

## Cottage Garden Society Cotswold Group Annual Report 2023

**Meetings:** We spent the autumn of 2022 sharing events with the Cotswold Cottage Gardening Group based in Charlton Kings. We provided the funding for speakers and venue hire, while the home group undertook all the organisation and made all the practical arrangements, including the provision of refreshments and raffle prizes.

However, we had no say in the choice of topics and visits. Our joint arrangement came to an end when a middle road could not be agreed and we moved location to Winchcombe in the North Cotswolds, where we have since held a series of meetings in the local community centre.

We have tried meetings in the late afternoon, a series of teatime talks with refreshments available, on a day and time designed to avoid clashes with other garden events. As our members come from a wide area and not all have the transport or mobility they need to attend, the meetings' arrangements will be kept under review to see what suits members most.

**Speakers in 2023** have covered topics including Wildlife and Your Garden; Making More of Your Plants; the NGS scheme and Gloucestershire; and Seed Saving. We have had plants for sale and some free, along with free seeds. There has been a deliberate emphasis on the practical and lots of follow-up information.

We have welcomed visitors and guests to both meetings and visits and have gained extra CGS members as a result. In the winter months we hope to develop joint activities with Winchcombe Gardening Club, especially with regard to their evening talks.

**Visits:** Natalie organised a series of excellent small group visits for 2023. Members visited The Gate in Winchcombe; Hatherley Court Road in Cheltenham; Westaway off Cleeve Hill; White Cottage in Gretton; and Keens Cottage and Cobblers Cottage in Lower Chedworth; and Court House in Stretton on Fosse. An end of the gardening year visit to Bourton House was cancelled owing to the very wet weather.

**Website:** Thanks to Noel Blundell's great generosity with his time and expertise, we now have a website to publicise us and store key information and documents. To see for yourself visit <https://cotswoldcgs.org.uk/>

**Newsletter:** We now provide an email newsletter, usually monthly, to all members for whom we hold an email address. These not only publicise our own events and report on those activities, but also draw attention to other things happening locally and further afield which might be of interest. Newsletters are then routinely stored on our website. If you haven't been receiving yours, let us know!

**WhatsApp Group:** This was suggested as a way of enabling members to share surplus plants, equipment and produce. We will launch it this winter, ready for the next growing season.

**Committee:** As usual with voluntary groups, it has proved difficult to get volunteers to join us regularly. The core group of Natalie as Treasurer and Visits Organiser; Robert as Chairperson and liaison with other organisations; and Sue as Secretary continues. We are happy to carry on, but would love others to join us! As you will realise, it is onerous for such a small group to organise a full programme of events.

**Documentation:** We took advice from a senior officer at the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council and drafted a constitution with her help and also drafted some basic policies to foster good practice, with the benefit of examples shared by other CGS groups and a Hardy Plant Society group. The resulting documents are all on our website and are being reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate as we go on.

**Gloucestershire Federation of Gardening Societies:** We joined the GFGS to benefit from their information sharing and other services.

**Re-establishing our administrative and financial year:** Our financial report is attached with this. We had intended to run a traditional financial year, but decided to move to co-ordinate with the national body's practice of starting in October. The process took some working through given the obstacles thrown up by the need to re-establish the Cotswold Group, following the unexpected loss of our previous chairperson; Covid; and the need to find a new bank which catered for community groups.

**Our AGM** was, therefore, delayed. Given that we are a small group yet scattered in location, we will again conduct this AGM largely by email and/or post, while providing opportunities for members to meet up to discuss issues and ideas for next year's activities.

**The membership year**, however, has now become a rolling year at national level, according to the date of joining and we will adopt this practice too.

**A membership fee:** We propose to charge £5 per year for individual local membership and £7 for joint membership on top of the CGS national membership. This will cover the basic running costs of our group including website hosting; GGFS membership; room hire; and modest postage and printing costs. In return for this charge, members will receive monthly email newsletters about events of interest locally; and have access to a website; a programme of small group visits to gardens of especial interest; a WhatsApp group to share plants, seeds and equipment; and the opportunity to meet other members in their own gardens. We will look at other ways of increasing our income to diversify our activities still further and would very much welcome members' ideas on this.

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