Lathyrus*: the complete guide” by Greg Kenicer and Roger Parsons is the first major review of *Lathyrus* species since Kupicha’s 1983 review. It takes account of botanical changes accepted by RBG Kew and other botanical authorities. There are implications concerning which species are eligible to be shown in classes for *Lathyrus* species, other than *L. odoratus*.

Some species are added to the list of eligible species and one has been removed to another genus. *Lathyrus saxatilis* is no longer accepted as being a *Lathyrus* and had been re-named *Vicia saxatilis*. Kupicha had expressed doubts about whether or not this species was a *Lathyrus* and subsequent genetic studies have revealed that it should correctly be within *Vicia*. This species is not one that I can recall having seen exhibited in classes for L. species for a very long time.

The opportunities for showing additional species have however been considerably expanded. Two genera have been identified through genetic studies as being entirely within the range of *Lathyrus* species. These are *Vavilovia* and *Pisum*.

Vavilovia Formosa was the only member of its genus and has now been renamed as *Lathyrus formosus*. This species has attractive purple flowers on short stems. It has low ground-hugging plants on high altitude, rocky ground and is not one I have ever grown.



Lathyrus formosus (taken from the RHS publication, *Lathyrus: the complete guide*)

Rather more controversial is widespread acceptance that the Garden or Edible Pea, *Pisum sativum*, is in fact a *Lathyrus*. All *Pisum* are now subsumed within *Lathyrus* but after 250 years of Peas being known as *Pisum sativum*, this change has not been universally welcomed. The original name was given by Linnaeus in 1753 but it was respected French botanist Lamarck who named it *Lathyrus oleraceus* in 1779 and this latter name is the one now accepted. *Pisum fulvum*, the Tawny Pea, has also been renamed as *Lathyrus fulvus*.

Whether or not you welcome these changes, it does mean that additional species are now recognised as *Lathyrus* and are therefore eligible for inclusion in our classes for annual *Lathyrus* species. You may not be growing other *Lathyrus* species but if you have a row of Garden Peas being grown for the kitchen, you could cut a few blooms from these to make a bowl. Garden Peas are best known for having either white or purple flowers but pink is also found and there is variation around these colours which I am proposing to trial. *L. fulvus* has orange flowers but are short stemmed, rather like *L. ochrus*.

References

G. Kenicer and R. Parsons 2021 *Lathyrus*: the complete guide. RHS, London.
F. Kupicha 1983 The infrageneric structure of *Lathyrus*. Notes RBG Edinburgh 41: 209-244



Matthewman's Sweet Peas



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Growing Media

Graham Johnson

As I'm sure people are aware by now, our favourite composts are being phased out and peat free mixtures will soon be the only ones available.

I've used many composts over the years, including Clover and Levington's professional products, John Innes no2, Humax original, and garden centre own brands. Of them all, I found Humax original to be the best. Unfortunately, this has already been discontinued but even though I still have enough for at least two more years, at some point an alternative will have to be found. So, I've decided to make a start this year and trial some alternative peat free composts.

Many peat free, or peat reduced composts are available at garden centres and all sound wonderful when you read the bag, but previous experience of using peat-based garden centre composts and finding ingredients in them that are not listed on the bag (if you get my meaning) suggests not to wholly believe everything claimed. I have also investigated ordering composts that are available on-line but at mouth-watering prices!! Out of all of them, I've decided to try the RHS endorsed Melcourt Sylvagrow compost, as that seems to be available at some garden centres, along with an online generic peat free compost from Woodland Horticulture.

I'll be sowing 40 seeds of Sir Jimmy Shand, Gwendoline and Anniversary on the 1st of February, 20 seeds of each in both composts, comparing germination rates and then growing on in root trainers or 4-inch pots, so I'll get a good comparison of how they grow, compared to previously sown seeds of the same varieties in Humax original. I will be sowing exactly the same way as I have done previously on a heated bed under T5 horticultural lights, so I'll get a good comparison.

Once the trial is over, I will post a follow up article with conclusions and pictures for later bulletins.

Deadlines

Graeme Hollingdale

Finally, an extra plea for those of you who were kind enough to send copy for these pages, to think ahead and try to observe deadlines. Until I started to chase, push and prod various members on and after my published deadline date of 2nd January, I was literally sitting on three articles, all from one person and no photos. Thankfully this quickly changed.

In life we do all have to follow rules, regulations and deadlines and although NSPS publications are probably not nearly as important to you all as many other aspects of your lives, please can I ask that you think ahead for next year? I would rather not have the extra stress and embarrassment of sending out pleading emails.

District Reps; thank you to the 7 out of 24 of you (not on the committee) who responded and provided something. It is after all part the reason we have you; to provide that important local and personal link between those ‘on the ground’ and the wider membership and the committee. Thank you for all your hard (and largely unacknowledged) work for our favourite flower and Society, it is really appreciated!

Also please remember that for ease of the editing process, no embedded tabs, spaces or photos please (they can be very difficult at times to eradicate) I use Times New Roman font size 11 but that is easily altered. If you could remember when typing in Word (or similar apps) to select “No Spacing” please; even “Normal” does on occasions throw up some anomalies!

Photos as .jpeg files are best for me please (not too low resolution) Also, do remember that what you see beautifully laid out on your screen (by default will be A4 size) does not necessarily easily transfer to the Bulletin page size of A5, hence let me do the tabs etc please!

Photo credits in this edition of the NSPS Bulletin with thanks, go to:

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RHS publications

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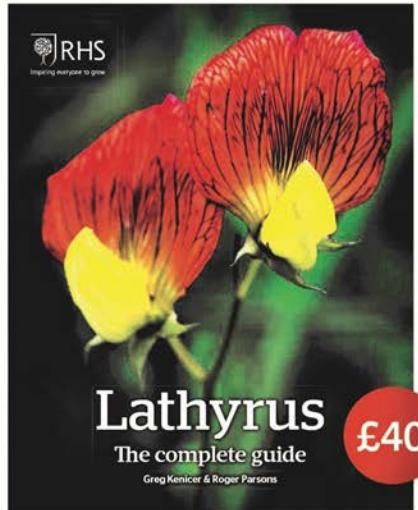
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