

## **U3A Gardening group March 24 report for Forum**

2024 has seen a great start for the gardening group with several new Members bringing the group total to over 100!

The group has a full programme for the year of talks and garden visits.

The February talk was the first of the year and our most popular event so far with a large turnout. Julie welcomed the new Members to the group and our speaker Keeley Metcalfe. The subject of the talk was Garden Designs for Small Gardens. Keeley has previously spoken to the group around 3 years ago but was new to most of the Members present.

Keeley trained at Leeds University in Landscape Garden Design, she was brought up near Boroughbridge and now lives near Northallerton.

Keeley told us about the stages of garden design:

Survey the site looking at soil type, drainage, aspect, existing features, boundary, views access. Consider a concept or theme for the garden, maybe a wildlife friendly garden. Start to put together a draft design and keep working on options until you have your Masterplan. Keeley uses lots of photos and plans out designs using tracing paper or greaseproof paper.

A common issue with small gardens is being overlooked by neighbouring houses and other dominant features, she suggested we overcome this by using "distraction techniques". This could involve drawing attention to another feature of the garden such as putting a bench under a tree. We could also use paving to draw the eye to different parts of the garden.

Keeley also advised using Planting Accents, for example using plants and shrubs to frame the access to a path, maybe clipped box balls. For a square garden she suggested that symmetrical planting can work well. For small gardens she suggested that we could use fake doorways and arches, consider the angle of lawns and flower beds and put larger plants towards the front of the garden. The main point was to plan the garden in advance.

This was an interesting talk which was well received by the group.

In March our speaker was Peter Kirkland who talked about the design and maintenance of ponds and water features. We heard about the importance of the location of the pond, needing to be accessible, able to be viewed from the appropriate aspects, avoiding trees which drop leaves into the water, avoiding slopes and taking account of manholes and pipes. The types of pond may be for Koi, ornamental ponds with a fountain or water feature and wild life ponds. Other than wild life ponds a filter is needed and they can now be solar powered avoiding the expense of electrical cables. The most popular type of system is pressurised especially one which can be dug into the ground and so hidden from view. Many of the systems have ultra violet light to stop the water from turning green.

Ponds can be dug into the ground to be flush with the soil or built up with bricks which requires less digging. We learned about the types of pond liner from the rigid structure and were able to sample the different grades of liner from PVC to Green Seal, Butyl and Firestone progressively stronger and more expensive. Maintenance of the pond needs to be considered at the design stage so as to make it as easy as possible.

Common problems are predation of fish by cats, herons and otters. Blanket weed can be cleared using an enzyme which does not harm wild life or plants. Duck weed is almost impossible to eradicate. We learned that irises do not need any soil as they take nutrients from the water but water lilies do need soil. Instead of plastic pots with slats there are now

landscape bags which are being used for pond plants. Its best to check and trim any pond plants in spring, taking care not to puncture any liner.

This was another interesting talk which was enjoyed by the group.

On 5<sup>th</sup> April Mr K J Vincent Chairman of the Chrysanthemums and Dahlia Society will be talking about growing these flowers in containers.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May we will be having our first coach trip to Holker Hall and Gardens.

On 7<sup>th</sup> June we will be visiting the RHS Bridgewater garden.

Julie, Fran and Kate