

# The Gold Club Membership Booklet 2026/27

## Table of Contents

<b>About The Gold Club .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Gold Club Membership Benefits.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Annual Free Talks.....	2
Discount Shopping Visits.....	3
January & February Discount Cards.....	3
Spring Flowering Bulb Discount Cards.....	3
Growing Competitions.....	3
Discount Compost Pre-Ordering.....	3
Show Cards.....	4
Newsletters.....	4
Website.....	4
Corporate Support.....	4
Summer Party.....	4
Networking Lunch.....	4
Forums.....	4
Annual Renewal Meetings.....	4
<b>The Gardens Group Talks.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Plants.....	5
Garden Style.....	6
Garden Visitors.....	6
Garden Maintenance.....	7
Plants As Food.....	8
Seasonal Favourites.....	8
Indoor Gardening.....	9
Talks with a Wider Appeal.....	9
Talks with Demonstrations.....	10
An Inside Look.....	10
<b>Portfolio of Speakers.....</b>	<b>11</b>

# About The Gold Club...

The Gold Club is designed to support local community groups such as gardening clubs, horticultural societies, allotment associations, the Women's Institute and U3A to flourish by offering exclusive benefits for your members. The Gold Club is run by The Garden's Group, which unites three Garden Centres across Dorset and South Somerset allowing us to connect with a wide network of groups. These centres are Castle Gardens in Sherborne, Brimsmore Gardens in Yeovil and Poundbury Gardens in Dorchester.

Our mission is to work alongside communities to promote gardening for its environmental and health benefits while gaining a closer relationship with our valued garden centre visitors. To do this, we offer a wide range of benefits to groups that join The Gold Club which are listed within this booklet ranging from expert talks from our speakers, discounted events at our centres and more. We hope you'll join us and we look forward to getting to know you!

Our membership year is offered for £120 from the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2026 through to the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2027 and is available for groups within 25 miles of any of our centres. In order to be able to properly support your group we do ask that you have at least 15 active members. If you would like to apply for membership or organise renewal please get in touch via the methods below.

## Contact Information

Our Gold Club Administrator Katherine Keogh will be your main point of contact for all things Gold Club. You can always get in touch by email at [thegoldclub@thegardensgroup.co.uk](mailto:thegoldclub@thegardensgroup.co.uk) or alternatively you can call **01935 814633** from 9am to 4pm on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

# The Gold Club Membership Benefits

## Free Expert Talk

Your membership includes a **free talk** each year on your choice of subject from this year's list, which includes a wide range of topics across all areas of gardening and horticulture and can be found below beginning on page 5. Our speakers have a wealth of knowledge and experience in the field and are happy to share it with your club.

Once you have selected your topic and a few possible dates just get in touch with Katherine to book it in, we'll always do our best to squeeze you into the diary but it's always best to let us know with as much notice as possible. Once your talk is in the diary you can check our 'What's On' page on our website ([www.thegardensgroup.co.uk](http://www.thegardensgroup.co.uk)) to verify that we have the correct information, which is also the case for any other events booked with us.

*Please note that speaker availability is limited during late September and early October (while we create our famous Christmas Displays). Changes occasionally have to be made to booked talks should a specialist speaker become unavailable. Notice will be given where possible and a choice of alternative subjects offered. Due to the high demand our speakers receive we are unable to provide additional talks at this time. #*

## Discount Shopping Visits to our Centres

Each visit will begin with a short topical talk (either 2:30pm or 6pm depending on your booking) accompanied by a hot drink and biscuits. Afterwards you are free to shop. Your discount at checkout will be **25%** off any full priced purchases - excluding restaurant, farm shop, concessions, vouchers and furniture. Where an item is already on offer, for example 3 bags of compost for £25, the tills will calculate the best deal for you. Our regular offer for **free delivery** still applies, and usually we will visit your club's area the following morning – not including weekend days. For clubs slightly further afield, there may be a longer delivery period.

**Evening discount shopping visits** can be booked between January and the end of September. To be fair to our staff, who will be giving up their evening at home, we can only book these evenings when you are assured of a **minimum 25 members** attending.

**Daytime discount shopping visits** are available between January and mid-March (when the clocks change) or from the middle of June until the end of September. For these events we need a lower minimum participation – at least **15 of your members** should attend for your full discount to be available.

***Teaming up!** - if you think you will struggle to bring enough members we are happy to help arrange a joint visit with another club of limited numbers. We promise not to link you up with so big a club that we are too busy for you to enjoy the ambience of a good social outing with your group.*

## Vouchers for 25% off in January and February

During January and February, we offer an exclusive 25% discount on all full priced items and excluding our restaurant, farm shop, concessions and furniture. These vouchers will help your members prepare for their spring gardening. The discount vouchers can be used as many times as your members wish during January and February. Our free delivery service is still available for all of these purchases.

## Vouchers for 25% off of Spring Flowering Bulbs

These vouchers are available in July/August for members to use from August onwards and offer a 25% discount on our wide range of spring flowering bulb. These vouchers can also be used as many times as your members would like while our bulbs are in stock.

## Plug Plant Growing Competition

We are happy to sponsor a growing competition within your club, local school or community. We provide the plants free of charge along with certificates and a Gardens Group gift voucher as a prize for the winner if requested. A list of plants to choose from is available in October, place your order for collection in March and see who can grow the best plant! We try to supply new and colourful varieties to keep things interesting each year.

## Spring Flowering Bulb Growing Competition

We also support a second growing competition later in the year, this time for spring flowering bulbs. A list of options for bulbs will be ready to order in April for a September collection. This one is more of a 'just for fun' competition so to keep our membership costs down we aren't able to provide vouchers as a prize.

## Discount Compost Pre-Ordering

We offer an extensive range of compost, mulches, fertiliser and other gardening sundries at a discounted rate which can be pre-ordered at the end of the year for a delivery window in January. We aim to be ready to receive orders from mid-November onwards.

## Show Cards

We can print entry cards and certificates for your annual garden shows in a variety of colours, free of charge. Please get in touch to order for stationary at least a month before the event.

## Newsletters

We email out informative newsletters throughout the year to keep you and your members up to date with forthcoming events and offers in the garden centres along with regular updates to keep in touch with you and ensure that you are getting the most out of your Gold Club benefits.

## Website

Our website, [www.thegardensgroup.co.uk](http://www.thegardensgroup.co.uk) has a 'what we do' section with all **THE GOLD CLUB** information available for you. Your Gold Club events can also be found in our 'what's on' section so that you can verify that your talks and shopping events have been booked correctly.

## Corporate Support

We aim to help promote garden clubs by offering your club support when you undertake projects. This can be gardening advice, help developing a community area, even lending plants to brighten up an event. We can also share and promote your club events to other clubs who are part of our Gold Club mailing list. Get in touch if you would like some help.

## Summer Party

We host a popular summer party every year, for all of our Gold Clubbers. It is usually – but not exclusively - arranged around a performance by the outdoor theatre company 'Illyria'. Another theme we have enjoyed over the years is has been 'A gardener's question time'.

## Networking Lunch – New for 2026!

This year we'll be hosting an exclusive event for committee members of our Gold Club groups to come along and meet each other. We aim to provide a space for you to meet your peers from other garden clubs and share stories and helpful advice, during which we'll serve a hot meal, desert and a nice cup of tea.

## Forums

We also host occasional discussion forums to talk about the issues and challenges facing garden clubs. We welcome your questions to pick the brains of our team and your fellow garden club leaders to hopefully find the answers you need.

## Annual renewal meetings

When applying for membership each year it's essential for us to make sure we have all of the right details. That's why we take the time to meet with you over a complimentary hot drink to discuss any changes to the Gold Club package or to your group. This lets us stay up to date and make sure that we're giving you the best possible experience.

# The Gardens Group Talks List 2026/27

The majority of our talks use live plants and materials to demonstrate rather than slides. We prefer to speak for approximately 45 – 60 minutes and are delighted to field questions afterwards. We have a team of speakers and we share the bookings out with the most appropriate person available on a monthly basis. If you wish to book a specific speaker, please specify this when booking and we will endeavour to meet with these wishes although sometimes this may not be possible. Most talks can be booked for any time of the year but those that are time sensitive are noted.

**(P)** indicates that this subject may require you to provide a projector screen. The speaker will bring everything else including a projector.

Subjects marked \* are specific to only one of our team of speakers. When booked a long time in advance there is occasionally a change of circumstances for the speaker, and we may need to invite you to select a different topic. Should this happen, we will gladly rebook the original subject for another day.

## **Plants**

This group of talks are very much based around plants, which ones to choose, how to look after them and varieties you may not have considered before.

### **Alternative Plants, Alternative Places\* (P)**

A fresh look at ornamental and edible plants with the intention of challenging the way we grow and appreciate them.

### **Climbing Plants (P)**

*April - September*

A guide to the selection of climbers and wall shrubs with many practical examples.

### **Companion Planting**

An in-depth look at the way that plant communities and associations can have positive and negative results. Including some tried and tested tips for using combinations of plants to deter or control pests in the vegetable garden.

### **Garden Giants\* (P)**

In this talk we explore some of our favourite oversized plants and mention a few record breakers.

### **Primitive Plants\* (P)**

Steve investigates some of the first plants to develop characteristic features, including leaves, spines and flowers. Possible detours include the first vegetables and the first carnivorous plants...

### **Plants for Specific Places**

Pick two garden situations that your members would like advice on - e.g. 'shady', 'sunny', 'wet', 'windy', North facing and we will put together a special talk for you based on the best plants for those areas.

### **Roses\* (P)**

Everything you need to know about roses, what to plant, cultivation and care.

### **Shrubs for the Flower Arrangers**

A look at shrubs that will be useful to the flower arranger and how and where to grow them.

### **Slightly Naughty Plants\* (P)**

Steve takes a fun look at plants that cheat, steal and deceive, followed by poisons, aphrodisiacs, perception altering and other uses the doctor wouldn't recommend.

### **The Lighter Side of Plants\***

A light-hearted look at the side of plants that you don't usually see.

## **Garden Style**

Trends and styles in gardening are evolving all the time so these talks are based on some of the more innovative trends using new techniques and new plants, without ignoring the best practice of the past and the best plants.

### **Container Gardening**

How and what to grow in containers including advice on pot choice, compost and many ideas on the plants that can be used and how to look after them.

### **Garden Design**

A look at the principles of garden design and practical tips on how to set about designing your own garden.

### **Gardening Trends\***

A look at the new trends in gardening including the latest developments and the plants that are in fashion.

### **Patio Gardens**

A guide to growing plants on the patio.

### **Planning a Border**

The principles behind designing a border with practical tips and a live demonstration of putting together a border.

### **Success with Rockeries (P)**

*March - September*

The siting, construction and planting of rockeries with lots of interesting plants to look at.

## **Garden Visitors**

In this section of talks we look at a variety of things that might wander into your garden, whether invited or not. From pests and weeds to bugs and bees, these talks are all about your visitors.

### **A Closer Look at Weeds\* (P)**

Some weeds are good news - they may be tasty, medicinal or great for particular kinds of wildlife. Other weeds are toxic, invasive and can have negative impact on wildlife. Yet more weeds are very pretty and have produced cultivated 'cousins' that flourish in our garden borders. With this talk we look at a few highs and lows in the world of weeds and consider some of the latest weed control strategies.

### **Garden Friends and Foes\* (P)**

Steve looks at some of the heroes and villains that crop up (pun intended) in our gardens.

### **Gardening for Pollinators**

*March - September*

The best plants to attract bees and butterflies into your garden as well as information about which garden chemicals it is safe to use without harming our bees.

### **Gardening for Wildlife\***

A look into the reasons why one may wish to garden for wildlife and how to fit wildlife gardening into a conventional garden.

### **Organic Pest and Disease Control**

A full guide to controlling pests and disease for the gardener who prefers not to use chemicals.

### **Pest and Disease Control**

Starting out on prevention being better than cure, through non-chemical methods of control.

### **Weed Control**

A practical guide to the control of weeds including specific examples and many non-chemical methods.

## **Garden Maintenance**

From your soil to your hedges, in these talks our speakers give you a range of tips and tricks for all of your day-to-day gardening tasks.

### **Composting (P)**

How to create a good compost heap and why composting is so important.

### **Fabulous Hedges\* (P)**

A hedge is often the second largest feature in a garden, after the lawn. With this talk we hope to convince you it should be more than just a chore to tend to your garden's perimeter.

### **Gardening in Climate Change**

With the changing weather conditions different ideas about what plants to grow and how best to look after the ones you have. This talk contains tips on how to get your garden in a robust state in order to cope with the challenges that climate change will pose. The talk discusses the challenges of gardening in a changing climate as well as soils, plant choice, watering, feeding, lawns, pests and how gardening can help in the battle.

### **Get your Lawn in Order!**

A practical guide for all types of lawns including wildlife friendly and grass free lawns!

### **Hedges and Barriers (P)**

Formal vs informal, planting, cultivating, wildlife, trimming and shaping, screening, breaking wind and everything else we know. Our speakers ensure this is not as dry a topic as it might sound!

### **Improving your Soil\***

As gardeners we are always looking for ways to get the best out of outdoor spaces and looking after your soil is a very important one. With this talk we explore the options available for improving different types of soil and the latest suggestions from the experts.

### **Low Maintenance Gardening**

Is there such a thing as working too hard in the garden? Our tips on cutting back and freeing up time to relax and enjoy your outdoor spaces.

### **Propagation**

*January - March*

A practical guide to raising your own plants from young plants or from cuttings.

### **Putting your Garden to Bed for the Winter**

*September – November*

Tips and information on how to over winter your plants successfully and what you need to do to get your plot in tip top condition for the Spring.

### **Seed Sowing, Pricking out and Potting On**

*January - March*

A practical guide to raising your own plants from seed.

### **Water Management in the Garden\***

As we experience increasingly variable weather conditions, water resources are becoming too precious to ignore. With this talk we look at making the most of water while it is available to us and consider both the extremes - drought and flood.

### **What to do with an Overgrown Garden**

Practical tips and advice on how best to manage an overgrown garden.

### **What to Grow in your Greenhouse**

*Spring/Summer*

Tips on what you can grow in your greenhouse and how to look after your crops.

## **Plants as Food**

Homegrown food always tastes best, and in these talks our speakers give you all sorts of tips and tricks when it comes to all things edible in your garden.

### **Growing Fruit & Vegetables on the Patio.**

*Spring/Summer*

Advice and tips on how to make the best use of your patio to grow fruit and vegetables and the best varieties to grow.

### **Home Grown Fruit 1**

*October - June*

A guide to selecting and growing soft fruit – currants, berries and friends

### **Home Grown Fruit 2**

*September - April*

A guide to selecting and growing top fruit - apples, pears etc and nuts.

### **Pruning your Garden Fruits**

*September - April*

With an emphasis on getting the best productivity from the fruit trees in your garden.

### **Sweet Plants and Sugar Sources\* (P)**

Plants produce sugars. Some plants are famously sweet. With this talk we explore some of the traditional sugar/sweetener sources and how they can be grown and used in our gardens today.

## **Seasonal Favourites**

In this group you'll find talks that are different every time and can change with the season. Prepared specially for each event by our speakers so no two talks will be the same.

### **Difficult Questions**

This is a wide-ranging talk picking up some of the speaker's favourite topics of the moment. Expect to explore anything from using peat-free compost to dilemmas about which variety of rhubarb is best.

### **Exploring your Garden**

*May – September*

A visit to a garden of your choice, for instance one of your members with a guided tour picking out the highlights of the garden.

### **My Seasonal Shopping Basket**

A look at what great plants and products are available for the garden, a reminder of the seasonal chores and kit we may need to tackle them, plus plenty of discussion about plants that inspire us and deserve a place in our shopping basket.

### **Seasonal Colour and Interest in the Garden**

Different every time! Even if your club has had this talk before, each speaker has their own favourites and with the constant introduction of new varieties of plants you will be assured of an interesting and informative guide through what to grow to get the best out of your garden at this time of year.

### **Why Did I Plant That?**

A virtual tour of the speaker's garden, illustrated with a collection of plants that made it into the speaker's personal collection and a few that didn't get to stay there.

## **Indoor Gardening**

Not all gardening takes place in the garden! These talks are all about the plants we can grow in the comfort of our own homes and how best to look after them.

### **Success with Houseplants\***

Selection and care of houseplants including tips on what to grow where.

### **Houseplants for Christmas\***

*Mid-October - December*

Selection and care of houseplants in the winter season including tips on what to grow where and what makes a good present.

### **Houseplant Heroes\***

A guide to the most forgiving houseplants for tricky spaces to help those who struggle to keep their houseplants alive

### **Ten Ways to Kill a Houseplant\***

Ten of the most common and a few imaginative ways to kill your houseplants, and most importantly how to prevent them.

## **Talks with a Wider Appeal**

This group of talks will appeal to a wider audience. Still based in horticulture but branching out to cover slightly different aspects of the topic.

### **A Quiz\***

A light-hearted horticultural and/or general knowledge quiz. They can be more serious if required!

### **Gardening Folklore\***

Old and new gardening laws and the stories behind them.

### **Gardening Folklore - The Next Instalment!\***

Loads more old and new gardening laws and the stories behind them.

### **Organic Gardening**

A practical guide to the principles of gardening without chemicals and how to put these into practice.

### **Plants we Love to Hate\* (P)**

Some plants provoke an instant reaction when spotted. Neighbours go to war over horticultural incursions under (or over) the fence. Steve takes the time to look at a few of the 'trigger plants' from bindweed to leylandii.

### **The Eco-friendly Gardener\* (P)**

Being wildlife friendly is only one aspect of the value our outdoor spaces can offer. With this talk we step back a little and consider the environmental pros and cons of our gardening choices.

### **What's in a Name?\***

The background behind the classification of plants with light-hearted look at unusual names using lots of examples.

## **Talks with Demonstrations**

These talks are exactly what they say they are. We bring along everything you need and then show you how to do get the job done in a hands-on practical demonstration.

### **Pruning Ornamental Plants 1**

A practical demonstration of pruning trees and deciduous shrubs, including with tips on timing

### **Pruning Ornamental Plants 2**

A practical demonstration of pruning in the garden with an emphasis on climbing plants, hedges and evergreen shrubs with tips on timing.

### **Summer Baskets and Containers\***

*Mid-March - June*

A live demonstration with a huge number of practical tips.

### **Winter Baskets and Containers\***

*September - December*

A live demonstration with a huge number of practical tips.

## **An Inside Look**

These talks give you a peak behind the curtain of the garden centre from our experts on the inside.

### **From Grower to Garden Centre\***

Adam Wallis gives us an insight into how plants are grown and propagated commercially and what happens to them before they are delivered to the garden centre.

### **Fresh off the Shelf\***

Looking at the latest planet friendly gardening products and reviewing a few recently introduced varieties of fresh air machines (otherwise known as plants)

### **How we Build our Christmas Display\* (P)**

This is a talk which takes you behind the scene of our Christmas Displays, how we build them, how long it takes, where we get inspiration illustrated with slides.

### **The Garden Centre Year\***

A behind the scenes view of Castle, Brimsmore or Poundbury Gardens with an insight into the garden centre industry.

### **The Story so Far\***

Mike takes a look back at what has changed over the years in Castle Gardens, Brimsmore Gardens and Poundbury Gardens - both within the garden centres and in the gardening world.

# Portfolio of Speakers

## **Mike Burks B.Sc. Hons. Hort.**

Mike Burks B.Sc. Hons. Hort. Mike is an honours degree graduate in Horticulture from the University of Bath. Mike is one of the founders of The Gardens Group. Brought up on an organic market garden, nursery and the garden centre, horticulture is in his blood. Mike was Chairman of the Garden Centre Association from January 2020 until 2022 and is on the industry Growing Media Taskforce representing garden centres in the transition away from peat and is a director of the Responsible Sourcing Scheme.

Mike speaks on a wide range of subjects with his favourites including trees and shrubs, border design, pest and diseases, climate change and organic gardening. He is the Managing Director of The Gardens Group.

## **Louise Burks B.Sc. Hons. Hort.**

Louise is also a graduate from the University of Bath where she was awarded the Aberconway Medal by the Institute of Horticulture. Louise also founded The Gardens Group. Her favourite subjects include hanging baskets – both winter and summer. She is the director in charge of bedding plants with the group and is the inspiration behind our amazing Christmas displays.

## **Adam Wallis**

Adam started working at Castle Gardens the autumn of 2003. He has been in charge of various departments including trees and shrubs before being made Manager at Brimsmore Gardens in 2007. Adam has a National Diploma in Horticulture. He speaks on a variety of topics including trees, fruit and hardy plants.

## **Brian King**

Brian is the shop manager at Castle Gardens. He joined in 1992 and quickly rose through the ranks to his present position. He has extensive gardening knowledge and is our pest and disease guru. He is also our quiz specialist – so for some fun and to challenge the little grey cells book a quiz!

## **Steve Fry**

Steve has worked at Castle Gardens since the mid 90's. Over the years he has been involved in running various plant departments and currently divides his time between all three garden centres, supporting the team and also keeping an eye on our IT systems, including the online shop.

## **Malcolm Mills**

Malcolm is a Retail Plant Care Award Gold Medal winner and our “plantsman extraordinaire”. He has been associated with The Gardens Group for many years at all the centres. He is a knowledgeable and entertaining speaker on a range of subjects including hardy plants and fruit.

## **Emma Stent**

Emma was born into a horticultural family and grew up on the family nursery in Somerset. She has been a part of The Gardens Group for many years and has worked in most departments. Her passion is houseplants and she has been managing the houseplant department in Brimsmore Gardens for several years now.