South & South East & London in Bloom

August Bloom Bulletin

Welcome to our August edition and as I write we have received the majority of the Desktop the entries so thank you all for the amount of work you have put into your entries in this the strangest of Bloom years. Your submissions are being reviewed by our judging and assessment teams and we are looking to have the results with you by September 11th.

The RHS throws a lifeline.

Like ourselves but on a far greater scale it's been an exceedingly difficult year for the RHS who manage the Britain in Bloom Finals and the Its Your Neighbourhood Scheme. The RHS also has lost considerable income from the lack of shows, their Gardens not open and falling membership, but recognising the hardships many Regions have endured due to cancelling Bloom 2020 have given outstanding support by providing small grants to regions to keep them going and we are very grateful for the funding London in Bloom has received.

We are immensely fortunate that in the South & South East in Bloom Region we did not need to apply for a grant as we have enjoyed continued support from Your London Airport Gatwick Community Engagement Team. Without this, we would probably not have been able to run any events this year and 2021 would have been in doubt, so a huge thank you to them and we wish that Gatwick returns to some sort of normality as soon as possible

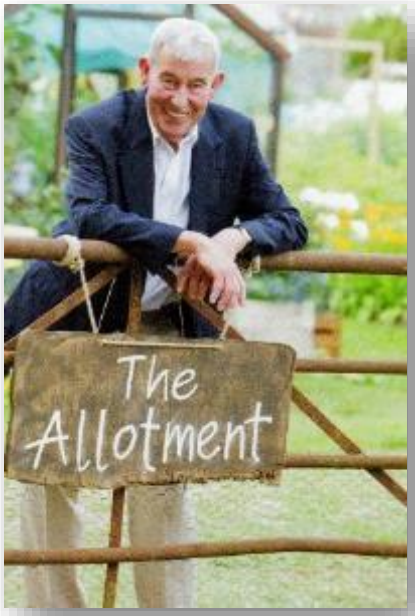
Funding the regional is always a worry. Trustees are always seeking to find supporters, donors and sponsors who can support us in keeping our annual events going. So, if you know of any individuals, small or large businesses or truly kind people who could donate to our cause please let us know.

While restrictions have been lifting, COVID is still with us and maybe for some time to come, so to all of our entrants and readers please take care, stay safe and well and let's look forward to a " normal" or near "normal" 2021.

Should we continue?

We would like to know if you wish us to continue the monthly Newsletter/Bulletin, so before we commission the September issue maybe you could let us know. If you wish us to continue perhaps let us know what kind of article would be of interest. Suggestions are always welcome?

Keep Blooming.



Jim Buttress VMH, SSEIB Judge and former LIB Chairman

As you know for the past few months I have been taking a trip down memory lane and the ideal opportunity to sort out cupboards, drawers, and filing cabinets. The paperwork and files I am sorting out go back to 1961. This was the year that my headmaster decided to put me on the transfer list!!! The only qualification I acquired was my Cycling Proficiency Certificate.

I started working at a local nursery called Fullers & Sons which was situated at the junction of Little Woodcote Lane & Foxley Lane. We produced Roses, Shrubs, Alpines, Herbaceous plants, bedding, cut flowers and provided garden maintenance. I had the most wonderful training and the owner, Bill, always talked about me applying for an interview as a Wisley Diploma Student. I did not want to go back to school and I always hoped that Bill would give up on the idea.

He taught me how to bud Roses, graft Clematis and every week he would give me plants to identify in a little test.

In the early part of 1965 to my utter dismay, he told me that he had arranged an Interview with the Croydon Parks Deputy Chief Officer one Mr R.S. Upton. He felt [Bill], that I needed experience and working in a Parks Department would provide additional support for my Wisley application.

At the interview, Mr Upton was very complimentary about my enthusiasm and knowledge but said as I did not have the necessary certificate to be a Gardener he would offer me a position as a labourer and I was to start at the recently opened new Croydon Central Nursery at Coombe Lodge.

The contrast between working for Bill and the Parks Department was incredible. The Nursery produced all of the Boroughs Spring & Summer Bedding, Tropical Plants, Ferns and decorative plants for florally decorating Council Offices, the Mayor's Parlour, Fairfield Halls, the Registry Office, and plants for special events such as the Policeman's Ball. The Parks Department had its apprenticeship scheme, and this is where I met Peter Holman. I can't believe we have been friends for 55 years. In the spring of 1966, I was amazed to find I had been invited to attend to an interview as a potential RHS Wisley Diploma Student and even more unbelievable that I was accepted as a student in September 1966.

In 1996 I was judging at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and one of the exhibits we were to judge was an exhibit from the London Borough of Hackney. The display was based on the plants introduced by the famous London Nursery of Loddiges which became ' the greatest of nurseries dealing with exotic' circa 1771. Yes, you have guessed it 31 years later I met Peter Holman again who had designed and built the exhibit. I have always said that Horticulture is the 'friendliest of professions'. At the time I was Chairman of London in Bloom and Peter told me he was thinking of taking early retirement, which he did in 1998 and I wasted no time in asking him to join the committee and shortly after to join the South East in Bloom judges panel. Following major changes to the South East judging panel, Peter was voted in as Chairman. In London, much change was needed and in 2003 Peter took on the role of Executive Trustee to manage and develop London in Bloom and when I was asked to become the Chairman of Judges for Britain in Bloom a new Chairman, Geoff Hyde, was appointed with Peter continuing to manage the operation. When I stepped out of regional management I was confident that I had left Bloom in good hands and it is to Peter & Anne's and now Kates credit that London & South & South East has gone from strength to strength. These are unusual times for everyone, and we all need to support Peter Anne & Kate of the Trustees of both regions to enable both regions to continue.

Community Gardening and wellbeing have never had such a high profile. Local Parks and conservation areas such as wildflower meadows are regularly highlighted in newspapers and television so we should not miss this opportunity to use Bloom to increase the quality of life and preserve the best this planet has to offer.

I have looked into the next drawer and it would appear my next contribution will involve my time with Britain in Bloom. - Finally, clearing the garage is getting closer.

Keep Safe – Jim

UK Native Wildflower Meadow Trial at Eashing Cemetery, Godalming, Surrey

Suzie Gortler Community & Communications Officer Godalming Town Council

At Eashing Cemetery, one of Godalming Town Council's two Cemeteries, a trial to find the most effective, sustainable, and long-lasting wildflower meadow installation method has been undertaken. The method used, is based on local environmental and soil conditions.

The wildflower meadow installation is the work of Godalming Town Council's Groundsman who has set aside 400m2 of previously mown grass areas and divided these into a cultivated and uncultivated section. The Cultivated section was dug using an excavator in the late winter months (2019) when ground conditions allow. This was raked over and allowed to settle. In April 2020, any grass and weeds were manually removed, or spot treated with a herbicide. The cultivated section was divided into 2 sections whereby one side was seeded by broadcasting seed into a tilth seedbed and the other top-dressed with a seed infused growing medium.

The uncultivated section of grass area was mown very low and scarified in numerous directions. This was then divided into 2 sections - broadcast seeding and seed infused mulch. Each of the sections was divided into 3 equal sections. 1) control section 2) treated with a natural non-selective herbicide 3) conventional non-selective herbicide. The two sections were then seeded using the same methods as the cultivated sections.

Both areas were watered during germination and establishment phases. Time will tell which method will prove most successful, however early indications are that the seed infused growing medium is a clear front runner.

By rewilding sections of the cemetery grassland, Godalming Town Council has endeavoured to not only provide a colourful display to bring joy to the visitors of the Cemetery but to provide the greatest benefit to local wildlife. The rewilding has led to a remarkable increase in insect species like butterflies, bees and grasshoppers and the Council feels confident that the increase in insects and wildflower seeds will, in turn, attract birds and small mammals such as blue tits, sparrows, swallows, shrews and hedgehogs.

Osborne Gardens Update- Toby Beasley – Head Gardener

Summer bedding and what to do when your plant orders are cancelled

For those of you that know Osborne the bedding on the terraces is one of the most impressive areas of the garden when the plants come into full bloom. We plant out around 15-20,000 plants for the summer display with the majority being grown by a local nursery as we just don't have space or time to do this in house. We do raise a number of the larger 'dot' plants ourselves to get around some disease issues that are prevalent especially with Canna in the nursery trade and also because these often cost a great deal more than our usual bedding plants. Little did we know last autumn that these larger plants would be our saviour for this year's summer bedding.

With the lockdown and furloughing of staff, there was also a drastic reduction in our finances. No visitors equals no income. We had to cancel the orders that we had placed with our suppliers and rethink what we could do to put a display on for the terraces. We were thinking about planting some areas of the terrace in a jungle bedding style. This is an over the top style in which large-leaved and luxuriant looking plants are arranged to create the impression of a scene from the jungle. A very manicured and interesting jungle scene but an added benefit of this style is that you use a lot of larger plants that cover the ground easily and it is generally quite an informal style which helps if you don't have the numbers of plants you need. The glasshouses were raided for anything that would fit this theme.

We knew we would need smaller plants for planting around the edges and to provide more flower interest, so in mid-April, we sowed any spare flower seed we had that we thought may be of some use. We managed to raise over 1000 Zinnias, several hundred marigolds, nicotiana and antirrhinum, Tithonia, castor oil plants, nasturtium and pot marigolds to help bolster the display. We undertook the sowing of these plants at just about the last opportunity we had to get them ready for our summer display (mid-April) and have just planted the last of them to complete our bedding display.

Our summer bedding design ideas that we had planned were also thrown out of the window, so every bed had to be designed on the spur of the moment as we had to work with what we had. We also had to do this work with just 4 members of the garden team (7 were furloughed and all 65 volunteers had been called off) and these 4 gardeners also had to try and look after the rest of the garden as well. At one stage we thought we may have to sow annuals on the terraces or even have some bare flower beds but thankfully the terraces are starting to look their spectacular best.

Ham Lands – Ham, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Ham Lands has a rich history. Because of its location on a bend on the River Thames, over the centuries, rich deposits of soil and gravel were laid down. It is thought that the fertile and varied landscape has been attractive to settlers since the Iron Age. In the first part of the last century, the lands were extensively excavated for gravel and sand leaving many large pits. Some residents remember swimming in the water that filled the pits.
Except for one lagoon, the pits were filled in with WW2 rubble and backfilled with soils brought in from outside the Borough. This has created a huge diversity of ecosystems in a relatively small area, making Ham Lands a unique and very important site. We have dry areas; we have areas where the plants need to have wet soil. Seeds can last for a remarkable length of time and burst into life when the conditions suit.

This precious space needs sensitive care and management. Friends of Ham Lands are fortunate to be able to work closely with Richmond's parks department to develop a strategy to create a reserve that nature can thrive, and the community can enjoy. The area in the picture above was cleared of encroaching bramble and scrub and is now full of Rose Bay Willowherb, Tansy and Golden Rod and it alive with a rich variety of pollinators.

Nature has a remarkable way of coping with changes in weather patterns if we have a rich biodiversity. We are fortunate to have many local naturalists, some who have lived locally for more than 50 years. Our naturalists help in the discovery and recording of rare species, as well as observing the trends and changes in more commonly found species over the seasons, years, and decades.

Here are some of Paul Bartlett's notes.
This account starts in the far north of our area, where there is a splendid display of Common Meadow-Rue *Thalictrum flavum*, surely one of our special plants, not common anywhere, but especially rare in the London region and normally a plant of water-meadows and fens such as the Norfolk Broads and Somerset Levels.

Another moisture-loving plant. Phalaris arundinacea stands tall nearby. Also called reed canary grass, this perennial bunchgrass that commonly forms extensive single-species stands along the margins of lakes and streams and in wet open areas.

There are lots of leguminous plants on the Lands, presumably because they favour the dry calcareous soils. Here is a random selection of four of the commoner ones.

Lucerne *Medicago sativa subspecies Sativa* A bushy plant 1-2ft. tall with dark blue or violet flowers. Alfalfa is another name for it. It is used as animal fodder in many countries. It often hybridises with the similar, yellow Sickle Medick *Medicago falcata* so that flowers of the intermediate colour result.

Goat's Rue or French Liquorice *Galega officinalis* 2-3ft. tall, with pale blue or even white flowers. An alien from Europe.

Yellow Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* is usually about 1-2ft. tall with a cluster of yellow flowers. Not to be confused with the much rarer smaller Yellow Vetchling, *Lathyrus aphasia,* another of our special plants.

Bird's Foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* is almost prostrate with typical pea-like flowers, yellow but sometimes orange or reddish giving rise to the colloquial alternative name of 'Eggs and Bacon'.

If you want to find out more about Ham Lands take a look at the website https://hamunitedgroup.org.uk/friends-of-ham-lands/

Awards that weren't - Graham Mee

Early this year I was privileged to be asked to make the bowls for South and South East in Bloom Awards ceremony planned for September.

This was the third time I had been offered the opportunity and a challenge I gladly accepted!

I retired in 2015 and was looking for a hobby. On a visit to Aldi, I found a woodturning lathe* at a bargain price! I had taken Woodwork as an O Level; my Mum was still using a fruit bowl I had made then, and I had always enjoyed making things with wood. Why not try woodturning?

So, I got my lathe (quickly upgraded!) and rapidly arrived at the point where my wife's response to everything I made became 'That's very nice – where am I going to put it?'

So, the next step was 'donating' things to family and friends, including a bowl to my wife's sister and husband in 2017. Just so happens they are both heavily involved in Britain in Bloom, organising the South and South East Awards.

They had attended the East Anglian Region awards and were impressed that the winners received an engraved turned wooden platter. South and South East in Bloom also provided a trophy for each of their category winners. However, to this point, they had used engraved glass plates which, having seen the East Anglian awards, were not deemed very appropriate for a horticultural organisation.

Could I make some bowls for them to use for the 2018 awards?

Yes, I said confidently, having never made more than one of anything previously.

Making the bowls wasn't the issue but what about the engraving? It could be done as East Anglia showed, but how?

That Christmas my son ordered some coasters from Etsy, laser engraved with designs he had submitted. Was that an option? If I ordered several coasters with the SSEIB logo, date, and award detail on, they could be inset into the bottom of a bowl, problem solved!

Not really, the coasters were MDF and not the best finish and couldn't be worked on further without risking damage to the engraving. Also, how could I assure they would be flush in the bottom of the bowl – there must be a better way – get my own laser!

A little investigation on Amazon and a machine identified where the bowl sits on the plate which moves backwards and forwards while the laser head moves left and right one pixel at a time, capable of delivering an image up to about 5"x5". It came with software that allows an image to be uploaded to it and then the software controls the movement of the laser to burn the imported image. There are controls to manage the laser strength, the size of the pixel, the duration of the burn and the level of detail to be copied, all of which is by trial and error, oh and not forgetting the manual focus of the actual laser beam! Did I mention, it comes from China in bits and has to be assembled first? However, the machine was up to the job of engraving the awards, so it was possible to do what was wanted.

A sample was created and sent for committee approval. A simple design from a 10 x 2" Sycamore blank. Yes please, one for each of the 30 category winners!!! 40 such blanks were duly ordered from Oliver's Woodturning once assurance was available that the wood was from a sustainable source which Ed Oliver, being a member of the Woodland Trust, could provide.

The turning began in March 2018 and delivery at the end of August, with the award ceremony scheduled for September at the Amex Stadium in Brighton – no pressure!

As it worked out the turning wasn't the bottleneck, it was the engraving taking about 7 hrs per bowl!

Late on, in addition to the 30 category awards, I was asked if I could do several more as Discretionary Awards, but could they be different!

A quick dash to Ed Oliver secured sufficient Elm blanks to do the job but these were 3” deep. So, the first job was to trim these back to 2” which left me with a number of 1” disks. Fortunate,- as I was then asked if I could do a special long service award for one of the trustees. I was also offered the opportunity to do a little “advert" that would be displayed at the awards. I used the Elm disks to make engraved platters for both.

The ‘advert' announced that the woodturning was by TIGS, standing for ‘Turned in Grumpy’s Shed' (Grumpy being the name my wife claimed was what my grandson was trying to say when he was learning to say, Grandad).

The committee deemed the awards a success (as I hope the recipients also did) and wanted to repeat it for 2019 but...!

They asked if, rather than bowls could I do platters like the long service award. Back to Ed Oliver for some blanks, but 1” blanks were in short supply and he had one ash and one cedar that I could use for sample designs.

So, a couple of ideas were sent in. They decided they liked the ash design, but they loved the cedar look and smell, could I do the platters in Cedar. Yes, if Ed could source them, which he was able, Oh and could I do the major categories with 10” and then the minor ones with
8” blanks and could I do the discretionary awards like the previous year's Sycamore bowls!

In the meantime, some members of the SSEIB Committee had connections to London in Bloom (LIB) and suggested that they also adopt wooden awards, which the committee agreed with. Hence a request for 12 large and 15 smaller awards in Sycamore.
With a few weeks to go, all the judging having completed, and awards decided, and me making the last of the requested bowls, it was realised they had more awards than bowls. Could I make 14 more to be given as discretionary awards for Outstanding Contributions, Chairman’s award etc?

There was time but the laser was providing some entertainment at the time doing its own thing with a few of the inscriptions. The worst example was this one which failed 5 times and left the base so thin from being sanded and re-engraved that it had to be remade.

No explanation for what was causing this to happen, the best anyone came up with was that the image had been corrupted whilst being copied and pasted.

It was a lot of work, with many challenges but well worth the effort. I got lots of shed time without having to find a home for what was produced, shed still smells of cedar, and the awards will hopefully be well looked after by all those who received them.

Anticipating repeating the process for the 2020 awards, I wondered about what form the Committee would be looking for this year. I decided to make some samples using different suitable woods and designs.

Five samples were duly produced, Ash, Sycamore, Beech, London Plane and Oak. Each was a different shape and engraved with the SSEIB logo as the final awards would be and with the type of wood and a style letter. This was to allow the Committee to select the shape and wood combination they thought best.

And then came COVID …… and so we await 2021!

If you might be interested in trying woodturning check out the AWGB website (https://www.awgb.co.uk) and find your local club. They would be delighted to see you; provide advice on what you need and help you get set up.

GARDENING TIPS & TASKS FOR AUGUST - Reg Leach, Judge and former Parks Manager, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

August is about spending time in the garden relaxing and enjoying it with friends and neighbours, which is now possible as lock-down rules continue to ease but still take care. However, there is always something to do in the garden and below are a few tasks for this month.

Weeding:

Continue to weed beds and borders. By this time in the season, most of your beds may well be covered with herbaceous perennials and bedding plants, which will have smothered any annuals that may have tried to grow. However perennial weeds may still be lurking so remove them as appropriate.

Lawns:

The spring vigour of the lawn tends to slow down at this time of year, so you'll probably need to mow it less often, however you may still mow, to remove the 'bents' (grass flower heads) that appear more frequently now. Also, some weeds may still be growing in the lawn even if the grass is not. Before any mowing, check the lawn and if clover f is abundant, you may decide to hold off mowing, to allow the bees to pollinate the flowers.

Pests & Diseases:

Keep checking roses for black spot and mildew and keep a lookout for aphids. Treat as appropriate. If you have a bird feeder, keep it topped up as this will encourage birds into your garden and they will snack on the aphids!

Feeding:

Keep up with regular feeding of plants, particularly those in pots, containers and hanging baskets which are likely to be pot-bound by now, so they will be relying on any extra nutrients you can give them to continue looking fresh and healthy.

Deadheading:

Keep on top of deadheading, not just of your roses but bedding plants and herbaceous perennials too, to keep them flowering well and for longer into late summer and autumn.

Pruning:

Now is a good time to cut back shrubs that have finished flowering such as Lavender, Hebe - but don't cut back Lavender too hard into the old wood, as they are not good at regenerating. Cutting back after flowering will help keep the size of the plants in check and encourage new growth which will flower next year.

Cut out new straggly growth of Wisteria, back to about 2 or 3 buds of the main framework, or tie in the new wispy growths to extend the framework.

Drought resistant plants:

Following on from last month's tips about looking after your plants while away on holiday, which this year has been difficult (although it's more possible to do so now that Covid-19 restrictions are lifting), I have included below just a few drought-resistant plants that, once established are good at withstanding short drought conditions.

Some drought-tolerant plants are of course well known like Lavender, Rosemary, Santolina and Buddleia, but there are many more that need little water during the summer months - once they are established.

Here is a very small selection for your consideration:

- Cistus (Rock Rose): that can be found in many colours and heights.
- Potentilla: Yellow, red, and orange flowered varieties.
- Ceratostigma: Blue flowers.
- Stachys lanata: – Lambs Ears with soft leaves and purplish flowers.
- Tamarix: with its feathery leaves and pale pink flowers, grown as a shrub or as a small tree and is a good coastal plant, resistant to salt winds.
- Ceanothus: evergreen with blue flowers that remind me of liquorice allsorts.

- Phlomis fruticosa: - Jerusalem sage, with yellow flowers.
- Caryopteris: with grey/green leaves and delicate blue flowers.
- Perovskia atriplicifolia: with its pale blue spires of flower.
- Teucrium: good for ground cover with its pale blue flowers and great for bees.
- Escallonia: evergreen, good for hedging and red/pink flowers. There are white flowering varieties too, but I don't think they are as showy.
- Cytisus: Broom, having yellow flowers.
- Artemisia 'Powis Castle': grown for its fern-like leaves.

Many of the drought-tolerant plants listed above come from the Mediterranean region and are therefore used to dry summers.

Herbs such as Sage and Thyme are reasonably drought tolerant and as with most herbs, the flowers are great for bees too.

Some others worth considering but may need a little protection during particularly hard winters are Callistemon (Bottle Brush), Olive, Eucalyptus and Acacia dealbata with feathery leaves and pompom yellow flowers. Both the Eucalyptus and the Acacia can romp away once established so select where you want to plant them very carefully.

If you have a south or west-facing wall the above plants and many more will survive the colder winter as they will benefit from the heat that will radiate from the wall overnight creating a microclimate that benefits those less hardy plants.

Whatever the reason, our climate is changing, so experimenting with plant hardiness can be exciting. The need for drought-tolerant species is increasing – they save time and effort to maintain and require much less water. A good selection of perennials and herbaceous plants will benefit honeybees and butterflies, so consider using more drought-tolerant and perennial plants in future designs rather than traditional bedding plants.

Don't forget:

- Check on shrubs that are not very drought tolerant, particularly during hot spells, such as Rhododendron and Azaleas, so water well and if they are in pots move to shadier areas of the garden.
- Continue to hoe beds and borders regularly to prevent emerging weeds from flowering.
- Trim hedges as required to keep them looking neat and check for weeds underneath. Check first for nesting birds as some years they may have a second brood.
- Keep checking for aphids and blackfly and on your roses - black spot. Woolly aphid and mildew - treat, as necessary.
- Continue looking out for slugs and snails, they will still reappear when it rains!
- Keep paths clear of weeds, moss, and algae.
- With any chemicals, always read the label before applying. If at all possible keep use to a minimum or find other control methods that are not harmful to beneficial insects.

In the September column, I'll provide a list of plants attracting birds, butterflies, and bees into your garden.

Community Corner - Rainham in Bloom - Lockdown Life - Jackie McArdle Rainham in Bloom

For the first week of lockdown Elaine and I hid over the allotments in a daze, was this really happening? Well, that's ok we have them in bloom competitions to keep us busy, then bang, Britain in Bloom was cancelled and London in Bloom virtual judging only on everything up till lockdown. We were devastated.

What now? Garden centres were shut, online plants and seeds were becoming extortionate and with nothing to do and nowhere to go gardening was the go-to hobby for most people. It is and always has been therapeutic and gives people something to look forward to, no matter what mother nature finds a way through.

Thank goodness Elaine is known as the “Seed Queen of Rainham”, we posted on our Facebook page the fact that we were giving away free seeds and probably delivered at least 500 packets of flower, herb and veg seeds. As the Steward of the local allotments, I also had 48 plot holders to worry about so we quickly put up notices that seeds were available and that we would be growing veg for them all to buy at 6 plants for a £1 just to cover costs and for site funds which they were more than happy with.

We also had all our plug plants for the in-bloom competitions, so we grew them on, made up over 40 hanging baskets and again sold them to locals and plot holders.

We soon became the go-to place for all your plants and seeds. We donated to residents, Havering Mind, a local disabled group, Rainham Village Primary kept their children busy with the all the seeds and plants we gave them and we also donated around 200 vegetable plants for a growing zone in Mile End Park that we work closely with. Once demand dwindled we put leftover plants outside the allotment gates with a notice to “help yourselves”

With the money we raised from all this all costs were covered; the allotments and the in-bloom fund has a healthy start for next year and we donated a third to St Francis Hospice.

To give local people something to look forward to and to keep the horticultural theme alive we launched an internal Rainham & Wennington in Bloom contest were residents emailed pictures of their hanging baskets, front gardens, tallest sunflower etc for judging by the in bloom team and local Councillors in August, this is proving very popular and most of the entries are with seeds and plants that we gave away.

Rainham has always prided itself on its great community spirit but the lockdown has bought people together like never before, I was immensely proud to be a part of what we achieved. The allotments have never looked better and we now have plans to open up our trading hut this Autumn which will supply the allotments, the in bloom campaigns and residents who will find prices very competitive as things are sold virtually at cost with profits going back into the site.

We have new volunteers, new contacts and much more support for everything we are trying to achieve in Rainham, and we owe it all to " lockdown life"

Growing flowers on allotments – Kevin Taitt, Judge & SSEIB Trustee

Back in 2015, a new set of allotments were being created in my village and as I had been on the waiting list for some time I was offered one which I gratefully accepted. I then got going on preparing the soil to plant the traditional vegetables. During 2016 a small plot became available which I offered to take on and thought I could grow something other than vegetables and soft fruit. In the winter I was chatting to a mate and he offered me some dahlia tubers to grow. As I had never grown dahlias, I thought I would give it a go. What follows is how I grow not only dahlias but also sweet peas and gladioli. By growing these flowers, you can have flowers in your home from June through to the first frosts.

Dahlias.

I ended up with 16 dahlia tubers which I gladly planted in the Spring of 2017. Before I planted them, I put them in the greenhouse just to get the tubers sprouting new growth. On the plot, I prepared the soil and dug in plenty of homemade compost and a base dressing of blood, fish and bone was added a few days before planting the tubers. In went, the tubers and they grew particularly well that year. One mistake I did make was not to disbud the stems, so I ended up with lots of flowers on short stems. In the following years, I disbudded the stems down to the third set of leaves which gives you a good stem and after that stem is cut the side shoots lower down develop and give you a second flush of flowers. During the season, the dahlias receive little attention other than to disbud. I do not feed them other than put mulch on during May to help retain the moisture and keep the weeds down. I don't water them at all during the season and so far, have not been troubled by the dreaded aphid.

At the end of the season, after the first frost has blackened the foliage, I cut down the plants and put the foliage onto the compost heap. I leave the tubers in the ground and put some soil over them and they remain in situ all through the winter, to date I haven't lost any of them. The soil on the allotment is very light and free draining but if you have heavy soil I would advise you to dig them up and put them somewhere frost-free. The type of dahlias I grow are cactus type and single-flowered to attract bees to the site for pollination but there are many types of dahlias.

Gladioli

These are the easiest to grow. My wife whilst shopping in Lidl's in 2017 came across a bag of 50 gladioli corms for a very reasonable price and promptly brought them home. My first thought was that I was going to be wasting my time planting them but lo and behold the first year they turned out fabulous and in the subsequent years they have continued flowering well. I planted the corms about 3" deep and they again have been left in the ground all year. They get a feed in the spring and no other attention is given to them and I don't even bother with watering them.

Sweet Peas

Before you start growing sweet peas you need to decide if you are going to grow them as a cordon and as a bush. Cordon growing is one plant up an 8ft cane and removing side shoots and tendrils whereas bush growing is you just let everything grow. As I grow my sweet peas on the cordon system I will briefly explain this. You will need to get your seeds from either a specialist seed supplier or garden centre. I normally get mine in September and plant them in January. I plant them in root trainers in a multi-purpose compost and put them in the greenhouse. I aim to plant them out in late March or early April depending on the weather. Before planting, again I use a base dressing a few days before and once they are growing I select one stem to take up the cane. Secure the stem to the cane using a sweet pea ring (a wire loop) as they grow. Sweet peas are hungry plants and need feeding regularly and like lots of water. Once the plants reach the top of the canes they need layering. By this, I mean taking the stem off the cane and move it along about five canes and this obviously reduces the height and then they are off again. Flowers need to be picked regularly before they start to set seed otherwise the plants will slow down. Aphids can be a pest, as they have been this year, but hopefully, ladybirds will be around to eat them.

If this has whetted your appetite, have a go as this will certainly brighten your visit to the allotment and have lots of flowers to cut for your home.

The Lockdown Limpsfield Spitfire by Ann Osborn

This has been an interesting year for Limpsfield in Bloom. I happened to meet Peter and Anne in our local garden centre just before we locked down and they confidently said that they would make sure we continued to have a competition. So - we decided to continue our plans to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain since it was fought in our local skies. Our theme colours were red, white, blue, and yellow, as our research showed these were the colours of the RAF roundels on the spitfires.

One of our borders – each year we paint the troughs in the theme colours, and this year we also have roundels.

On July 9th we had a 'virtual' judging day when we invited people to see our very own Spitfire flying in the village. We served coffee and spitfire cakes outside and we aimed to make the village as beautiful as ever on judging day. Over 70 people came along, from the very young to the very old, a splendid community occasion.

Our spitfire flew proudly, with roundels made by children in the village

Making our Limpsfield Spitfire

Our very own spitfire started life on the dining room table of a retired GP (with a very understanding wife!) It was made from willow withies covered in layers of papier-mache.

When it needed painting it moved to the garden

And finally became the key attraction

Our village seat made from a felled lime

And one of our theme tubs