



NATIONAL
Sweet Pea Society

AUTUMN
BULLETIN

2025



Registered Charity No: 226802



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NATIONAL SWEET PEA SOCIETY

Registered Charity No: 226802

AUTUMN BULLETIN 2025

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2026 Dates for your Diary

NB correct at the time of editing, subject to change

Please check the website for regular updates, any changes and other news

Thursday 11 February	Committee meeting via Zoom	Committee members
Saturday 7 March	AGM & Spring Social	All NSPS members
Wednesday 29 April	Committee meeting Face to face meeting	Committee members venue tbc
Wed 17, Thur 18 June	Early National Exhibition RHS Wisley Gardens	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Sunday 28 June	Chiltern S P S Show Lacey Green Bucks	Members' Competition
Sat 11, Sun 12 July	Late National Exhibition RHS Bridgewater Gardens Worsley	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Sat 18 – Sun 19 July	Wem Sweet Pea Show and Festival	Members' Competition and town festival
Mon 20 – Thur 23 July	Royal Welsh Show Builth Wells	Open Competition Display & Bureau
Fri 31 – Sun 2 July	North West Regional Show At Chorley Flower Show	Members' Competition Display & Bureau
Thurs 20 – Sun 23 Aug	Southport Show	Display & Bureau
Thursday 2 Sept	Committee meeting via Zoom	Committee members
Thursday 11 Nov	Committee meeting via Zoom	Committee members

Erratum

Page 6 of the Spring 2025 Autumn Bulletin mentions Bridget McAteer; this cultivar is of course named Bridget McAleer.

The raiser (Chris) pointed out that this is not the first time this typo has happened; the year it was awarded a First Class Honours at the Scottish trials, it was also incorrectly labelled!

Deadline dates for submitting copy for 2026 publications:

Spring Bulletin by **31 December 2025** please.
ANNUAL by **30 January 2025** to Caroline please.
Autumn Bulletin by **1 September 2026** please.

Thank you again to everyone who has assisted in the production of this Bulletin, it is very much a collaborative effort.

Do you enjoy what you see or do you have ideas on how to improve these publications? If so, then please do get in touch; remember, we are all volunteers supporting each other, this wonderful Society and all it has achieved in 125 years!

Oasis Renewal Floral Foam

I think that without exception, we are all following the saga about Oasis and the alternatives with interest. Some of you may have seen an advert recently:

“Oasis® Renewal™ Floral Foam will be available in the UK soon.

You can request a free sample by contacting us on the email below. Please include your full name and address for delivery.

contactuk@oasisfloral.co.uk

Subject to availability, no purchase necessary, UK residents only, one sample per person, only while sample stocks last.”

They separately state that this is “plant-based, low carbon footprint, high-performance floral foam suitable for every kind of floral design”. Its biodegradability is believed to be undergoing trials.

If you did and you have received and trialled this product, then please share your experiences and thoughts via the Spring Bulletin any accompanying pictures also welcome.

Report from the Classification Sub-committee 2025

Classification of 2025 Novelties

The classification sub-committee met on 24th June 2025 at West Dean Gardens. Members present were Keith Brewer, Phil Johnson, Jim & Mary McDonald and Roger Parsons. Also present were Caroline Ball and Dave Fitton. The 2025 novelties were classified as follows:

Amy Dowden	– 10 pale pink on white ground
Blackberry Way	– 5 maroon
Butterfly Blue (also sold as Wings of Blue)	– modern grandiflora
Claire Mitchell	– 16a bicolour
Grandad Myers	– 9b pale blue
Greenfingers Cherry	– 16 striped
Karen Michelle	– 16 striped
Minette Marrin	– modern grandiflora
Our Helen	– 16a bicolour
Ruby's Gown	– modern grandiflora
Scarlet Flake	– 16b flaked
Shell Pink	– modern grandiflora

NB, all the above are Spencer types except where stated.

The numbers prefixing the colour description correspond with the colour categories as listed in the NSPS 2026 Classification publication.

The use of Peat

The RHS have publicised that in 2026 the use of peat (as in compost mixtures in pots) are no longer acceptable in exhibits shown at any of their shows, whether held on their premises or not. The only exceptions being if the exhibit was planted in the pot prior to 1st January 2026. Cut flower material is not relevant.

The impact on us in the NSPS is limited, as we only have one class in each show that allows pot grown plants to be exhibited. If you will be exhibiting in this class, having already planted in the pot, which will appear on the show bench, prior to 1st January 2026 and have used peat in your compost, then we would suggest that you include a card with the date on which you planted. Obviously in subsequent years, with the advanced warning, nobody will be using peat anyway.

2026 Schedules for the National Exhibitions

Graeme Hollingdale

Following the first “in person” AGM since 2019, where break-out groups discussed many aspects of the NSPS, following up on comments and suggestions put forward by members, inevitably our flagship National Exhibitions were hot topics of debate. The results of these discussions were fed back to the committee, and a working party was formed to take these ideas further and to see if some, many or all could be implemented.

Whether we like it or not, nothing stays the same; this includes the changing statistics of what is exhibited, which in turn reflects what the members are growing in their gardens and other plots and therefore wish to exhibit. In some ways, this also reflects what visitors to our shows are interested in.

There is no doubt that since I have been growing and exhibiting, the old-fashioned section has seen more popularity but has probably now plateaued. Other non-spencer *odoratus* types have, after a steady start, become firmly established as great garden plants. With the natural tendency to produce masses of flowers, medium sized blooms with lots of scent, they have become established on the show bench.

Species, both annual and perennial have also seen an increase in popularity; I put this down to the hard work of members who have used these to showcase our society when putting on displays, especially at times when *odoratus* blooms are sparse.

Each year after the vast majority of shows have ended, a show sub-committee meets to analyse statistics from previous years (especially the most recent ones) to see if any changes are needed in the schedule. In most cases, the changes are minimal. Sometimes wording has become clumsy and is simplified but contrary to this, sometimes we have to increase the word count because one or more exhibitors haven’t correctly understood the requirements. Occasionally (like when the number of single vases for spencer cultivars was reduced a couple of years ago) more major change takes place.

This year, the sub-committee had a huge amount of information to work with and produce a new schedule for 2026 that, as much as possible, reflected the views of those present at the AGM (including submissions sent in advance) through the paper presented by the working party.

When you read through the 2026 National exhibitions booklet, you will notice many things that are different, so well worth reading through ahead of show season however, almost all the classes are exactly the same as in 2025.

The first thing gives me (the editor) much pleasure. I have been able to increase font sizes because it was agreed by the committee that I could increase the number of pages; so hopefully you can all read the tiniest of print!

Secondly, the regulations (at the back) having been given a thorough overhaul; including listing the NSPS Bank account details for paying by BACS! Hopefully they are now clearer, less cumbersome and more relevant.

On page 5 you will notice a banner which states “More than one exhibit can be made in any class in the whole show”. Instead of listing exceptions, we have come to the decision that it will be self-policing. We started off with multiple entries being allowed in the single vase classes but when the question was offered “why can you not enter more than one exhibit in other classes”, it became apparent that if someone really wanted to enter two times in the 12 vase class (the extreme example) then they could. As with all changes, these will be reviewed annually to see if adjustments need to be made.

Then you will notice the new numbering system, which reflects a more modern fashion. It also means that you can continually add new classes in the same section (division) without having to change the first digit.

No new sponsor came forward for the Best vase of Anniversary in show, so after lengthy discussion, it was decided to drop this award alongside the similar Best Lavender cultivar in Show; the prize fund for that had long since been exhausted. If these decisions really offend you, then do get in touch with your offers of sponsorships! We do however thank Laurie and Pat Burrell for extending their sponsorship to cover the NSPS Triple (pages 5 and 20)

Alongside the renumbering, divisions have been renamed in some cases and reordered, reflecting (as referred to above) public and growers interests.

The **Special Classes** are still first, then followed by what was Division 5, now named **Non-cordon Division**. Division 1 is now referred to as the **Open Division**, followed by what would have been division 3, which is named the **400 Division**. The next two divisions logically follow being named **200** and **100 Divisions** respectively. We had already named the next division the **Decorative Division**, so no change there.

The Entry Form has been tidied up, as the amount of information that I was being asked to include on it made it unworkable. Please note that as you can enter a class more than once, please list how many in the relevant place. Do not forget to include your name and all your details please (including Bank details for prize money payment later) Block capitals are always best on forms for clarity, including email addresses.

To additionally help the admin, there is now a stand-alone email address for entries: showentries@sweetpeas.org.uk This means that forms will be received by more than one person, especially helpful if ill-health or an emergency happens, meaning that the manager cannot deal with them. Please use this address if at all possible.

Also, entry fees have been given a substantial revision. Now, all classes have the same fee (which is £1) up to ten entries. Above that, then all entries are free. £10 becomes the maximum amount to pay and entitles you to make as many entries as you wish. So, not only does this encourage everyone to enter and stage more exhibits but it reflects what was happening by many exhibitors anyway, who would rounding up, make a donation when they entered.

NSPS AGM 2026

As already highlighted in the dates for your diary section, please put the date of the 2026 AGM in your diaries now! Whilst the venue has not been confirmed (it will be somewhere in the Midlands being fairest to all regarding travel) the date has: Saturday 7 March 2026.

AUDIT OF THE LATE NATIONAL

12 & 13 July 2025 RHS Bridgewater, Worsley
Carole Tate

No	Name of Cultivar	1st	2nd	3rd	unplaced	Total	Colour	Class
	Spencers							
1	Gwendoline	3	3	1		7	Pale magenta	4a
2	White Frills	2	3			5	White	1
3	Anniversary	3	1			4	Picotee white ground	15
	Karen Louise	3	1			4	Lavender	8
5	Sir Jimmy Shand	1	1	2		4	Fancy (striped)	16
6	Dalesman	2				2	Mid blue	9a
	Grandad Myers	2				2	Pale blue	9b
	Eva Bridger	2				2	Pale mauve	7a
9	Evie Jones	1				1	Magenta	4
	Honeymoon	1				1	Lavender flush	8a
	John Gray	1				1	Salmon pink white ground	10a
	Karen Michelle	1				1	Fancy (striped)	16
	Pink Pearl	1				1	Pale pink white ground	10
14	Daily Mail		1			1	Cerise pink	10c
	Eclipse		1			1	Mauve	7
	Just Julia		1			1	Mid blue	9a
17	David Unwin				1	1	Red (scarlet)	3a
	Seedling	1	1			2		
	Total Spencer	23	13	3	1	40		
	Non-Spencers							
1	Henry Eckford	1				1	Orange scarlet	OF
	High Scent	1				1	Cream with lilac	MG
3	Little Red Riding Hood		1			1	Red/white bicolour	MG
	Total non-Spencers	2	1			3		
	Mixed vases	10	7	3	3	23		
	Total vases	35	21	6	4	66		
	Decorative & bowls	18	14	11	15	58		
	Total	53	35	17	19	124		

AUDIT OF THE EARLY NATIONAL

21 & 22 June 2025 Webbs @ Millets Farm, Abingdon
Roger Parsons

No	Name of Cultivar	1st	2nd	3rd	unplaced	Total	Colour	Class
	Spencers							
1	Gwendoline	3	3	3	1	10	Pale magenta	4a
2	Sir Jimmy Shand	3	2	4	0	9	White	1
3	Anniversary	5	2	0	1	8	Picotee white ground	15
4	Mary Priestley	2	2	2	2	8	White	1
5	Naomi Nazareth	2	3	0	2	7	Pale blue	9b
6	Mrs Bernard Jones	2	2	1	1	6	Rose pink white ground	10b
7	Just Julia	2	2	1	0	5	Mid blue	9a
8	Lizanne Davies	4	0	0	0	4	Picotee c.g.	15a
9	Bristol	2	1	1	0	4	Pale blue	9b
10	Jilly	0	3	1	0	4	Cream	2
11	Judith Wilkinson	2	1	0	0	3	Magenta	4
	Margaret Hastie	2	1	0	0	3	Striped	16
13	Restormel	2	0	1	0	3	Cerise scarlet	3
14	Betty Maiden	2	0	0	0	2	Striped	16
	Dawn Everest	2	0	0	0	2	Pale magenta	4a
	Lady Nicholson	2	0	0	0	2	Striped	16
17	Memorial Flight	1	1	0	0	2	White	1
	Windsor	1	1	0	0	2	Maroon	5
19	Alan Titchmarsh	0	1	1	0	2	Salmon pink cream ground	11b
	Daily Mail	0	1	1	0	2	Cerise pink	10c
	Oban Bay	0	1	1	0	2	Pale blue	9b
22	White Frills	0	1	0	1	2	White	1
23	Sally Maitland	0	0	2	0	2	Magenta	4
24	Eclipse	0	0	1	1	2	Mauve	7
	Alec Cave	0	0	1	1	2	White	1
	Gilly Norah	0	0	1	1	2	Salmon pink cream ground	11a
27	David Unwin	1	0	0	0	1	Scarlet	3a
	Grandad Myers	1	0	0	0	1	Pale blue	9b
	Hannah Magovern	1	0	0	0	1	Scarlet	3a
	Night Sky	1	0	0	0	1	Striped	16
	Noel Sutton	1	0	0	0	1	Mid blue	9a
	Serenity	1	0	0	0	1	Lavender	8

33	Clotted Cream	0	1	0	0	1	Cream	2
	Linda C	0	1	0	0	1	Mid blue	9a
	Millennium	0	1	0	0	1	Crimson	3b
	Queen of Hearts	0	1	0	0	1	Striped	16
	Solitude	0	1	0	0	1	Lavender	8
	Somerset Lady	0	1	0	0	1	Magenta	4
	Valerie Harrod	0	1	0	0	1	Orange pink	13
40	Karen Louise	0	0	1	0	1	Lavender	8
	Olivia Grace	0	0	1	0	1	Dark blue	9
	Syd Dunscombe	0	0	1	0	1	Orange red	14
43	Ballerina Blue	0	0	0	1	1	Mid blue	9a
	Hannah Rachel	0	0	0	1	1	Rose pink white ground	10b
	John Gray	0	0	0	1	1	Salmon pink white ground	10a
	Mrs R Chisholm	0	0	0	1	1	White	1
	Our Colin	0	0	0	1	1	Mid blue	9a
	Pip's Maroon	0	0	0	1	1	Maroon	5
	Seedlings	0	0	0	1	1		
	Total Spencers	45	35	25	18	123		
	Non-Spencers							
1	Romeo	1	1	0	0	2	White / blue rim	MG
2	America	1	0	0	0	1	Red flake	OF
	Chrissie	1	0	0	0	1	Lavender	SG
	Cupani	1	0	0	0	1	Maroon / violet	OF
	Little Red Riding Hood	1	0	0	0	1	Red / white	MG
	Scarlett	1	0	0	0	1	Red	MG
	Sweet Caroline	1	0	0	0	1	Bright pink flake	OF
8	Black Knight	0	1	0	0	1	Maroon	OF
	Total non-Spencers	7	2	0	0	9		
	Mixed vases	8	5	3	6	22		
	Total vases	60	42	28	24	154		
	Decorative & bowls	12	8	1	1	22		
	Total	72	50	29	25	176		

Sweet Pea Gardens Network

Alison Shreeve

The society has started a new initiative called the Sweet Pea Gardens Network. We intend to develop a new web page which will have listings of gardens which you can visit to see Sweet Peas growing in the summer months. In return the gardens will show information about our Society and how to grow Sweet Peas.

This scheme is envisaged as a mutually beneficial collaboration between the NSPS and individual gardens, wherever they might be. At the time of going to press we have nine gardens signed up for the scheme and these range from the West of England with Bodmin Railway, through other areas of England to Scotland and Northern Ireland. We are thrilled that these nine pioneers have agreed to help us start what we hope will be a comprehensive list of places for Sweet Pea lovers to visit.

The website will provide information about locations and types of garden and will have a link to the garden's own website for people to follow up with bookings where necessary.



Easton Walled Garden

If you know of any gardens which regularly grow Sweet Peas and/or other Lathyrus species who you think might be interested in taking part in this scheme, please send the Chairman an email or drop a line giving details and preferably a named contact with whom I can follow up and arrange to add them to the list.



L. rotundiflora (perennial species)

We also hope to feature gardens on the list in our Annual, so that we can all enjoy and celebrate the work of growing Sweet Peas and seeing the various ways that they can be used in the garden.

Reply to an article in the 2025 Spring Bulletin

The article from a member in the Spring Bulletin describing problems with young Sweet Pea seedlings received some very helpful replies from several members and we would like to thank those who have contributed to this compiled article, they will know who they are!

Compost Issues

Several responses focused on the wood-based peat free compost. There might be a problem with the break-down of the wood fibres which requires nitrogen which is no longer available to the seedlings causing nutrient deficiencies. Also, the fertilisers used in some composts do not survive as long as the manufacturers claim, nor are they consistently spread through batches of compost if the performance of my tomatoes in growbags this year is anything to go by!

The water holding properties of peat free composts are very different and some look dry on the top and are waterlogged below, so that might also affect the seedlings, though the roots appeared healthy.

To counteract some of these problems it might be helpful to feed small amounts of fertiliser, which previously has been decried, as composts used to have enough nutrient to see Sweet Peas through to planting out. Suggestions include trying a loam based potting compost with little or no wood chip and adding a small amount of dry feed such as seaweed meal to keep the seedlings going or start watering with very dilute seaweed from around 4/6 weeks if you think they are struggling. Or you might prefer to mix your own compost using coir multipurpose with slow release fertiliser mixed with John Innes no1 compost in equal parts. Also top-dress with vermiculite after sowing and include the holes where the seeds are sown.

Pests and Diseases

Another reply suggested the cause of seedling failure might be due to a species of sciarid fly. The respondent says, having grown *Lathyrus* for about 60 years and never having had a problem with seedlings until a few years ago he searched and eventually found the cause of the problem. The symptoms were the same as those described and illustrated in the spring Bulletin.

This appears to be the presence of fungus gnat larvae feeding on the actual living seed and stems of the germinating seeds and seedlings. I found the best remedy to be to water the compost at sowing time and until growth is well away i.e. until planting time, with half strength Bug Clear Ultra Vine Weevil Killer.

Fungal activity in wood-based composts is also another likely contender for affecting seedlings. With more wood-based and recycled materials being used there is a higher likelihood of fungal activity developing or being present in the odd bag of compost if not all.

If you are reluctant to use chemicals to resolve problems another possible remedy might be to use ground cinnamon as a seed dressing. This is less targeted but is anti-bacterial and fungal! Well worth a try if you are an organic gardener. At the very least it might deter the larvae if they don't like cinnamon!

Thanks once again to all those who sent in these very helpful responses to what appeared to be a bit of a mystery.

This is a timely article as we approach the new growing season. It is even more timely with the RHS bringing in their ban on peat in composts for any pot grown plants on their premises. This is being addressed by the society through a zoom discussion and further dissemination of information in our Bulletins and on the website as it becomes available.

Please do keep your information and experiences coming in to the editor as shared knowledge is the best way to manage change and development in practices and materials.

Encouraging Novice and First Time Exhibitors

Jen and Lewis Morgan, South Wales District Reps

Within the Horticulture Village at this year's Royal Welsh Show there was a push to encourage first time and novice entrants, with a number of new classes aimed at them, across many sections of the schedule; Adam Jones, the Horticultural Honorary Director, was one of these.

Adam is enthusiastic about encouraging people of all ages and abilities to grow their own vegetables and flowers. He is a regular face on the Welsh language gardening programme Garddio a Mwy, along with involvement in many community and schools' projects, and has an active social media presence.

Adam had never entered a Show himself and decided he had to take the lead in this incentive and entered a number of the vegetable and floral classes including the Novice Classes within the Welsh National Sweet Pea Championship; putting his efforts in front of the camera and on his various social media outlets for the world to see!

So, on the Sunday evening, here he comes with a deep box full of veg, flowers and a pot plant. Jen had to put Adam's mind at rest that whilst his Sweet Pea stems weren't the longest the blooms were fine, and it would all be okay. He had entered the Open Single Stem class, and the Novice Mixed Vase Class.



Jen overseeing the careful staging progress of Adam

The first job was to show Adam how to trim the fibre floral, place it in the vase, leaving the top just below the rim for watering, all accomplished without alarm, which was a good start.

Then it was a case of sorting out the left and right hand blooms and getting a balance with his various colours. Fortunately, other exhibitors had already staged vases, so Adam could see what Jen was explaining, regarding positioning stems in the vase, placing the leaves and the like.

How did Adam get on? Well, he came second, so he can enter again next year, but in doing so he has cajoled a number of the Stewards from the “other side” - that is the floral art crowd - to also enter, so we can look forward to there being some good natured “serious” competition and banter next year, which is no bad thing.

Sowing dates on seed packets

Roger Parsons

The following enquiry was received so I thought other people might be interested in my answer.

Q. For some time now, I have noticed the stated 'sow by' or 'shelf life' on seed packets reducing down, from the date of supply, sometimes to merely a few months. I recently bought some seeds of Barry Dare from a supplier, not a garden centre, which arrived with a 'sow by' date of December '25, which to me implies that it is old seed. (I obviously would have bought from you, but I've never seen them on your site)!

I remember seed packets used to have a 'Year packed' date but this is no longer used.

So, can I ask you? In your opinion, how long do sweet pea seeds remain viable? And would you feel that a packet supplied in late February should all have to be sown by December of that year? Or should I raise a concern with the supplier?

A. Every seedsman handles their seeds differently. I think the benefit of a "sow by" date is that it gives a life for that packet. "Year packed" isn't helpful to my mind because you don't know how the seed was stored prior to packing or how old it was when packed.

If Sweet Pea seed is stored at ambient temperatures, it remains fully viable for 2 years in my experience. After that, the rate of germination deteriorates so that after five years you should expect nil germination. It is possible to extend the storage life of seeds, either using a cold store / refrigerator or by freezing. A cold store set to just above freezing, or a domestic fridge, will extend the viability of Sweet Pea seeds by an extra year or more. The best way to store seeds is frozen, which is what we do. This maintains seeds indefinitely so the 2 years viability starts from when they come out of storage. As an example, last October I sowed 32 seeds of a Sweet Pea named 'Strawberry Ice'. The seeds were harvested in 1997 so were a year old when frozen in 1998. All 32 germinated and all have produced strong healthy plants for me. I am so pleased!

When we packet seeds, straight from the freezer, we provide a "sow by" date 2 years ahead. The sow by date on your 'Barry Dare' may be from someone who uses a different timescale. They may use a shorter timescale depending on how old the seed was and how it was stored. If anyone uses a longer period, say three years, they may be pushing their luck a bit but customers should still get reasonable germination.

Personally, I would not be over-concerned about a packet ordered in February 2025 with a sow-by date of December 2025. If you want to store them till after December, just pop them in the bottom of the fridge or freeze them in an air-tight storage box. If you are not happy, by all means raise it with the supplier to ask how old the seed is and how it was stored prior to packeting. If sowing this Spring and you get poorer than expected germination, you should definitely raise this with the supplier.

The Harington Scheme; a Sweet Pea College

Lee Haley

Harington is a further education/vocational training centre based in Highgate, North London. We do a lot of things for our students in order to help to prepare them for the workplace. At the scheme our main career path is Horticulture, which we teach alongside other core subjects such as English and maths. The seasonal requirements of the site, including three annual events, provide many opportunities for students to practice their English and maths skills in real life situations.

The organisation was initiated back in 1980, when a board of local representatives sought to protect an undeveloped area of land and to fund a horticultural college for young adults with special educational needs. The site was initially a greenhouse and a couple of small buildings. The main site hasn't changed much and still possesses a rural character, which, in London, is refreshing. Over the last 45 years Harington has developed to include a retail branch, based on another site (at Hornsey) and the Harington Gardeners, who carry out contractual work for local clients. We also have job coaches and a number of staff who work with students one to one on bespoke programs.

In the garden we teach units which count towards qualifications with City and Guilds and a few other bodies. Initially I was teaching the conservation syllabus, which for me was an excuse to grow wildflower meadows (something I never found easy) and to be close to nature. Last year I began teaching a horticulture group and I realised straight away that I needed to pull something out of the hat in order to engage these incredibly bright young people, and to ensure that they all got the most out of their short time in education.

One day in September I found on my desk a Roger Parsons Sweet Peas seed catalogue. It had a picture of Ruby's Gown on the front cover. Now I was planning on doing sweet peas again, having tried and failed to grow stunning blooms for two years in a row. In 2023 I bought seeds from Sarah Raven and did everything wrong. I planted one seed per 8cm pot using seed compost. Without proper guidance I tried to use the cordon method but mistook the side shots for the leaf stems and grew long stems incapable of carrying out photosynthesis, each with a tangle of basal shoots, and disappointing flowers.

The catalogue in my hands gave me confidence that we could do better, and that expert guidance was at hand. In the front pages were mentioned two respectable looking books by Roger; one on sweet peas and one on the *Lathyrus* genus. In the back pages of the catalogue were pictures of unusual *Lathyrus* species, with similar flowers to the sweet pea, but all very different. From that moment I was hooked and started ordering.



Part of the Sweet Pea plot during the hot and dry summer of 2025

Details of our Lathyrus project 2025 will be published in the 2026 NSPS Annual. We decided that the sweet pea is the perfect vehicle for learning at Harington for several reasons. In education we require careful sequencing of activities, to ensure that prior knowledge is remembered and understood. The sweet pea calendar allows for this and gives us all plenty of time to get our heads around everything that we will need to do, so that when we start to do it, we are empowered.

When it comes to cordon management, it's much better to demonstrate out in the field, than to try to explain with words and diagrams (although we do try!). For a good number of us, learning by doing is the only way. The repetitive nature of cordon maintenance chores is rewarding in that it improves our fine motor skills, attention to detail and our ability to focus.



'Peas growing inside the polytunnel

There is plenty of maths to be done with sweet peas. From ordering seeds, pots and compost to counting out pots for sowing and pricking out. We measure the distances between the canes and mark out the whole area for our cordon frames. This year we are trying to work out how to make money from sales of cut flowers and seeds. We also want to win more prizes at local and regional shows, which means we need to work out how many plants we will need in order to have enough to enter certain classes. For me the answer to everything is simply to grow more sweet peas.

In some ways the sweet pea cultivars remind me of the students themselves. We celebrate diversity at Harington, and in sweet peas we see a good range within a single species. Some need some support, and some can climb by themselves. Most of us learnt a lot about nutrition, which links in with our Healthy Living subject (Part of Personal development curriculum which complements our vocational agenda).

Not all students were up for growing Spencer types; some preferred to just collect flowers from their old fashioned types, without worrying about the tying in and removal of side shoots etc.

Mental health is another big focus of ours, and it was thrilling to see students and staff members reacting to the Sweet Peas that we were bringing up from the plots last year. Some may need counselling who have spent too much time around me, as my obsession with the project has been almost off the scale at times.

Probably the most important thing we do for our students is to help them to build confidence. If we can grow better sweet peas than our neighbours then that could not only help with self-esteem but could also help to ignite a passion for horticulture, which can be a slow burn.

I honestly doubt that many professions will offer us the opportunity to continue to grow Sweet Peas, but as with everything we do at Harington, the skills which we teach are transferable. Not all of our students decide to pursue a career in horticulture when they leave, but I wouldn't be surprised if many of them came back to it later. When we gave each of the students their own cultivar to raise it was great to see how much each of them cared for their plants.



King Sized Navy



Henry Eckford

We aim to take the sweet pea even more seriously next season, hoping that people will also take us even more seriously. Many employers tend to have low expectations of people with learning difficulties, and I love to shock such people by having my students teach them stuff that they themselves have no idea about. I have come to realise that our students are highly intelligent and it's a big part of my job to try and prove that to others. The sweet pea itself has special powers and one of them is to bring us all into contact with a wider community of like-minded spirits.

Ed – this is such an unexpected article to be sent (thank you Phillipa for the contact made with Lee at Wem) and read, with much (if not all) lining up with our own thoughts, beliefs and outlook on life.

We all know the benefits of gardening, growing your own and the pleasure Sweet Peas in particular give us; including an outlet for that competitive spirit (in some) where we make lasting friendships and acquaintances. It can also take over a vast amount of your life (which is good, I think you agree!)

You will be seeing more about this project in both the Annual and hopefully the Spring Bulletin. Do you know of any similar projects in your area? If so, then please send details to your editors. If you would like to find out more about Harington, here is a link to their website. www.harington.org.uk

Comments from around the regions via the D R's and an update on her year from the co-ordinator

Roz Warley

Overall, it has been quite depressing reading feedback from around the country on the 2025 growing season. Weather (inevitably) being the main talking point.

The early spring, high daytime temperatures and for most, long periods of drought has meant a rapid shortening of stems and an early finish to flowering. High winds also effected some areas this year. Bud drop didn't help early on (probably the large difference between day and night temperatures being a likely trigger) and almost unanimous reference to aphids and the virus that rather inevitably follows, appearing early and rapidly taking hold, were other common themes.

High points have been in those areas where due to hard work by the few, socials, workshops, talks and displays have kept Sweet Peas in the public forum. It is also sad to read that despite efforts over many years, members are not necessarily responding to the proactive "reaching out" from many D R's. A plea from all of us, if you receive something from a District Rep, do reply, enter into a conversation for example; it will give them a reassuring boost, knowing that their efforts are not being wasted. Similarly, if your DR has given up or there isn't one in place for your area, how about stepping up and offering?

2025 has certainly been a 'different' year in terms of growing sweet peas for me. In the past I've grown up to 300 plants, over 2 allotments in Yorkshire. Having made the move up to NE Scotland 2 years ago, that became 100 plants in 2024, and this year numbers were reduced further to around 50.

The main reason for the dwindling numbers has been an arthritic hip, and its much delayed replacement. So, being unable to bend to ground level, it was impossible to grow my plants in the ground this year. This left me deliberating on how to grow in 37 litre pots. Or more precisely how to secure the canes and make layering possible.

As it happened my operation took place on Good Friday, 18th April. This meant I was out of action at the very time the plants needed tying in to canes, having been sown in early February. As I was unable to make a framework for the canes to be attached to, the plants grew into a tangled mess.

It was early July before climbing a ladder in a safe fashion was feasible. This prompted a visit to Temu.

We have a sunny wall which was vacant, and it struck me that with four garden arches, all placed at a right angle to the wall, this would not only form a 'tunnel' which should also be lovely to walk through when the blooms arrive. Plus, if I were to fasten the arches to each other via canes over the top, this would strengthen them (as we do get some fierce winds) but more importantly, also give an anchor point for the vertical canes.



The garden arches were cheap; deliberately so! Due to the presence of concrete and rubble under the soil surface the arches could not be sunk into the ground, so more 37 litre pots were purchased and planted up with roses. The arch legs were then pushed into these. Not pretty but it worked!

The photo was taken in July, and instead of layering I found it was possible with care, to 'drop' the plants, wind them around the outside of the pot, and put back up another cane.

Like many people's plants, mine eventually ran to short stems, and had a bad influx of aphids. On the plus side we also had a named storm and the structure didn't move!

The plants will be removed and the pots filled with Heather plants for some winter colour. In Spring I shall replace the compost and try again, providing (of course) that the whole structure survives a Scottish winter!

Hopefully I will be able to report a better season this time next year; fingers crossed.

Preparing for RHS Badminton

Alison Shreeve

The team from the NW Region have much experience of exhibiting at RHS Tatton and other prestigious shows and have done very well winning many awards including Gold Medals and Best Exhibits. Last year however, the RHS started a program of moving venues for their shows around the country and there will be no Tatton again until 2027. Instead, the shows next year will be at Badminton and Sandringham. The thinking behind this is that varying the venues will enable more people to attend the shows and reduce the journeys made by many to see an RHS Show.

For the Society this has presented a big challenge. The new RHS venues are too far for the NW team to manage and nobody in the South and East of England has had experience of setting up such a large show, although Phil Johnson with Caroline Ball's help, very successfully exhibited at Chelsea this year as has Darren Everest. Caroline and Alison plus a small team have exhibited on behalf of the Society, at The Royal Windsor Rose and Horticultural Show for several years.

After discussions with some of the committee and a couple of members who were exhibiting at Gloucester, we have decided to pitch for a floral marquee spot at RHS Badminton on 8-12 July 2026. The RHS have been very helpful and four of us attended a seminar at Malvern Show Ground on 23 September. We have already put in our bid for a stand at Badminton and had some brief discussions about it.

The seminar was a wonderful opportunity to learn first-hand from top exhibitors how to go about the challenge of exhibiting at the RHS shows. We heard from three different nurseries how they stage and the pitfalls to look out for. We also learned how the judges view and assess the exhibits and what might let you down at the key assessment point. We even had a go at assessing ourselves!

We are now looking for members' support to help us to achieve our aims and ensure that we have a beautiful display of Lathyrus to attract the visitors and judges eyes. You don't necessarily have to be experienced at building a show stand – there are lots of jobs that need doing and you can volunteer for any of the following:

- Manning the stand, selling seeds and merchandise and hopefully encouraging new members. The advice we had was to always speak to members of the public, smile and be encouraging. If you enjoy talking to people this might be for you!
- Advising the public on what to grow and how to grow it. Sharing your knowledge.
- Help with setting up and breaking down the stand – practical skills.
- Floral art 'experts' or keen 'novices', who would be happy to help with the cut flower displays.
- Most important of all – providing blooms for us. We will need to refresh the display on the third day, so that is an important key event. We will need Spencers, Modern Grandifloras/semi-grandifloras, Old Fashioned and Species please.
- We are intending to grow some plants in pots, supported with natural materials other than canes, if possible, though not essential. *As with all RHS venues any pots must NOT contain peat in any of the growing mediums if planted after 1 January 2026.*

- If you have any accessories that fit with the theme of a 1920s/30s potting shed and you would be willing to lend them, please let us know and send a photo to the Chair, Alison Shreeve.

There will be rotas drawn up and a limited number of helpers allowed each day. There will be plenty of time to visit and enjoy the rest of the Show during the day, if you are on the rota.

Please have a think about joining the small team we already have identified. Many hands make light work and it is fun and very interesting to talk to members of the public, where we hear lots of stories and enthusiasm about our wonderful Lathyrus. If you have any questions about this please do email the Chair or contact one of the Committee.

Reflections on a Sweet Pea Career

Kathy Gray

As I reach the end of my time growing and showing Sweet Peas, I wanted to look back and reflect on my progress and the people who have supported me along the way. I have always grown Sweet Peas for my own enjoyment, but with the encouragement of local growers Peter Bolton and Dennis Hargreaves, I started to grow for show by the cordon method in 2005. The first Spencer that I grew was “Evening Glow” which gave me some early success.

In 2006 I entered my first national in Lyndhurst and won a third prize with a mixed vase in Division VI. I was lucky enough to go round with John Bishop, Graeme and Chrissie whilst they were judging to pick up tips and learn from their advice. Then In 2007 I won Division VI and was invited to join the committee of the Chiltern Sweet Pea Society.

The joy of growing Sweet Peas is not only in the growing, but also the community that I have become a part of. I remember the “stuffing parties” organised by Caroline, where we all came together to distribute the annuals. It was during one of these that I picked up tips for making my daughter’s Sweet Pea wedding posy.

Keith Brewer has been an ongoing support in my progression. He is always on the end of a telephone for advice and encouragement and latterly seeds.



Daily Mail entry 2022

In 2010 I progressed to win Division V and in 2016 I won Division IV.

In 2017 I attempted entries in Division III. I won the three vase class. The next year I returned and entered the full 9 vases, coming first. I was also awarded the Colledge Prize for the best lavender in the show. I came second in the Roger Parsons challenge Prize in 2021.



First win in 2007



Clay Cup win in 2022

In 2022 I had my success with “Anniversary”, which was awarded both best vase of that cultivar and the overall best vase in show, the Clay Cup, which was part of my third placed exhibit in the Daily Mail class at Wisley. 2025 has been my final year of showing, so it was lovely to have continued success with a favourite cultivar, winning both the best Anniversary and also the best vase in the Early National at Abingdon. A wonderful end to my showing career.



NSPS glassware special prizes

In addition to the Nationals, I have entered many more local shows and travelled as far afield as Cheltenham, Wem, Hayling Island, Burley, Downton and Liss. These local shows are where we can meet with fellow growers, pass on knowledge and encourage future growers and exhibitors.

I have met some wonderful people and achieved more than I believed I would. My 18 medals and cabinet of Nationals glassware is a wonderful reminder of my experiences.

A plea from the Annual and Bulletins Editors (and for website news)

We absolutely love receiving your photos and they really make the publications come alive, showcasing our wonderful flowers and visually describing what people have been up to. As they say ‘a picture tells a thousand words’. It is great that more and more people are sending photos to illustrate their articles or just sending us photos. The publications consume a lot, almost 200 in the Spring Bulletin and the latest Annual, so please don’t stop sending us them.

You can, however, make the life of your editors so much easier if you save into the file information about the photo. We receive a lot of photos that are just a number and whilst we know lots of people in the Society we don't recognise everyone and it adds considerably to our workload when we have to search elsewhere for descriptions or if we have to follow them up if we don't have a description at all. We like to know things like the names of the people depicted, where the photos are, what is going on in the photo and were applicable the varieties in the picture.

It is also helpful if you can send your photos files as large as possible; anything under 1mb is unlikely to be published because the resolution is not good enough for printing. These can be as email attachments, via maildrop, Dropbox (providing you set the permissions to allow us to download!) WeTransfer or similar.

One other plea, if you would like to show us an example of how you would like the photos to be embedded in your article that is very welcome but please also send us the article and photos all separately, correctly named and labelled. This will all help us make our publications even more informative.

The news section of the website similarly needs regular short articles of copy and illustrative photos, to keep it relevant.

If you are in any doubt that your news/views/photos might (not) be of interest, then send to your editors who will make the decision for you. It is always better to have too much than not enough.

As a reminder, articles for the Bulletin to graeme@graemehollingdale.com
For the Annual to caroline_a_m_ball@yahoo.co.uk
For the website to a.shreeve1@btinternet.com

Thank you and keep the articles and photos coming!

Books, Annuals and Bulletins for sale

Caroline Ball

The Society has a number of Sweet Pea publications for sale. These include NSPS Annuals for the majority of the last 50 years and older and Bulletins from the last 30 years plus. If you are looking for particular years please contact, me we might be able to help.

We also have copies of some classic books on Sweet Peas, for example:

The Complete Guide to Sweet Peas by Bernard Jones (first and second editions)

Sweet Peas for Exhibitor and Market Grower by Roy Genders

Sweet Peas a complete guide to their culture by ER Janes

Sweet Peas for Garden and Exhibition by D Gorlay Thomas

Sweet Peas by Chas W Unwin

There are miscellaneous others also available.



If you are interested in any of these books or looking for something in particular do get in touch at caroline_a_m_ball@yahoo.co.uk

We might just have a copy and are open to reasonable offers for them!

Sweet Peas at RHS shows 2025

Caroline Ball

Many people thoroughly enjoy the spectacle of an RHS show. The flagship of which is of course Chelsea. Sweet Peas were well represented this year with Darren Everest (*Darren Everest Sweet Peas*) and Phil Johnson (*English Sweet Peas*) flying the flag.

Darren, by now a seasoned Chelsea exhibitor, went for a stand design that was well received, the “Ye Olde Sweet Pea Shoppe”.

This was a new concept with Sweet Peas displayed on a sweet jar background, Sweet Peas in sweetie jars plus the focal points, lovely old weighing scales and a till adorned with old fashioned Peas.



The symbolism can't have been lost on many, the RHS shows are just like being in a sweetie shop for enthusiastic gardeners.

Phil's English Sweet Peas display showcased Spencers, Old Fashioned and Modern Grandifloras being displayed in ribbed glass vases of a shape that was perfect for displaying the delicacy and grace of Sweet Peas. The concept was to showcase Sweet Peas through their growth cycle in a novel, naturalistic design. The vases included Sweet Pea vines with both buds and tendrils. They even continued to grow throughout the show.



The impact was great, and the display well received by both the judges and public alike.

Perhaps a glutton for punishment in such a scorching hot Summer, Darren did it all again at Hampton Court in July where his display included Sweet Peas and his other love, apart from wife Dawn of course, Dahlias. He showcased both in frames focusing on each flower's individual beauty. Darren was awarded two Silver Gilt medals, one at each show. Phil was awarded a Gold Medal.

What fantastic ambassadors both of these gentlemen are for our wonderful Sweet Pea, sharing their beauty and their passion for the flower with the large crowds that attend the RHS shows.

More about these displays will be included in the 2026 Annual.

Conversations, Questions and Answers

Phillipa Cooper writes:

Last year at Wem one exhibitor had huge Old Fashioned blooms. I have been in touch with the person and was told that they disbudded the plants up until 2 weeks before Wem.

I know that it is common amongst growers of Spencers to disbud if exhibiting, however if Old Fashioneds should be naturally/bush grown, I would assume that disbudding would not be natural. I am probably very naive!

Personally, we have never disbudded anything intentionally unless the stem has been affected by bud drop. We enjoy the flowers and love giving most of them away. As you guessed we are not that competitive. Any chance that you could clarify. I have looked in the little rule book.

Secondly, my Old Fashioneds on the allotment have started flowering profusely (wish I was free to enter the Early this weekend) They are on a new plot (runner beans last year). Senator in particular is producing some 4s. I don't think that will continue but if I did enter 4s in a vase would that be down pointed?

Roger Parsons replies:

I do not think that this aspect has ever been raised before. As I see it, our show regulations do not say that Old Fashioneds must be grown "naturally". They simply require that plants are not cordon-grown. The guidance to judges requires that the form of Old Fashioneds is true to the cultivar.

Disbudding will not affect the form of their blooms in the way that cordon-growing would. It is simply a way to delay flowering time, as it is with Spencers. The size and form of spencer blooms that have been disbudded is no different to Spencers which have not been disbudded. If size is affected in either Old Fashioneds or Spencers, it would be because the first flush of blooms can be superior. So, I cannot see there is any objection to someone disbudding Old Fashioned blooms prior to a show.

Having 4s on your 'Senator' shows they have been grown well so you should get extra points for this. I prefer to have 4s in vases of Old Fashioned cultivars. Some are more likely to produce these than others.

These are interesting queries which are likely to interest readers of the Autumn Bulletin.

PRISES AT THE NATIONAL SHOWS

Neal Hatch for the Committee

In the spring discussion about the future of the National Shows, some members wondered whether the prize money could be increased to attract more exhibitors. In response, the Committee thought it would first be useful to look at what other societies do. It is difficult to draw exact comparisons, as plant societies run their shows in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, we compared the latest information available, taken from show schedules and various other sources.

The information is summarised in the table overleaf.

We listed the largest first prize available (column 2), as well as the range of first prizes (column 3). We also estimated the total prize fund paid (column 4) if all prizes were awarded. In reality, some prizes may not be awarded due to a lack of entries or exhibits that were simply not awarded prizes for various reasons. Some exhibitors may not claim their prize money, therefore donating back, so the cost of prizes paid may well be less than estimated here. To get to the bottom of those issues would require much more work. But that isn't necessary, as what matters is what is publicised as 'on offer' to exhibitors.

There are still some difficulties in comparing like-for-like. For example, how do we value vouchers relative to cash? If an exhibitor travels to a show and gets a voucher for a garden centre, that may not be of much value if they live 200 miles away from that garden centre! For simplicity, we haven't tried to identify the value of vouchers or other prizes, only the cash prizes available. Nor have we delved into the various trophies, certificates, rosettes and medals on offer (column 5).

We use Charity Commission submissions to estimate total funds available, income & expenditure (column 8). Those financial figures help give a sense of the 'scale' of the various societies' activities and a rough idea of their financial position.

We included a few 'specialist' Sweet Pea shows like New Forest and Chiltern shows, to help benchmark the Nationals. We also included a few 'general' flower shows (some affiliated) that have Sweet Pea classes (only prizes for Sweet Pea classes are included in the table). These societies/shows are just a small sample of all the shows held, but we thought they were helpful to include. We also looked at a couple of non-Sweet Pea specialist societies for comparison (dahlia & fuchsia sections of two specialist societies) – but these aren't included on this table for simplicity.

The National Vegetable Society appears (not surprisingly) to have the largest prize fund. However, **most flower societies offer less prize money than the National Sweet Pea Society does.**

Indeed, one or two well-known national societies have reduced/stopped cash (and other) prizes at their shows in recent years, in an attempt to contain costs. Financial pressures are visible elsewhere too; we all know of some shows that have been cancelled in recent years. On the face of it, the National Sweet Pea Society prize fund still seems fairly generous, compared with many other national plant society shows. If one adds in the cost of the glassware on offer (in addition to the cash prizes), then the Sweet Pea Society appears to be towards the very top of the prize money tree.

Our General Committee discussed the level of prize money compared with what other similar national plant societies offer. The Committee concluded that there was no need to change prize money offered at this time. But at the same time, they recognised the enormous effort put in by those exhibiting their Sweet Peas, and the financial costs incurred in doing so. The Committee is considering offering an option to take a cash alternative to the glassware for some of the awards at its two National Shows from 2026 (as plans for 2025 were already in place).

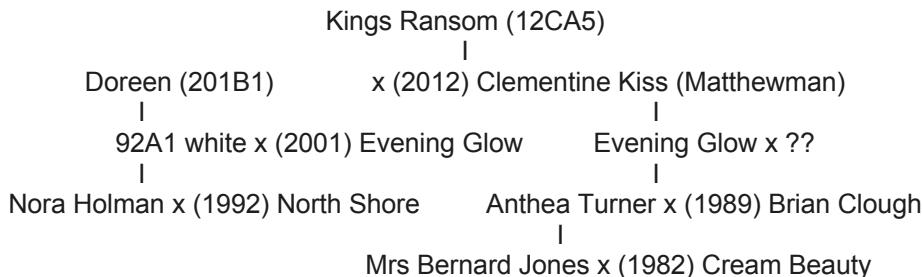
Plant Society Show Prizes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Society	Cash Prizes	Max 1st Prize	Range (1st prizes)	Max Prize fund payout (per show)	Medals / Certificates / Rosettes / Trophies	Members	Shows per year	Exp £ '000
<u>National Societies</u>								
Sweet Pea	Yes	£ 60	£5-£60	£ 1,260	Yes	500	2	24
Dahlia	No	£ -	n/a	£ -	Yes	1100	2	47
Chrysanthemum	No	£ -	n/a	£ -	Yes	500	2	36
Rose	Yes	£ 30	£4-£30	£ 492	Yes		4	n/a
Gladiolus	Yes	£ 6	£3-£6	£ 325	Yes		1	n/a
Vegetable	Yes	£ 150	£50-150	£ 3,960	Yes	2000	1	111
Daffodil	No	£ -	n/a	£ -	Yes	1000	1	5
Fuchsia	?	?	?	?		900		24
Delphinium	Yes	£ 2	£2	£ 45	Yes		1/2?	12
Iris	No	£ -	n/a	£ -	Yes		4	7
Pelargonium	yes	£ 5	£3-£5	£ 364	Yes			7
Alpine	No	£ -	n/a	£ -	Yes		>10	n/a
Cactus	?	?	?	?	Yes		0.25	142
Primula/auricula	No	£ -	n/a	£ -	Yes		2	n/a
Cyclamen	No	£ -	n/a	£ -	Yes		1	
<u>Specialist/Regional Sweet Pea Shows</u>								
New Forest	Yes	£ 25	£3-25	£ 253	Yes		1	n/a
Chiltern	Yes	£ 10	£0.5-£10	£ 160	Yes		1	n/a
Gloucester	Yes	£ 15	£5-£15	£ 122			1	n/a
Yorkshire	Yes	£ 75	£4-75	£ 1,368	Yes		1	n/a
<u>General Flower Shows with more than 2 Sweet Pea Classes</u>								
Taunton	Yes	£ 10	£5-£10	£ 55	No		1	291
Southport	Yes	£ 75	£10-75	£ 362	Yes		1	1361
Norfolk & Norwich	Yes	£ 1	£0.5-£1	£ 6	Yes		1	31
Clutton	Yes	£ 3	£3	£ 24	Yes		1	n/a
Royal Welsh	Yes	£ 30	£5-£30	£ 252	Yes		1	n/a
Royal Windsor	Yes	£ 8	£3-£8	£ 70	Yes		1	n/a
<u>Sources</u>								
Column 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 schedules								
Column 6, various web sources								
Column 7, websites/schedules								
Column 8, Charity Commission submissions								

The “Marmite” Sweet Pea – Kings Ransom”

Andrew Beane

First of all, the hybridising history:



Doreen (cream) and Clementine Kiss (orange) were growing in clumps next to each other on the allotment in 2012. The two matched well together and it was decided to cross the two.

The F1 colour in 2013 was cream.

In 2014, the F2s threw cream, apricot/salmon on cream, scarlet, lavender, orange and burnt orange. Also, that year Alec Cave decided to stop exhibiting and I offered him some of the F2s to grow. He agreed on the proviso that I came down at flowering time and selected what I wanted to grow on. At home, I had selected 12C2, a paler burnt orange, but this burnt in the sun and broke up.

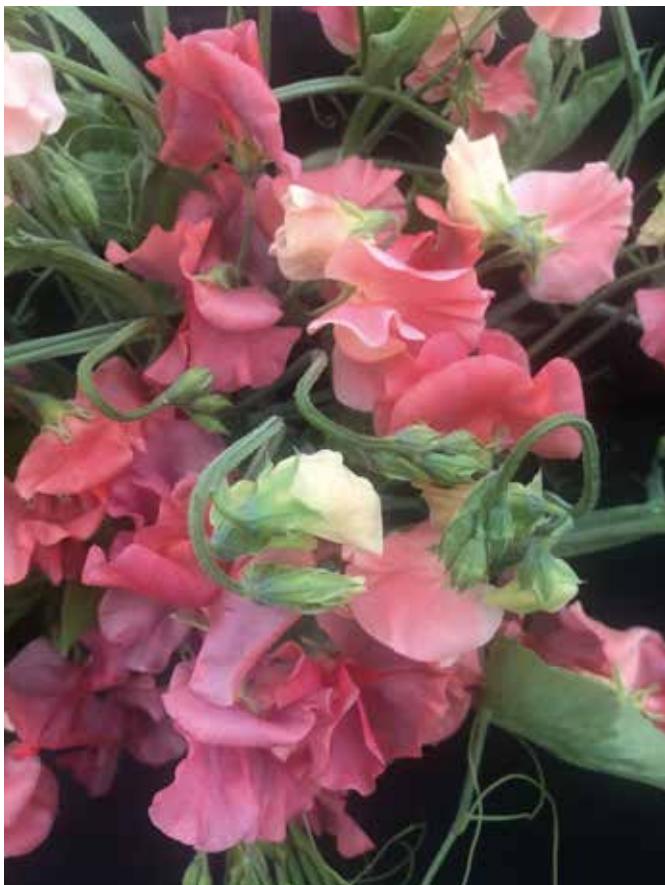
On a visit to Alec's, going round the seedlings, we came across a burnt orange. Alec's comment was “look at this horrible colour, it needs pulling up”. My reaction was “hold on a minute, this is very different colour; seed this one for me please”. A later visit from two florists confirmed my thoughts that it is a brilliant colour.

This was 12CA5, burnt orange and has a distinct orange keel which was, in 2015, grown on at home and came fixed in its first year, throwing fours. In 2016, it remained fixed, with many fours, lots of blooms and good growth.

In 2017, 12CA5 went to trial at Askham Bryan and Sparsholt. It was awarded AM for garden decoration and HC for exhibition at both trial grounds.

In 2018, it was sent to Kings Seeds for trial and in 2019 was given the name "Kings Ransom". My theory is the genes of Evening Glow and North Shore (blue bicolour) created this colour, but that is just my musings.

Lastly, only farm out F2 seed if you can reliably trust the grower and on the proviso that they will seed your selection. It is always a risk and I have done this on only one occasion. What you can do to grow more F2s is put some in the freezer to sow at a later date. I would do this only if your F2s have a good break of colour.



Kings Ransom, bred by Andrew Beane

THE FUTURE OF THE NATIONAL SHOWS: YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

The Committee

In the 2025 Spring Bulletin (page 22) the Committee posed some questions about the future of our national shows to get your thoughts and comments. We received several responses. This was also followed up by three highly engaging breakout sessions at the subsequent AGM. Several important points were raised by members. One common theme that emerged is the need for more help on specific work strands, whether that is just some willing extra hands to move tables, or some help on more technical issues like taking/editing a video of our shows.

The idea of this short article is to list a few of the areas discussed at the AGM where we would welcome more help, either now or at some point in the future. If you think there are strands discussed below where you would like to become more involved in helping the Society, then please do get in touch (using Committee members' contact details in the Annual, the contact form on our website, or simply email us at hello@sweetpeas.org.uk)

Events/Shows

We try to keep an up-to-date list of events on our webpage, see <https://sweetpeas.org.uk/events/>

This helps in our mission to promote the sweet pea – in this case by advertising the shows of regional/local societies. But we might not know about all the sweet pea shows taking place. So, if you think you know of a flower show, or an event with significant sweet pea interest, then please do let us know. Flower shows don't have to be affiliated with the National Sweet Pea Society to be listed on our website. But please note, we only need to know about shows with a *significant* number of sweet pea classes, or interest, as we can't list all flower shows!

Photography classes

Following suggestions from several members, we may trial a class for a photo of sweet peas taken in the garden at our AGM next year (details to follow). This style of photography class may well find its way into our National Shows in future years, if there is support and resources allow. However, several members have expressed an interest in a fully 'online' sweet pea show, such as those run during the pandemic when physical shows weren't always possible. Such shows enable a wider range of members to take part, even if they live a long way from a physical show, or just because it's fun!

Our existing Committee members already have their hands full, so if you are itching to get involved in a fully online sweet pea flower show and would be prepared to help run it for the society, then we'd love to hear from you! An online show event would be in addition to our two physical shows. Some links to the Society's existing web and social media presence would be needed – as we would very much like this to be badged as a National Sweet Pea Society event. But you would need to manage the event and pick up any details in running a trial online show for us.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship is often suggested as a way of raising the revenue needed to fund our activities – notably the two national shows. But, as with most things, raising sponsorship requires some expertise and knowledge as well as some free time to do the necessary research and make contact with potential sponsors. Would you be willing to help find sponsorship for our shows or other events (possibly from outside the sweet pea world)? Please do let us know what you might like to do, before approaching anyone on the Society's behalf!

Videos of our shows

We would love to put out more videos of our favourite flower and will be trying to do more videos at our national shows in 2026 but more help would always be welcome. Would you like to offer any assistance in producing a video/s of the National (early or late) show, for use in our publicity on YouTube/Website etc. This might be a video of the staging, the judging process or the final displays – or all of the above! Please tell us if/how you might like to be involved.

Social Media

We already have a strong social media presence – see our Facebook, Instagram and X (formally twitter) posts. But we can always do more. Perhaps you would like to add to the Society's existing Social Media efforts or via other platforms? Please let us know any thoughts you have about expanding what we do, and on what platforms.

Venues

We have had lots of suggestions concerning future venues for our national shows – many of which sound like exciting possibilities. But a key requirement is having a local management team that can run such a show on behalf of the Society. This is the reason that recent shows have been located where they are – because we have enough 'local' members willing and able to manage an event. If you would like to join one of those existing teams, or potentially help manage a future show yourself, then we would love to hear from you. We have lots of experience we can share, so you would not be on your own – there is plenty of shadowing/training we can offer if you are interested in managing a show for the Society.

If you would like to propose a possible future venue for a National Sweet Pea Show (2027 onwards), then we would eventually need you to provide a plan for managing the event – for example, some idea of whether you already have a local team that could help you run the show, or how you could form one. Please specify any likely location and time frame, and any thoughts on what training you would like/need to get things up and running.

Assisting a show management team

You may not want to take on the big task of managing the whole show, but you may just want to get involved and join one of the existing show management teams – whether that is shifting tables and vases, setting up and laying out the show tables, acting as a steward or judge, helping with show administration, offering a few hours to work on a society stand/desk, or helping to clear up! You would be very welcome – you don't have to be planning to enter the show as an exhibitor to help out!

Workshops (and mentoring) for members new to the National Sweet Pea Society

Julia Beardmore

In the North West, we have for several years held workshops early in the year for both new and 'not yet' members, to help them with growing Sweet Peas; starting with sowing seeds, through pricking out, stopping and hardening off, to planting out. Each person has been able to work through the process with their own seeds and are able to take home a tray of healthy plants ready to plant out. We also provide a leaflet for each session to help them with each process and to keep for future years.



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North West Region

Sweet Pea Workshops

Session 5.
Planting and Supporting



www.sweetpeas.org.uk

Warning: Seeds and plants are not edible

31/1/24

Information is provided on how to prepare your growing area ready for planting out; soil structure is discussed, along with suggestions for feeding their Sweet Peas. They will also be given advice on various structures for supporting their Sweet Peas. Further guidance can be provided for those interested in Cordon growing.

The benefit of holding these workshops has been that we have encouraged members to continue to grow and, in some cases, to exhibit. Refreshingly, a good number of non-members have joined the Society through these and gone on to become volunteers for events, shows and displays.

It would be fabulous if our experienced growers and exhibitors could also consider being a mentor for anyone who is keen to learn. Many already do this quietly without fanfare but there might be the odd person who has never considered passing on their valuable knowledge to other less experienced gardeners. If you think that you might be able to do this, then please email me on membership@sweetpeas.org.uk

Any new or less experienced growers, who would be interested in the potential benefits they could gain from having a mentor or guiding hand, you can also email me as above. Hopefully we will then be able to make the introductions between potential mentors and students.

5. Planting and Supporting

5.1 Naturally Grown (Bush)

Sweet Peas for decorative purposes are usually grown naturally (ie the number of shoots are not restricted). As the many shoots form a clump it is generally referred to as 'bush growing'.

If we assume that the types are climbing and not dwarf they will need supports which they will naturally climb by using their tendrils. Any form of trellis work is usually suitable and various types of netting can be used (usually against a wall or fence). In the case of netting it needs to be securely supported at the top and the bottom and occasionally it is necessary to have fixings at medium height, as the plants in wind and rain are quite heavy and will pull down an unsecure net.



Intermediate varieties need the same growing medium but with shorter supports. Dwarf varieties need no support at all and will grow very successfully in low troughs.



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Examples of the excellent material within the information booklets

I hope this will encourage more members to be able to successfully grow and enjoy wonderful, Sweet Peas and maybe have the confidence to exhibit in future years; after all, as people sadly become less able to grow and exhibit, unless other younger people come along to take their places, another once thriving pastime will be lost.

Many of the people who have been through the North West workshops (as I did in my early years of being a member and learnt so much) are now growing lovely Sweet Peas. A good number are now confidently showing at local and regional shows and some also at the Nationals.

Please consider giving it a try during this coming season.

Sweet Peas in Fiction

Roger Parsons

The Society receives a range of different enquiries from people. An unusual enquiry in October 2023 from Sylvia Lott in Germany was passed to me because I hold the Society's archives. I have lost her original message but she was asking for information on the 1911 Daily Mail competition to form part of a work of fiction she had in mind.

I replied to tell her:

There is a book about the competition which you might find a used copy cheaply online. It is "A Bunch of Sweet Peas" written by Henry Donald, published in 1988 by Canongate, Edinburgh. The grower of the 1911 winning blooms, Denholm Fraser, wrote a book on how he grew his Sweet Peas and this too can be found in used book shops. It is "Sweet Peas: How to grow the perfect flower", written by Denholm Fraser, published by Amalgamated Press, Southwark, London 1911.

Several other contemporary books are available on how they grew Sweet Peas in that era. Another source on the competition itself is to search through archives of the Daily Mail newspaper, which published extensively on the competition because they sponsored it. Specialist publications of that era might also contain information on the competition, for example the Gardeners' Chronicle. I don't know of any German language sources from that era.

Sylvia's reply included the following:

Thank you so much for your quick response! I already have downloaded the audible-Book, spoken by Judi Dench, from "A Bunch of Sweet Peas" and started to listen. In addition to the history and the how-to-grow-aspects, I am also looking for inspiration around a fictional, more present (currently) Love Story, that one could somehow connect with the story from 1911. In your life as a Sweet Peas-expert, I could imagine, you may have witnessed or have heard something of that kind of story...? I would be very delighted to get knowledge of that. Even a glimpse could be helpful, little sparkles for the Fantasy are mostly welcome...😊

I was unable to inspire her, replying:

I am sorry to disappoint you but all my life I read history, never fiction. I am someone who organises facts and am not a creative person. So, I have nothing further to offer you in order to spark your creative process. We all have our strengths and weaknesses.



After that, I had completely forgotten about the correspondence until a message in August 2025 from our Secretary, Carole Tate, telling me she had received a book, addressed to me, titled "Duftwicke en Sommer", "Sweet Peas in Summer".

The Penguin books website provides a summary of the book, which is written in German:

A small villa on Borkum, fragrant sweet peas, and two love stories in turbulent times...

England 1911: A Daily Mail competition for the most beautiful Sweet Pea bouquet thrills the country. Young Anni enters, dreaming of traveling the world with the prize money. Lord John Ramsgate, engaged to her employer's daughter, reports on the contest. Their paths cross again and again....

Borkum 2024: Mariecke is now divorced and has moved to an island cottage. "Villa Cupani" is emblazoned on the gable in old-fashioned lettering. From her neighbour Aleine, she learns what it's all about – a woman named Anni once lived here, who discovered her love for sweet peas in England....

This appears to be a great book for any members of the Society who are German-speaking fans of Barbara Cartland and her ilk. It must be very rare for Sweet Peas to feature as an important part of a fictional book. Does anyone know of another example?



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