

Stoke Gabriel Horticultural Society report 2024, Julie Goodall, chair  
Parish council meeting 20th May 2024

We are a group of friendly gardeners of varying degrees of expertise from the beginner to the RHS qualified. We share a love of growing things and a concern for nature, the environment and our community. It is very much a team effort with the roles broken down into smaller jobs for more people to share the load.

Historically, we organise three annual events in the village hall. The plant sale is our fundraiser that helps cover the costs of the two other events: the Flower Show, on 8th June this year, and the Village Show, on 17th August.

The society is growing fast and we have been very pleased to welcome nearly twenty new members in the last year and because of this we are able to broaden our activities.

Recently we worked on creating a garden in the orchard as a memorial for Anthony Scoble which was designed by one of our members, Teri Porter and the hardscaping was done by Pete Collings and Gareth Danger Jones. It was a miracle that we found a couple of dry days in the autumn to plant out nearly 4000 bulbs, chosen for a long-term, low-maintenance garden but that does invariably mean that there will be periods when it looks a bit scruffy as we wait for new bulbs to come up or foliage to die back. Please bear with it. The garden is also still a work in progress as we spot any gaps that might appear.

Also as part of improving our local green spaces, a number of our members have volunteered this year to adopt some of the beds around the village and will be weeding, planting and mulching them up soon. Do say hello if you see them out and about!

We've also begun a program of talks on a variety of horticultural issues that we hope will be of interest. So far we've had a talk on sustainable farming by Riverford and the importance of protecting our heritage seed varieties by Vital Seeds, a local organic seed supplier. Our next talk is on 19th September and we are very excited to announce that Toby Buckland from Gardeners' World has agreed to come to our talk on Pollinators in Peril by our very own member, Stephen Reed. We will be supporting Toby's Pocket Meadow Project, the aim being to encourage everyone to grow some wild flowers, whether your garden is big or small, to help bolster the habitat of pollinators. We will be giving away packets of wild flower seeds as part of this project.

We also gave away flower seeds and baby tomato plants to children at our plant sale a couple of weeks ago which was very well received and we will be giving away sunflower plants to children at the flower show. We are really keen to encourage a joy of growing things from a young age which then naturally leads to an awareness of nature and the environment.

The plant sale was a huge success and a big thank you to everyone who came along or donated plants, seeds and cakes. We had so many plants we needed extra tables and the cakes and bacon rolls went down a treat!

Hot on the heels is the Flower Show which is on 8th June. We have extended the categories to include other flowers in addition to roses and sweet peas to give people more opportunities to enter. The great thing about the flower show is that you don't need any special skills to take part. A garden or pot in which to grow some flowers, a pair of secateurs or scissors and a vase is all you need ! This year we have introduced cash prizes for first, second and third in every class so there's more incentive to give it a go! An important change this year is that due to an increase in exhibits over the last couple of years, entry forms need to be picked up in advance from Stoke Gabriel Stores and brought on the day.

This will be the third year running that we donate all proceeds of the raffle to charity and again this year we will be supporting Ukrainian Action. Last year we raised £400 which is amazing.

The biggest event of the year is the Village Show on 17th August and this will be our 83rd year. If you've never been, it's an impressive sight to see the hall jam packed (excuse the pun) with displays of prize vegetables, flowers, homemade cakes and jams(!), handicraft, flower arrangements, photography, homemade spirits, houseplants and the children's section. Again, we really want the emphasis to be on taking part for the fun of it (and of course, there's money to be won!) as well as the satisfaction of being part of a community event.

Finally, we are very pleased to join the other village clubs and societies by having our own noticeboard outside the Church House car park. We aim to keep it updated with news of both ours and other local horticultural events or information of interest. And of course, as you'd expect nowadays, you can find us on Facebook too!

<https://facebook.com/stokegabrielhortsoc>