Oxenhope

Gardening Club News

November 2026

Welcome to November's newsletter. This month will be the last meeting of 2026. It's difficult to believe that a year has gone by! The committee would like to thank you all for the wonderful support you have given to the club during the year. We look forward to seeing you again in February, 2027!

Last month, I visited my friend Gerry who lives in the US state of Georgia. I first met her 45 years ago when we both lived and worked in London and since then we have travelled to many wonderful places. This time, we spent 10 days in Wyoming and Montana visiting the magnificent Yellowstone National Park and the Lamar valley with its amazing wildlife - bison, elk, moose and wolf (only one!) before returning to Gerry's home in Georgia.

Forty years ago, Gerry and her now ex-husband, moved to the small town of Elberton, Georgia where they established a very successful business and in 1990, they bought a house, which they set about extensively renovating. However, just as important to Gerry was to transform the barren area of land at the back of the house into an English garden, which she gave me the task of designing.





Garden in 1990

In the autumn of 1990, I went out to Georgia and took measurements and photographs of the space, promising to return the following spring to start the transformation. Fortunately, my late husband David was very good at drafting accurate plans and was able to translate the measurements and my vague scrawls into a plan. I spent that winter researching the plants and shrubs that would grow in the Georgia climate: warm

and sunny springs, ferociously hot and humid summers, and winters, where sometimes temperatures could drop below freezing.

In 1990, the internet or the world wide web had only just been invented so any research had to be book based, which although far more laborious, wasn't the problem. The problem was finding suppliers of the plants I had identified. At that time, apart from a very few exceptions, gardening in the southern states was limited to vegetables in the back yard and a strip of azaleas and photinias in the front.



Carolina Silver Bell

Among the list of shrubs and trees I had identified were, at that time, unfamiliar to me. These included the Carolina Silver Bell (Halesia Carolina) Stewartia pseudocamellia, Callicarpa, Tea Olive (Osmanthus fragrans) Eastern Redbud (Cercis canadensis), Maples, Flowering Dogwood (Cornus Florida), Confederate Jasmine (Jasminodes Trachelospermum) and Lady Bank's rose (rosa banksiae)and of course, rhododendrons and azaleas. Most of these plants were native to the south east of the USA and all preferred an acid soil, which Gerry's garden had, unfortunately along with many rocks. However, finding somewhere that sold them was far more difficult and became a challenging, but interesting quest.

David and I drove miles into the Georgia and neighbouring South Carolina countryside searching out the nurseries that had been recommended. Most turned out to be just sellers of pansies and the usual fillers of photinias, crape myrtle and hollies, but there were exceptions. One day I took the truck and Gerry's gold card (one didn't need any proof of identity in those innocent days) and drove deep into the countryside finally reaching a small dirt track. On the side of this track was a small cabin where I had been told I might find some unusual varieties of azaleas and rhododendrons. And indeed, I did, and it was called Transplant Nurseries. There, in a small field behind the shed were rows and rows of azaleas and rhododendrons, but more importantly, the owner, who was a very knowledgeable older lady, was able to name and describe the many varieties in great detail.

The history of this nursery is fascinating. It was started by a native plantsman passionate about azaleas, who searched the mountains of North Georgia to find unique native azaleas and then set about growing and hybridising them. She also informed me that some of the varieties they had raised had found their way into the royal gardens at Windsor Castle. Although at that time, it was only a wholesale enterprise, she allowed me to buy several varieties of both azaleas and rhododendrons, and she gave me a valuable lesson in how to plant them correctly. Incidentally, on this last visit to Georgia, Gerry and I visited this nursery again. It is still run by the same family but is now a vast operation with acres of shrubs and plants of all varieties, selling to garden centres all over the USA. An indication of how gardening has changed in 40 years in the USA!

Finding a nursery supplying herbaceous perennials in Georgia was even more challenging. Garden centres as we know them simply didn't exist. They were only suppliers of annuals and a few bog-standard shrubs. Some plants we were able to source by mail order from some others states, but they weren't very successful.

However, on about our fourth yearly visit, we were given a recommendation for a nursery 45 drive minutes away – it was called Goodness Grows.



Goodness Grows

When we arrived, it was so unexpected-it could have been in the UK. It had a wonderful collection of herbaceous plants and shrubs, all beautifully displayed and run by two charismatic and very knowledgeable men, with whom, over the years, we became great friends.
This is where I was first introduced to the Paper Bush tree, (Edgeworthia chrysantha) that I now grow in my son's garden. Sadly, Goodness Grows no longer exists: both owners died relatively young from cancer, which is thought to have been caused by the copious use of pesticides in the early days before they were cancer linked.



David and I visited Gerry each spring, adding to the garden and enjoying watching it grow and flourish. As in every garden, there were failures, but the successes more than made up for that and along the way, I learnt a lot. Who would have guessed that Daphnes would flourish in that climate!



The garden now.

Gerry went on to take a gardening course at the nearby Athens Botanical gardens and achieved her Master Gardener award. She has spearheaded the improvement of the flora in and around Elberton through her Keep Elberton Beautiful campaign.

Speaker of the Month: Samantha Hopes: Plants with a story.



Samantha was a student at Birmingham Botanic Gardens and also at Pershore College and Wisley with stints at Kew and Great Dixter before joining John Massey at Ashwood with husband Nigel. Now, together with husband Nigel, they have created and built their own garden, propagating and growing a range of unusual plants at home. Samantha talking about the plants she raises with her husband Nigel. **Hence, Plants with a Story.**

Plant of the month: Cyclamen hederifolium & Cyclamen coum.



Continuing the theme of highlighting plants that thrive in dry conditions, I have chosen cyclamen, particularly cyclamen hederifolium which is autumn flowering and cyclamen coum, which is winter flowering. Both thrive reliably in dry and difficult areas of the garden. Both cyclamen hederifolium and cyclamen coum have pink flowers and dark green leaves; coum usually green, but hederifolium marbled with grey. However, both have white forms and cyclamen leaves can be variable in pattern and shape.

There are 23 species of cyclamen, some are very rare, like the cyclamen libanoticum, which only exists on a couple of mountains in the north east of Beirut in Lebanon. Cyclamen, surprisingly, is a member of the primrose family and grows from tubers that can survive drought and heat. After flowering, their seeds are carried off by ants, which are attracted to the sticky covering. When the ants have licked off the sweetness, the seed is abandoned, often as much as 300 yards from the parent plant. Many species flower shortly after the arrival of rain, whilst others start by growing their leaves, forming a backdrop for the flowers in spring. Cyclamen hederifolium was the first species to be introduced to Britain in the late 16th century, and it has now naturalised in much of southern England where there is dry shade. Both varieties are hardy everywhere. If you have an unheated greenhouse, there are many other beautiful

varieties you can grow. Hederifolium are best grown under trees, and coum, which tends to flower at the same time as snowdrops, makes a great combination. Plant on top or just beneath the surface. The tubers are small when young but can live up to 100 years when the tuber will be the size of dinner plate! Coincidentally, the leading grower of hardy cyclamen is John Massey of Ashwood nurseries, so a link there to our speaker this month!

Next year's programme will start in February 2027. Details will be listed in the December Newsletter.

We will be taking subscriptions from January and we can take subscriptions via bank transfer. Membership for 2027 will be unchanged at £30. Details of how you can subscribe online will be sent out to all members via email in January. Of course, you can still subscribe by cheque, or cash at our first meeting in February. The full programme for 2027 will be published on our website from January. **Also, just a reminder that videos of club meetings only stay on Facebook for 30 days before they are deleted**.

Gardening news and events.

RHS Harlow Carr: Glow: November 26th - December 30th

Fountains Abbey: Little Bird Christmas Artisan Market: Sat. 28th & Sunday 29th November 10am -3pm.

Hebden Bridge Open Studios: 4th- 6 th December. 10.30-5pm.

Skipton Christmas Market Sunday December 6th & Sunday December 13 th 10am -4pm.

Tea and coffee rota

A big thank you to the great team who volunteer to help with the rota. If you can help, please sign the rota sheet on the refreshment counter.



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