



**MISTY ISLE DEDICATED GARDENERS' EPISTLE  
JULY 2019**



[www.skyegardeningociety.org.uk](http://www.skyegardeningociety.org.uk)

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello Members

It seems a long time since I began this letter!

I hope that you are all reaping the fruits of your gardening labours.

There were to have been five events since the last edition of the Midge. Unfortunately, the basket weaving workshop had to be cancelled as there were just three people interested, one of whom was me. We try to find activities in which members would like to be involved and this obviously wasn't one of them. Even moving the event back a week from our usual date (to avoid clashing with Christmas Fayres) didn't help.

However, we did have a very successful Gardeners' Question Time. More about this in article following this letter.

The Society's Annual General Meeting and Spring Show were back in April, more of which later in the Editorial section. Luckily, we found one new member that made up the required numbers for a quorum.

A wet, but well supported, Plant Sale and Open Gardens took place in May, showing again that it's good to connect these events in a small area. Many thanks to everyone who opened their gardens and all those who braved the weather to attend.

Finally, I would like to record my sadness at the passing of Colin

McCormack. His wife Kathleen was a very active Membership Secretary supported by Colin, and both of them worked hard for the Society over many years. My belated condolences, on behalf of the Society, go to Kathleen.

I hope to see you all at the Flower and Produce Show on Saturday, 17 August.

Kind regards

Rose Hill

### **Gardeners' Question Time 26 Jan 2019**

This year we were delighted to hear (from David Maclean) that Carole Baxter, of Beechgrove Garden, would be on our panel. Of course, this treat was dependent on good enough weather for Carole to travel from Aberdeen, and so it was.

Thankfully our regular experts agreed to make up the panel, which meant that we had five esteemed gardeners altogether to take questions from the floor, these being David Maclean, Calina MacDonald, Andrew Peters, Ron Johnston and Carole Baxter.



Archie kindly stepped down from chairing the meeting permitting David to organise the event. This included venturing into the audience with his roving microphone. I felt that this worked very well and with a large audience of 60, it meant that everyone could easily have their say, including several professional gardeners that were seated among the audience. To my knowledge these were Tim Godfrey (retired), Una Clare (Dunvegan) and Ingrid Galbraith (Dunvegan). Sorry if I've missed anyone out. The resulting discussions were very lively as opinions differed on some points.

Unfortunately, Jo-Ann Cherry missed at least half of the discussion since she was, almost single handed, preparing the refreshments. A number of members donated scrummy cakes.

Thanks then to David, Jo-Ann, the bakers, all our experts especially Carole for the extra travel, and those of the committee who participated. All this effort, on one of our biennial charity events, including the raffle raised £449.82. So, a big thank to those attending for your generosity. £232, less £20.00 travel expenses went to Carole's chosen charity for retired gardeners, the Perennial Trust.

Rose Hill

### **UP BEFORE THE "BEAK".**

When we moved to Skye in 2015, we knew that our garden here was going to be very different to the lush sub-tropical garden we had left behind in South Somerset, but we were prepared for that. What we had not been prepared for, however, was the lack of birdlife on our patch. For us the birds have always been a big part of what we would like to see in our garden. Could we face the prospect of no dawn chorus, no baby birds squeaking and squabbling or pestering and pursuing their poor parents in the hope of scrounging an easy meal? No, we could not, so we were determined to make the garden more attractive to our feathered friends.

We set about pruning the lanky overgrown shrubs and reclaiming the garden soil which had all been covered over by assorted weed suppressing materials including black plastic, carpet and underlay. We planted a lot of ground cover for the birds and made sure that the plants would provide seeds and berries for them to eat. We also mucked out the ponds to give the birds clean shallow areas for bathing. In short, we did everything we could think of to encourage birds to visit. They do say that you should be careful what you wish for as you might just get your wish! We had not thought about that when we embarked on our bird resort.

After many months of hard-labour we had a garden fit for birds. However, we still had to get the birds to notice this, so we decided to start putting out food, just to get them to come and inspect the place and, in no time at all, they started to arrive.

We were absolutely thrilled that the garden was teeming with birds. Birds were singing, chattering and in no time were breeding. Soon the place was full of the sound of hungry chicks demanding food, so we continued to put food out. At first it had been just a bit of bird seed, in feeders, with a bit sprinkled underneath. But, as time went by, more and more birds arrived and bred. The feeding regime had now become a fine art. Seed for the finches, nyger seed for the goldfinches, sunflower hearts for the collared doves, suet for the blackbirds and meal worms for the robins and wrens.

All this catering to special diets was costing a fortune, but we were happy to pay. Feeding our little friends each morning was a lovely leisurely affair which gave us great pleasure. That is until the arrival of 'The Beak'.

The Beak became our collective noun for the flock of some sixty or so rock doves, who just turned up one day and moved in. At first The Beak would arrive after our birds had already been fed and would vacuum up any leftovers. However, they soon cottoned on to what they missing out on, so they then started to turn up just that little bit earlier. To compensate for this, we took to feeding our birds a little earlier. The Beak seemed to have been dealt with! The Beak still came each day, but seemed to disappear elsewhere for the best part of the day, returning only for a brief evening visit before flying off to roost.

The Beak, for all its daft appearance, is a very smart entity indeed. Over time, the morning visits became earlier and earlier to coincide with the food and the length of the stay became longer. In the end, The Beak was staying in the garden all day and all evening until nightfall. Availing itself of all the facilities, stirring up the pond

water, splashing about, stomping all over our flower pots, chilling out or sunbathing on the lawn, preening on the decking, billing and cooing and worst of all engaging in activities certain to generate yet more Beaks.

To deal with this we devised a strategy to get rid of The Beak for a short time at midday so that we could sneak a meal to our little birds whose breakfast had been stolen. We would chase them until they flew away out of sight, then we would go around the garden stashing food under bushes where The Beak wouldn't see. This did work for a while until we noticed that The Beak had been leaving spies on the rooftop. These spies were watching where we had put the food and would soon signal to rest of the flock that food was available and where.

To deal with this we took to getting up to feed the birds before first light which in the winter months involved layers of clothing, welly boots, a woolly hat and a torch. It soon became apparent that this would work only as long as our birds got up as early as we had, but at least we gave them the chance.

What we have learned from all this is that, most garden birds do not care to rise particularly early, especially in winter. Even if they can see us out there in the gloom, drowning in the rain and hail or being flattened by the wind as we put out their food. Although they do get up nice and early in the summer. However, we are not getting up at 2.00 am to feed them. The rock doves, however, are always ready and waiting whatever the time. Conclusion, no matter how hard we try we are never going to be Up before "The Beak"!!!

**Lindsey Brooke**

## **YOUNG PEOPLE'S CORNER**



Spring is here again and time to start planning what we are

going to grow this season. It is time to decide what and where we are going to plant.

You may be lucky enough to have your own patch in the garden, but if not, you can still grow many things in containers and pots including vegetables, even potatoes can be grown in large pots, along with carrots, beans, peas and courgettes.

The Word Search this issue has ten fruits or vegetables that can be successfully grown in pots. Can you spot them?

S	Q	W	E	R	T	Y	U	I	O	P	A
E	S	G	O	O	S	E	B	E	R	R	Y
I	D	F	G	H	J	K	L	Z	X	E	C
R	P	E	P	P	E	R	S	V	B	B	N
R	M	Q	E	W	R	E	T	C	E	M	Y
E	U	I	A	S	O	D	F	A	G	U	H
B	J	K	S	T	L	Z	N	R	X	C	V
W	B	N	A	M	Q	S	E	R	W	U	T
A	U	M	I	O	P	A	S	O	D	C	F
R	O	G	H	P	O	T	A	T	O	E	S
T	J	K	L	Z	X	C	V	S	B	N	M
S	E	T	T	E	G	R	U	O	C	Q	W

The answers are at the end of the last page.

Have you ever thought of growing peas in a pot at home, or at school and then maybe entering them in the Skye Garden

Society Summer Show or maybe you would just to eat them? Of course, you may prefer a different vegetable such as beans. Like peas, beans also need support like peas.

To grow peas in a container you will need:

- Large container – the bigger the better with good drainage
- Potting soil or compost
- Fertilizer
- Peas
- Gravel or small stones
- Canes, stakes or sticks to support the peas

### **Preparing Your Container for Peas**

Place enough gravel to cover the hole in the bottom of your pot or container. If there is no hole in the base of container you will need to make one for drainage.

If your container is very large, you can fill the bottom third with clean plastic containers, soda bottles, or anything that will take up some space, but won't impede water flow. This can save you money on potting soil or compost and make your container lighter if you need to move it. Fill the container to 2 to 3 inches from the top rim with your growing compost.

Create a support for the potted peas with bamboo poles, stakes or short branches from a pruned tree or shrub and set into the centre of the pot. Space the pea seeds 2 inches apart and 1 inch beneath the surface. Water in thoroughly and top with a 1-inch layer of mulch, like compost or wood chips. Keep the seeds in a lightly shaded area until germination (9-13 days) at which time you should move them to a full sun exposure.

### **Caring for Peas in Pots:**

Keep an eye on whether the plant is too dry and water until the

soil is moist but not drenched to prevent root rot. Don't over water when in bloom, as it may interfere with pollination. Once the peas have sprouted, fertilize twice during the growing season, using a low nitrogen fertilizer. Be sure to protect your container grown peas from frost by moving them indoors. The peas are ready for picking when the pods look swollen and feel firm, and ready to eat either cooked, or uncooked. They are delicious in a salad and if not eaten they can be frozen for use later in the year.



Maybe you would prefer to plant flowers in pots so here are some ideas for both flowers and for different pots:

## Choosing Flowers

The best flowers for containers can be found in the “annual” or “bedding plants” section of the garden centre. While they only live one summer, they'll bloom the entire season. Other flowering plants (such as perennials, bulbs, and shrubs) may be blooming beautifully right now, but the flowers will be gone in a few weeks. Read the labels to be sure your chosen spot offers the right light and temperature conditions for the plants.

Here is a selection of flowers suitable for pots. However, there are missing letters in their names and you have to fill in the gaps with the right letter to see what the flower is. The letters missing are either: a, e, i, o, or u. For example: B-g- n - - s are the flowers known as Begonias by adding the e, o i and a. The answers are also on the last page.

1. G- r-n- -m s.
2. F-r n s.
3. M-r-g-l d s.
4. P-t-n- -s
5. V-r b-n-
6. H-r b s
7. P - n s - - s
8. D - f f - d - l s
9. T - l - p s
10. C - s m - s

**Jo ann Cherry**

**EDITORIAL**

**AGM**

The AGM of any organisation is the one entity from which the authority of the executive officers and committee members, to act on behalf of its membership, is derived. Without that authority being granted, on a yearly basis, the executive officers technically no longer have the powers granted to them by the constitution and thus cannot act on behalf of the membership. This year, initially, due to there being insufficient members present to form a quorum, meant the meeting could not take place. Fortunately, at this point we gained one new member and thus a quorum.

It is appreciated that members of any organisation, such as Gardening Societies, join for their own reasons and that is an entirely good enough reason and should always be respected. Furthermore, it is understood that the mention of an AGM can get members fleeing to the hills to avoid getting cajoled on to the committee, again a good enough reason for individual members.

Having said the above, I respectfully submit, that it is more than reasonable for the committee to expect reasonable support from the membership. Especially at times when this support is required to further the interests of the Society. Hence, on behalf of the committee I would request that the membership reflect on this matter and their support to the committee. Without adequate support the Society cannot continue. I am sure we all wish the Society continue.

I am pleased to advise that the next edition of the MIDGE will see the start of a series of articles by Lindsey Brooke on herbs. If there are any more of you budding authors out there, I will be pleased to receive your article(s).

**Tom Smit**

**MINGINISH OPEN GARDENS AND ANNUAL PLANT SALE**

## ON 25 MAY

Looking at the forecast the night before the Minginish Open Gardens event and annual plant sale, my heart sank – heavy rain all day!! Well, tomorrow will be a wash-out I said to myself, but we had to go along anyway, just on the off-chance other members would make the effort.

It would appear that we gardeners are a hardy lot! I and the other committee members present were pleasantly surprised to see around 30 plus members/non-members who ventured out in the pouring rain to visit the six open gardens and buy plants. In fact, the Plant Sale was the Society's second most profitable in recent years as around £230.00 was taken.

Maggie and Jeremy Seal kindly volunteered to host the Plant Sale at "Selkie Lodge". They borrowed a gazebo, through Jess Donaldson, from Friends of Portree Hospital so those manning the plant stall managed to stay dry. Maggie and Jeremy's garden overlooks Loch Bracadale and they have a lovely "sundowner terrace" surrounded by colourful plants which, I'm told, is an ideal place to relax after a hard day in the garden. There is also a large polytunnel which was a welcome respite from the rain, as well as a "bothy" where hot refreshments were available as well as live feed to a great tits' nest complete with young.

Just down the road was Ampa Thomson's garden which contains a mixture of shrubs, trees and flowers. Ampa has problems with deer so she had styled a scarecrow just off the entrance to the driveway which seems to have had the desired effect. Ampa was also attempting to grow herbs but, at the time of the visit, were struggling with lack of heat.

Denise Ghalebi's garden was next on our list. The garden comprised a mixture of shrubs, trees and flowers. The front garden is split into two areas – one with grass surrounded by flowers beds, the other a "zen" garden which contains acers, a Buddha and a small fountain.

The back garden was on a slope and contained a variety of shrubs.

Lyn and Mike Shields' garden was a complete contrast to the other gardens we visited. It also overlooks Loch Bracadale, and, as a consequence, is very exposed. Windbreaks have been established, but their mantra is "self-sufficiency" and recycling which includes old oil storage tanks, tyres, with even a disused boat being used as a protective growing area! There are some shrubs in the garden, but their main focus is growing vegetables in raised beds and in greenhouses.

Sue Tate's garden is large and well-established that incorporates a large variety of trees, shrubs, herbaceous and pond areas. It was very colourful and it was lovely to wander around the rhododendron/woodland walk.

Patricia and David Oliver's garden incorporates trees, herbaceous borders and a vegetable plot. One area of the garden is laid out in a levada style using gabions which is very effective.

Naturally, all the gardens visited were different and reflected their owners' style and it was very interesting to see how they had been developed. Everyone should be congratulated on the work they have done and being so welcoming.

Unfortunately, due to the poor weather, no photographs were taken as they would not have done the gardens justice.

**Alison Smit**

## **A BLACK ISLE GARDEN TOUR WHAT'S NOT TO LOVE?**

Seventeen members, complete with five cars headed, following tea, coffee and biscuits in Ledgowan Lodge, for the Black Isle and Munro's Garden Centre where we were due to have lunch and a wander round the plants and exhibits. It had been a few

years since we last visited Munro's and were pleasantly surprised at the changes that had been made. The plant sections had been pleasantly extended and the range of plants on show increased. Overall the impression it made was a garden centre that had gone up market. Talking to the owner over a potential purchase he advised that a further extension was being planned.

Our first visit was to Poyntzfield Herb Nursery that was to include a guided tour at a cost of £2.00 per person. So much more than just a nursery, Poyntzfield is also a garden where over 400 varieties of herbs and wild fruits can be viewed growing in situ. The plants can be seen at different stages of growth so you can get an idea of what the final



size and appearance will be. Many easy to walk paths meander through the grounds so that you can appreciate the plants from all angles, and the lovely backdrop of tall green hedging brings to life all the different shapes and colours to be seen. Many of the plants there are not what you might necessarily think of as herbs. Indeed, many of us will already have some of these plants in our gardens, unaware that they are herbs and bought purely because of their attractive

flowers or interesting foliage. Others were a complete surprise such as the Oyster Plant (*Mertensia Maritima*) a low grower with pretty azure blue flowers which would grace any rockery but which is, in fact, a culinary herb much in vogue in restaurants. Even if you do not have or want a herb garden as such, there were still lots of plants there to interest you.

Poyntzfield is the most northerly herb nursery in the UK, so it is probably safe to say that if the plants will grow well here then they should do o.k. on Skye. Our guide, the owner Duncan Ross, (see picture) did say that all the plants there were fully hardy and since the 1970s have all been grown organically.

Our tour of the nursery was most enjoyable and our guide was happy to answer questions and educate us a bit on the history of herbs, especially those with a connection to Scottish folklore and traditions. I think we could have listened to Duncan all day without losing interest, but our time was limited. Fortunately, Duncan had available several well written and illustrated guides for sale as a reminder of our visit. Following the tour, we were free to raid the many rows of huge tables laden with all sorts of tempting plants for sale and everyone was keen to buy that plant which had caught their eye. So came the end of the visit and it was off to the garden at Brackla wood for tea, coffee and cake.

Our second visit on our Black Isle tour took us to Brackla Wood, a private garden situated near Culbokie. The garden was part of the Scotland's gardening scheme charity and hence subject to an entry donation. Prior to starting the tour, we enjoyed afternoon tea, coffee and cake served under a gazebo. It was a very nice way to start the visit. The donation at £4.50 per person was value for money.

As the name suggests it is a woodland garden with large, mature conifers providing shelter and shade for the underplanted lawns, with beds of attractive perennials and shrubs. Upon gazing up into the crown of a fine scots pine, we noticed a large dense object hanging from a high branch, gently swinging slightly in the breeze. It was an exceptionally large example of a 'witches' broom', which must have been about 6 – 8 feet long, and possibly 4 feet in diameter, like a huge lantern suspended high in the tree. Witches' brooms are not uncommon in some types of tree, notably birch which sometimes have spherical, dense objects amongst the branches. They are caused by a continual division of the growth cells at the tip of a shoot, leading to a proliferation of tangled twigs. I worried that this one was getting so heavy that it could possibly snap off one day, hopefully not when a group of gardeners was standing underneath, admiring it!

Witches' brooms can develop from a variety of causes. Insect activity is one, but other causes include virus or bacterial infection. Many types of tree can be affected, but the one we are most likely to see in Skye is the birch variety, as mentioned.

**Lindsey Brooke**

**Tim Godfrey**

**Tom Smit**

## **2019 SPRING SHOW**

This year's Show was held in Dunvegan Village Hall in conjunction with the Society's AGM. In another first for the society, perhaps there are members out there with longer Society memories who will tell me differently,



we had a sale stall by courtesy of Lusan Plants manned by Ron and Rae Johnston, who also managed the judging. It was good to see Ron

again given he had to call off judging last year's Spring Show due to ill health.

Following the success of last year's debut Show at Minginish Hall, it was pleasing to see that the same high standard of entries was maintained. On a disappointing note there were no young people's entries. I believe this could be the first time this has occurred.

This year's winners were, in 1<sup>st</sup> place Alison Smit; 2<sup>nd</sup> place Lindsey Brook and 3<sup>rd</sup> place Tom Smit.

Once again, a big thank goes to all our exhibitors for their dedication and effort throughout the year without you there would be no Show. Please continue to support the Show and why not encourage a friend or neighbour to come along and enter some of the classes. Parents/grandparents please encourage your children/grandchildren to enter as many classes as possible – after all, they are the future of our Show.

Finally, thanks must be made to our judges Ron Johnston and Jess Donaldson. Your support to the Society year after year is valued and also without you there would be no Show.

**Tom Smit**

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

17 August: Flower and Produce Show in The Venue, Portree High School. Entries between 10.30 a.m. and 12.15 p.m. Prize giving at 3.00 p.m. Refreshments available

5 October: Lunch, Quiz and Plant Exchange at Viewfield House, Portree at 12.30 p.m.  
**£10.00 per person**

9 November: Pruning workshop with David Maclean in Wendy Clark's garden in Idrigill. Timings to be advised

## **Alison Smit**

Solutions for the word search: cucumber, peas, beans, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, carrots, courgette, strawberries and gooseberry.

The flowers with missing letters: Geraniums, Ferns, Marigolds, Petunias, Verbena, Herbs. Pansies, Daffodils, Tulips, Cosmos.