

The Club was pleased to welcome horticulturalist Sam Baines to the meeting in May. Sam had trained at Writtle College and Capel Manor and is currently volunteering at both RHS Hyde Hall and the Gardens of Easton Lodge.

Her subject for the evening was Summer Hanging Baskets and Containers. Sam gave an excellent presentation using both slides and a practical demonstration. The science behind the choice of compost, plants and feeding regimes was outlined and this was followed up by Sam making up a number of hanging baskets. Peat free compost was used throughout.

First of all, the compost was decanted and thoroughly worked by hand to eliminate any lumps and slow release fertiliser mixed in according to directions on the jar. Sam pointed out that she wasn't in favour of using water retaining granules as they were made of plastic and would ultimately end up contaminating the planet. Prior to putting the prepared compost into the coir lined hanging basket, Sam placed a perforated disc of plastic (cut from an old compost bag), to slow down water loss.

Colour schemes and suitability for the proposed site of the baskets were discussed and small healthy plants were placed in the the basket filled with compost to within an inch of the top of the coir lining.

A number of suitable plants were discussed, many of which were new to the audience. Sam stressed the after care of a hanging basket is of paramount importance, especially if the basket is to be sited in a sunny windy position. The baskets would need regular watering, preferably in the early morning or the evening, sometimes both if the weather was hot. After about 4 weeks, the initial fertiliser would be used up by the plants and a regular weekly feed of tomato or seaweed feed was recommended. Regular dead heading would ensure a good display over a longer period.

When going on holiday, Sam suggested that all the baskets and containers were grouped together to cut down water loss and that all the flowers be removed. This sounds a bit drastic, but we were assured, that on return from holiday, we would be greeted by a basket in full flower.

Of course, the survival of the baskets is greatly increased by the services of a kindly neighbour.