



Newsletter

WFGA

Winter 2016



News, workshops, plants

WRAGs update

New gardens

We welcome the following new gardens to the WRAG Scheme:

- * **The Old Vicarage**, Burley, Rutland.
- * **Finzean House**, Banchory, Aberdeenshire.
- * **Harrogate House**, Harrogate, Yorkshire.
- * **Tattingstone Place**, Tattingstone, Suffolk.
- * **Church Lane**, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire.
- * **Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens**, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham.

Chairman's report

I'm sure you all enjoyed the glorious autumn colour this year, along with the brilliant crop of berries, hips and haws. I feel I have come to appreciate trees even more this year – especially after attending the WFGA Trees workshop at Batsford Arboretum, a fascinating day.

On visiting Bodenham Arboretum later, in early November, to view all the autumn colour, I found myself noticing the trees for their other qualities, too. An arboretum, with so many different trees in close proximity to each other, is a good way to focus on their differences – bark, colour, texture, shape – all fascinating. Yet sometimes one tree in silhouette, standing alone in the corner of a field or garden or above a hedgerow, can provide just as much interest.

Don't forget to appreciate trees in winter, too. Get yourselves out there once the leaves have fallen and look at trees in all their bare glory. Look around in any garden you may be working in and pay more attention to the trees – I bet you will find making a closer inspection most rewarding.

Debbie Barber, Chairman

Investing in the future of gardening

Deborah Williams, owner of Armscote Manor in Warwickshire, has been an enthusiastic supporter of the WFGA for nearly 20 years. She talked to us about her lifelong love of gardening and her belief in the WRAG scheme as a way of changing lives

“Substantial changes have been made in a relatively short time,” observes Deborah Williams, reflecting on the changes she has overseen at Armscote Manor. “We have a Head Gardener, a Head Groundsman and a trainee or apprentice, plus three part-time staff and they are all kept busy!”

The Jacobean Manor house, which was originally the home of the wool merchant and Quaker, John Halford, is situated in grounds of 44 acres. “I was brought up with a big garden,” explains Deborah, “so when we moved here 25 years ago, I didn’t feel daunted by the state of the grounds, which were substantially run down. Instead, I set about creating something new.”

She did this with the help of Dan Pearson, who was in the early stages of his career as a garden designer, and quickly grasped Deborah’s desire for a formal layout with informal planting. Over time, the Williams family extended the formal and informal gardens, creating a lake, heritage orchard, nutteries, canal, herbaceous borders and a wind garden. They also planted over 15,000 trees to provide shelter for ground nesting birds and other wildlife – conservation is dear to Deborah’s heart. “We also have 92 Portland rare breed sheep,” she says. “It maintains the tradition with the wool trade which led to the establishment of the house.”



Massed *Rudbeckia* form a swathe of gold in front of the summer house at Armscote Manor

A close involvement with WFGA

During her time at Armscote Manor, Deborah has formed a close association with the WFGA – indeed, it was through the WFGA’s Jane Lipington that she became acquainted with Dan Pearson. Over the years, Deborah has welcomed 15 WRAG trainees at Armscote, and sponsored four more at Kensington Palace and Hampton Court. “I am a patron of the charity Historic Royal Palaces,” she explains, “and I felt that I particularly wanted to support their gardens. Sponsoring a trainee is my way of doing that for them.”

“We take our training very seriously,” says Deborah, “and by the same token, we only take on people who are serious about making a career.” By that, she means that they do not treat trainees as ‘cheap labour’, but instead invest the time of the Head Gardener, Gwyn Perry (who has been at Armscote for 11 years), in helping trainees learn as much as possible during their year. In return, they are careful to select trainees



The lake at Armscote Manor

who are committed- and indeed all but one of their former trainees are now gardeners.

“We host a lunch every two years or so, to keep in touch with our trainees,” says Deborah. “This is a good time to catch up and see what is going on in the gardens. So many have gone on to do interesting things – setting up their own businesses, working in historic gardens, designing gardens – one is even now working for *Which?* magazine as a gardener on their trials! I’m very proud to have helped all these people change their lives in this way.”

Planning for the future

While there are no plans for big changes at Armscote at the moment – the team are busy consolidating the estate’s existing features – autumn is always an exciting time of year for Gwyn. “There comes a point where plants have taken over and need to be brought in hand, or where we decide to substitute one cultivar for another, so this is the time of year to rethink things,” she says. “Even small changes lead to new ideas – for example, a new fence in the woodland area allowed us to try new planting up against it.”

The garden’s heavy blue and white lias clay is a challenging medium, however, and not everything will grow well. “We usually just try a few new plants before investing in 50 or so,” says Gwyn. Other changes are dictated by Deborah’s own tastes, which have evolved over time: “Years ago, we had fields of *Verbena bonariensis*, which Deborah disliked en masse!” Gwyn remembers. “We took them all out – but now we are reintroducing them into different beds – Deborah has come to like them in smaller quantities and in different locations.”

Recently Armscote Manor has invested time in two apprentices in conjunction with Moreton Morrell College. This commitment is taken as seriously as the WRAG scheme. Deborah explained she felt it was time to give assistance to a young person in a different way.

Deborah would recommend garden owners look in to the WRAGS scheme seriously. The support given by the WFGA to both trainees and garden owners is very helpful, and the scheme not only helps the trainee but is also a personally worthwhile thing to do. The qualities required for both the apprentices and the trainees are the same: “They must be able to listen, learn and work as a team, and this so far has brought success,” says Gwyn.

Esther Wolff, Editor

www.armscotemanor.co.uk

Meet the Trustees

Ever wondered what a WFGA Trustee does? Andrew Branford White explains what the role means for him and what has been achieved since he joined

I became a Trustee in 2014, at the suggestion of Vivienne Hayday, my local WFGA Regional Manager whom I met when she came to the Great Haseley Horticultural Society to talk about bees. She mentioned that she was involved with this charity I had never heard of, the WFGA. I asked if I could take on a trainee and my involvement with the organisation started from there.

Like many WFGA trainees, I am a career changer; I now run my own garden design business, having spent most of my working life in advertising and marketing. My specialist area is direct marketing – testing and measuring data to determine what kind of advertising activity produces the best return on investment. This approach is well suited to any organisation which has members and membership subscriptions – that is, an ongoing relationship with customers, as compared with casual ‘one-off’ transactions. Which is why it suits the WFGA.

Changing and developing

In order to ensure that what I did for the WFGA as a Trustee was relevant and effective, the first task I set myself was to gain an understanding of how the organisation works. This took me around the country talking to garden owners, trainees and regional managers looking for data, numbers, ratios and percentages that revealed what worked and what could be improved.

My research resulted in two things: first, a

monthly report was introduced that quantified new members and membership renewals. I discovered that renewal rates were below expectations, particularly among WRAGS trainees. This suggested that trainees either had a low awareness of the activities of the WFGA as a whole, or that they were aware, but did not value them. It was also evident that few garden owners or head gardeners were members of WFGA. As a result of these findings, garden owners must now join WFGA before they can employ a trainee.

Second, it became clear that bespoke financial software was needed to enhance the flow of information, vital to decision-making. We also decided to rationalise banking arrangements to provide ‘automatic renewals’, i.e. membership renewal by direct debit to overcome the inertia that prevents people from renewing their membership.

Raising our profile

Another challenge for the Trustees is how to increase awareness and membership. It was evident from looking at where new members come from that the major source was PR – articles and stories appearing in both local and national media and social media, where one of the Trustees, Vanessa Easlea, maintains an ongoing WFGA presence.

The low awareness of WFGA was in part attributable to the fact that we had ‘WRAGS Coordinators’. We decided to rename them



Above: Trustee Andrew Branford White

'Regional Managers', in recognition of the importance of the role they play in serving not just trainees and garden owners, but all members and WFGA activities in their areas. One Trustee, Helen Seal, is now responsible for all matters to do with regional organisation and personnel.

We are also fortunate that Clare Gogerty, a professional journalist, has joined the Trustees to co-ordinate national PR activity and to assist the RMs with their local efforts.

The future

Although the changes to the organisation have begun to pay off, there remain significant challenges. Recent changes in employment legislation continue to have an impact on our trainee scheme, for example. And the historical name is something of a mixed blessing as we are not all women and few (if any) farms are involved. Hence the identity 'WFGA, Advancing Horticulture' which you see on our literature and the possibility of a 're-branding' in the future.

Today's Board

The Trustees always welcome new talent on the Board. If the role appeals to you, the question to ask yourself is what can I bring to the WFGA and do I have the time and commitment to devote to it? The role of the Trustees, albeit unpaid, is to identify the challenges and opportunities faced by the WFGA and to work hard to meet them successfully. The WFGA carries out an important role in horticultural education and helps many who cannot find these opportunities easily elsewhere. As a trainer, I appreciate enormously what the trainees bring: knowledge of the world of work, a determination to improve their skills and to step up to the demands of mentally and physically challenging work. As a Trustee the satisfaction lies in helping all our members get the most from their horticulture experience, which can be both life-changing and life-enhancing.

Andrew Branford White, Trustee, Dip.Hort.RHS

KNOW YOUR TRUSTEES

Debbie Barber (chairman)

Andrew Branford White (marketing and strategy)

Sue Curtis (treasurer)

Vanessa Easlea (social media, website)

Clare Gogerty (PR, publicity)

Helen Seal (WRAGs)

Spotlight on...

... the WFGA's administrators, Tracy Davies and Julia Thorne. Based in our office in Cirencester, they joined the charity in September 2015 and April 2016 respectively. We chatted to them about their roles

I understand you share the role of administrator for WFGA – how does that work?

TD: We find that we wear a variety of hats, and also change them frequently! I do most of the accounts, and pay the bills.

JT: And I have picked up some of the workshop tasks for next year, which I'm looking forward to. We each bring different skills and interests to the role.

You've both recently joined the charity – what were you doing in your former life?

JT: I used to work for a company that provided an administration outsourcing service to charities. I had one main client, an endowed charity, that gave money to the arts. I thoroughly enjoyed working with them and found the applications for funding fascinating to read, but I'd been with them for four years and needed a new challenge. The WFGA was a totally different style of organisation.

TD: I worked in a doctors' surgery for a year, and before that for an animal charity in administration for over four years. I dealt with the pet bereavement side of the charity along with companion animal studies – which ran the only telephone support line in the country – and also worked very closely with Guide Dogs for the Blind.



WFGA's administrators: Julia, left, and Tracy, below



And now you're with a gardening charity – are you keen gardeners yourselves?

TD: I love to garden and enjoy being out in the fresh air. I prefer a cottage-style garden as I like a less formal setting. My favourite plants are delphiniums, hollyhocks (also a favourite with the snails!), phlox and bellflowers. My 'Hot Lips' salvia is still going strong and so is the campanula (due I think to the mild weather we have been having rather than my efforts).

JT: I do enjoy my garden – it's not huge but it keeps me busy. This year we've put in a pond with a rockery and sunken deck. I've found the pond very frustrating to get right. My favourite plants at the moment are my salvias, which are lovely vivid colours, and the succulents I bought at the Malvern Spring show.

Many thanks for chatting to us – and for all the work you do for the WFGA!

Esther Wolff, Editor

A really royal day out

A meeting of WRAGS trainees from Bristol and South Gloucestershire also took in a private tour of the Royal Gardens at Highgrove



Above: The Thyme Walk, enclosed entirely by striking clipped yew hedge, designed by Sir Roy Strong. Right: the Wildflower Meadow. Source: www.highgrovegardens.com



to begin our tour. Debs led us through the maze of the different 'rooms', from the old cottage garden to the stumpery (a garden feature similar to a rockery but made from parts of dead trees), providing us with fascinating insights into the inner workings of this Royal garden. As a group of gardeners ourselves, we enjoyed hearing about some of His Royal Highness's favourite plants, including delphiniums and hydrangeas, and the ongoing tasks of the different gardening teams. At the time of visiting, all hands were on deck planting thousands of bulbs for the spring display in 2017.

The final 'room' we entered was the Carpet Garden, inspired by a Turkish carpet and commissioned by His Royal Highness for the Chelsea Flower Show in 2001. With its colourful mosaic tiles and warm pastel walls, it was the perfect place to finish the tour. After we thanked Debs, we sat outside of the café to chat over a drink. The chance to talk to other WRAGS trainees, hear about their experiences and where the scheme has taken them is invaluable for newer members like me. I'm certainly looking forward to more events like these in the future!

Heather Lorusso, WFGA member

The Royal Gardens at Highgrove have been welcoming WFGA trainees since 1997. Having such a long standing and solid partnership makes it the perfect place for a meeting of WRAGS trainees from the past, present, and future to get to know each other and brainstorm ideas for workshops, garden visits, and how we can improve the WRAGS scheme in our area. Bristol and South Gloucestershire Regional Manager, Louise Bastow, arranged this gathering on 27 September 2016, which included a private tour with the estate's Head Gardener, Debs Goodenough.

After watching a short video of His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, explaining the organic ethos and sustainable goals of the garden, we assembled in the apple orchard

Going back to first principles

From September to October 2016, thanks to the support of the WFGA Christine Ladley bursary, **Poppy Nicol** was able to visit the Navdanya Bija farm and participate in the Navdanya A to Z course on agro-ecology. She tells us what she learnt

Located in the Doon valley in the northern Indian state of Uttar Khand, the Navdanya Bija farm sits at the foothills of the Himalayas. The farm draws upon traditional Indian Vedic agricultural traditions as well as organic farming principles. The 47-acre site is also home to Bija Vidyapeeth, the Navdanya Earth University, an agro-ecological centre for learning.

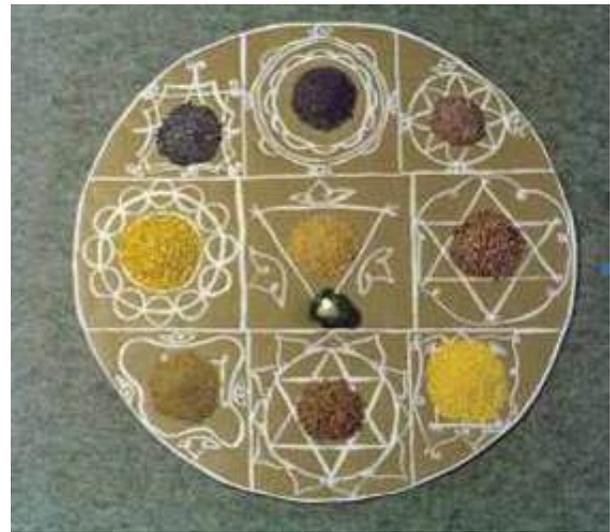
The A to Z course offers insight into the principles and practices of agro-ecology and the work of Navdanya. It covers four key components of agro-ecology: living seed, living soil, living food and living communities.

Nine seeds, nine cosmic influences

Navdanya translates as 'nine seeds' as well as 'new gift'. The organisation derives the name from the traditional Indian practice of the planting of nine crops in gardens, believed to relate to the sun, the moon and the nine planets. According to the principles of agro-ecology and the work of Navdanya, it is only through cultivating healthy soils that we may cultivate healthy crops and healthy seeds. Seed contains both the stories of the past and the possibilities of the future.

Navdanya have spent the last 30 years working to preserve the cultural and

ecological diversity of India's agricultural heritage. Seed-saving is a central component of this work. To date, they have collected thousands of varieties of crops from across India including a huge range of grains, pulses and vegetables.



Navdanya (the nine seeds)

Living soil

The cultivating of healthy soil is central to the work of Navdanya. Mixed cropping, crop rotation, composting and green manures are key components of agro-ecological and traditional Vedic Indian agricultural practices. During the course, we learnt about ways of supporting healthy soils including the Indore compost pit method, vermicomposting (using worms), crop rotation and the use of green manures.

As a 'machine-free' zone, the agro-ecological farm relies upon hand tools, cow power and earthworm activity. But it also hinges upon the thousands of microbes and mycorrhiza abundant within healthy organic



One of Navdanya's 242 seed banks

soils. Looking at a range of soil samples under the microscope in the Navdanya Soil Lab opened my eyes to the diverse communities residing in the ground. These life forms are critical for the transformation of organic matter and nutrients into bioavailable form and the maintaining of balanced, healthy ecosystems.

Living food

A critical component of Navdanya's work is the support of the cultivation of healthy food communities, as well as agro-ecosystems. According to the Navdanya philosophy, "whatever happens at the field passes up to the table." Enhancing health per acre is at the centre of this philosophy. The Navdanya team is demonstrating how mixed organic systems have the potential to support more nutrition per acre.

Navdanya are working to support the culinary heritage of India through reclaiming forgotten foods and marginalised crops. At the Navdanya Bija 47-acre site, over 770 rice varieties are cultivated, as well as a number of millet varieties, pulse crops, vegetables, herbs and a 22-acre mango orchard, the

fruit of which is celebrated at the annual mango harvest. Throughout the course, the dishes cooked used produce sourced mainly from the Navdanya Bija site and Navdanya family farms.

Living communities

Learning is central to the Navdanya vision. In their wide-ranging work they are supporting the training of future generations of farmers, seed savers, chefs and health practitioners. The Navdanya team run farmer trainings on organic agriculture and seed saving at the Bija site and beyond, as well as a range of courses for students.

This year Navdanya celebrates UN Year of the Pulse with the publication 'Pulse of Life', which highlights the ecological and nutritional advantages of agri-food systems that cultivate a range of pulses. As legumes, pulses support the fixation of nitrogen in the soil. Indeed, legumes can grow in exhausted fields and support regeneration of soil fertility. Nutritionally, pulses are high in fat, zinc and iron and rich in nutrients.

I sincerely thank the Christine Ladley Trust and WFGA for making this trip possible and the Navdanya family, including the course tutors and my fellow participants, for creating such an inspiring and nourishing space. I return, energised, to carry forwards the Global Gardens project I am working on in Cardiff. I hope to develop a community seed saving network within South Wales. If anyone is interested in joining an organic seed saving network, please do get in touch at poppy_nicol@hotmail.com.

www.navdanya.org

Sussex members' autumn gathering

Sarah Raven's Cutting Garden at Perch Hill Farm and Rapkyns, a cottage garden nursery, provided inspirational settings for an autumn gathering in East Sussex

At **Sarah Raven's garden** near Burwash, head gardener Josie Lewis welcomed our group of 23 before providing a fascinating tour of the two -acre gardens, which were full of sumptuous autumn colour. The garden, which Sarah began 20 years ago, is constantly changing and highly productive, with much succession and under-planting, since everything in her catalogue is trialled here.

A riot of colour

The garden comprises different garden 'rooms', including the Oast House Garden – which provided the basis for Sarah's book 'The Bold and Brilliant Garden' – and was designed to be full of saturated and intense colour combinations, with tulips and wallflowers planned for spring. Entering the Rose and Herb Garden, we were amazed to hear that although it looked mature, it had only been planted in spring last year. The central beds include herbs suggested by herb doyenne, Jekka McVicar, planted alongside a combination of old and new English roses. Josie favours the newer varieties, which are more disease resistant. The roses have been underplanted with salvias as a trial to see whether this may help prevent blackspot. Josie advised that salvia should be cut back hard in March and back again after mid-summer to encourage continued blooming on tidier plants.



Left: *Dahlia* 'Delicious Candy' being trialled at Perch Hill

The Cutting Garden is currently being transformed from an annual to a perennial garden to meet with current trends, and the vegetable garden will become a mixed vegetable and annual cut flower parterre garden. A stunning selection of dahlias included 'Bright Eyes' – voted as the favourite dahlia at a recent open day. Finally, we saw a gorgeous array of *Echinacea* being trialled before being moved to the cutting garden.

Small but productive

Rapkyns Nursery is hidden down a country lane near Broad Oak and specialises in perennials, shrubs, climbers and grasses. Nearly all plants grown on the site, which is less than an acre. Owner Steven Moore started work in 1992 on preparing the land for the nursery, which is gardened as organically as possible and is the result of his lifelong passion for plants. He began with ericaceous plants, before moving to shrubs and then perennials, which now comprise 75% of his stock with over 1,500 varieties available. Steven focuses on growing the plants he likes best – a favourite are salvias,

with around 40 varieties grown.

Steven highlighted tips for successful semi-ripe cuttings, demonstrating on a selection of plants including *Fuchsia microphylla* and *Salvia leucantha* 'Purple velvet'. Tips include using a newly sharpened tool to strip off selected material, ensuring that the material is not too soft. He uses a planting media of 50:50 multi-purpose compost and perlite, and explained that a compost low in nutrients encourages the root development. Hormone rooting powder is used for cuttings, although not too much as this can inhibit rooting. He said that trays are better than modules for overwintering of cuttings as roots can mesh together.

The nursery's cuttings are over-wintered in a heated greenhouse. Until the cuttings have rooted (around the end of October), the greenhouse is kept shaded, with minimal ventilation, and kept damped down to create a humid atmosphere. However, once the cuttings have rooted, there needs to be as much light as possible, and the greenhouse kept dry and ventilated during the day, although the plants must be moist. The cuttings stay in trays until around March, when they are potted on and moved to polytunnels and then outside in April/May. Steven explained that a salvia cutting can become a fully grown plant in under nine months, showing that taking semi-ripe cuttings is definitely worth trying!

Both Sarah Raven's Cutting Garden and Rapkyns are open to the public, and Rapkyns also visits Farmers' Markets. See their websites for opening dates and times.

Rebecca Lloyd, Regional Manager, East and West Sussex

www.sarahraven.com

www.rapkynsnursery.co.uk

Social media update

We are continuing to build our presence on social media:

- **Twitter** - now we have 2,030 followers! This month we have had our messages retweeted and 'liked' by many including the RHS and NAFAS Flower Arrangers.
- **Facebook** continues to be well followed. We are up to 576 likes for our posts.

Please remember to follow us on Facebook /Twitter and help get our message out there.

Farewell... and welcome...

We say farewell to **Liddy Davidson** who has looked after Sussex so capably for the last four years. We won't say goodbye completely as she will continue to organise the Sussex local gatherings for one more year. Thank you very much Liddy. Welcome to **Rebecca Lloyd** who has taken Sussex on, and also to **Sally Smith** our new RM for the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire area.

Regional Manager vacancies

Due to reorganisation, we are looking for 3 new Regional Managers. The new areas are:

1. Yorkshire
2. Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire
3. Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Rutland.

Details can be found on the GRN on the Forum.

If you know of anyone who is not a member but might be interested, please ask them to contact the office.

WFGA subscription rates

From 1 January 2017, WFGA subscription rates will rise. For those receiving digital newsletters, the new fee will be £28 pa (£75 for three year membership). For those receiving printed newsletters, the fee will be £35 pa (£100 for three-year membership).

Members' benefits

Don't forget that as a WFGA member you can get a large discount on orders with King's Seeds and Quality Garden Tools – for full details and forms please go to WFGA Topics on the Forum. For information on how to order go to www.wfga.org.uk/forum

Get your WFGA news delivered to your inbox

If you haven't already done so, don't forget to register on the website to access the Members' Pages, the Forum and receive our electronic updates. On the home page of wfga.org.uk, click on "New User?" (in the login box) and fill in the user registration details requested. You will then get regular updates on workshops, garden recruitment vacancies and other WFGA and WRAGS news.

ASK CRISPIN

Our new Agony Uncle, **Crispin Spencer**, WFGA Regional Manager and Head Gardener at Cloughton Hall Estate, answers your horticultural queries. Email crispin.wfga@gmail.com

Q: I have a number of mature apple trees in my garden and each year the apples are full of grubs or brown patches where grubs have tunneled. The trees that do bear edible fruit and rarely have more than a dozen apples. I have noticed white fluffy patches on the branches of the trees. Can you advise what I can do to improve the crops and lessen the damage done by these grubs?

A: It sounds like codling moth, or 'Maggoty Apple', which is probably the number one pest of apples, and can also affect pears, and even quince and walnuts. One option is a spraying regime, but this involves the application of pesticides and you might as well buy apples from the supermarket. Organic options include pheromone traps, but this is more a monitoring technique. The old-fashioned grease bands can be very effective, however, as are nematode controls. But the single best control is good hygiene. Clean up loose bark on the trunk and winter wash will help, plus remove fallen fruit and foliage as regularly as possible. Something the books tend not to mention is simply cultivating the ground just around the base of a tree – this exposes any grubs overwintering here and they will be eaten by resident birds. A good application of lime, or calcified seaweed, as well as reducing the incidence of bitter pit in the fruit, also discourages the codling moths.

KEEP IN TOUCH WFGA

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