



What's on next?

Monday 8th April

Bill Le Grice

"Trees and Shrubs for colour all year"

Monday 11th March



ORCHIDS - a talk by Robin McDonald

Orchids! A fascinating range of plants, especially for our speaker, Robin McDonald, for whom a hobby has turned into a real passion. Robin now travels around the world giving talks and sharing her deep knowledge and love of orchids.

In recent years, orchids have become very popular, in shops, offices, and homes. Robin described them as 'the pot plants of the present'. They are seen as exotic plants with a certain mystique about them and they are available in a wide variety of colours, shape and size. They are being bred for the modern, centrally heated home where they not only look decorative but, like other plants, absorb the many toxins that are found in our homes. This in itself is an excellent reason for growing one at home. Orchid breeding and growing can be a very lucrative business.

There are over 800 different genera of orchid and 25,000 different species and as they have become so popular, garden centres and nurseries are offering ever more varieties.

Orchids grow naturally in all corners of the world including here in Norfolk where some varieties can be found growing wild. In Australia, there is even a variety which grows underground and the flower only breaks the surface of the soil to attract insects.

There are three very different ways in which orchids grow:

- i) in the ground where they are deciduous, lying dormant during the winter months and then pushing up above ground to flower in late Spring and summer. These are known as **terrestrials**,
- ii) on trees where they use their roots to cling to the bark and draw moisture from it. These orchids grow horizontally. These are known as **epiphytes**,
- iii) on rocks and mountainsides where they can get moisture from the air or mountain streams. There is one variety that only survives in flowing water. These are known as **lithophytes**.

Many of the orchids available are originally ones that grow in trees and have to be specially potted in bark and supported with sticks to keep them upright. As the roots need light to survive, they are planted in transparent pots and then kept in a transparent or translucent container in the home. If you put your orchid plant in an opaque container, it is unlikely to survive. It is also important for this type of orchid to avoid letting the roots lie in water as they will rot.

Some orchids will stay in flower for months whereas others others lose their flowers quickly. Many are highly perfumed though some emit an unpleasant smell, such as the smell of rotting meat, which will attract a specific type of insect.

Orchids are different from all other plants because they do not have stamens and pollen. Instead they have a 'sticky mass' which has to be transported from plant to plant by insects for fertilization. Each specific orchid has its own specific insect to do this and an orchid will use smell, colour or even movement to attract its insect.

Not only is the growing of orchids for the home big business, but so too is the growing of the orchid *vanilla planifolia* from which vanilla essence is extracted. Vanilla essence is used in a wide range of food products, more than you would imagine, and it is a huge commercial business even though cheaper synthetic vanilla essence is widely available.

Wild orchids flowering in Norfolk and Suffolk, start appearing from April and information is available on line (eg Norfolk Wildlife Trust) as to where and when to go.

Next month: Bill Le Grice will be giving a talk on 'Trees and Shrubs for colour all year'. Monday 8th April at 7.45 in the Methodist Church, Martham. New members and visitors always welcome. For more information about future talks and events, please look on our website (marthamgarden.weebly.com) or phone 01493 740960.