



Gary's Garden Update - July 2020

In this little update I will be sharing what my focus will be in the gardens for the month ahead and some highlights to look out for in the next few weeks. This month I'll also be explaining why some areas of grass are being left unmown this year and how going organic is already working wonders for the site's biodiversity.

My gardening jobs this month:

- Weeding
- Mowing
- Compost turning (excited to see our first batch of Highland Court compost)
- Developing the meadow area
- Dead heading
- Clip/prune hedges and shrubs
- Hanging basket maintenance
- Watering in dry weather

Wildflower Meadows:

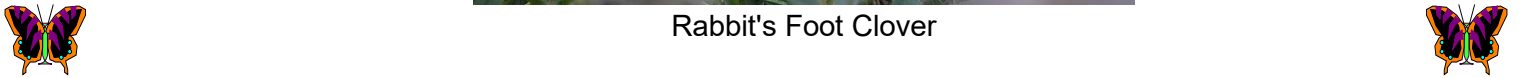
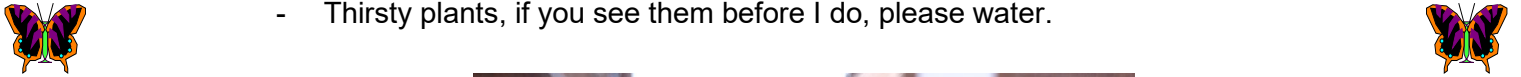
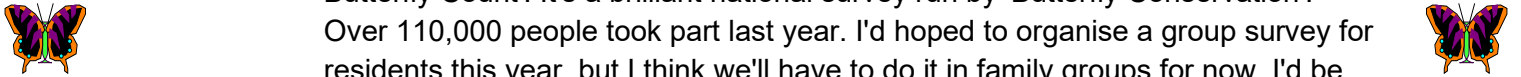
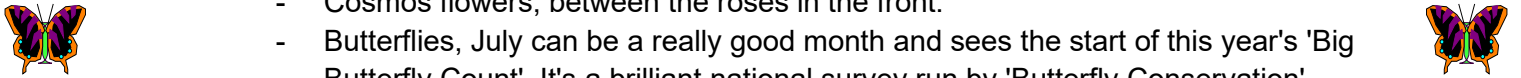
This is something I have been eager to experiment with here, and is the reason why there are patches of long grass in the north west corner of the site. In Britain we have lost 97 percent of this habitat (an area 1 and a half times the size of Wales!) since the Second World War. This has had a devastating effect on the insect species that rely on them, in turn affecting birds, and mammals as well in delicately balanced food chains. Just having some long grass can mean that butterflies such as Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers, whose caterpillars feed on grass, can breed, while providing cover for countless other species. I have seen elsewhere how just having a few more wildflowers can make a big difference to pollinating insect populations, and at least at a local level go some way to reversing the terrible declines these animals have suffered. In time, meadows can look as beautiful as any flower border, so I hope residents won't mind a little long grass here and there too much.

At this time of year, when days are at their longest, we expect to see lots of flowers around but I was pleasantly surprised to record about 35 different species of wildflower in a quick 45 minute survey of the site on Sunday 5th July. I only recorded plants with open flowers (they're much easier to ID). The list included Black Medic, Selfheal, Herb Robert, Bristly Ox tongue, Yarrow, and Lesser Stitchwort, but for me the highlight was Rabbit's foot clover (see next page for photo). This is a plant associated with sandy soils, and rarely seen in the predominantly clay soils of this area. It's located on the lawn by the entrance to flats 1-7 and gets its common name from the softness of the white/pink fluffy flower heads, well worth checking out. I'm happy to share the full list with anyone that's interested and hope it shows one of the many benefits of gardening organically.

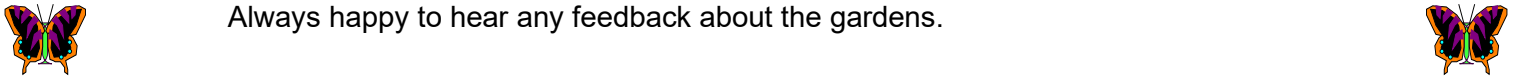


This month look out for:

- Cosmos flowers, between the roses in the front.
- Butterflies, July can be a really good month and sees the start of this year's 'Big Butterfly Count'. It's a brilliant national survey run by 'Butterfly Conservation'. Over 110,000 people took part last year. I'd hoped to organise a group survey for residents this year, but I think we'll have to do it in family groups for now. I'd be interested to hear about any butterfly sightings within the grounds. More details on their website <https://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org/>.
- Thirsty plants, if you see them before I do, please water.



Rabbit's Foot Clover



Always happy to hear any feedback about the gardens.



Best wishes



Gary

