



NATIONAL
Sweet Pea Society

SPRING BULLETIN

2023



Registered Charity No: 226802



RPS
Roger Parsons Sweet Peas

NEWS

NEW WEBSITE

This summer saw the launch of our new website. It is now much easier to search for varieties by flower type, colour or scent value. You also now have the option to pay directly by card. The previous ways to order via our catalogue, email and phone are still available to you.

WWW.RPSWEETPEAS.COM

Instagram Success!

Our Instagram account has gained traction this summer with over 4000 followers. Make sure you follow us for all our latest news, information and top tips for growing success!



Instagram

2023 Novelties:

- Terry Davey—mauve
- George McAra—crimson
- John Warren—white
- Ian Myers—mauve bicolour

Roger Parsons Sweet Peas

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NATIONAL SWEET PEA SOCIETY

Registered Charity No: 226802

SPRING BULLETIN 2023

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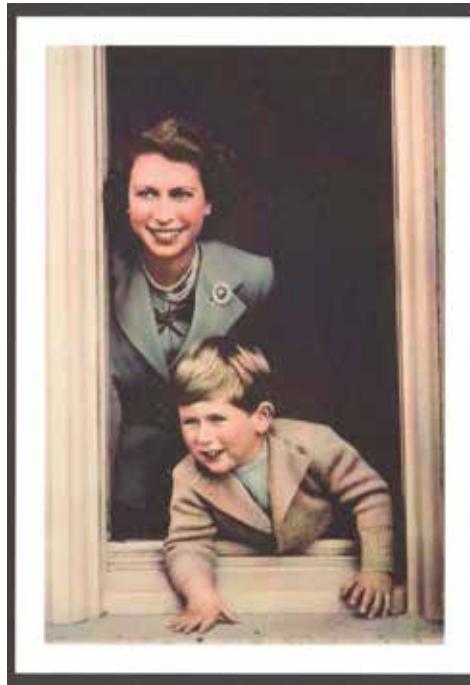
Facebook: For the Love of Sweet Peas

Twitter: @SweetPeaSociety

Instagram: @national_sweet_pea_society

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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It was so very kind of you to send me such a wonderfully generous message following the death of my beloved mother. Your most thoughtful words are enormously comforting, and I cannot tell you how deeply they are appreciated at this time of immense sorrow.

Charles R

Dates for your 2023 Diary

[correct at the time of editing]

Saturday 4 March **NSPS AGM & Spring Social** All paid up members

*NB due to members' feedback, this will now be held on-line via zoom.
Please see notification article.*

Saturday 4 March	NSPS AGM & Spring Social	All paid up members
<i>NB due to members' feedback, this will now be held on-line via zoom. Please see notification article.</i>		
Wednesday 26 April	NSPS Committee meeting (Face to face)	Committee members only
Sunday 18 June	Chiltern Sweet Pea Society Show Lacey Green Bucks	Members' Competition
Sat 1 and Sun 2 July	Early National Exhibition Squires Garden Centre Shepperton	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Sat 8 and Sun 9 July	Late National Exhibition RHS Bridgewater Gardens Worsley	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Sat 15 and Sun 16 July	Eckford Society of Wem	Open and Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Weds 19 – Sun 23 July	RHS Tatton	Display & Bureau
Mon 24 – Thurs 27 July	Royal Welsh Show Buith Wells	National (Open) Sweet Pea Championship of Wales
Fri 28 – Sun 30 July	North West Regional Show Astley Park, Chorley	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Wednesday 6 September	NSPS Committee meeting	Committee members only
Wednesday 8 November	NSPS Committee meeting	Committee members only

Introduction/Editorial

After a bumper edition in the Autumn, this Spring we have a more normal sized publication for you. As always, thank you everyone for your contributions for these Bulletins, along with the wonderful proof-reading job that Janet Bulstrode does for me.

The main focus of your committee (apart from all the usual and ongoing issues that have to be done behind the scenes which, if you have never served on the committee of a national organisation, that is also a registered charity, you will have little idea of all the work that does take place) this season has been all about the setting up and working through the teething issues (see the article on pages 9 to 11) of the new website.

All things internet develop at such a pace that the previous website which, when set-up was cutting edge, sadly had passed its best before date when compared to the systems that other similar societies and business are now using.

We can't thank webmaster Bob Rishworth and his son Andrew, enough for all the time, effort and expertise that they gave over the years to the Society and especially with the website.

So, rather like the CD player which was lauded at the time of release as the best ever system for playing music (which was then overtaken by digital downloads) we are going with the tech flow. The benefits are there for all of us to take advantage of, so do visit sweetpeas.org.uk on a regular basis and enjoy seeing what it offers grow over the weeks and months. If you haven't yet registered your membership through the site, then please do so.

Ahead of the AGM on 4 March (see official notice on pages 7 and 8) as is normal procedure, we publish the main Reports in this Bulletin. Please see pages 15, 16 and 17.

Deadline dates for copy to be received by:

2023 ANNUAL

any late articles to Caroline ASAP.

2023 Autumn Bulletin

by **4th September** please.

2024 Spring Bulletin

by **2nd January 2024** please.

2024 ANNUAL

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

Annual General Meeting 2023

Notice is hereby given that the ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Members of the National Sweet Pea Society which will be held on Saturday 4th March 2023, **online, starting at 10.30am** for the purpose of receiving Reports and the Balance Sheet as of 31st October 2022.

Mrs Carole Tate
General Secretary NSPS
22 Lime Grove, Chorley
Lancs PR7 3JA
07961 477137
caroletate10@gmail.com

AGENDA

1. Chairman's welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of meeting held on Saturday 5th March 2022
4. Matters arising
5. Committee Reports (the Chairman's and Secretary's Reports are printed in the Spring 2023 Bulletin) and Trials Reports
6. Election of Office Bearers and Members of the Committee
7. Election of Independent Examiner
8. Any Other Business (that has been sent, in advance, to the Chairman and Secretary)

It is to be noted that all 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 conduct an election.

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

Phillippa Cooper

There is currently one vacancy on the General Committee and nominations please must reach the General Secretary by Saturday 25th February 2023.

The Society's accounts will be published on the website by 25th February and any questions or representation on them must be received by the General Secretary by 5pm on Thursday 2nd March 2023.

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 2022) at the National Exhibitions, which will be held in July 2023.

The planned Plant Competition will not take place in 2023.

PROGRAMME

- 10.15. Registration
- 10.30. AGM
- 11.30. 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 4th 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 25th February 2023.



Some freshly cut 'peas, to remind you why we grow them!

The New Website

Alison Shreeve (Chair) Julia Beardmore (Membership)

We finally went live with the new website in December and we think it looks great, but we have had some teething problems with it. We would like to apologise to those members who have had difficulties logging in. There were gremlins in the backend of the system which took a while to find and resolve. As we complete the renewal cycle, we hope we have found any other problems which could occur, but as with all new technologies it will take a while to bed in and for us to maximise the benefits it will bring to members, so please bear with us.

If you have logged in with your card details the website is able to automatically take payment when subscriptions are due in January. This year there was a reminder sent to members to renew which was a little confusing, so we will try and remove this in future. As we also give people who join from August onwards a free end of year, they pay in advance for the following year, this also caused a few headaches for the technical team. The website software is set up to do automatic payments from joining dates, but if we moved to this system, it would have meant very complex accounting procedures, so the team have had to resolve this issue too. Nothing is very simple and for those of us who are not technical whiz kids it is also frustrating. However, if you will bear with us, we are sure it will all be smooth running in future.

Once Members have registered their payment details through PayPal, you will receive an email link to fully complete your Membership. Click on this link which will take you through to the Members area, and complete the screen, then hit the **Register** button.

If you don't get the link, please check your SPAM, if it's not there, email Julia Beardmore at membership@sweetpeas.org.uk for a resend.

Once you have registered through PayPal for payment, and if you are struggling to complete the process, please do not try to register again as this will create a duplicate payment.

Some members have found whilst accessing the website on their mobiles/tablets, in particular IOS, it may not show all the buttons. This can be common on a Safari browser, try using Google Chrome or Firefox.

We now have the ability to send updates out via Mailchimp; this will be useful to keep you updated of anything newsworthy, these will automatically be sent out to all who have registered on the website. We can still forward these should you not be registered, if you wish to be included, please update the Membership Secretary with your email address. You can always unsubscribe if you no longer wish to receive them.

Please save **membership@sweetpeas.org.uk** in your address book, it will help stop it going into SPAM and also identify it as a genuine email address.

We understand that not everyone will want to register for making payments online; if you have already paid your subscription and would like access to the members area, please do ask to be added by contacting Julia as above.

Our Membership Secretary does try to respond as soon as possible, but she is undertaking this role in a voluntary capacity and she isn't always able to get back to you as quickly as she would like.

Apologies to those who have experienced long response times following the launch of the new site. We are delighted that there has been a good number of people wanting to register on the website and with the new online only rates we think this will increase in future.

If there is anything in particular you, as members, would like to see please do contact us with your suggestions. We might not be able to accommodate everything, but we will try our best. We now have an online only membership available at a cheaper rate. All the Bulletins, Annuals and other publications are in the members area for reference as well as articles to help with growing and showing.

We would like to have a greater representation of shows throughout the country, so if your local Affiliated Society is holding a show, please let us know. Take photographs and send them to the Chair or other committee members so that we can post them as a record of events.

Sadly, we had no response from the Autumn Bulletin request for a merchandising manager to run the shop, so for now this facility is unavailable on the website. If in future a volunteer(s) come forward we can set this up. The website has this functionality, so if you know anyone who might be interested, please think about it.

Finally, and as a reminder to you all, we are a registered charity and we do not employ people in any capacity, everyone who works on behalf of your Society does so as a volunteer, so please bear with us as we try to move forward with technology and if you can, offer to help out!

We are all really looking forward to the growing year; now is an exciting time to plan your displays and your participation in shows, at National, area and local levels. We wish you a very successful year and don't forget to look on the website for advice and information to help you succeed.

Dappled Sweet Peas

Roger Parsons

Those who have studied the 2023 Classification List carefully may have noticed a new category: 16c Fancy (Dappled).

No cultivars are as yet listed under this sub-heading in the current list. The category has been introduced to accommodate 'David Tostevin'; which is a new cultivar sold by Plants of Distinction from Autumn 2021, which was introduced after the 2022 Classification List went to press. Unfortunately, this was sold out at the time the 2023 list was in production. The Classification List each year consists of the cultivars currently in commerce and who supplies them. Cultivars are often omitted if no seedsman was listing them for a particular season, only to be re-instated on the list in the following year if they become available again.



A 'mottled' as yet unnamed and unreleased selection from "Butterfly Wings"



A different selection from “Butterfly Wings”, also unnamed and unreleased

‘David Tostevin’ has been selected by Seedlynx from segregating material bred by Keith Hammett and distributed under the name Butterfly Wings. The origin and distinctive character of this colour pattern were described by Keith Hammett in an article in the 2017 Annual titled “Flakes and Stripes”. Keith refers to the pattern as “motley” and I have in the past referred to it as “mottled” but your committee has endorsed the term “dappled” to distinguish it from other fancy colour patterns, such as flakes and stripes.

The genetic relationship of this pattern to other patterns remains unclear so in the meantime it was thought appropriate to create a new distinct category, recognising that other cultivars with a dappled pattern may be introduced in the near future.



David Tostevin

Random Oasis Anecdotes:

Graeme Hollingdale

Did you realise that as far back as the 1980's Gloucester Cathedral banned Oasis from being used on their premises? The reason; it was blocking the drains.

Many churches have banned the use of Oasis by their flower arrangers since becoming aware of the environmental impact this product produces when disposed of.

General Secretary's Report 2023

Carole Tate

I am delighted that 2022 has seen lovely weather, fantastic sweet peas and an abundance of Flower Shows. It was great to get back into the swing of things last autumn when I was turning over the sweet pea beds, stacking the canes and planning which varieties of pea to plant for the Shows. The Winter saw me checking out the schedules and drawing up a grand plan with the various show dates, sweet pea requirements, planting times and expected flowering dates.

Spring saw hundreds of seedlings shooting up in the propagator ready for potting on, nipping out and hardening off, with more work on the beds to incorporate manure and keep a fine tilth; and keeping the local cats off the bed with judicious placings of rose thorn cuttings!

Summer flew by in a flurry of National and local shows, along with NSPS stands at RHS Tatton and Southport. We won Gold Awards for our excellent displays where we used pre-loved glassware rather than plastic bowls and Oasis, receiving full marks from the judges. We received good feedback from the public who visited the displays and information bureaux also signing up some new members. Well done to all of the teams involved.

I entered the NSPS Early and Late Shows which were well attended and very enjoyable. The North West Region Show was held at Chorley Flower Show, where we again won a Gold Award. Such events are a good opportunity to catch up with fellow sweet pea growers and pick up hints and tips on growing and displaying. Show reports will appear in the Annual.

That brings me back to Autumn where the season starts again! I have found useful information on our Facebook page, "For the Love of Sweet Peas INC The National Sweet Pea Society" and this year we have our updated website www.sweetpeas.org.uk which will enable renewals and online membership to be automatically handled, plus giving us the capacity to pass on more information to our members.

I am looking forward to another busy 2023 season and wish you all success and happiness growing our beloved sweet pea.

Chairman's Report 2022-23

Alison Shreeve

This has been my first year as chair of the National Sweet Pea Society and it has been a very rich and rewarding time, though a bit stressful too! I have learned a great deal and begun to find out much more about our society and the people who make things happen.

The growing season has been excellent, with no rain to damage the blooms at critical times here in the Chilterns. I had my first experience of helping to set up an exhibition stand and information desk for the society at the Royal Windsor Flower Show. We were inundated with people amazed at the scent and abundance of blooms and struggled to keep up with the enquiries and the sale of blooms. This was repeated at the Early National where Julia and Carole did an excellent job as so many people came through the New Hilltop exhibition hall at Wisley. We could really do with more people to help man the desks at shows and indeed to help set up and take down, so if you are interested, please get in touch with your District Rep or any of the committee who can point you in the right direction.

I managed to travel to take part in the Wem show, revived thank goodness in large part to Philippa Cooper who was awarded the Jack Davies award for her efforts with well-earned recognition from the Society. I exhibited at Wem, the Early National and at two local shows, WARGAS and the Chiltern Society with some success. I also visited the Chorley Flower Show, where rain had unfortunately struck just before staging. In spite of this there was a good show and many (rather damp) visitors. I hope to see a few more areas of the country next summer to meet people and see how things are done.

The biggest development this year has been the building of our new website. This was mapped out by a sub-group of the Committee who researched similar plant society sites and planned an outline structure for the new site. The brief was put out to tender; we interviewed (and did further research) on two companies. The contract was awarded to George Foster; I think we are all agreed that it does look very good. We have had some teething problems, with technical hitches which were not present in the testing stages, and some which have surprised even the technical backup team at WordPress! For those of you who have struggled to log on to the members' area we send our sincere apologies. We hope that this won't put you off using the site. It will bed down I'm sure and provide us with an easier and more comprehensive service for members whilst providing non-members with sufficient information to help them grow and understand Sweet Peas.

You will remember that we put out a call for anyone interested in becoming a Merchandising Manager for the Society in the Autumn Bulletin. Unfortunately, we had no response from this request, so there will be no sale of Sweet Pea related items, rings or cane clips in future and no shop on the Website, although we have this facility should we need it in the future. I would like to extend my thanks to Julia Beardmore, Caroline Ball, Nicky Edwards and Bob Rishworth for their input and hard work in relation to the new website.

We also welcomed Roz Warley's offer to act as District Reps Coordinator. This will help us to reinforce the network of keen growers and experts throughout the UK and enable the sharing of good ideas. We hope also to make sure there are showing opportunities and encouragement for new growers in local areas. The Schedules for the NSPS shows and some local shows have been amended to encourage beginners to have a go at showing and to access help from all you expert enthusiasts around the country. Please do contact your local Representative (listed in the Annual) if you need information or use the contact us buttons on the website.

We reluctantly took the decision to make the AGM a zoom meeting for 2023, though many of us would prefer to have a face-to-face meeting. We recognised that many members cannot travel easily to the centre of England and we will have to be more versatile in our approach to social events in future with, we hope, more regional activities spread around the UK. If there is enough demand, we are certainly happy to reinstate the face-to-face event in future, so please let us know your feelings about this.

Finally, it remains for me to wish you all a good growing year and much success with showing and much enjoyment from your Sweet Peas in 2023.

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Soil update

Caroline Ball

In 2021 I had my soil professionally analysed. Whilst I might be amply qualified to do this myself, I do find the off the shelf kits that you can buy are not particularly sensitive and do not cover all trace elements; plus, I had done this previously and treated the soil according to the results, with disappointing improvement in my Peas. I felt the test was necessary because my ground has been used for Peas for over 10 years now and despite diligent applications of manure and other soil improvers, my plants were starting to look weaker each season. I don't really have space that I wish to use for moving the Sweet Pea plants en masse to elsewhere in the garden. I had tried growing other flowers and vegetables on my Pea plot during covid, in lieu of crop rotation, with only marginal subsequent improvement.

My test results showed a very high pH (not a surprise I have always grown my Peas in very alkaline sites, that is where I live!), deficiencies in Manganese, Molybdenum, Sulphur and Iron and too much Phosphorus, Potassium, Magnesium, Copper and Zinc. In order to address this I made a winter application of flowers of Sulphur (a job I did not enjoy!) to reduce the pH and once the plants were in the ground I made a fortnightly application of a solution of the deficient trace elements.



So, what happened?

My plants definitely looked stronger initially which encouragingly continued throughout the season. I would say that the plants were still not quite as strong as they would have been had they been grown on fresh ground. Nevertheless, I pressed on with the regime.

The flowers when they came, were beautiful of course and my successes at the Early National and Chiltern Sweet Pea Society Shows convinced me this is a program I will continue with in 2023. I will continue to try to lower the pH too - Sweet Peas prefer to be more neutral or even on the slightly acidic side.

Like most people, my season was curtailed by the heat and drought of our scorching 2022 Summer and I didn't think my treatments contributed negatively towards the duration of the season. I am looking forward to more beautiful flowers in 2023 and would encourage anyone worried about their soil and whether what they are adding to it is doing any good, to get a professional analysis completed and to act accordingly.



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Exhibiting Sweet Peas

By Carole Tate, Show Manager

If you are new to exhibiting I would urge you to scrutinise the Exhibition Schedule and plan well for success. For NSPS Shows, decide which division(s) you will be entering. The divisions allow growers to compete against members who grow a similar number of plants. Check which cultivars you are growing and work out how many Spencer blooms you will need for each vase class. Division VI is for non-cordon plants and includes Old Fashioned, Modern Grandifloras/semi-grandifloras and Lathyrus species (annual and perennial).

The decorative division is very popular, particularly with growers who have smaller gardens. Again, I would encourage you to study the schedule and work out how many blooms are needed, which cultivars/types, what foliage (if any), what size arrangement and any accessories. It allows opportunity to display sweet peas in different arrangements. Let your imagination run and be rewarded with gasps of delight from the judges and public. It also gives you opportunity to use your shorter stemmed blooms!

Please check through the Regulations for Exhibitors. We aim to be fair to all, giving each the opportunity to maximise the potential of their sweet peas. Refer any questions to the Show Manager. Lots of hints and tips can be found in past publications, on Facebook (For the Love of Sweet Peas) on the website www.sweetpeas.org.uk via your District Representative and your fellow growers.

I hope you are encouraged to enter your flowers in one of our NSPS Shows or at a local venue. Many horticultural shows across the country are struggling to survive. Without entries there are no shows. I look forward to seeing you (and your peas) at one of the many events in 2023.

Exhibiting at the NSPS Late Show **on the 8th and 9th July 2023**

This year the NSPS Late Show will be held at RHS Bridgewater Gardens, Worsley M28 2LJ. It is a new venue for us but has been chosen to give accessibility to as many members as possible with good motorway access and fantastic facilities.

It is always difficult finding a suitable venue where they can accommodate our particular needs, but the proposed marquee will be large enough to allow us to display the entries for judging and for the public to view our magnificent blooms. Situated in a central location and advertised at Bridgewater and on the RHS website there is the potential for a large footfall of interested horticultural people who hopefully will no doubt be inspired to grow and find out more about our beloved sweet pea and join our Society. The volunteers at the Information Bureau will be able to help encourage new and existing growers as well as to provide advice and answer questions.

Help will also be on hand for exhibitors. We have a team who will be available to help with transporting blooms from the car, supply water, vases and staging materials, help with staging and make copious cups of tea and coffee. Staging starts at 6pm on Friday 7th July and runs to 10pm then restarts at 6am Saturday morning. Judging is due to start at 9.45am on Saturday but can be delayed for the largest vase classes as we appreciate that time is limited as we have not been permitted to have our traditional overnight staging available at this venue.

Please check the schedule for details of the Special Classes which are open to all members and the Special Awards available. Any questions, then please contact your Show Manager, Carole Tate.

Exhibiting at the NSPS North West Region Show **on the 28th, 29th and 30th July 2023**

Our sixth NWR Show will again be held at Chorley Flower Show over three days at the end of July. It is exhibitor friendly with good parking, lighting and overnight staging facilities. We have a team of helpers to assist with fetching and carrying, staging and providing water, vases and staging materials (Oasis is allowed but we encourage the use of alternative environmentally friendly mediums)

Staging is from 4pm to 10.30pm on Thursday 27th July and 5.30am to 9am on Friday 28th (overnight staging by arrangement) with Judging taking place on Friday morning between 9-10am. The presentation of Awards, by the Flower Show Celebrity, will be at 1pm on Friday. Refreshments are provided during staging and throughout the show for exhibitors and helpers.

We particularly encourage novice and junior entries with a range of graded sections to encourage members with different growing capacities. We also support this with a local workshop. The decorative classes are very well supported and include petite and buttonholes. The popular sponsored single bloom class is open to all members, and this year we have introduced a vase to be judged by the public.

Chorley show has a true horticultural focus with a very high standard of trade and amateur exhibits. We will have an environmentally friendly display stand and information bureau and look forward to meeting friends new and old.

As with all the shows and displays we need lots of donated flowers and volunteers. You do not need to be a member to help. Please contact me if you would like to support us at this or any of the others shows, workshops or displays and for details of any of our North West events.

Best regards and good luck with your blooms.

A funny old year

John Rieley

You know how it is. You start the season with fresh seed and fresh hopes for glory but as time goes by reality kicks in as disease and weather problems take their toll. But what if unreality occurs instead and things turn out the other way around? Surely not...

I nearly did not grow any Sweet Peas this year as for the past few years the quality of my 'Peas has been dropping and the only thing that kept me going was the desire to find out what had been going wrong. Putting aside all hopes of success at showing I decided to grow fewer plants and carry out some experiments.

I used three beds. One was prepared as I normally would, ie double dug with home-made compost incorporated. Another, which had previously grown beans, had the top spit dug in spring and the third was in virgin soil in a different part of the garden which was double dug and had several bags of commercial compost incorporated (in case my own could have been the cause of my problems)

I had a strong suspicion that one source of my problems was aphids, most likely coming from my neighbour's oak tree which overhangs the southern end of my garden; so the first and third beds were encased in insect proof netting. The second one, alongside the first, was left unprotected as a control.

The start of the season was not auspicious. The seeds were germinated on tissue and put into pots containing peat free compost and then put into a cold frame. At first all went well but after the plants had produced their first pairs of leaves, growth became very variable. None grew well and many just stopped.

Watering and feeding had no effect so at the end of February they were planted out in the garden on the grounds that they couldn't do any worse out there. Since I did not have many plants, everyone was planted out regardless of its state of development with the thought that, if they did grow, layering was going to be a nightmare. (Spoiler: it was!) Quite a few gave up the ghost but most, after an agonising delay, decided to start growing.

At this point the unreality set in. The pathetic seedlings started to turn into respectable plants, especially those under the netting where the temperature was significantly warmer and I began to think that a couple of mixed vases at the Nationals might be possible. Layering was carried out four weeks before the show.

After that the plants under the netting were growing so quickly and the stems becoming so long and spindly that, aphids or not, the netting had to come off.

Before entering the Nationals there was the matter of what staging material to use since Oasis was banned. Believe it or not, I had rushes growing in my garden. They had just appeared there as weeds and I had never bothered to get rid of them as they were growing, not in their preferred marshy ground, but in heavy clay where nothing else would grow. I also had the good fortune to watch how Keith Brewer used them many years ago on my first visit to the Nationals. On using them myself I found that they were no more difficult to use than Oasis and had the benefit of it being easier to rearrange blooms. The only drawback seemed to be that they do not hold water as well as Oasis and therefore more topping up is needed.

The plants had grown so well that in addition to entering the mixed vases I was able to enter a couple of single variety classes as well. Staging of my first three vases went well but I suddenly realised that I had lost track of time and was left with less than twenty minutes to stage my mixed vases of twelve and fifteen. I managed it but they showed signs of haste. The results were most gratifying, three wins from three classes in Division 4 plus the best vase, a win and best vase for the mixed vase in Division 3 and a second for the mixed vase in Division 1. I was astonished to get the best vase in Division 3 but then I found out that there had been only two entries in the whole division. I then started feeling guilty collecting a cup for such a feeble effort.

Overall, I think that the number of entries was down due to the ban on Oasis and that I might not have done quite as well if it hadn't but as the saying goes 'the prizes go to those that entered'.

The results of the experiments were interesting. The netting was probably a waste of time as no greenfly appeared in the control bed until after the show and there were few in the garden as a whole. But what do I do next year when they might be back as it does seem to indicate that they were the cause of my troubles?

Despite the lack of protection, some of the plants in the control bed were used in my show vases. The mixed results were probably due to the fact that many of the plants were the weakest as I had planted the best ones under the nets. I am now beginning to wonder if some of my troubles might be the result of overzealous ground preparation!

Poynton Show, 27th August 2022

(article held over from the Autumn Bulletin)

Nicky Edwards

This event had not taken place since August 2019 so it was fantastic to see it up and running again. There was an oft repeated theme at many events this year of starting over after the pandemic, with organisers not being sure how much interest they would get in terms of entries or visitors, so it was lovely to be able to support the show with a National Sweet Pea Society display stand and information bureau in the Horticultural marquee. There were several plant societies there with stands; notably, the British Gladiolus Society were having their National Show 2022 there and the Macclesfield and East Cheshire branch of the British Cactus and Succulent Society were also holding their annual show there. Along with the other sections in the general horticultural show this made for a very full and interesting marquee.

The main worry about the stand for this show was how many flowers we would actually have on the day to put on it. I think many of us experienced one of the shortest sweet pea seasons in recent memory this year. My plants flowered their socks off very early in the year with a profusion of some of the most beautiful flowers I had ever grown in June and early July. I was giving flowers away to friends and neighbours left, right and centre and I didn't have enough vases in the house. The scent and beautiful jewel colours will stay in the memory for a long time. By the time we got to the end of July they had faltered. The species have remained with me right up to the point of writing, if a little covered in mildew, but the spencers and old fashioned were long gone. So all in all a very successful but very short season. The stand involved using the "History of the Sweet Pea" timeline sign boards to mitigate the shortage of flowers. As luck would have it, we did get a late flush of flowers in the society beds, thanks to Sarah and her (very small) team, so we did have enough flowers to fill the stand admirably.

It was an interesting showing season with the RHS ban on oasis. We managed to arrange all our stands at the shows this year without using any oasis and using lots of pre-loved glassware. This was recognised by the judges as showing a great commitment to finding more environmentally conscious ways forward. We continued the theme of using pre-loved glassware for the stand at Poynton so as to minimise the use of disposable baskets and plastic containers. This does involve more work as the glassware has to be cleaned before and after each show, transported carefully and then stored somewhere.

To arrange the vases, we used water-storing gel beads which are made of an environmentally safe polymer which swells when immersed in water. The beads can hold 100 times their weight in water and are also used by the Dahlia Society who say that they will last and keep their flowers fresh for up to two months as long as the beads are washed out from time to time to keep them fresh. Members interested in using these to arrange can find them online or at a florist wholesalers. We also made use of re-usable crystals in clear and white colours.



Bowls, especially larger ones, were arranged using layers of chicken wire. A piece of wire can be wrapped around to form two layers, a bottom layer which sits in the base of the bowl and an upper layer which is level with the top of the bowl. It is the bottom layer which is crucial in keeping the flowers in place properly when doing the arrangement. This proved a very successful way of arranging bowls of Spencers, Old Fashioned and Species and was a technique that some of us used when entering our exhibits for the Late Show at Harlow Carr.

It takes organisation and several hours for a stand like this to come together. Of course, this depends on the size of the team doing the arranging and our small team spent much of the Friday before the show creating the stand. Judging took place at 8.30am on the Saturday and we were thrilled to achieve a Gold medal and win the Silver Challenge Cup for the best plant society stand.

We signed up some new members, gave out lots of advice and promoted the NSPS and the workshops which we run in the North West. We also sold seeds and merchandise. All in all, this was an excellent event and thanks go to the team of Sarah Haisley, Catherine Bromley, Stephen Heyward, Carole Tate and Mavis Bell (Duxbury) for all their hard work. A great day was had by us all; made particularly special by the catering offered in the Horticultural Tent and friendly show managers. We also enjoyed watching our North West members Don and Liz Ross competing with their donkeys at the show and winning some prizes – well done to them. As you can see from the photos, Carole in particular got into the spirit of this; see page 39!



This concluded a season of successful shows and proved yet again that one of the best ways of promoting and informing the public about our favourite flower and meeting new members is to support these events as much as we can.

A Fragrant Welcome

Maxine Nelson

For the last 5 years my husband and I have been growing annual sweet peas against our fence at the entrance to our bungalow. The site is in a lovely sunny spot and passers-by enjoy the fragrance just as much as we do!

We have been fortunate to win Gold Awards with Leeds in Bloom 2017, 2018, 2019 and one of the judges made a lovely remark about the quality of our sweet peas, we have therefore been spurred on to continue growing these annuals.

Together we separate the tasks to be done to achieve our end goal; Neil always sows the seed, applies fertiliser, does some watering and vermin checks. I carry out the ground preparation, mechanics, tying in and finally when they are flowering, arranging displays in our special Dartington Crystal Sweet Pea vases, which is just a delight to do!

This is a summary of how we go about the annual routine.

LABELLING

Each year I get amongst my sweet peas and assiduously label the flower stems which relate to my favourite colour choices, pale blues, pink/white, and the dark mauve. I carefully label the stems before the petals disappear with colour coded labels. The rest of the seeds collected in abundance are mixed up.

HARVESTING

The ripened seed pods are harvested on a dry day and placed into brown paper bags which I make from a roll of brown paper. I then decant the seeds from the pods (listening to Gardeners' Question Time of course!) grade them (retaining the most robust) and store my seeds in cool dry conditions until it is time to sow again.

SOWING

For the 2021/22 season, the seeds were sown in August using 3 ½" pots with 7 seeds per pot and to a depth of ½" using a good quality compost. When the seedlings were ½" above the soil level we transferred them into the cold frame with regular checks for vermin damage and moisture. At the 2nd seed leaves stage (true leaves) they were pinched out using a pair of scissors rather than finger and thumb to help the arthritic hands!

GROUND PREPARATION

The soil depth is rather shallow on our plot, in order to overcome this problem we incorporate compost, water retaining gel and fertiliser to provide a good growing medium and give the plants a helping start.

GROUND MECHANICS

Our wavy fence has a trellis built into the top of it, to which I tie natural jute at regular intervals across the top, each strand is then pulled down, tied and pegged into the ground. We then have around 14/15 vertical strands of nice taut lines for each of the 6' fence panels are created (which takes a bit of setting up). Note, I only use natural jute which is the colour of the fence so it doesn't stand out like a sore thumb!

PLANTING OUT

As the weather was mild in February 2022, we planted out the sweet peas along the fence using a builders' trowel. The point on this trowel is much better than the traditional garden trowel. I placed a pot of sweet peas either side of each vertical line. When the seedlings were about 3" tall I then wrapped the stems around each of the strings on my fence panels. From the time of planting out up to and including harvest I just love nipping out of the house on a morning at 6am and spending half an hour twining the peas up the strings - my husband thinks I am crackers but for me I am happy to be in the garden before the full day starts!



As the flowers and fragrance emerge it is just so delightful when leaving the house and returning, to enjoy these delicate fragrant blooms along the driveway as well as arranging my flowers and giving bunches to family and neighbours. What is amazing for us, is that we harvest and use the seed year on year and to our delight the vigour just doesn't seem to deteriorate as I expected it would.



See also the photo on page 35 of the Autumn 2022 Bulletin

Our fragrant welcome to the front of our bungalow just gets better and better and we are already looking forward to our display in 2023. So why not give it a go yourselves and become crazy sweet pea lovers just like us.

Ed - Maxine and Neil are garden designers based in the Leeds area. If you are interested in making contact with them, then have a look at their website www.gardensbymax.co.uk

Letters to the Society

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

This letter was sent by member John Bassom to Caroline for information, together with the question, “Perhaps the broadcast is still available?”

True son of the soil

Sir,

You state that the first gardening programme was broadcast by the BBC in 1931 (On This Day, May 9). I have always believed that this record can be claimed by my husband’s grandfather, Charles Unwin, son of WJ Unwin, the founder of Unwins Seeds in 1903.

Charles gave the first broadcast gardening talk on the wireless in 1923, on the subject of sweet peas. His wife was in the studio with him and they had one of the earliest “conversations” on radio; I remember him telling me about it 70 years later.

His advice to nervous gardeners was: “If you can grow runner beans, you can grow sweet peas.” I have always loved them.

Fiona Unwin, Moulton, Suffolk

To lighten the mood

(and a reminder for us all to check what autocorrect thinks we should be typing!)

Roger,

I am new to growing sweet peas! Graeme Hollingdale from British Sweetie Society recommended that I contact you.

This year I am planning to sow 203 top varieties on my small back garden. I will appreciate your advice on the best ones to buy from your collection.

Kind regards.

RHS/NSPS Trials at Wisley

Rosalyn Marshall, RHS Trials Officer c/o Phil Johnson

The RHS are eagerly anticipating the second year of the sweet pea trial, taking place in the Trials Garden at RHS Garden Wisley.

Focusing on Grandiflora sweet peas, with 68 cultivars being grown and assessed for the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM).

Modern Grandiflora sweet peas have never before been the sole focus of an RHS sweet pea trial. The merits of the simpler Grandifloras make them excellent garden plants; they are floriferous, with superb scent and continue to be developed with increased vigour and flower size.

RHS trials concentrate on selections that are available for the public to buy, and this trial includes new and old cultivars and some current AGM entries for comparison. 'Crown Princess of Prussia', raised in 1868, is our oldest selection and 'Sweet Caroline' which has just been named and introduced in 2022 is our newest.

Also included are some amazing bicolour, striped, flaked and reverse bicolour cultivars.



Assessment by an expert forum over two growing seasons will identify outstanding, garden-worthy selections. The impact, vigour and health of the plants, the quality, quantity and distribution of the flowers, their colour and scent, and the length of flowering will be studied and recorded. The number of rogues will also be taken into consideration. Plants that perform will be awarded the AGM.

Please do come and visit over the summer. And look out for the Trial Report, that will include the AGM selections and will be free to read on the RHS Plant Trials webpage: www.rhs.org.uk/plants/trials-awards/plant-trials/growerguides



Photos © RHS Nicola Stocken

In 2022 each entry in the trial consisted of two bushes of six plants, growing up a column of wire and canes. Some had a third, spring-sown bush.

AGM plants should be:

Excellent for ordinary use in appropriate conditions

Available

Essentially stable in form and colour

Reasonably resistant to pests and diseases

And have a good constitution

www.rhs.org.uk/plants/trials-awards/award-of-garden-merit/agm-lists

West Midlands News

Phillippa Cooper

I am pleased to say that the Wem Open Evening and Demonstration in October, organised by our Show Manager Rose Horner, was a great success. The room at Wem Town Hall was packed with friends both old and new. The enthusiasm was amazing and hopefully we will have a number of new gardeners growing old fashioned Sweet Peas this year. It was very pleasing that a number of people have asked for a further evening event to concentrate on the staging of blooms.

On a more personal note, I have continued to distribute my own Old Fashioned seed. At the moment John and I have three local gardening groups to visit (two in the West Midlands and one in Staffordshire). My focus remains encouraging more people to grow the Old Fashioneds with their young people. Although not specifically Sweet Pea focussed, I think they will certainly be included! Getting children interested in any gardening at a young age is so important.

With the Wem Sweet Pea Festival taking place during the third weekend of July I will revert back to early February seed sowing. This has always been fine for us in the West Midlands but who knows what the weather will be like during the next few months.

Looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible in Wem on 16th and 17th July.

Invitation to the Sweet Pea Trials at Askham Bryan

Andrew Beane

This is an invitation for up to three NSPS members to attend the sweet pea trials at Askham Bryan College, York, where you will be accompanying the judging panel on one of three dates in 2023. These are not normally open to members of the public and so it is with enormous thanks to Andrew Beane for negotiating this opportunity.

Judging normally takes place (weather conditions allowing) on three separate dates during the last week of June and the first two weeks of July. Therefore, numbers will be limited to a maximum of 9 over the three dates. Judging starts at 11am and normally lasts approximately 1 ½ hours. The dates are not decided until late May and are always subject to weather conditions on the day.

Invitations to book a place to Andrew Beane charlesabeane49@gmail.com giving your name and contact details (phone, email etc) asap.

Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis and there will no doubt be a reserve list drawn up in case someone who has been allocated a space is unable to take up the offer.

On the day you will have to register at reception as a member of the NSPS (have your membership card with you) visiting the sweet pea trials at the horticultural department.

Good luck and for those fortunate to be able to take advantage of this opportunity, do please write up your experience for the next Bulletin!



Matthewman's Sweet Peas



Summer's Day

New for the 2022 / 23 season, a fantastic new Spencer sweet pea.

Light blue with nicely frilled florets on good long stems and a fabulous scent.

Raised and grown by David Matthewman
in Yorkshire

Matthewman's Sweet Peas brings quality sweet pea seeds from an expert, award winning grower to exhibitors and gardeners alike.

Visit www.sweetpeasonline.co.uk for our full range of sweet pea seeds,
or contact Matthewman's Sweet Peas Ltd, 0121 706 7833

Peat Free Compost for sowing Sweet Peas

Andrew Beane

Having read “Time to Change Compost” by Thorold Cox on page 69 of the 2022 Annual and “Sowing with Peat Free Compost” by Prof Alison Shreeve in the Spring 2022 Bulletin, I have been encouraged to share my experiences.

I have been using Dalefoot Potting Compost for three seasons now and have had satisfactory results each year.

I have been mixing 4 litres of course Vermiculite and 4 litres of Seaweed Meal together with 30 litres of the Dalefoot. From this mixture I fill my pots about a week later (after allowing the mixture to settle) and then water well. I leave them for a few more days before sowing, which I have found works extremely well for me.

The wool component of this compost gives a slow release of Nitrogen, which means that with an October sowing (in Yorkshire) the plants do not get too leggy. I have not yet tried a spring sowing, so do not know how well this might work.

The disadvantage is of course cost; however, with Peat based composts no longer going to be available for amateurs beyond 2024, those who haven’t yet made the switch to alternatives, need to start planning.

Ed – Andrew has also helpfully kept sending through updates. Some bullet points are added below!

Germination erratic; not sure if this is compost or weather.

Sowing on 7/10/22 - plants looking excellent, nice and cobby.

Sowing on 15/10/22 - not as good, more leggy.

Germination eventually getting there, some late coming through.

This is the third year I have used Dalefoot potting compost and the plants so far, are the worst I have ever seen. I don’t know why. The best plants so far are a batch of F2’s and these aren’t brilliant.

New Year’s Eve update; one of the main problems of using a bracken wool compost is root rot, which I can now confirm!!!

Chiltern News

Graeme Hollingdale

A more comprehensive report of events in the Chiltern area will be provided in the 2023 Annual, here is a brief summary.

Our Autumn meeting was held in October incorporating our brief AGM, was a great success; even though as everywhere, we would love to see more people. (It is to me, one of the mysteries that in answer to questions, our members always ask for more local events, yet when they are put on, those same people do not attend!)

Phillippa Cooper visited us and gave a wonderful presentation all about Old Fashioneds, Henry Eckford, Wem and the Eckford Society of Wem, which she has been instrumental in not only supporting throughout its history but in particular, its recent rebirth.

We will be holding another Autumn Meeting this coming October, so please get in touch and let me know what you would like to be placed on the agenda (we always allow time for the popular Open Forum, where people can ask questions and share knowledge).

We have also, as an experiment and in response to the demand for (in particular) those in the southern part of the UK to have Shows earlier than usual, decided to hold our Annual Show on Sunday 18th June 2023. Many growers have been saying that the Early National is now too late in the calendar, as climate change has moved our flowering season early. Personally, on my plot, I struggle to get significant numbers of (quality) flowers that early, however I do agree that seasons often finish much earlier than they used to.

So, this year you are invited to exhibit in the Chilterns on that date and we can then move on to (maybe) planning future Early's around that time. Our schedule has always been focussed on smaller numbers of 'peas in vases, not too many divisions and encouraging smaller, local and less experienced growers; however, many top exhibitors have visited and staged here over the years (we have limited staging times on the day ie 8.30 – noon; so large, multi-vase classes are not practical).

We now have classes for Novices (who have never previously won a first prize at a CSPS show) and one for New Growers, which we state “any type of Sweet Pea and can be staged in anything (including Society vases) with assistance if you would like some!”

Talks/presentations/workshops have been undertaken locally by me and Alison, sometimes together. With topics focussed on how to grow (including practical workshops with free seeds and compost) a potted history of Lathyrus, the NSPS & CSPS. Handouts are given alongside the PowerPoint and email address shared with offers to give help and advice when required. The new website is certainly attracting more traffic as a result!

A further update on Soilless Compost

John Rieley

Going out into the garden this morning and seeing my sweet pea plants reminded me that I meant to update you on my experience of soilless compost.

My sweet peas have not had any of the problems experienced last year. They were germinated on tissue and transferred to pots of Melcourt Sylvagrow as soon as germination occurred. The problem this year has been spindly growth caused by too much warmth.

The wallflower and cabbage plants that I grew as experiments in different types of compost showed no differences at all. The wallflowers are still in the tray in which they were sown and left unfed over winter. I suppose this must indicate something but the only conclusion is that there must be duff batches of even the best compost.

What does one do about spindly sweet peas? I have been taking the tops off so that there is less foliage to get blown around but am wondering if re-sowing the worst affected might be a good idea. I hope that yours are flourishing.

Oasis at our National Shows

Graeme Hollingdale

Following feedback from you, our membership, and as the Early National is being held at a non-RHS venue this year, with permission from our hosts (Squire's Garden Centre) we are allowing Oasis to be used. Obviously as the Late is taking place at RHS Bridgewater, this option was not available to us.

We are by now all completely aware of the reasons and the environmental impact of using such products (even though we are of course, in the wide scheme of things, very small users) but many of us hold quite a stock of Oasis, bought in bulk prior to the Covid year(s) and we are going to have to use/dispose of it at some time anyway, so why not allow it to be used-up as it was intended to be.

Many smaller and regional shows are also continuing to allow its use, although they are encouraging alternatives. We sincerely hope that this does not encourage exhibitors to go and buy new quantities but simply to use what we have as quickly as possible.



Your Secretary and Late Show manager, Carole!

