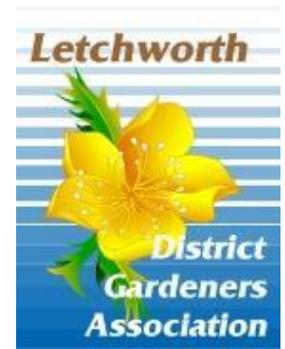


Letchworth District Gardeners Association

Affiliated to the BFS, NDS, NSPS, NVS, RHS
President: Mr Graham Tapp



Annual Report 2018

Chairman's Report

2018 was a challenging year for gardeners in general and it had a knock-on effect for the Association. What with the Beast from the East and then a long period without rain in the summer it took its toll particularly at the Trading Store. We rely on income from the Trading Store to financially support our meetings, shows etc. so I was delighted to hear that sales later recovered. This was partially due to the hard work of the team that man the store week in week out, thank you all for this huge commitment. We have been accepting credit cards for a year now which has given us an appreciation of the cost to the Association. Regrettably we will now be introducing a minimum £5 spend on card transactions, just as so many retail outlets do.

The committee and in particularly Myra are always trying to think of new ideas for our meetings to try and tempt more members to attend. We have very varied talks and have tried an afternoon meeting but this didn't result in an increase in attendance so what aren't we doing? The meetings do take a lot of organising and speaker's fees are ever increasing. With so many horticultural groups closing their doors, if we are to continue with the regular meetings then we really do need your support. So if you know someone that might enjoy it then please spread the word and encourage them to come along.

Shows are the third arm of the Association and despite the weather 2018 members came up trumps. The demonstrations seem to be appreciated so these will continue for another year as it makes for a more enjoyable afternoon out.

One new venture in 2018 was the allotments. We took over two allotments at Flint Road one has been subdivided into smaller plots and with agreement with NHDC has been sublet as people told us that they could only manage to cultivate a small area. Looking at what people have grown on their plot it seems that they have been very successful. The second allotment for which we don't pay any rent is for our Seedlings Group. This is being masterminded for us by Kay who is passionate to get youngsters interested in gardening.

More detailed reports are to be found below.

As always, I am most grateful for the support given to me by our President Graham Tapp and members of the committee and for the hard work that they all put in to help run the Association, it is much appreciated. Thank you also to you the members for your continuing support.

M. Herscox

Speaker, Outings and Social Report – Myra Smith

We started the year in January 2018 with 64 members attending our popular Sausage Sizzle and Quiz, a great night. As we progressed through the year, we had 7 speakers plus 2 that included excellent demonstrations one of which was in the afternoon. They covered many differing aspects of gardening from growing to design and much in between, there was also our version of Gardeners Question Time headed up by Pippa Greenwood with a supporting cast of Philip Whaites, Nicholas Warliker and our President Graham Tapp, a thoroughly entertaining evening,

attended by 159, a good result. In June we had another celebrity to entertain us, Christine Walkden, what a very knowledgeable and entertaining lady she was and a great example of how never to give up on what you want to achieve in life, attended by 112.

We had 3 coach trips booked, one cancelled due to lack of support. 44 of us visited Wisely Flower Show always very popular a super day out, then in November 69 of us finished the year off with the most wonderful evening at Kew's winter light extravaganza, what a show.

In addition there were 10 coffee mornings at Tapps Garden Centre, the 1st Wednesday of the month, where not only is the coffee good but also several cakes to tempt us, and the good news is as a member we get 10% of plants as well as in the coffee shop.

Thank you Roz for all your help with setting up the hall, and the rest of the team for their invaluable help, especially when we had our celebs, it was all hands on deck, so thank you team.

As some of you may already know we are going to be holding some of our meetings at the Cloisters next year. The main advantage will be flexibility with our meetings content and times along with a bar facility and a lot more parking spaces, 84. We will try a supper with a speaker evening, and maybe a lunch time event. I have 4 outings booked so far also for next year. Our first adventure will be to Letchworth Golf Club, we have a speaker and lunch booked on Thursday 21st. March. So, a lot of new things to look forward to in 2019. Hopefully there will be some things in this year's diary for everyone.

Show Report - Paul Heydon

It has been a trying year for growers and exhibitors, the bitter cold, rain and the long hot dry weather. This said, I was again amazed at the amount and standard of what was shown at our two shows. They were both excellent especially a display of carnations in July, which I think is a first for me as show secretary, and the impressive display of chrysanthemums and dahlias in September. There was also some outstanding vegetables and handicraft.

The number of exhibits in the September show was the most we have had, we only just had enough tabling with extra tables I had supplied and others that were borrowed from across the road.

I would like to thank all the helpers, without them the show could not take place. Also, a big thank you to those who exhibited as without you there definitely would not be a show, and a thank you to those who donated plants, cakes and produce as these go to help offset the cost of running the shows.

It would be nice if there were more children taking part, it seems that we only have to rely on the schools whose pupils enter. If you have never visited our shows, please make 2019 the year to start, you never know it may make you feel like entering.

Trading Store Report – John Brookbanks

This past year has been my first year in charge of the Trading Store since my predecessor, Peter Faulkner, stood down. Now I fully appreciate how much hard work he put into doing the job! It has been a steep learning curve for me. But this has been made easier by all the people who give their time freely to help with the running of the store. To all of them, both myself and all the members owe a big thank you.

After an extremely challenging start to the year, when we had a long drawn out cold Spring that impacted on trading. Sales did recover and the year ended on quite a positive note.

Seed potatoes sold well, though that said this year's order is being reduced by 10% due to declining sales. This involves reducing the quantities of certain varieties, but also introducing 3 RHS recommend new varieties.

Both Spring and Autumn Onion sets sold out. Although our usual order has been placed for this year's Spring Onion sets, at the time of writing this report we are unsure what quantity we will be receiving. This is due to last Summer's drought that has caused a shortfall of up to 65% of the harvest of certain varieties in Holland.

All the composts continued to sell well, as did the Strulch. Our star seller of the year was the Farmyard Manure which we introduced as a trial. We ended up having to reorder an extra 3 pallets. This was our first year of stocking King's Seeds which also sold steadily through the season.

As for the coming trading year. We are phasing out items that tend to sell slowly and are introducing around a dozen or so new lines across the store. If anyone has further suggestions for other new items, we would be more than happy to hear your ideas.

I'm going to end by saying that we have lost 4 or 5 people who helped down at the store for various reasons. This has made the creation of this year's rota's very hard work and puts an unfair burden on the few. We do have two or three members who have offered their services and are joining the team. But we need to teach more members to use the till, as well as helpers. We only have one certified forklift truck driver, we need someone else to be qualified as a backup driver. The Association would pay for any qualifying course, could it be you?

Publicity, Schools & Seedlings Report – Kay Walker

Having been warmly welcomed and nominated to join the LDGA Committee I took on the role of Publicity Secretary in February 2018 after the AGM. Amongst my first tasks I updated our Facebook page and our Twitter account and shared details of the fantastic Pippa Greenwood and Christine Walkden events. As the events of the year passed, I realised that everyone was already fantastic at sharing publicity duties, which gave me the time to look at other areas of interest to the LDGA.

I produced a list of things we could do to increase interest from the LDGA members. This included starting children's workshops. I found that parents can lack confidence in the garden and not sure where to start. However, through simple activities we could educate both the children and their parents. We chose the name 'Seedlings' for our children's group and the first workshop was held on my own allotment in May 2018. We had 8 children sign up and we received great feedback. The 8th Scout Group Letchworth also approached us to help them achieve their Gardening Badge award, and Maureen and myself also attended the Samuel Lucas School in Hitchin and gave a school assembly about the LDGA, and gave talks to several different classes about the food in their lunchboxes and how it had been grown. Realising the need for the Seedlings group to have a purposely designed allotment, we approached North Herts District Council. They met us at the Flint Road site by the Trading Store and in June 2018 we took on two full sized plots. One was divided up to be used as mini plots and the other would be used for the Seedlings plot. At the same time, a group of us also revamped the existing half plot opposite the Trading Store. All the plots have taken a lot of hard work to clear, level and plant up. We were extremely grateful to have been donated our amazing Greenhouse, paving slabs and a couple of water butts. On the 16th September, the Seedlings plot was ready to hold its first event. This time 12 Children and their parents arrived for an Autumn Themed Workshop. We made bug houses, planted bulbs on the plot, planted up a crocus pot and put a Viola on top for instant colour. The children were also able to pick their own Pumpkin from the Pumpkin Patch and take it home. The cost of the Workshops has been £3 per child, which covered the costs involved. At both Workshops, they have been able to take everything they have made home with them. They have been incredibly successful, and my huge appreciation goes to all who helped. The Seedlings Workshops are being very well received by parents and children alike and we have received some amazing feedback. We do however need continued support and the plot itself would really benefit from some weeding volunteers throughout the year.

For 2019 we plan to hold at least 3 Seedlings events themed by the passing Seasons. The first being a Seedlings and LDGA open day planned for Easter Sunday which is the 21st April 19. The fantastic gift of the Greenhouse enables us to start off strong healthy plants for the events and to help fill the allotment up. We also want to push the Children's section of the Summer and Autumn Show. It was suggested that I take on the Schools Liaison Role of the committee and link the Seedlings Activities with the Schools encouraging all to enter the shows.

I have only had my own allotment for 3 years now and I have a lot to learn, so I'm always grateful for growing advice, any spare plants and especially some volunteers to help maintain the plot.

Membership Report - Jo Schurch

The membership this year is approx. 418

We had 74 new members this year which looks good but is matched by 69 leavers, so membership remains static.

Of the leavers about 39 were older or long-standing members but about 30 were people who had only been members for between 2 and 5 years. Not sure what this means or what we can do about it.

Treasurer's Report – Maureen Hersee

Unfortunately, the person that offered to take over as our treasurer wasn't able to do so in the end. Consequently, I have been hopefully keeping the books in order over the past year. Thankfully Carol Russell agreed to come on board and was co-opted to the committee. However, it has taken longer than anticipated to get the bank mandate sorted out and to get Carol up and running with the banking. Hopefully we are over this hurdle now and Carol will be able to fully take over the role of treasurer.

Website & Newsletter Editor's Report – Andrew Dear

Website

The website's yearly overhaul is now complete, and we are ready for the new season. The website is still the place to go when you want current information about the Association. Have a look at the photos on the gallery pages as they showcase everything we do throughout the year. Please send in your photos if you have anything garden related that you would like to share.

Member's emails

As part of our preparations for the new GDPR regulations, last year we took the opportunity to tidy up the mailing list, removing all those who were not currently paid up members. During this process we managed to re-establish contact with some members who's addresses had changed or gone out of date. On average in 2018, 55% of those emailed opened their monthly update, which is a shade higher than it was in 2017.

Email is the best way for us to keep you up to date with things relating to the association, so please let us have your email address if we don't have it all ready. We will look after it! Please also let us know if you are not getting the emails. Check spam or junk folders first and add our mailing address membershipsecretary@ldga.org.uk to your address book. If you still don't get them, let us know your correct email and we'll try to see where the problem is.

Compost Heap

I enjoyed compiling the quarterly Compost Heap's again last year and was encouraged by the increase in contributions from both committee and the wider membership. More have been pledged for future editions. Also encouraging is the increase in readership, for the last 2 editions particularly, with nearly 50% of all those emailed clicking on the link to open the file. In addition to this, others may be accessing via the website or reading paper copies if they don't have email. As ever, your feedback would be most welcome, let me know what you like or dislike and what you would like to see in future editions.