



Oxenhope

Gardening Club News

May 2026

Welcome to the May newsletter.

Although most weekends I am to be found maintaining my son's garden, last weekend was a particularly hard working one. On May 1st, my son will be celebrating his 50th birthday with a party in the garden for 60 of his friends and family. Since it starts at 4pm, there will be ample time for guests to wander round, hence the frenzied activity last weekend.



Original view down the garden

Daniel bought his large Victorian house just over 10 years ago. It, and its garden were neglected. The garden is on a site which was originally a small quarry used to extract the limestone and sandstone required in the manufacture of glass, which has been an industry in the area since the 17th century. Consequently, much of the garden soil is alkaline and very well drained but there are areas that are loamy and slightly acidic due to the quantity of leaf deposits during its long era of neglect, which has allowed a variety of plants to be grown.

Apart from the fact that the land sloped quite steeply to a worn-out patch of grass, with a large wooded area at the bottom, the terrain of the garden was almost impossible to see under a cover of tree seedlings- mostly sycamore- brambles, ivy and a dense covering of some kind of ornamental grass. Beyond that, all that could be seen at the far end was a dense thicket of trees, brambles and ivy.



Uncovering the rockery

While Daniel and his partner Natalia mostly concentrated on the house, I took over a large part of the restoration of the garden, starting with clearing the sloping area nearest to the house. Clearing back the various tree seedlings, impacted grass and ivy from the slope, we discovered York stone paved pathways, a rockery and a pond.



Rockery now



Part of the wood before clearing

After clearing and planting other areas of the garden, the most daunting part to tackle was at the end of the garden. This was also covered in dense undergrowth but had the added challenge of old car engines, remains of washing machines, a variety of scrap metal and a number mattresses which were hiding in the undergrowth.

Given that one of my favourite books as a child was *The Secret Garden*, my desire to transform all of this was an exciting challenge. Dove Cottage nursery saw many visits, as did Daleside nursery in Killinghall, the place where I had bought most of the trees and shrubs planted in my garden in France, (those were the days pre-Brexit when you could freely transport plants into Europe) In fact, many of the seedlings of these plants returned to the UK into Daniel's garden.



The wood now.

A seedling of *Cornus Kousa* from France originally bought at Daleside, is now an 8-foot tree in his garden. The whole adventure allowed me to fully indulge my plant buying obsession- while Daniel and Natalia, have provided the muscle power, building embankments, patios, tools sheds and very recently, levelling land for an orchard, the trees for which were a generous wedding gift from his godfather. **Sandra**

Plant of the month: Tree peony: *Paeonia x suffruticosa*.



My choice for this month's plant, the tree peony, was as a result of seeing a magnificent example in a friend's garden in London. It is a variety I am not familiar with, and despite my attempts on various websites, I still haven't been able to identify it. If anyone recognises it, please let me know!

The ancient heartland of the peony lies in Asia, specifically China, where cultivation began thousands of years ago. In Chinese mythology, the peony is associated with various legends, including one where the spirit of a woman named Gejin, left behind two tree peonies after fleeing to the spirit world, which were said to have blooms larger than before. This cultural reverence has led to the tree peony being celebrated in art and literature throughout Chinese history. Historical texts suggest that peonies were in use as early as 1000 BC, initially valued for their pharmacological properties rather than their petals. The roots of tree peonies have been used in traditional Chinese medicines to treat liver issues and other various ailments.

In the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), its ornamental value was recognized and celebrated by the imperial court. This led to a boom in cultivation, transforming the peony from a medicinal herb into a symbol of wealth, nobility, and honour. The Tree Peony (*Paeonia suffruticosa* group) became particularly revered, earning the title "King

of Flowers". The city of Luoyang became a famous centre for peony cultivation, a tradition that persists with an annual festival dedicated to the flower.

The first Chinese peonies reached European gardens much later, starting in the mid-18th century, primarily through trading routes that brought the herbaceous *paenonia lactiflora* to England. Tree peonies followed in the early 1800s, creating a sensation among wealthy collectors and sparking interest in Western cultivation. The first recorded introduction in Europe was in 1789 at Kew Gardens.



Paeonia suffruticosa Ling Hua Zhan

Tree Peonies form woody shrubs and are almost exclusively native to the mountainous regions of Central and Western China. These species thrive in environments that provide winter chilling and good drainage. Tree peonies are best planted in autumn, but winter or early spring planting is also suitable. Plant in a sunny or lightly-shaded position and although tree peonies are very hardy, foliage and flower buds can be damaged by late frosts, so avoid frost pockets and choose a sheltered position to prevent damage to flowers and foliage by strong winds.

Tree peonies prefer neutral, humus-rich, well-drained soils, but they will tolerate slightly acid or slightly alkaline soils. It is possible to grow tree peonies in pots, however, peonies are deep-rooted plants and vigorous growers, so tend to be more challenging when you plant them in pots as opposed to the ground. Just make sure you're giving them enough room to grow, ideally in a container that is at least 50cm deep and 50cm wide. Peony tubers can rot in waterlogged conditions, so be sure to choose a pot with plenty of drainage holes.

Plant Sale. Thursday May 21st

We hope you have all been sowing seeds and dividing and splitting plants to donate to our plant sale that takes place on Thursday May 21st at 7.30.

Please can our lovely members who are donating plants arrive by 7pm and have their plants labelled. The selling of plants will begin, and definitely not before, 7.30. We are always grateful to members who make cakes for the sale, they are always delicious!

Our speaker on June 18th will be Daniele Altieri:

His subject will be Mystery, Surprise & Illusion.

Garden visits reminder

The visit to the Scapegoat garden is £10, (pay on entry). The visit to Hooton is £7 (pay on entry). The cost of the visit to Jacqueline Iddon's garden is £22.50 which includes a hot and cold buffet. Names can be taken for the July and August visits at the plant sale.

May 15th, Visit to NGS Scapegoat Gardens, Golcar, Huddersfield.

July 13th Visit to Hooton's Walled Nursery, Rotherham

August 11th Visit to Jacqueline Iddon Garden Bretheton, Leyland.

We would like members to arrange car sharing. At the May meeting, can members who are willing to share, make themselves known and thereafter make their own arrangements.

Garden Events

Shipley Open Gardens: Saturday, June 13th & Sunday, June 14th. 1pm -5pm.

Midgley Open Gardens: Saturday, June 6th & Sunday, June 7th. 11am-5pm

Happy Visiting!



Once again, thanks to our volunteers who help with teas and coffees!

www.oxenhopegardeningclub.co.uk