



125 YEARS OF THE  
NATIONAL  
*Sweet Pea Society*

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SPRING  
BULLETIN

2025



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Registered Charity No: 226802



## 2025 Novelties

### Our Helen (right)

Extremely pretty pink and cream bicolour in Spencer flower form.

Raised by D.J. McDonald



### Karen Michelle (left)

Magenta stripe in Spencer flower form.

Long stems and frilly flowers. Good scent

Raised by Ian Myers



### Grandad Myers (right)

Pale blue Spencer type with long stems and good flower placement.

Won 'Best Vase' at the Late National Show and Wem 2024.

Raised by Darren Myers.

## AVAILABLE NOW

Roger Parsons Sweet Peas

W: [rpsweetpeas.com](http://rpsweetpeas.com) | T: 01243 673770 | E: [info@rpsweetpeas.com](mailto:info@rpsweetpeas.com)

# NATIONAL SWEET PEA SOCIETY

Registered Charity No: 226802

## SPRING BULLETIN 2025

Patron

Alan Titchmarsh MBE VMH DL

Editor of the Bulletins and Exhibitions Schedule:

Graeme Hollingdale

[graeme@graemehollingdale.com](mailto:graeme@graemehollingdale.com)

General Secretary:

Carole Tate

07961 477 137

[caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com)

For all membership related enquiries (including Societies):

Julia Beardmore

07557 950 014

[julia.nsps@outlook.com](mailto:julia.nsps@outlook.com)

Website: [sweetpeas.org.uk](http://sweetpeas.org.uk)

Facebook: For the Love of Sweet Peas incorporating the National Sweet Pea Society

Twitter: @SweetPeaSociety

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 Diary**

[correct at the time of editing]

|                       |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Thursday 12 February  | <b>Committee meeting via Zoom</b>   | Committee members                         |
| Saturday 8 March      | <b>NSPS AGM &amp; Spring Social</b>   | All paid up members                       |
| Wednesday 23 April    | <b>NSPS Committee meeting</b><br>Face to face meeting, venue tbc              | Committee members                         |
| Sat 21 – Sun 22 June  | <b>Early National Exhibition</b><br>Webbs at Millets, Frilford<br>Oxfordshire | Members' Competition<br>Display & Bureau  |
| Sunday 29 June        | <b>Chiltern Sweet Pea Society Show</b><br>Lacey Green Bucks                   | Members' Competition                      |
| Sat 12 – Sun 13 July  | <b>Late National Exhibition</b><br>RHS Bridgewater Gardens<br>Worsley         | Members' Competition<br>Display & Bureau  |
| Sat 19 – Sun 20 July  | <b>Wem Sweet Pea Show and Festival</b>  | Members' Competition<br>and town festival |
| Fri 25 – Sun 27 July  | <b>North West Regional Show</b><br>At Chorley Flower Show                     | Members' Competition<br>Display & Bureau  |
| Thurs 14 – Sun 17 Aug | <b>Southport Show</b>   | Display & Bureau                          |

### **Deadline dates for submitting copy for 2025/6 publications:**

**2025 ANNUAL**

**2025 Autumn Bulletin**

**2026 Spring Bulletin**

by **30 January 2025** to Caroline please

by **1 September 2025** please

by **31 December 2025** please

## Introduction/Editorial

The Spring Bulletin traditionally looks forward to the coming season, whereas the Autumn edition tends to look back at the previous one.

In this edition we remind you of the landmark year that 2025 is for the Society, also that we will be restarting “in person” Annual General Meetings in conjunction with a Spring Social.

Committee meetings are mostly still held on Zoom, with many formal and informal “sub-committee” meetings taking place either via this method, email, phone or if practical, in person. All of these options mean that it is far less restrictive than it has ever been for members to step up and become much more involved in helping to guide the Society during, what is for many societies including ours, challenging times.

Falling memberships mean fewer exhibitors which mean fewer shows and whether we like it or not, discussions have to be held about reducing the numbers of classes at shows including the National Exhibitions! Historically, the NSPS held one National each year, with one or more so called “provincials” taking place, which had smaller schedules. As a balance, there were also more area specialist shows on the calendar, which again had smaller schedules. Competition was fierce on the benches but as we know in the Sweet Pea world, also very friendly!

Please enter into open discussions about such things, the more support and help (both in running the Society, entering exhibits in shows, giving talks locally, assisting with displays and the like) you all can give, will be so beneficial. Above all please be positive, open-minded and supporting rather than negative and inward-looking. We have included a paper, on pages 22 – 26, with many discussion points, historic context (which many younger members might not be aware of) and some specific questions for you to respond to.

If you think that this edition has a more North England bias, then you are correct; I have received far more copy from that area of the UK than any others, which probably reflects where there is more activity in the Sweet Pea world going on – well you know what to do about that don’t you!

## ERRATUM from the Audits as printed in the 2024 Autumn Bulletin:

### Late National

Eva Bridge should be Eva Bridger  
Nora Holman is  
Tom Atherton is  
Terry Davie should be Terry Davey

7a pale mauve  
10a salmon pink white ground  
16 striped

### North West Regional show

Charlie Bear is 16a bicoloured  
Promise is 16a bicoloured  
Fields of Fire is 3a red (scarlet)  
Bridget McAteer is 7 mauve, not purple  
Olivia Grace is 9 dark blue

### Chiltern show

Piccolo is 8a pale lavender flush  
Barons Court should be Baronscourt  
Olivia is 16 striped  
Judith Wilkinson is 4 magenta  
Sweet Caroline is Old Fashioned.  
RP would describe the colour as bright pink flake

*Please also note that Gardeners Jubilee is a trade name so should not be used. This cultivar is registered as 'The Princess Royal' and should be named as such. It is in classification group 1 a white, not fancy.*

## Staying in touch

As time passes, we can't always do all the things we used to. The Society has received a couple of comments from previously active members about the Society and its members staying in touch. They enjoy variously the publications, the website and the Facebook pages but would also very much welcome direct contact from their fellow members. Whether that is to hear about your Sweet Pea season, your showing exploits or even what the trials are like, they would love you to get in touch. Let's remain the 'friendly Society' we have always been.

## **Annual General Meeting 2025**

Notice is hereby given that the ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTIETH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Members of the National Sweet Pea Society which will be held on Saturday 8 March 2025, at Kings Court Hotel, Kings Coughton, Near Alcester, Warwickshire B49 5QQ for the purpose of receiving Reports and the Balance Sheet as of 31 October 2024 and the election of Officer Bearers for the coming year.

Mrs Carole Tate General Secretary NSPS  
22 Lime Grove Chorley Lancs PR7 3JA  
07961 477137 [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com)

### **AGENDA**

1. Chairman's welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of meeting held on Saturday 5 March 2024
4. Matters arising
5. Committee Reports (the Chairman's and Secretary's Reports are printed in the Spring 2025 Bulletin) and Trials Reports
6. Election of Office Bearers and Members of the Committee
7. Election of Independent Examiner
8. Presentation of the Jack Davis Award
9. Presentation of the FC Harriss Award
10. 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. Nominations for any of the officer positions to be received by the secretary by Saturday 1 March 2025*

*The following Members of the General Committee retire under the three-year rule and are eligible for re-election: Julia Beardmore, Jen Morgan, Lewis Morgan, Roz Warley and Laurie Burrell*

There will be at least one vacancy on the general committee, for which we would be delighted to receive nominations; again, to the secretary by 1 March please.

The Society's accounts will be published on the NSPS (<https://sweetpeas.org.uk>) website by 27 February and any questions or representation on them must be received by the General Secretary by 5pm on Saturday 1 March 2025.

## PROGRAMME

- 10.00 Registration and coffee
- 10.30 AGM
- 11.30 Presentation of Paper for discussion -  
The future of NSPS Shows?
- 12.00. Lunch
- 14.00. Results of Plant Competition
- 14.15 Breakout sessions - the Future of NSPS Shows
  - 1) One or two shows?
  - 2) Increasing numbers of exhibitors
  - 3) Finding show managers and helpers
- 15.00 Feedback from groups
- 15.30 Questions (submitted in advance)
- 15.45 Raffle and auction (donations much appreciated)

**There will be a of £20 payment (on the day) to cover coffee and lunch.**

It is suggested that members have cash with them at the AGM please, in order to pay for the above, raffle tickets and sundries etc, as electronic payments (to the NSPS) may not be available on the day and even if they were, a percentage is deducted by Sum-up. Payments direct to the venue are of course not of our concern.

A special double room rate of £105 B&B has been negotiated between the venue and the NSPS; please contact the venue quoting NSPS – AGM, or the General Secretary for further details.

**All questions and to register to attend the meeting, which is for fully paid-up members only, you must email the General Secretary on  
[caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com) well in advance of 1 March 2025**

## AGM Plant Competition

Please use the following page (scan/copy) to indicate - please tick the classes you wish to enter into the AGM plant competition - and emailing or posting to the General Secretary before 1 March 2025

**Only 1 entry per person in each class please!**

## Sweet Peas

1. Autumn sown - 6 plants, max. pot size 5"/13cm
2. Autumn sown - single plant in any container
3. Spring sown - 6 plants, max. pot size 5"/13cm
4. Spring sown - single plant in any container

## Lathyrus species

5. Lathyrus Vernus - max. pot size 5"/13 cm
6. Lathyrus Vernus - 7 stems, flowers and foliage, own vase

## Spring flowers

7. Daffodil - any variety, 1 specimen, cut stem, own vase
8. Daffodil - any variety/varieties, 3 cut stems, own vase
9. Daffodil - miniature, 1 variety, 3 cut stems, own vase
10. Container - any size, growing bulbs, any variety/varieties
11. Mixed vase of any cut spring flowers, own vase
12. A flowering pot plant in bloom, max. pot size 8"/20cm

A certificate will be awarded for the winner of each class and there will also be a sponsored prize for the most points in all classes

Name.....

Telephone.....

Email.....

**Please return this form to General Secretary, Carole Tate,  
22 Lime Grove, Chorley, Lancs PR7 3JA  
or email [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com) before 1 March 2025**

## Annual Report from the Chair 2024-2025

Alison Shreeve NSPS Chair

2024 was a very challenging year on many fronts for the society and for my Sweet Peas in particular. I started with a sowing in November which I did on kitchen paper and then transplanted germinated seeds into root trainers. I haven't used this method before and I won't use it again! Germination was patchy and prolonged which didn't bode well. However, those that transplanted grew well until they were several inches tall and then they started to mysteriously die off. This affected odd plants and didn't seem to be one variety or type – Spencers, grandifloras and old fashioned were all affected. The root systems looked healthy and I couldn't see any visible signs of disease.

I made a second sowing in January this time directly into pots. These faired a little better but then seemed to stop growing. By normal planting out time, I had a motley collection of miserable looking plants. I struggled to find 100 to plant out as cordons having to use some very feeble looking specimens to complete the rows. The spring was cold and overcast and things just sat there looking awful. 'Spare' plants – those that looked too weedy to bother with - were left in their pots on the edge of the plot. I finally planted these out as bush grown plants in another part of the garden; some of them eventually started to grow.

Then came the slugs... I think everyone had an infestation in 2024, it seemed to be the only thing in the garden enjoying the conditions. I had leaves and leaders eaten out by slugs, something else (possibly mice?) had chopped three tops off. My cordons by this time were looking pitiful although thankfully, they had started to grow.

When they did start to produce flower buds, inevitably they developed bud drop. I had bud drop on and off through to July, which has never happened to me before. What else could go wrong? I wondered about layering them, but they looked so brittle that I didn't dare to move them. By the time it came to put in the entries for the Early show I was struggling to think what I could manage, but I did put an entry in. Then came a phone call from Roger, on the Saturday morning before the show. He was worried about the lack of entries, as we needed to fill a large space in the Hilltop Centre at RHS Wisley. Previously when we had our Early Show there, Phil had been able to provide blooms for a display alongside those from the trials which were growing at the RHS gardens.

This year nobody in the South had any spare blooms unless they were growing under glass/polytunnels; added to this, Phil had a crisis at one of his sites and had to prioritise getting that resolved. We rallied the troops and had a zoom conversation where we went through possible solutions after analysing the issues. There would have to be the collection and returning the show benches, vases, bowls, exhibition boards, table coverings etc to the east coast. Someone able to stand in for Phil and his roles at the Show? Was there anyone able to provide additional help? Nobody had filled in this part of the entry form, so we just had those few people we knew about in the Chiltern District who might be able to help.

It was with very great reluctance that we bowed to Roger's greater knowledge and experience of show management and decided that there was simply no practical alternative, so we would have to cancel. Roger duly rang around the few who had submitted exhibits and told them the bad news. It was devastating for all of us but particularly for those who had planned for the larger classes and had been growing and tending to their Sweet Peas for months.

It was not a decision taken lightly and I hope one we will never have to make again; but it was one which the RHS understood. The weather had been so dreadful over the preceding months that things were not normal. Ironically the sun came out and stayed out over the next five days and by the original Early show day I would have had more than I thought possible when I submitted the entry form and of pretty good quality too. If only we had a crystal ball. We have since had other offers of help which might have changed the balance of thinking on cancellation, but hindsight is a wonderful thing too.

The committee had one face to face meeting (which are so much better than the zoom meetings we normally have, but zoom is more eco-friendly and also enables everyone from all corners of the British Isles to attend. We decided that in 2025 we will go back to the traditional in person AGM format in the hope that the social aspects of the Society, missed by many, will return in some small measure. I hope that many of you will be able to attend and I can get to meet more members.

In spite of the weather and the poor start my Sweet Peas eventually picked up and I took some to the Royal Welsh show – an event that I had never been to previously!

This was a great eye-opener – the largest agricultural show I had been to. Jenny and Lewis Morgan plus members of the North Wales District produced a wonderful display in the newly opened Horticultural Tent. There were disappointingly few exhibitors, though the exhibits were great. I would encourage members to have a go and even to take a few days holiday to go and visit the show which is very well organised and quite spectacular. The landscape around Builth Wells is beautiful and it didn't rain once!

My season lasted longer than any in the past ten years. I had flowers to enter in my local horticultural show at the beginning of September and even at the end of the month there were a few blooms still to pick. Oddly, my *L. latifolius* only started to flower in late July. Normally I have had some for the Early show in June and it has been at its best in mid-August. Last year it seemed to be a full two months later than usual and lasting into the end of September. All in all, a very strange year for weather and growing conditions for Sweet Peas.

Your committee have been discussing ways to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> year of the society. This includes special classes for the National Shows, so please have a go and support the celebrations. You might like to have a special event such as a visit to a great sweet pea garden with afternoon tea for those in your area. Please let us know if you are planning something special and we will advertise it to members through the website and through our emailing system which we now have up and running. We have also started a series of winter talks and question time sessions via zoom. We would love to hear what you think about these and if you have any suggestions for topics to interest the membership.

Please don't forget to check out the resources in the members area of the website – we have added several things to it this year and if you would like to see something which you can't find please let us know and we will do our best to provide it.

One of the biggest issues facing the society is the challenge of putting on the shows and getting new exhibitors involved. This will be one of the biggest topics of discussion in the coming year, so if you have any views or ideas about the best way forward do speak to your District Rep and also contact committee members. If you prefer to do this via Facebook there is the Members Only Chat Room where you can air your views as well.

I look forward to a joyful celebration of the Society's 125<sup>th</sup> Year.

## Annual Report from the General Secretary 2024-2025

By Carole Tate

As we usher in another year of celebrating the beauty and diversity of sweet peas, I am pleased to provide an update on some of my activities and plans for 2025.

The year started with our North West Workshops, run over several weeks, where we encouraged an enthusiastic group of gardeners to sow, pot on, nip off and take home sweet pea seedlings with instructions on how to grow them on. They were invited back later in the year to help at various plant fairs and the setting up and giving advice on our NSPS Information Bureau. We also encouraged entry into the local and National shows with Workshops on exhibiting and creative floral arrangements.

We also participated in a couple of initiatives to encourage junior members; including attending a schools “Let’s Get Growing” event which had 18 local schools represented with 75 children attending and assisting the staff at RHS Bridgewater during the May school holidays. We helped 350 children sow seeds, giving the pots to take home to grow on. At RHS Bridgewater, those children who brought along flowers, or photos of their flowers to the Late National, were awarded with a “Well Done” certificate.

Tatton Show was soon upon us and the huge task of sourcing flowers for the stand, setting up and arranging the display and finding enough volunteers to man the stand took place. The efforts of all the volunteers were rewarded with a well-deserved Gold Award.

Despite challenging weather conditions, enough ‘peas were blooming by July, ensuring a good turnout for the Late National Show at RHS Bridgewater Gardens, near Manchester. Congratulations to all our exhibitors and especially the award winners, whose vibrant blooms and floral arrangements captivated judges and attendees alike.

The North West Region Show at Chorley Flower Show followed on shortly after and was again well attended. Close on its heels was the display at Southport Flower Show in August, where we again won a Gold Award, as well as NSPS members winning on the show bench. Separate show reports will follow in the Annual.

These events are a great opportunity to catch up with like-minded fellow sweet pea growers and pick up hints and tips on growing and exhibiting.

Preparations for the Early and Late National Shows are well underway for 2025. **This year we will also be celebrating our 125 year Anniversary of the founding of the National Sweet Pea Society and have introduced two special Classes to celebrate the event.**

More details can be found in the recently distributed Exhibition Schedule and Autumn 2024 Bulletins and on the NSPS website.

I encourage all members to participate in the shows, whether by entering blooms, volunteering, or attending the event. Please check the Events page on our website for locations and registration information in addition to what is included in the exhibitions schedule publication.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the committee members, volunteers, and all our members who contribute to the success of the Society. Your dedication ensures that the National Sweet Pea Society remains a beacon for sweet pea enthusiasts worldwide.

In closing, let us continue to nurture our gardens and share our love for these remarkable flowers. May your sweet peas flourish, bringing joy and colour to the months ahead.

## **Calling All Members:**

### **Help Uncover Hidden or Lost Assets for the National Sweet Pea Society**

The National Sweet Pea Society has long thrived on the passion and dedication of its members. This year, 2025, sees us celebrating our 125 year anniversary. Together, we've celebrated the beauty and history of this beloved flower, advancing its cultivation and sharing its charm with the world. However, as with any long-established organisation, over time, some valuable assets may have been overlooked, misplaced or forgotten. Today, we need your help to uncover these hidden treasures.

## What Are “Hidden” or “Lost” Assets?

Hidden or lost assets can take many forms. These might include:

- **Archival Materials:** Photographs, documents, or records related to the Society’s history and early activities.
- **Show equipment:** such as green NSPS vases, staging materials, display boards.
- **Physical Items:** Medals, trophies, or other memorabilia awarded or owned by the Society.
- **Intellectual Property:** Rights to publications, books, or artworks connected to the Society or sweet peas.

These resources are not just historically significant but could also provide financial or cultural benefits, helping us grow and sustain our mission.

## How You Can Help?

We’re calling on all members to reflect, research, and reconnect. You might already possess or know of resources that could be of value to the Society. Here’s how you can assist:

1. **Search Your Attics and Archives:** Do you have any old photographs, seed catalogues, or correspondence linked to the Society? These items could fill important gaps in our history.
2. **Spread the Word:** Encourage others - friends, family, and fellow enthusiasts - to think back on any interactions they’ve had with the Society that could lead to rediscovering valuable items.
3. **Reach Out to Historical Networks:** Local archives, gardening clubs, and libraries might hold records or artifacts related to the National Sweet Pea Society. Your inquiry could bring these to light.

## Why It Matters

Every uncovered asset, no matter how small, enriches our shared legacy. Saving our financial resources could help fund future initiatives, physical artifacts could enhance exhibits or educational efforts, and historical records could deepen our understanding of the Society's journey and its role in promoting the sweet pea.

## How to Report Potential Finds

If you come across something of interest, do please get in touch with us! You can contact the Society via the website [sweetpeas.org.uk](http://sweetpeas.org.uk) or email General Secretary Carole Tate at [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com)

Please provide as much detail as possible, including descriptions, dates, and if applicable, photographs of the items. With your permission, items of interest may well be included in future Bulletins.

## A Shared Mission

The National Sweet Pea Society is not just an organisation; it's a community. Together, we have the power to rediscover and preserve the treasures that define who we are and what we stand for. Let's ensure that no asset, however small, remains lost to time.

Thank you for your support and dedication to the Society. We look forward to hearing about your discoveries!

## Sowing Dates

Roger Parsons

February is a month that highlights the differences in growing methods in different parts of the nation. Over the years, I have been told by several growers in the north of Scotland that 14<sup>th</sup> February is the traditional date for sowing Sweet Pea seeds. I am at the other end of the country on the south coast and am usually planting out in February.

My plants are sown in late October, but some southern growers prefer early November. The benefit of sowing around these dates is that the nights are still mild enough for germination to occur outdoors or in a cold glasshouse. If I was in the midlands, I would sow earlier because the nights turn cold earlier. Once there is a risk of frost, from November through to February, seeds need a little warmth at night to assist good germination.



Roger sowing in the relative warmth of his polytunnel

Sowing in the Autumn is good for those who want early blooms and where the Winter light levels are good but further north the Winter light levels are not so good, and plants get drawn. It is possible to provide plants with supplementary lighting but most people in the north would prefer to sow according to when they can plant out. Every garden has a different microclimate but, as a rule, sowing at the beginning of January is a good date for those who can plant out in late March or early April. Sowing in February works for those who are unable to plant out until later in April or even early May.

Sowing at other dates can work well, depending on where your plants will be grown and what you want them for. For an early crop of blooms grown in a heated glasshouse, early-flowering cultivars can be sown in the UK from mid-August onwards to give the earliest blooms. Those simply wanting Sweet Peas for the garden can sow as late as May to stand the best chance of blooms from mid-Summer until cut down by frosts. Such late sowing makes it very difficult to achieve a good stem length for cutting.

## **Exhibiting in the North of England in 2025**

Carole Tate

### **NSPS Late Show, 12th and 13th July 2025**

This year the NSPS Late Show will again be held at RHS Bridgewater Gardens, Worsley M28 2LJ. It is chosen because it gives accessibility to as many members as possible with good motorway access and fantastic facilities.

We will be in the marquee which is 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 excellently advertised by Bridgewater Gardens and also appearing on the RHS website, means there will be a good footfall of interested horticultural people, who will no doubt be inspired to grow our beloved sweet pea. The volunteers at the Information Bureau will be able to help encourage new and existing growers as well as 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 your car, supply water, vases and staging materials, help with staging and make copious cups of tea and coffee. Staging starts at 4pm on Friday 11th 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 larger vase classes as we appreciate that with no overnight staging available, time is limited.

Please check the schedule for details of the Special Classes which are open to all members and the various Special Awards that are available to compete for.

## NSPS North West Region Show, 25th to 27th July 2025

Our eighth NW Region 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 material (Oasis is allowed but we encourage the use of alternative, more environmentally friendly mediums) Refreshments are provided during staging and throughout the show for exhibitors and helpers.

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 9am and 10am. The presentation of Awards by the Flower Show celebrity, will be at 1pm on Friday.

We 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.

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 other shows, workshops or displays and for details of any of our North West events.

Best regards and good luck with your blooms.

### **Erratum in the 2025 North West Regional Show Schedule**

Class 32 should read:

“One vase, any one cultivar from any classification.  
Exhibitors may make more than one entry (of a different cultivar)”

# NSPS Late Show RHS Bridgewater Gardens

## 12 & 13 July 2025

Carole Tate, Show Manager

I am delighted that I have again been asked to manage the 2025 late show at RHS Bridgewater Gardens, Worsley.

We will be holding this event in the Show Marquee again, which has a large display area and plenty of room for the public. Access to the Marquee for staging is gained on arrival at Bridgewater, pass through the green gate and take the first left. You will come to a coded gate (code will be provided with confirmation of entry). Follow the road down and to the left, please park next to the Volunteers facilities. There is a gate out of the car park to the marquee, and help will be provided to carry exhibits the short distance if required. Access for direct unloading in front of the marquee will be before 10am and after 6pm only I am afraid.

I would appreciate receiving your entries by email to [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com) - I will confirm receipt of your entry. If you send your entry by post, I will ring or email to confirm receipt. If you are late entering, please only 'phone through your entries as a last resort; email is much preferred if possible.

Bridgewater, along with other RHS venues, will again have a "no Oasis" policy. I plan on having a supply of Agrawool blocks for use in our NSPS vases. If a suitable eco-Oasis alternative that is acceptable to the RHS and can be sourced, we will offer it for sale on the day.

If you want further details, please don't hesitate to contact me. I am looking forward to lots of entries. I know this is always weather dependant but if you can't manage to enter Class 1, don't worry, just bring what you've got. One vase is better than nothing. Please note, staging is up to 9.15am on Saturday which gives members with not so many entries, plenty of time to stage on Saturday morning. We will be presenting the awards at 1pm on Saturday.

As always, we need helpers and volunteers to ensure a well organised show. Please consider being a Judge or Steward and let me know if you can assist in other ways on the day. We plan on holding a Members Stand and Information Bureau for visitors where we can exchange hints and tips on growing sweet peas and lathyrus species. We are also looking to add a "Planting for Children" feature, "how to arrange a Buttonhole" demonstration and by utilising the small Lecture Theatre at the rear of the Marquee, a series of talks and slide shows.

This is an excellent venue, and I am sure it will be a sight not to be missed. We have good lighting and tables for staging and catering in the marquee. All members can access the gardens during the weekend on production of your pink membership card at the entrance.

Good Luck growing your sweet peas this season. I look forward to seeing you in July 2025 as a competitor, helper or a visitor.

## **100 Club**

Caroline Ball

Each year the Society runs a 100 Club to raise some extra funds to support all the great ways we promote Sweet Peas and other Lathyrus. The idea is a simple one that many will be familiar with but not everyone: people subscribe £10 for each number they have in the draw which gives them the chance to win a top prize of £100, a second prize of £25 and a third prize of £10, five times a year. You are free to subscribe for as many numbers as you wish at £10 for each number. The draws happen alongside the 4 committee meetings each year and at the AGM.

To clear the costs of the Club we need to have subscribers for at least 68 numbers. Winners are notified after each draw either by post or email and prizes can be sent by cheque or electronically, whichever you prefer.

Please fill in the form sent with the publications together with a cheque, making sure that it is drawn in favour of National Sweet Pea Society, or send funds electronically and email the Treasurer explaining what the payment/donation is for.

Numbers joining have however dwindled over the last year or so and this year we are now not at break even. This means that we will need to cancel the draws after this year finishes if numbers do not improve. It is a great way to give a little extra to the Society and have the chance of a windfall. Please do think about supporting the 100 Club, otherwise it will disappear.

## NSPS Shows

The committee

*A very important paper for all members to consider and hopefully respond to:*

*First of all, via the General Secretary*

*Secondly at the AGM Spring Social*

*Follow up will then appear in the Annual and with the likelihood of this being a ongoing discussion, continued via subsequent pages within Bulletins.*

### Introduction and purpose

The objects of the National Sweet Pea Society are promotion of Sweet Peas and other *Lathyrus* by undertaking various activities, one of which is holding shows. This paper considers the evolution of Society shows over the years and provides background information for the committee to consider the future direction of its shows since the matter has not been considered in any detail for twenty years, since the introduction of 2 Nationals in 2004. This will form a series of discussions at the AGM in March and any feedback you would like to give can help to inform decisions made following that discussion.

### Background

The composition and number of shows held by the Society has varied considerably over the years. In 1903, the earliest year in which there is available information, the National show was held at the Crystal Palace in London. At this show there were 28 classes, 128 exhibits, 991 bunches of Sweet Peas with 90 varieties exhibited.

In the subsequent five years, the statistics for the National held in London were as follows:

| Year | Classes | Exhibits | Bunches | Varieties |
|------|---------|----------|---------|-----------|
| 1904 | 28      | 258      | 1561    | 107       |
| 1905 | 36      | 273      | 1820    | 119       |
| 1906 | 73      | 416      | 1946    | 152       |
| 1907 | 81      | 651      | 2390    | 205       |
| 1908 | 29      | 232      | 1690    | 175       |

In 1908 a show was also held in Dublin with a total number of bunches of 1183 of 115 varieties.

Looking at the data for shows held every subsequent 10 years as a representative snapshot:

| year | Venue                          | Classes | ‘vases’ | Other comments   |
|------|--------------------------------|---------|---------|--|
| 1920 | Birmingham                     | 50      | 554     | Less vases than pre WW1 because of ‘disadvantages of war’ and the weather but the show still included 9 trade exhibits |
| 1930 | London                         | 77      | 1121    |  |
|      | Provincial Southsea            | 40      | Unknown |  |
|      | Provincial? Bakewell           | 40      | Unknown |  |
| 1940 | No show                        |         |         | WW2  |
| 1950 | RHS Halls London               | 39      | 1148    |  |
|      | Provincial Guildford           | 37      |         | Total both provincials   |
|      | Provincial Formby              | 34      |         | 1044   |
| 1960 | RHS Halls London               | 41      | 894     |  |
|      | Provincial Waverley, Liverpool | 28      | 360     |  |
| 1970 | RHS Halls London               | 56      | 578     |  |
|      | Provincial Waverley, Liverpool | 48      | 323     |  |
| 1980 | Bath                           | 41      | 373     | 53 cultivars   |
|      | Provincial Lakeland            | 35      | 182     |  |
| 1990 | Gateshead                      | 67      | 422     |  |
|      | Provincial Southampton         | 53      | 470     |  |
| 2000 | RHS Wisley                     | 74      | 583     |  |
|      | Provincial Harrogate           | 63      | 131     |  |
| 2010 | Early Lyndhurst                | 74      | 420     |  |
|      | Late Lakeland                  | 74      | 313     |  |

## Statistics over the last 10 years:

| Year | Venue                | classes | ‘vases’ | Comments       |
|------|----------------------|---------|---------|----------------|
| 2014 | Early Abingdon       | 70      | 466     |                |
|      | Late Driffield       | 70      | 177     |                |
| 2015 | Early Abingdon       | 72      | 404     |                |
|      | Late RHS Harlow Carr | 72      | 214     |                |
| 2016 | Early Abingdon       | 68      | 188     |                |
|      | Late RHS Harlow Carr | 68      | 93      |                |
| 2017 | Early Woburn Sands   | 73      | 234     |                |
|      | Late Driffield       | 73      | 173     |                |
| 2018 | Early Abingdon       | 73      | 251     |                |
|      | Late RHS Harlow Carr | 73      | 196     |                |
| 2019 | Early Christchurch   | 73      | 272     |                |
|      | Late RHS Harlow Carr | 73      | 217     |                |
| 2020 | Virtual show         | 19      | 194     | Covid pandemic |
| 2021 | Early Abingdon       | 73      | 166     |                |
|      | Late RHS Harlow Carr | 73      | 81      |                |
| 2022 | Early RHS Wisley     | 76      | 183     |                |
|      | Late RHS Harlow Carr | 76      | 110     |                |
| 2023 | Early Shepperton     | 79      | 116     |                |
|      | Late RHS Bridgewater | 79      | 122     |                |
| 2024 | Early RHS Wisley     |         |         | Cancelled      |
|      | Late RHS Bridgewater |         | 128     | 20 exhibitors  |

## Issues

### **Exhibitors and vases** (which also includes arrangements):

Numbers have been dwindling over time, particularly since the 1970s (with some exceptions notably 1992 with over 1000 vases) and in more recent years have not recovered to pre Covid levels.

### **Cost of shows to the Society:**

In 2023 the two shows cost the Society net (£1,535.51). Entries income is trivial (e.g. in 2023, £90). We had £228 (2023) of re-donated prize monies, sponsorship totalled £567.50 (2023). Sale of blooms at shows equated to £616.20 (2023). The shows are a place where other income can also be raised which are not included within the direct costs and income cited above. Donations regarding sale of seeds per show are generous, normally in the region of c£400. There are small contributions from sale of merchandise (note with no dedicated merchandise secretary current stocks are largely being sold out) and a small number of new members are often recruited. Work has been done to minimise costs associated with shows. Prizes including crystal cost £2,051.50 (2023) and other exhibition related costs were £1,025.71 (2023). It is to be noted that there are important intangible benefits of running shows to the Society such as bringing Sweet Peas and other *Lathyrus* to the notice of the general public, to educate about their cultivation, their history and breadth and of course helping to meet the Society's charitable objects.

### **Show managers:**

Are required to run shows and without show managers being available the shows will not be able to continue. The show managers need teams of helpers to assist in putting up, taking down and manning the shows. The availability of sufficient helpers are also limiting factors in running shows. Show venues are constrained by the availability of show managers and helpers.

### **Venues:**

Another limiting factor is the availability of suitable venues and the restrictions the venues may impose eg oasis use, staging times, distance to travel and in some instances cost. Venues being able to increase or contract in size to accommodate fluctuations in exhibit numbers which are not known until a few days before the show might be helpful for us to source though this could be challenging – it perhaps should be a matter that is considered when show venues are selected.

The layout of shows can also be used to make the show look fuller – for example not just continuous runs of tables but individual tables that people can walk round all sides as used in the Late show in 2023. Another possibility might be to invite commercial growers, such as flower farms and seed producers, to exhibit.

### **Quality of flowers being shown:**

We are running National shows and promoting our flower/genus so expect the flowers displayed to be of the highest quality. The shows are of course a learning ground for exhibitors as well as the public so classes aimed at beginners and those less experienced should be retained as well as classes aimed at those more experienced.

### **Date/timing of the shows:**

Flowers are coming earlier and for some not lasting as long. There is variation as to when flowers are at their best around the country and juggling a single show to accommodate all the variables would be a challenge, though this has been done previously. Climate change is an added complication as weather is now more extreme and unpredictable (as in 2024 when few people had blooms to show for the Early).

## **Some questions for the Society and its members to consider**

With a substantially reduced number of exhibitors and exhibits should the Society reduce the number of Nationals to one with a view to consolidating and increasing the number of exhibits? *If so, where would this show be held and when?*

1. Should the Society consider the reintroduction of one or more Provincial shows with a reduced schedule, particularly if the number of Nationals was reduced?
2. Should no changes be made to the shows?
3. Should the number of classes be decreased? Increased?
4. Should venues for shows be selected with a view to maximising visitors?
5. What can be done to encourage more exhibitors?
6. What can be done to generate more show managers and helpers?

If you would like to share your views but are unable to attend the AGM in person then please send your comments to our Secretary as soon as possible and definitely by 28<sup>th</sup> February.

## RHS Tatton show, July 17 - 21 July 2024

Carole Tate

The Northwest team are delighted to have been awarded a gold award for their Society's stand. One of our volunteers Mavis turned up on the first day of set up with "two dead branches" for the stand, but more details on this will appear in the full report on the show and many more photographs will be in the 2025 Annual.



For anyone who is not aware, there will not be an RHS show at Tatton Park again until 2027; instead, the RHS will move to Wentworth Woodhouse, near Rotherham in South Yorkshire.

The distance is too far for our team to put on a Society stand, however, if there are any of our members closer to Wentworth Woodhouse, who think they would like to take on this event please contact me, as we would be more than happy to offer support.



In 2026 the RHS show will be on the move again, this time to Sandringham (the King's country residence) this does mean that there will not be an RHS show in the North during that year.



## Other Events in the North West

Nicky Edwards



An example (above) of a display put up by members of the North West group, showing what can be achieved at a smaller more local society show. This was at the Lyme and Disley Horticultural Show, where seeds were on sale along with advice for the public.



The second photo is of a larger display which won yet another Gold Medal Award along with the silver challenge cup for the Best Plant Society stand. This was at Poynton, a one-day agricultural show.



At the North West social meeting, 40 people attended an event which comprised of talks, demonstrations, hands on tasks and were rewarded with a hotpot lunch!

I think we can all agree that congratulations and thanks are due to the North West members yet again, who really do pull out all of the stops with regard flying the flag and showing off our favourite flower. Something to be emulated in other areas perhaps?

## **Cheques**

Caroline Ball

Along with other banks our bankers are tightening the rules around cheques they will accept. This means that we would like to ask that you please ensure that all cheques to the Society are drawn in favour of the NATIONAL SWEET PEA SOCIETY and no other abbreviation or permutation of the name. We have had the bank refuse to cash several cheques made payable to the NSPS recently, even though that abbreviation used to be acceptable, so please use the full Society name going forward if you are sending us a cheque. Thank you for your continued support.

## Sponsorship 2025, 2026 and beyond

Carole Tate

NSPS Exhibitions are held annually and fulfil one of the objects of the Society. This year we are holding our Early Show at Webbs @ Millets Farm, Frilford and our Late Show at RHS Bridgewater Gardens, Worsley. The Exhibitions 2025 Schedule was posted to all members with the Autumn Bulletin at the end of 2024 and is shown on our website [www.sweetpeas.org.uk](http://www.sweetpeas.org.uk)

The schedule details the various classes, some of which are sponsored. You could get involved in sponsoring a class from just £10 (this would be a single vase class). The minimum sponsorship would be the total of prize money for that class plus the cost of any special prizes. Classes available include vases, decorative, old fashioned and species. If you wish, you can set your own prize money amounts.

This would make a wonderful gift for a loved one, a memorial or even a treat for yourself. Depending on the class sponsored you would have the opportunity to rename it, have your sponsorship acknowledged or remain anonymous.

As the 2025 Schedule has already been printed, we would not be able to feature it in this year's publication, but it would be displayed on the show bench, and printed in the results listings, which are published on the website and featured in next year's Annual. If you wished, you could donate for several years in advance, just sponsor a one off or sponsor annually. We could then print the relevant details and your wording in our future Exhibition Schedules. In order for these to be included in the following years publication, the details should ideally be with the schedule sub-committee (c/o the general secretary Carole, chair Alison, or editor Graeme) as soon after that years shows, but certainly by the end of August.

If you would like more information, please contact myself, Carole Tate or Caroline Ball to discuss options. I do hope you will consider supporting us.

## ‘Ask the Experts’

### A zoom meeting held on 4 December 2024

Report compiled by Alison Shreeve

The Chairman welcomed members to the first of what we hope will be a series of winter activities. Some questions had been received prior to the meeting which was very helpful in enabling the meeting to flow and thus avoiding repetition.

1. We began with a question from Giles Reed about growing an early crop of Sweet Peas in an unheated greenhouse, primarily for cutting. Giles lives in Lincolnshire. Roger replied that for an early crop he would sow in late October. If sown earlier than this plants tend to become very leggy and lose robustness. Later sowings are of course possible and can extend the season somewhat. He advised that tops should not be pinched out before the end of January.

Is there an optimum size to overwinter? Articles in previous Bulletins suggest that small plants overwinter better than larger plants, which can be killed by frost.

2. Laurie Burbridge asked: A few years ago, I made two substantial obelisks to support my sweet peas. They work well and have been much-admired. The problem is, I can't move them. What should I do to the soil around them to mitigate the effects of growing sweet peas year after year in the same place? (So far, the Sweet Peas are doing well, although this year was not quite as good as previous ones).

A discussion followed about the difficulty for many people of having space to move around their Sweet Peas. Phil thought that 5-6 years is really the maximum to grow them in one place. Both Roger and Phil swap the paths with the growing space to ensure the soil is not exhausted.

If you can't move the growing area mulching was recommended – using garden compost or manure if one can get hold of a good supply from a trusted source. Members were reminded that many straw-based farmyard/horse manures might contain pesticides and weedkillers in the straw and these should be tested before applying to the whole bed. Changing the soil around the Obelisks appeared to be the most important way to ensure the continuing fertility for the Sweet Peas.

There was a suggestion that mycorrhizal fungus might help, or using a compost tea, but these need to be tried out. An autumn mulch was considered to be essential.

3. Questions from Tim Metcalfe-Kemp were around a similar problem of growing in the same area and he asked about infection problems and what might counter such infections. Currently he is battling against *Ascochyta* leaf spot, but an application of copper helped to control it last year.

Roger replied that for fungal infections a copper-based spray is good control, he uses Omex Zynergy but this is not available to amateur growers. These provide good anti-fungal control and he uses them once a fortnight in his polytunnels to reduce powdery mildew. However, Phil added that the most important thing is to ensure is good air circulation to avoid the retention of moisture on the foliage.

4. Julia Beardmore asked a related question about Mosaic Virus on plants and whether this would be retained in the soil. The most important aspect of this was that infected plant material had been removed from the plot as soon as possible.

5. This led on to questions around feeding regimes and how best to prepare the soil. Tim found that in his experience using green manures had not increased fertility, though other members had used them and not had this experience. He tried leaf mould last year which he found to be very effective.

The discussion ranged around the importance of improving soil structure to retain moisture and nutrients, particularly in the light of climate change, which was leading to more intense rainfall, poor light conditions in the spring and unpredictably hot temperatures.

In the polytunnels Roger recommended using SB Plant Invigorator as a spray once a week. The constituents are not known though it is possibly a seaweed-based product. It operates by building the strength of plants, enabling them to better withstand pests and diseases.

6. Feeding really depends on what nutrients might be lacking in the soil. A question from Barrie Eckford following a soil analysis of his plot was presented to the organisers before the meeting. There had been a reply from Darren Myers which neither Roger or Phil thought they could improve upon, so it was agreed that we would try and make this complex issue a feature in one of the society's publications.

7. Jenny Morgan asked whether the "gappyness" in two varieties only of her sweet peas might be due to too much watering or too much feeding, though other varieties appeared to be good. Too much water would encourage stem growth, but also too much feed could do the same, but also result in coarseness of the stem.

Phil suggested that you might leave side shoots to grow longer on the affected plants to increase the stress to the leader stems. Jenny replied that this had also been a suggestion made to her and she had tried it with some success. Phil suggested that the most important aspect of feeding for flower production was to have potassium present – Roger suggested using sulphate of potash.

8. Another of Tim's questions was about the best way to water. Roger and Phil replied that they would recommend a seep hose on a timer which can be adjusted according to the weather conditions if outside. Phil mentioned incorporating a diluter into a seep hose system to add a feed into the watering as well which cuts down the amount of work involved

9. A question from Milli Proust, who is co-owner of a flower farm which grows blooms for sale, relating to unusual bud drop in a couple of varieties towards the end of the season.

Roger replied that it had been a bad year for bud drop with cold winds and dark skies at the start of the season, but the nights were also cold. However, when asked, Millie said that these varieties were near the entrance to the polytunnel where the Sweet Peas were growing, so they might have been subjected to more cold at night or to cold winds which didn't affect the rest of the crop. Bud drop is more unusual later in the season but obviously can occur at any time due to stress on the plants.

10. Another question from one of our international members, Laurie Parkison, from Harbor Girl Blooms in the USA, who is also a commercial grower, asked about the best way of preparing blooms for sale and how to get the longest life out of them.

Roger's visits to commercial growers supplied some possible answers. In the company he knows well, flowers are picked and sorted, a process that can take up to two hours. They are then plunged into water containing a soluble plant food and then into cool storage which does prolong shelf life. However, Milli said that in their business they did not use any kind of plant food for blooms. They pick and place into clear clean water and cool them as soon as possible and they get up to a week of good blooms from this process.

The hour allocated to this session was up and members were thanked for their attendance, participation and questions. Roger and Phil were thanked for their time and their knowledge brought to bear on the questions around sowing and growing on Sweet Peas.

The session ended at 8.00pm

# National Sweet Pea Society Social and AGM

## Saturday 8 March 2025

### Kings Court Hotel, Alcester, B49 5QQ

Carole Tate, General Secretary

You will have noticed on page 7, that the NSPS has decided to return to the traditional format of Spring Social meeting which includes the AGM. For the first time since 2019, you can enjoy a full day's program in the company of fellow members including many of the trustees, committee members, district representatives and contributors to the publications, social media groups and website.

This will be an excellent opportunity to meet your fellow sweet pea enthusiasts, to ask questions, put forward your views, offer your assistance to those who promote, guide and run shows, events, displays and other Society business, hopefully along the way, picking up some great tips and other knowledge on how to make the most of your sweet peas.

There will be a fun plant competition, raffle, discussions, presentations and interactive sessions all being planned.

We would especially like to encourage all the Regional and District Representatives to attend so they can share experiences about and what they have been doing and what has been happening in the various regions since lock down and invite all the new members, many who may not have yet had the opportunity to meet many other society members from outside of their local areas.

We will be starting at **10.00 and running till approximately 16.00** with the option of a super lunch. Why not make it a weekend and book an overnight stay. The Society has negotiated a special rate of £105 for Double room, Bed & Breakfast at the Kings Court Hotel. Please let me know if you are coming so we know how many to cater for - [caroletate10@gmail.com](mailto:caroletate10@gmail.com)

I look forward to meeting old and new friends!

## Learning how to Adjust to Climate Change

Allan Evans

It was a challenging year for growing sweet peas in North Wales in 2024, however I did try to find ways to overcome the obstacles I faced. This meant making adjustments in order to overcome changes in temperatures and soil conditions.

It was a particularly wet spring and soil temperatures fluctuated during the crucial April time for planting out; this meant that planting was delayed. As soon as planting was completed, slugs then came out in force to feed on my plants. This was even more problematic in 2024 due to the high rainfall we experienced over the winter months and the soil being waterlogged and not warming up as normal.

Once the plants settled in and roots established in the ground, they soon put on growth, but it took about three weeks for this process to get going. Then we experienced high fluctuations in temperatures between daytime and at night, which led to bud drop. A huge disappointment at the loss of good well-formed flower buds and so not looking promising for securing good quality blooms for showing. Despite this and reviewing the varieties I had selected to grow for 2024, I felt I was missing some key varieties that do well for me on the show bench. This will need to be considered for 2025.

When you are growing sweet peas and dahlias as I do for showing, selecting the right varieties in order to cover a range of colours and numbers to grow, are important considerations to make at the beginning of the year.

The plants were looking better by the beginning of July and we had blooms to show as well as some for arrangements. More by luck, I think and having been talking to Phillipa Cooper in 2023, I decided to grow some Old Fashioned sweet peas to try.

The Old Fashioned did really well for me at the Late National and Royal Welsh Shows – the ones that did well for me and obviously liking my soil conditions are going to be grown again in 2025 with a few newer additions as well. The late show was a tremendous success for me, winning four Silver Gilt Awards and at the Royal Welsh Show had first prize in the six-vase class; also winning the celebration class.

Unfortunately, I was unable to show at Wem this year, as it was scheduled for the same weekend that we prepare for the Royal Welsh Show. This was a disappointment as it is a show that I really like to attend. Hopefully the organisers will co-ordinate dates in the future.

I also won at the Southport Flower Show in August with the three-vase class, showing Karen Louise, Terry Davey and Evie Jones; photo below!



We also held our Open Garden event in August 2024 and had a very successful afternoon.

I am looking forward to 2025 and wish you all every success with your sweet peas and the challenges that nature will bring to us this season.

## A Question for the membership to answer!

For the last few years, I have been experiencing issues with my sweet pea seedlings. Some of them just keel over and die. This year I sowed some the first week of December. I filled root trainers and long-toms with Melcourt Peat Free general-purpose compost with added vermiculite; which was watered a day before sowing directly into the compost, so that they were well drained. Melcourt is a wood-based, product which is composted and then has added nutrients. The pots were kept at around 15-20°C and as soon as germination occurred were transferred to a cold, ventilated greenhouse.



All the pots and the greenhouses had been washed down with Jeyes fluid and I used water from the tap, not the water butt. Things appeared to be growing well, though rather too leggy. This latter problem I put down to the poor weather conditions – very dark, overcast skies and fog. When I looked at them before Christmas, they were fine, however, a week later a couple had collapsed – looking as if they had wilted and then keeled over. This continued to happen – a couple more each time I looked, until the time of writing (8<sup>th</sup> January). I hope the rest are going to survive; I do have more seed to sow at the end of January as a safety net.



I would be very grateful if anyone could give me any idea of what causes this wilting - see the attached photographs.

One of the seedlings looks as if it might have been grazed by a mollusc as it has fractured on the stem, but the others do not appear to have been damaged. One seed looks as if it might possibly have some mould on it, but others I checked didn't show any similar signs. When I've checked in previous years, the root systems looked absolutely fine, so I couldn't see any reason why they would wilt. It is a bit of a mystery and if anyone else has encountered this before please do contact the editor and suggest ways in which I might avoid this problem in future. Is it just me this is happening to and why is it happening now and not in previous years? Thank you in advance.

*Edit Please send your responses/suggestions to me via the usual email address: [graeme@graemeholingdale.com](mailto:graeme@graemeholingdale.com) and I will collate for an article in the Autumn Bulletin; however, I will of course share your feedback with the correspondent asap!*

## **Articles from the Archives: Spring and Autumn 1975 Bulletins**

written and edited by B R Jones

This note is triggered off by a letter from Eric Ball of Derby in which he instances "the trouble people get each year with Sweet Pea seed going bad in the compost, some having to do with 50 per cent-70 per cent show and sometimes even complete failures." It appears that Eric "came across a supposedly empty seed packet in the greenhouse and still damp from some watering he had been doing he supposed"; about to dispose of it he left some seed inside, which, on examination, had roots showing, so "in a box they went, and every seed made a good plant." Thus, the following year he placed seeds "between layers of toilet paper in a tin box, thoroughly wetted and drained them, and placed in an airing cupboard; one variety per layer and duly named and numbered in his diary." After 4 ½ days he noted the seed root "going down the side," and on the fifth day "all were transferred to the customary compost, gently watered through the rose, and within ten days almost 100 per cent was achieved." The point Eric makes is that "every seed is germinated before contact is made with the compost"; he now follows this system each year, a bit more trouble sowing the seed twice, but no more 50 per cent germination."

An interesting note this, but a method not entirely new, for, with variations, it has been employed in the past; indeed, in the old halcyon days, when North Wales was the exhibitors' centre, some growers there would sow their seed in moist sand, transferring to the normal pots compost as soon as a show of root confirmed O.K. Likewise, other members have used blotting paper and gauze, etc., kept well moistened, for the germination phase. However, the writer continues perplexed why *any* growers get less than 100 per cent germination, presuming, of course, seeds viable; indeed, in his own case if just one seed doesn't "come" (out of perhaps 1,000) he is vexed and not himself all winter! The gen is logical and straightforward. Firstly, it hardly needs saying that seed should be bought only from an established source, this ensures absence of old and doubtful stuff. Secondly, all seed is treated with a protective dressing such as Murphy's, *the* boon if ever there was one. Thirdly, an acceptably wholesome and sound compost is obviously advisable, although it is remarkable what a clean plant can be ensured in any sort of sowing mixture if the seed dressing is employed.

The sowing compost can be home-prepared or bought in. If the latter, nothing is better than (or as good as) John Innes Seed Compost, but only if (repeat only if) obtained from a reliable source, and, as has been mentioned in these column before, one such sender is Messrs Neal's Kettering Loam Company, Kettering. If bought carelessly, locally perhaps, there is ever the danger that old spent greenhouse compost, used for tomatoes, etc., may be re-bagged for sale; looks and feels excellent, buy almost certainly contains harmful organisms plus fertilizer residue rich enough to cripple root development later. If making up one's own compost, the usual pattern of garden top soil plus peat (or leafmould) and sand is excellent, with the proviso that the soil portion is given a thorough treatment with a solution of Formalin, 3 fluid ounces (6 tablespoonfuls) to the gallon, several weeks before hand—this has been described and plugged in these columns often in the past.

A final point worth noting is that if the compost is ensured to be thoroughly moist and crumbly (but not wet and pasty) at sowing time, then there is no need for that top watering which pans the surface and clogs the seed around with sodden compost. To sum up, the successful sower will appreciate the needs if the seed itself—a cosy, moist, mildly warm, firm yet friable environment, with added dressing protection against possible presence of harmful organisms.

Which reminds that queries by post, and at meetings, often refer to the new soil-less composts, e.g. Levington and Kerimure. These are, in general, peat based and carefully prepared to contain all the requirements of the young plant from the seed stage, and for Christmas or later sowing they can be strongly recommended as being excellent for high germination percentage and for producing good root development and top growth subsequently. However, queries such as one recently, sometimes complain of October-sown plants tending to yellow somewhat in the later stages and not being particularly satisfactory, and it can be said that these composts are not ideal for *long term* pot work such as our Autumn sowing, it being probable that the nutrients contained may well become exhausted after the turn of the year.

The correspondent just referred to is a new grower and has been sowing "25 seeds for 20 plants of each variety." This is something one gleans frequently over the years when speaking with new growers, and, let it be said frankly, is taking thriftiness much too far. Seed has certainly increased in price, it's just had to, but is still ludicrously cheap-just compare with the cigarette and think it over! Good advice is to. Buy 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  times the number of seeds as plants required, these can be reduced to twice the number by grading to the bold stuff, this for the final sowing; rejected seed can always be used by casual grower friends, and surplus plants readily snapped up likewise or marketed if so disposed. Nothing like a good choice when planting out, the basis maxim being that *the last plant of a variety put out should be as good as the first!*

## Spring Sowing

Some members will find it more convenient, and suitable to the type of season they have in mind, to delay sowing until the Spring, and here Christmas week is an ideal time for the job. It will be appreciated, of course, that aided by warmth is essential for germination, a mild room indoors possibly, or a heated greenhouse, or whatever, and likewise there should be little need to emphasize that pots or boxes should be whipped out to the cold frame or cold house (top staging near the glass if the latter) *as soon as the first soil "lift" is seen*. Here, though, a little mild fostering with glass is more often than not necessary so as to induce growth to continue proceeding, and an early stopping of *these* plants, after first or second pair of leaves, ensures side-shoot production.

This is an ideal sowing, one finds, for the host for friends who like to grow a score or so for cut bloom, and an excellent plan practised by the writer over the years is to sow ten seeds to the normal five-inch pot, eight around the side and two in the middle; and if the trouble can be taken to sow ten varieties, one seed one each per pot, then this does simplify greatly the apportioning of the plants—one is so often in a dilemma as to how to manage a nice colour range from what is left over from one's own Autumn sowing. The much later plant-out from this sowing is usually preferable and more convenient for the ordinary grower.



From the Trials at West Dean 2024, showing a clump of beautiful selection of rogues which couldn't be judged. Nature's doing some lovely colour combining!

## AGM Saturday 8 March 2025

Laurie Burrell and Jenny Morgan

The NSPS Committee have agreed to hold a raffle and also if suitable donations are forthcoming, an auction, at the AGM on Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, to which all of our members are invited to attend and take part in the proceedings.

The Committee are aware that since Covid in 2020, attendance at meetings by members has been restricted and the AGM has been undertaken by Zoom (as a last resort). In previous years as part of the AGM and Spring Social, a raffle and auction has been held to help offset costs and to support the activities of the Society. The prizes for the raffle have, in the past, been generously donated by members who attend this important annual event. I have been tasked by the Committee, together with Jenny Morgan, to organise the raffle this year and we are politely asking for contributions.

If you have or are willing to donate a prize it would be greatly appreciated by Jenny and me on behalf of the Committee, and we ask that you email or phone either one of us with brief details of the donation (particularly if it is likely to be of interest for auctioning). Our contact details are:

Laurie Burrell [Laurie.burrell48@gmail.com](mailto:Laurie.burrell48@gmail.com) 01932 564556

Jenny Morgan [Jlmorgan178@gmail.com](mailto:Jlmorgan178@gmail.com) 01873 850937

It is also suggested that members have cash with them at the AGM in order to purchase tickets to take part in the draw, as electronic payments may not be available on the day. Thank you in advance for your support, Laurie and Jenny.



Henry Eckford



Chrissie

# A different type of Sponsor from 2025!

Graeme Hollingdale

Two totally different worlds collided when at the schedule subcommittee 2024, discussions took place over potential new sponsors required to fill substantial gaps, following the withdrawal of notable long-term sponsors from the 2025 season going forward. The question was, do sponsors always have to be sweet pea/gardening horticultural related; sometimes they are also a way of remembering a loved one who had an association with our flower &/or Society? Rather obviously, it has tended to always be that way, largely because of the particular specialist nature of the NSPS but there was no reason why that must continue.

My mind went back to the 70's when commercial sponsorship started to change. Who else remembers horses being named "Everest Double Glazing" and similar?

So, after clarifying a few tax implications/details with our (rather experienced in such matters) treasurer, the idea came to mind that as no other offers had come in, why didn't I take the initiative. This is why you find that class 4 (three vases distinct of no more than 15 stems) in division 1 is now known as "The Fulltone Orchestra Class". Although the sponsor is listed as anonymous, it will not need a Columbo, Morse or Vera to work out the who, why and motive!

Although the FTO is South West England based, over the last few years and in 2025, they will have performed/be performing at high-end theatres, cathedrals and concert halls in Basingstoke, Bath, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Cardiff, Cheltenham, Exeter, Gloucester, London, Oxford, Reading, Swindon, Tewkesbury, Wells, Worcester, Marlborough, and via a three day open air summer festival, in their home town of Devizes.

So, what is the Fulltone Orchestra (conducted and run by Antony Brown, known as Tone and his wife Jemma) and why should you be interested in attending one of their events and/or supporting and artistic venture that receives no grants or funding from anywhere else? The answer is complicated because it is many things, can't be pigeon-holed and is pretty unique as a consequence. At its core is a symphony orchestra of some 50 – 65 players who include fulltime professionals, ex and part time pros/teachers. However, they do not 'just' perform music from the normal western orchestral catalogue. At best they can be termed "cross-over" or "multi-genre".

Apart from a mid-summer open-air festival, where film and tv scores might be followed by a big band set, a 70's/disco and an electronic dance/house music sets. The following day you might hear the Tchaikovsky piano or Elgar Cello concertos, an 80's set followed by a Fleetwood Mac tribute. A DJ, percussion and sax Ibiza set might precede a Queen/Rock finale. Every year it is a different mix!

Concert and short tour wise, they have performed Jeff Waynes War of the Worlds, a semi-staged production of Pirates Of Penzance, several of Karl Jenkins large scale orchestral/choral works including Adiemus, Armed Man and Peacemakers a specially arranged version of Enya's Watermark album (which she never actually performed live!) and the unique Queen Symphony, as well as supporting top International and West End vocalists, including Lucie Jones and David Hunter, Carly Paoli, Gareth Dafydd Morris, Aled Jones, Emmet Cahill, Camilla Kerslake, Kerry Ellis and Ricardo Afonso.

All the music is performed live, with no backing tracks or auto-tuners in sight. They always use appropriate sound and lighting tech, according to the genre and setting.

In Cathedrals for instance, which require no additional amplifying but in theatres, where as intended, they use the in-built PA (often enhanced and improved by an additional production company) and at the festival, the full outdoor experience of stage, sound and lighting will be integral to the show.

Hopefully your interest has been awakened and you would like to see what events are coming up that might appeal to you, either as a day/overnight trip from home or perhaps when you are away visiting friends, family, on a holiday or a visit to a flower show!

Please use this hyperlink <https://fto.org.uk> which takes you to their website, so you can see videos, galleries, and their past and future concerts/tours (and how to book tickets) However you will also find them all the expected social media platforms, especially Insta @fulltoneorchestra X @thefulltoneorch TikTok fulltoneorchestra\_ and Facebook The Fulltone Orchestra.

I would recommend checking in at least monthly, as new and different projects appear in the diary!



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