



Heart of England in Bloom Newsletter

May 2020

Greetings

How could we have imagined, even a month ago, what would become 'normal'? It is astonishing how quickly we have adapted to staying at home and, in my case, how quickly we have learnt so much new technology - Zoom, Hangout, House Party and so many other ways to keep in touch with each other. Thank goodness.

It seems that Bloomers are still busy. Even though practical, community gardening is difficult, you are certainly not idle and there will be many great stories to tell in the next few months. Keep them coming and please keep in touch.

Carol

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Some good news first. Amberol is continuing to support the Heart of England in Bloom this year and we thank them very much for this. The managing director has sent the following message:

We were very sad to temporarily pause production, but it is the right thing to do. We are still very much in business and available to customers with a query or who want to discuss future planting plans or production requirements. Our management team is also hard at work taking this unexpected opportunity to do some planning. Any suggestions that you have would be gratefully received. We are constantly reviewing the situation and aim to open our factory doors again as soon as it is safe to do so. By the time you read this, we hope to have an opening date, so do keep an eye on our [website](#), newsletter and [social media](#) pages.

Free support for you from Amberol

- Our updated website has descriptions of all our products from self-watering hanging baskets to Percy Penguin litter bins.
- Our [community hub](#) has lots of interesting articles to inspire you.
- We also still have a few free tips booklets available on request by emailing sales@amberol.co.uk:
 - How to excel at Britain in Bloom
 - The Amberol guide to container gardening
 - Top tips for securing sponsorship for planters and bins
- Keep in touch with other In Bloom communities via our [Buzz in Bloom](#) Facebook page where members exchange ideas, post questions and offer advice. Just search 'Buzz in Bloom' on Facebook.
- And of course, Amberol's Twitter and Facebook pages have up to date information, facts and advice.
- If you don't currently receive our email newsletter, do sign up on our website to keep up to date with Amberol events, news and competitions.



Coming soon from Amberol

We are putting the finishing touches to our 'Best Plant-Ups' guide containing examples of successful displays from Amberol customers as far afield as Belgium.

Our annual photo competition is running this year, but in a different format. Details will be announced soon, so, please do send in any photos of Amberol planters that you see when on your daily exercise.

In the meantime, if we can help you in any way, please do call us on 01773 830 930, visit our website or email sales@amberol.co.uk

Good luck to you all and stay safe

Patience Atkinson-Gregory, managing director at Amberol



Heart of England in Gloom (or not?)

In Gloom? Yes actually! My wife Lesley and I, and all our over 70's friends are self-isolating and were on a bit of a 'high' arranging home deliveries and adjusting to a new regime. But the high faded fast when we were still in week 1. How many more weeks to go?

Let me start with a disclaimer for there is neither medical nor even horticultural advice to be found in this brief contribution. What I do want to share are some personal reflections from our experience as judges and assessors and start thinking about ways in which we can lift some of that gloom.

After almost every judging visit we have found ourselves thinking not so much about the horticultural and environmental achievements, important though these are, but on the people we have met. Most of them are volunteers. They give up time and



energy, not just to please H of E in Bloom judges, but to enrich and serve their local communities. Won't it be wonderful when Covid19 is all over and groups of volunteers are reconstituted and everything is back to 'normal'?

But - and perhaps you guessed there was a 'but' coming - all that enthusiasm and community spirit could easily disappear or be redirected into other channels. This is worrying because, as I see it, 'In Bloom' activities are essentially social activities and once groups disband and routines are disrupted, it may not be as easy as we hoped for all of us to get back to 'normal'.

So, instead of spending the next umpteen weeks in gloom, we need to find ways in which these social networks can be sustained with all the ingenuity and tools at our disposal, whether they be phone calls, texts, emails, FaceTime, Skype and good old postal services.

Here are a few initial, and I'm afraid rather modest, thoughts. You know your own groups best and I'm sure you will come up with much better and more suitable ideas, but here are a few to start the ball rolling:

- A weekly contact bulletin with colleagues sharing their gardening tips, successes and failures.
- Gardening books, (there are quite a few of them around). Which ones would you recommend to others, and why?
- Encouraging colleagues to watch or listen to a specific TV or radio programme, perhaps Gardeners Question Time, and invite comments using the various communication facilities that are available.
- How about compiling a gardening quiz and sending that out to colleagues?

I'm sure you can improve upon these initial suggestions and why not send some of them to us for the Newsletter?.

Listening to Radio 4 the other day there was a brief interview with someone in Wuhan where the coronavirus began. I can't recall his exact words but essentially, he said that life had been terrible with so much sickness, death and disruption to everyday life. But in the middle of all this people began to rediscover the most important things in life. They were spending more time thinking about and contacting friends and family members and finding new ways to re-establish social networks.



Of course, every Thursday we can all go out to clap or bang our saucepans. You can also go outside and sing. If you are in the generation that remembers it, how about:

*"How many kinds of sweet flowers grow in an English country garden,
I'll tell you now have some that I know and those I miss you'll surely pardon."*

Or if, like Lesley and I, you prefer hardy perennials and have very little musical taste, how about:

"Hi Ho Silver Lining!"

There, that's not gloomy is it?

David Pritchard

Grow Social ?

As we know, the RHS theme for Britain in Bloom this year is Grow Social - just a bit tricky when we have to stay distanced. However, where I live in Moseley, Birmingham many of us are very lucky to have our own gardens and can use the time we have been given to work in them. An additional bonus was the wonderful weather over Easter, always a busy time for gardeners but not always with weather so conducive to gardening.

Another outcome of our confinement to home is the new networks of neighbours that have developed. Within a day of the lockdown, two people in my road had leafletted every house offering help to anyone who needed it. Within the next couple of days, this had developed into a very lively WhatsApp group with all sorts of offers of help, swaps and giveaways, including environmental and horticultural offers. One of the first commodities was tadpoles. Parents were asking for these so that children could observe them and have some science while they are off school. Next came the need for rainwater for the tadpoles so those of us with water butts were popular. One family offered turf as they had over-ordered when re-doing the lawn and I am delighted to now have a water lily on my pond after neighbours had cleared out theirs. There has also been a great seed giveaway both within our neighbourhood and from nearby Acocks Green in Bloom where the Scouts have provided veg seeds, for a donation. It's social, but different.

Carol Miller



Pebworth in Bloom

Just before social distancing became a way of life our volunteers responded to a call for help from our small local primary school. Could we help to tidy the car park area and turn it into a haven for wildlife ? We certainly could. A large patch of ground was cleared of pernicious weeds and re-stocked with insect-loving plants, all of which had been donated by a local nursery and by villagers. Bird boxes were erected in some tall trees and bundles of twigs and branches were placed in a quiet corner for hedgehogs. Over the past nine years Pebworth in Bloom has helped the school, with many projects which the school could not afford.

These range from a polythene greenhouse which doubles as an outdoor classroom, improving access to the Forest School, providing slabbing for the large and productive vegetable garden, organising nature treasure hunts and helping out at gardening club. This support has enabled the school to achieve a Green Flag and to be awarded an In Bloom Gold numerous times. Our volunteers have

been rewarded too by being invited to the annual school community lunch when all the food, cooked by the pupils, comes from their school garden - and delicious it is too !



Dursley

Here in Dursley we are saddened that the judges won't be round to see what we've been doing this year, so here's a sneak preview in anticipation of next year.

We had two areas close to our Market Hall which had very old and tired shrubs, plus a few Hellebore plants. We decided the whole area needed a makeover and set to change it all. We enlisted the support of a local gardener and started on the 'Big Dig' under the trees by the Market Hall. We cleared the areas of overgrown Skimmia and Cranesbill and retained the good plants to re-plant. The unwanted ones, a total of four 'ton' bags of green waste, went for composting.



The following week the two areas were re-planted, the smaller one with ornamental grasses (*Carex Evergold*), a few ornamental ferns and *Heuchera* which we had split from a larger one in the autumn. In the larger bed we planted in shades of pinks and reds a range of plants for pollinators including *Leucanthemum*, *Erysimum* (Winter Passion) a mixture of *Papaver*, *Aquilegia* and *Achillea*. We then added a few ornamental grasses for year-round colour. The finishing touch was adding bark to suppress weed growth and aid water retention. The shrubs by the wall were removed and climbing roses planted in their place.



The photos show the process from start to finish, we hope you like what we did. The only problem is that now our plans, like everyone else's, are on hold. We just hope that in the future we can return to what we love to do - keep Britain Blooming!



Friends of Dunchurch Society

Last year **Dunchurch village** excelled by winning Gold and Best in Category in the Heart of England in Bloom on its first time of entry. The village was then nominated to go forward to this year's National Finals. What a blow to find that the Finals are cancelled. However, as we might expect from Gold winners, the Village is still active and full of ideas. Below, Tony Kember, tells us some of the things the Friends of Dunchurch Society (FODS) are doing while we are locked down.

We're working away on our plans for 2021 BiB and H of E in Bloom and using our isolation time to start some in-bloom inspired Covid 19 initiatives that could pay off in 2021.



Initiative 1.

We are asking local gardeners to send in by Email photos of their gardens, plants, shrubs, flowers and wild life. The photos will appear in our FODS E-news daily. We launched this idea on 4 April and by the following Wednesday we had already received over 40 photos. We intend to encourage gardeners to send, updated photos of their garden through the Spring and Summer and hope we can keep the initial momentum going. Each photograph will be distributed via our FODS email database (296 friends) and will also be posted on our FODS Facebook page that has 605 friends. On current response we will be able to send a new photo every day for the foreseeable future.



Initiative 2.

We have set up a FODS ECO /BIO advisory group of experts to help local groups and organisations to embrace and implement wildlife-friendly management of their existing or proposed Eco and Bio schemes. FODS will take on the overall project management and coordinate with the land managers and the experts .

Initiative 3

in the near future we will start promoting a scheme to make gardens more wildlife friendly. For this we have linked with a FODS member who will produce a range of Wildlife-friendly Eco homes made from recycled materials and available at reasonable prices.

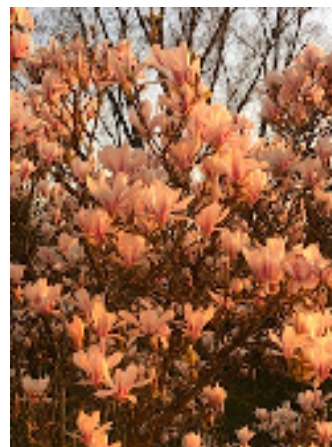
Initiative 4

We are promoting Blooming Barrows as individual projects rather than growing social at the moment. These projects are now subject to building supplies and to wholesalers being able to source and sell us the wheelbarrows.



Initiative 5

Our FODS village summer planting scheme for 2020 had been put into question by the lockdown. Plants are already ordered for 100 hanging baskets but the lockdown has put villagers off the idea of having these displays. Some members will implement the scheme without breaching social distancing guidelines but the lockdown sends a strong message that this sort of activity is irresponsible. We're waiting until the end of April and further Government guidance before giving up on the idea. A floral display in May/June would be a very welcome treat for the community.



Finally, our esteemed **Deputy Chair, Roger Bache** has clearly taken on the Lockdown gardening challenge very seriously. His lawn is no more and he seems to be focussing mainly on what will be on his dinner table later this year. Well done Roger!

