

# VOLUNTEER GARDENERS' NEWSLETTER

Spring 2023

THE  
KIRKWOOD  
SUPPORT  
LIFE.

## Welcome to the Gardeners' Spring Newsletter

By Head Volunteer Gardener Linda Roberts

At last, Spring is here, and we've had a real mix of weather; the driest February on record then came the rain, gales, hail and even snow, along with some warm magical sunny days.

The pond is filling again with aquatics and frog spawn, along with the appearance of the herons, sadly helping themselves to the frogs. We're hopeful that the zantedeschia has survived the cold spells as it would be sad to lose their beautiful white flowers as they are very special plants for the garden for many reasons.

It seems like ages since the long, cold, wet winter and so much illness around but as we dawn upon the new astrological year, it is energising to watch our bountiful borders emerge with such wonderful abundance. All our newly planted bulbs seem to have survived the wrath of the squirrels! Perhaps the sprinkling of chilli powder on top of the bulbs worked - who knows?

Most of the gardeners returned a couple of weeks later than usual owing to the weather though some of us did keep going through the winter. It has been jolly cold some mornings but now the weather has begun to lift, and longer days are returning it's making it much more appealing. Gale force winds felled several trees and branches, which made areas near the compost bays

unsafe to work in. Thankfully this has now been rectified, however, there are still areas of concern with ageing, dying and diseased trees needing further attention in the near future.

You can tell we are back, our herbaceous perennials are all cut back, and we have been able to use our brand new shredder, which has already proven to be a fantastic addition to the garden. It has made wonderful material that will compost down much quicker in our bays, improving our home-grown compost. Weeding is always part of our every visit, as is generally tidying up and maintaining our beds and borders to a very high level, ready for what is always and will be a busy year ahead.





## The Kirkwood Compost & Soil Project

Our soil stacks, we prepared from turfs dug out of the front lawn when enlarging the long fence border, are making headway toward preparing our very own 'John Innes' type of compost. We are very proud of how we are managing our compost, and we all take great pride in how our borders look. We compost them regularly with our general compost and leaf mould.

Everything we cut back and remove is composted leaving very little to throw away. Excess plants are kept to add to our sales table and garden events throughout the year. All that we compost comes back into the garden, enhancing our beautiful borders and adding to our biodiversity. Apparently in deciduous woodland trees and shrubs provide five pounds of leaf litter for each square yard of ground. In some small way, we are doing what we can within our own smaller space.

Exciting (at least for some of us!) To have our very first 'no dig' cutting bed newly prepared at the top of the main drive. Plain cardboard soaked and laid directly on top of the grass, then covered with horse manure (kindly donated by Julia Owen from Fundraising) then followed by our very own Kirkwood compost. All ready now to be planted with our own seedlings raised by one or two

of us along with the assistance of Sadaf, The Kirkwood Service Development & Partnership Manager

We are hearing so much news about how badly gardeners are damaging their soil by excessive digging and overworking it, continually disturbing the millions of worms and organisms in the soil, as well as disturbing locked in carbon. Participating in the 'no dig' allows plants, fungi, and soil organisms to break down naturally and incorporate organic matter into the soil. In doing so the soil structure is not disrupted, keeping the soil ecosystem intact. We will (eventually) get fewer weeds, and fewer problems with slugs – this is because the soil beetles have not been disturbed who eat the slug eggs and also encourage the soil to naturally retain its moisture.

This bed will be our first 'Kirkwood community' cutting garden, sharing with The Kirkwood teams, florists and patients' families - picking their own flowers to take to their loved ones. There is already another one in use by our terrace of compost bays which is full of bulbs emerging at the moment, but come summer will be full of beautiful flowers, offering some wonderful opportunities to pick just a few blooms and foliage to add something beautiful to patients' rooms and team workspaces.



## What are the plans for the year ahead?

There are plans for one further bed at the visitor car park entrance, which for this year, will be predominantly Sunflowers in readiness for the annual Sunflower event. We were wondering whether local school children could be involved with this or perhaps help with re-filling our bug hotel. Might also be worth considering if there is another option other than Sunflowers whilst they are interesting to grow and children love them, as a cut flower they are not easy to manage. They discolour the water quickly, and it makes the water smell. If grown, they are probably best left in a border. They are a tad out of place in UK gardens and look much better when grown en masse in French or Mediterranean fields.

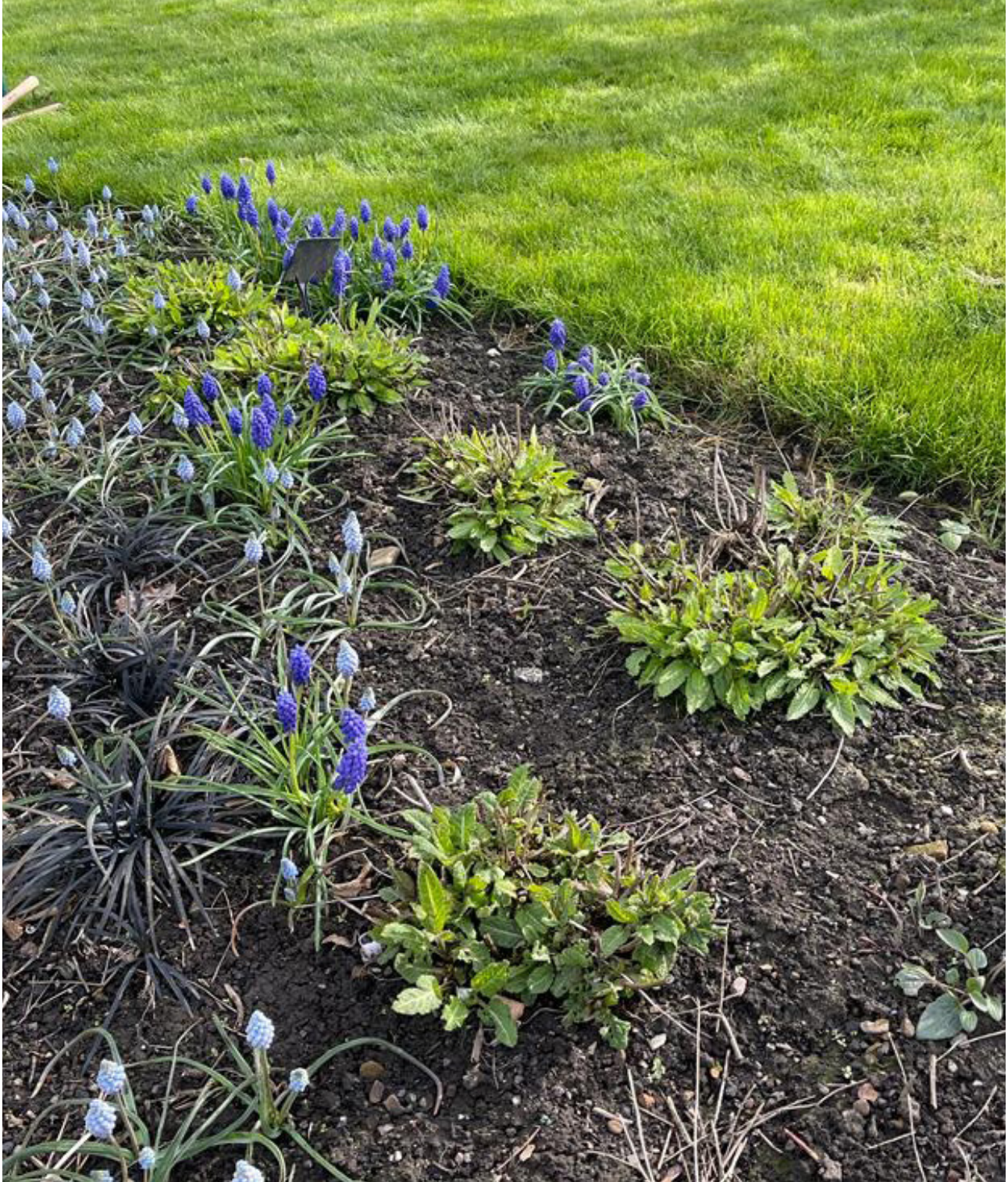


Our latest project, and probably the most important one this year, is enhancing our pond. You may have noticed already, the new addition of our magnificent Duck House built by Martin, and we are pleased to report we have a duck in residence already sitting on her nest inside. We did have another duck nesting in one of the patient's planters, but sadly she must have been disturbed as the whole nest is now empty.

The pond has the electrics and pump restored with an extra hose ready to use, and all that remains is the removal of the unsightly and invasive grasses. We are awaiting Tim to confirm sighting of the small feeder pond, and then works will begin to realise the idea of a cascade with water trickling down into the main pond offering gentle sounds and rhythm. How lovely this would be to bring some sort of sensory, calming experience to someone who is medically/clinically challenged. Some strong hands will be needed for the excavation, but we are all confident that we are up to the challenge to create this new feeder pond and replenish, split and re-site existing plants and give the whole of the pond borders a bit of a makeover. We are all hoping this project will be completed in time for judging for Yorkshire in Bloom. All very exciting.

We understand the patient's planters are being replaced (hopefully in late summer) we are still unsure when this is happening but in preparation, we have decided that as plants come to the end of their season, we will lift them and pot them up for replacement in the new planters as and when. If we buy or add anything new, we will put them into the planters in their original pots to be transferred at a later date from their pots into the new planters, which we hope will give these a better shelf life than the existing ones!





Spring is an incredibly busy time of year for any gardener, there is so much to do, and it is hard to know where to start. A few of us getting involved at home with seed propagation is not an easy task and always a challenge with the weather to contend with, the need for space for equipment and time, not to mention the pricking out. It is truly a labour of love and passion. Of course, we have Tim, our resident Garden Designer and plant propagator extraordinaire, who is truly excellent at supporting our vegetable beds and annuals.

One other project on the go is the making of an Artists Inspirational Easel, which on wheels (to be in use for patients, their visitors and perhaps for budding artists among the teams!) will be moveable around the garden this is in response to an excellent suggestion from Penny Wade - Happy gardening!!