



Spring Newsletter No 180



April 2026

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Photograph of Stuart Easton's stored vegetable exhibit by Caroline Plant

Editors Notes

As we see the bulbs die back, deciduous trees and shrubs come into leaf and the nights get longer, hopefully we can enjoy another wonderful spring and summer in our gardens. With that in mind this newsletter is packed with some great articles, so firstly thank you to my contributors, which this month include Squires Garden Centres who have been fantastic supporters of our society, sponsoring our Spring Show since 2022 and who are celebrating their 90th birthday. There are very few truly independent family owned nurseries in the UK but not only that they also truly support the UK horticultural economy with 85% of plants sold by them grown on the UK.

With such a wet winter, I think we were all a little nervous about the Spring show this year, but never fear members once again supported the show and from my point of view, it was great to see Stuart Easton's display on what veg can be stored all through the winter for your dinner table and an inspiring display of fresh veg from Dan Bosence, his article has certainly given me some useful tips to ensure that we fully utilise our greenhouse this winter to keep the fresh veg going.

As a society the next few months are very busy, and we do need support from all our members. The Frensham Fayre is an opportunity for us to show as a society the support we give to the community, with the Rose Show which is open to everyone to enter and the Plant stall, which is our biggest fund raiser, if you can help, with any of the requests in this newsletter, it would be appreciated, after all it is your society.

You may also want to show off your garden to other members or just be inspired by visiting a member's garden and having a chat to other members, if so, please contact Caroline, see the advert below.

The next newsletter will be the end of July, so please have a wonderful spring and early summer.

Neil

Teas in Gardens

We are running our Social Event, **Teas in Gardens**, on Thursday 4th June. For this, we ask members to volunteer to host 4-6 other members for tea in their gardens. The format is up to the host, who may wish to take their guests on a short tour of the garden, pointing out items of interest; or may leave the guests to wander round on their own. The tea might involve tea/coffee/soft drink, or something more.

If it looks like it is going to be bad weather on the day, we will ask the hosts to be in touch with the people coming to tea in their garden to arrange a mutually agreeable new date.

If you would like to volunteer to host tea in your garden, please would you let Caroline Plant know by Sunday 24th May, together with a one-line description of your garden.

If you would like to be a guest in a garden, please contact Caroline by Sunday 31st May on 07900 28736 or by email: caroline.tonkinxxx@gmail.com.



February Meeting



At our February meeting, which over 30 members attended, we had the pleasure of welcoming Janet Arm of Redleaf Nurseries. Tilford who talked about trees for small gardens. Janet is well known in the Surrey Horticultural circles, having been a past Chairman of the Surrey Horticultural Federation and current secretary of Tilford Horticultural Society.

Janet along with her late husband Brian moved to Tilford in 1986 buying 4 acres of land, which is where Redleaf Nurseries is situated. They now have 8 acres of land used for growing trees.

Janet explained that they supply over 20,000 trees a year to nurseries, including Longacres, Bagshot, who is their largest customer.

Trees are grown by either seeds, cuttings or budding. Budding, which are grown on rootstocks and within 18 months can grow into trees that are between 6 and 13 feet tall.

They currently make up their own compost and are finding it difficult with having to use less peat, currently they use 30% less peat and 30% wood fibre but finding that the soils are less moisture retentive.

When purchasing a tree, Janet advised us to consider the following:

- Site – Not too near buildings or other trees
- Soil– Is it Acid, Alkaline, Clay Wet, Dry, Shallow
- Shape of Tree– Do you require it weeping, horizontal, upright
- Time of year – When do you want to show most interest
- And lastly is it British grown.

When you plant a tree which is typically grown in round pots with the roots in a round ball, ensure that you dig a square hole, twice the size of the pot and water well for the first year, the roots will then find their way.

Redleaf offer an extensive range of trees and Janet mentioned quite a few trees to consider some of which are mentioned on the next page.

Amelanchier- Ballerina, October Flame (below right), Robin Hill (below left) and Juneberry



A number of Acers were recommended which included, Brilliantissimum (below left), Griseum, Crimson Sentry(below right), Davidii and Eskimo Sunset.



Also mentioned were:

Arbutus

Betuli Pendula

Cytisus (Pineapple Tree)

Liquidambar Slender Silhouette

Crab Apples

Red Robins

FlagPole Cherry

Neil Mumford

Mulching

I have often expounded on the benefits of mulch. Mulch is a protective layer of material applied 2-4 inches (5-10 cm) thick to the soil surface. It is important to keep mulch away from the stems of woody plants, else moisture retained by the mulch might rot the stem. The word can be traced to Middle English molsh/melsche (soft, moist) and German molsch (soft, beginning to decay), first recorded in the 1650s, when it referred to "strawy dung" or loose, decaying organic matter, for protecting plant roots.

It suppresses weeds, retains soil moisture, improves soil structure, stops the soil temperature heating up or cooling down too fast, and protects plant roots. It is best applied in spring (before the new shoots of herbaceous plants come through) or autumn (to protect the soil over winter), but as the organic gardener Bob Flowerdew (great name) once said – the best time to do a job in the garden is when you get round to it. Some mulches will kill off existing weeds by their sheer bulk and their total exclusion of light – bark chips laid thickly are pretty good for this – but generally it is best to remove any weeds before applying the mulch, else you may be providing them with ideal conditions for when they do grow!

To my mind, a big point of a mulch is to improve the soil as the mulch breaks down over time, so for me, the best mulches are organic: for example,

1. Bark chips or any chipped brush from tree surgery work (as per the attached photo – where you can see green bits amongst the brown – the green is the leaves, the brown is the stems, all shredded together), raked up leaves, bracken, etc.: all good for underneath rhododendrons and other plants that do not want extra nutrients in the soil as it decomposes slowly, but can use up nitrogen in the soil as it decomposes, which is necessary for leafy growth;
2. Compost which has been composted long enough for any weed roots or seeds to have been killed off (a minimum of 6 months);
3. Manure which is at least 6 months old, so excess urea has leached away (urea will "scorch" the plant);
4. Grass clippings and straw (not heaped high – these will create heat as they decompose, and may include grass seeds which will germinate);



5. A number of commercial offerings including organic compounds such as Strulch (a popular straw-based product) which Kate Atkin and I used to mulch the garden round the Marindin Hall in February (as per the photo above and next page), and which has hitherto proved very effective in not allowing weed seeds to penetrate and germinate. It settles down into an excluding mat on the ground. I have hardly had to do any weeding since the ground around the Hall was cleared in the autumn of 2023 and given thereafter an annual application of Strulch or bark chips;

I have used all of these in my time

I have also used on my own garden: wool from when we had sheep (I had originally intended to wash and card and knit with their wool);

I will never again attempt to wash daggy sheep's wool in the bath by treading on it en masse with detergent, as if I were pressing grapes the traditional way. You end up with a very greasy and slippery mess (all that lanolin) that smelt vile. And no, I did not do this in totally the traditional way for grapes, which was to do it all but naked, as illustrated in this 3rd Century mosaic from a Roman amphitheatre in Badajoz in Spain (see below); this was for me a step too far!

I have also used feathers and down from old pillows; old 100% cotton and wool clothes and carpets; old newspapers, scrap paper, magazines, and cardboard – all with leaves or similar sprinkled on top to make it them look less odd in the garden.

There are also inorganic offerings which will retain water and resist weed penetration, but will not break down and improve the soil, such as glass balls, gravel, pebbles, slate chippings... or even environmentally unfriendly horrible sheets of black plastic, which work by excluding the sunlight (so weeds do not germinate) and keeping water in the soil (it can't evaporate through the plastic).

And finally: if buying in a large quantity of mulch, find out how it will be, delivered – firms will typically only deliver "to the kerbside", so you need to think how will you get it from the road to where you want in the garden. Fine if it comes in compost-sized bags, more difficult if it comes as in a 500 litre bag or dumped loose off the back off a truck!



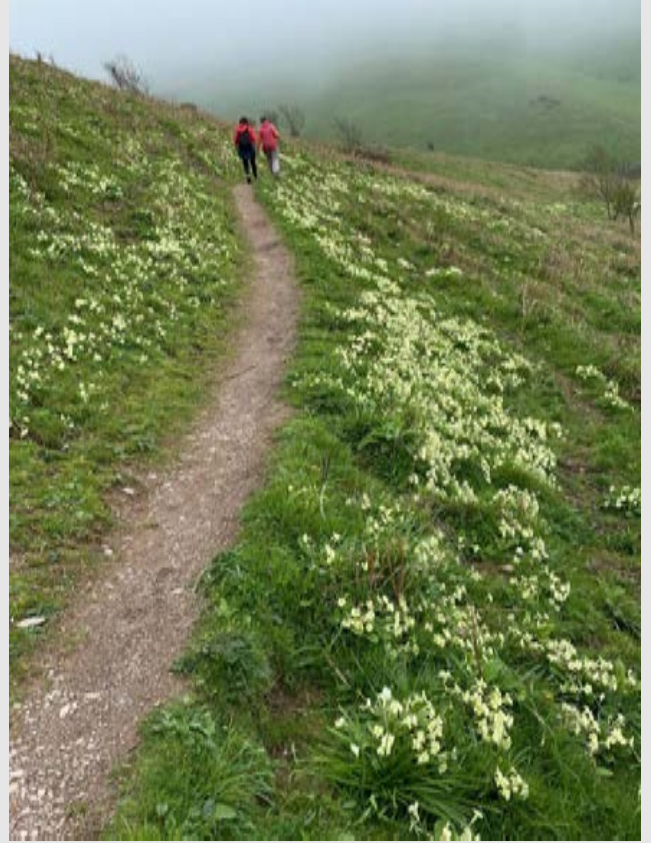
My favourite plant

Wild Primroses

Of all the beautiful flowers that appear during the year, wild primroses have got to be one of my favourites. When I see the delicate pale yellow flowers peeping up through the grass and leaves in the woodland and verges as we walk, I feel great joy.

It's partly that they are portent of spring - the cold will be over soon and the evenings will be lighter which is always a pleasure. That is the way of things. But more than that to me, primroses take me back to my childhood when I used to visit my godmother, Mary. She was my father's sister, an science teacher, and lived in the country near Ludlow. From about the age of 8, I was invited to stay with her in her cottage every spring and leave the troubles of home behind. We explored the woods and fields around her cottage and I learned so much about the countryside, science, and plants. At home, I weeded for pocket money; with Mary, I was inspired to grow things. I will be forever in her debt.

And so for me, Primroses are inspirational as well as beautiful.



Jilly Steventon

What's On

Society News

Thursday 28th May Speaker Belinda Allen – Companion planting.

Our Spring judge, Belinda Allen is known for her approach to companion planting, emphasizing organic gardening methods to create gardens that are compatible with wildlife. This is likely to be a very informative talk for all gardeners.



Saturday 30th May (10.00-12.00) Chris Reynolds:

Walk & talk at Forest Research
Arboretum, Alice Holt

Thursday 25th June (2.00pm)

Visit to Pepperpot Nursery, Alton with talk

Pepperpot Herbs is a family run herb nursery established in 1998 who produce around 200 different varieties of fresh herb plants using traditional and sustainable growing methods in 100% peat free compost in the South Downs National Park. There will also be buying opportunities.



Open Gardens Scheme

Froyle Gardens- Open Day – Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th June

A warm welcome awaits as Froyle Gardens open their gates once again, enabling visitors to enjoy a wide variety of garden, **9 gardens in all**. Froyle 'The Village of Saints' has many interesting old buildings. Our gardens harmonise well with the surrounding landscape, and most have spectacular views. The gardens themselves are diverse with rich planting. You will see greenhouses, water features, vegetables, roses, clematis and wildflower meadows. Lots of ideas to take away with you, along with plants to buy and delicious teas served in the village hall. There is also an exhibition of richly embroidered historic vestments in the Church in Upper Froyle (separate donation). The gardens are well spread out so wear comfortable shoes!

Home-made teas in the village hall & picnics welcome on the recreation ground in Lower Froyle.

Admission: Adult: £10.00, Child: Free, **Opening times** 13:30 - 18:00

Hook Cross Allotments- Open Day – Saturday 18th July: 1pm – 5pm

Reading Road, Hook, Hampshire RG27 9DB

5¼ acre community run allotments overlooking Hook village. Explore more than 100 plots showcasing a variety of vegetables, fruit, and flower growing styles, plus a community orchard, wildflower meadow and banks, and wildlife friendly gardening information. Talk with plot holders about growing your own, vote for your favourite scarecrow, and learn about soil health with guest display from Soil Ecology Laboratory.

St Mary's School Competition

We are delighted to be returning to our local infant school, St Mary's, for another Growing Competition. This year we are setting all the children the challenge to grow some dwarf beans, which can be grown in a pot.

Committee members will hand out seeds and growing advice at the start of the Summer Term, and then visit again at the end of term when the children bring their plants back in to school. Winners in each class will receive prizes - and all the children will have the chance to enjoy some very fresh, home grown beans!

Recent years have seen nasturtiums and marigolds being grown, so vegetables are a new venture. We've bought Opera dwarf bean seeds from Thompson & Morgan: taking advantage of the FDHS discount!

Photos of the winners to follow in a later newsletter.



Frensham Fayre

Frensham Fayre showcases all what is good at this wonderful village and the Horticultural Society summer shows were the precursor to the Frensham Fayre. The society is heavily involved and we need help. A number of members already help out on various other Fayre stalls, so we need the help of other members for the following:

Saturday 20th June : Frensham Fayre – FDHS plant sale and FDHS Rose Competition:

Classes are:

- 1) The best scented rose
- 2) Best rose bud
- 3) Most unusual rose
- 4) Most romantic rose
- 5) Best wedding button hole



Frensham Fayre Plant Stall



Planting up

We're doing it, 10 am - 12 noon at Chas and Jilly's place - Bramble Cottage, West End Lane, Frensham GU10 3BE

If you would be able to help, please contact Caroline Plant on 07900-287361 or caroline.tonkinxxx@gmail.com.

Can you spare 1 hour and help on the plant stall at the Frensham Fayre this year?

It helps to have a few people available at any one time. You won't need to worry about being an expert - others will help if you don't know a plant, and we will label all plants and put together a crib sheet on them. Once people have volunteered for the the plant stall, they do tend to volunteer again and have even offered up that it was fun - and it is lovely feeling being part of the community.

If you would be able to help, please contact Caroline Plant on 07900-287361 or caroline.tonkinxxx@gmail.com.

The Spring Show

Every Spring, it rains (or snow, or hails) the day before the Spring Show – and every year we find that despite the deprecations of the weather, the Marindin Hall is awash with the joys of Spring. (At least we were spared the Beast from the East.) The Marindin Hall's overhaul and redecoration at the end of last year really helped make this a classy event.

This year, we continued the excellent recent trend of large numbers of flower arrangements, with 20 in all, including the winner of the best entry in the show (out of 209 entries from 31 people) – an Easter table arrangement, resplendent with miniature bunnies and Easter eggs, by Annabel Sommerfelt. Let's hope it survives the visit by the grandchildren over Easter and there were some delightful, decorated Easter hats in the Junior classes.



Daffodils and camellias were well represented, and as ever, 5 hellebore flowers floating in a bowl were popular, even though the early Spring meant hellebores had rather come and gone by then.

The vegetable classes were also popular, especially the rhubarb section, and Stuart Easton and Dan Bosence once again showed us how it should be done with their prize winning baskets of vegetables.

And finally, the prizes for cakes and other foodstuffs were hotly contested, though there were fewer handicrafts and photographs than the norm. It was wonderful to welcome once again, Sarah Squires of Frensham Garden Centres who have supported us for the last 5 years and who presented the cups.

Overall, Penny Hearn swept the board, (and not for the first time!) winning several cups in a wide range of classes. All in all, another most enjoyable show, enjoyed by members and visitors alike.

Cup winners include:

Darling cup – exhibit of highest merit in the show – Annabel Sommerfelt (opposite with Sarah Squire)

Huitfeldt cup – winner of Floral Arrangements – Annabel Sommerfelt

Frensham Spring cup – best daffodils – Penny Hearn

Diver cup – highest points total for flowers, shrubs, potted plants, and vegetables – Penny Hearn

Wood cup – best exhibit in shrubs classes – Sharon Miller

Barnes cup – highest points total in Home Industries classes – Penny Hearn

Peattie cup – best photographic exhibit – Harry Glover

Denne cup – highest points by a junior – Huxley Atkin

Pat Mattin cup – best floral exhibit by a Junior – Mabel Pullman

Prize for Most entries in Show – Penny Hearn

People's choice award – Annabel Sommerfelt





Annabel Sommerfelt's, best in show exhibit



Huxley Atkin- Denne Cup winner



Best Floral Arrangement



Judge Belinda Allen

Veg Corner

Fresh Vegetables in the Spring

Many of us are very good at growing vegetables in the Summer and Autumn and we see the splendid results on the tables of our Autumn Show. But one of my long-term aims has been to grow fresh vegetables for the kitchen all the way through the year. Even through what gardeners have traditionally referred to as the “Hungry Gap”, when winter greens and leeks, and the stored roots are over, and the summer’s vegetables have yet to crop.

What I have learned over the years is that it is not difficult to do this, no special techniques are required, but you do need to be well organised. Most of our vegetables are sown in the spring but the tricky bit is having space in the garden at the right time so that winter/spring cropping vegetables can be sown. Having an unheated greenhouse or cold frames will help as well but is not essential as plants can be protected against frost with horticultural fleece.

As Chris Beardshaw said on Gardeners’ Question time on 27th March: *“don’t allow your glasshouse to stand empty over the winter”, don’t allow it to be a refuge for “dead and dying pot plants, broken deck chairs and the BBQ”, but “make sure it is working for you throughout all the seasons of the year”.*

People asked me at this year’s Spring Show how I managed to produce a large basket of fresh vegetables in late March, without a visit to Waitrose (although this was suggested by more than one visitor).



Class 28- Exhibit of fresh vegetables. Clockwise from front centre. Lettuce- 4 seasons/ Quatre Saisons, Black Spanish Radish, Celeriac-Monarch, Rhubarb- Timperley Early, Spicy salad leaves- Mizuna (rather wilted), Leek- Musselburgh, Sprouting Kalettes, Brussels Sprouts- Clodius, Purple Sprouting Broccoli- Claret, and then repeated round to lettuces.

The critical points are to make sure these veg are sown, planted out in time, to appreciate that it takes plants longer to grow to maturity in winter because there is less sunshine, and they may get knocked back by severely cold weather. All the veg in the basket can withstand light frosts but can be protected by fleece or an unheated greenhouse to temperatures down to -3 to -4.

Sowing times to ensure you get fresh veg over the winter and spring:

Lettuce- 4 seasons/ Quatre Saisons: Sown in October and planted out in unheated greenhouse in November, after tomatoes and aubergines had finished fruiting.

Black Spanish Radish: Sow *in situ* outside in August/September and thin to 10-15 cm. Cover with fleece if heavy frost.

Celeriac-Monarch sown in February in trays, potted on in April and outside in May. Cover with fleece if heavy frost.

Rhubarb- Timperley Early: Perennial, these stalks were forced under pots. This is the best variety I have grown and currently on sale in Squires for £8.00 a pot.

Spicy salad leaves- Mizuna: Sown in October and planted out on unheated greenhouse in November after tomatoes and aubergines had finished fruiting.

Leek- Musselburgh: Sown in April and transplanted in June and grown under fine (2mm) netting against Leek Moth larvae.

Sprouting Kalettes, Brussels Sprouts- Clodius, and Purple Sprouting Broccoli- Claret: As per normal for winter greens. Sown April, planted out in May. Sprayed with biological control (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) against “cabbage whites” whenever caterpillars appear and then covered with 5 cm pigeon netting over the winter.

FROM PLANTING TO PLATE – ST MARY’S INFANTS SCHOOL PUPILS LEARN HOW TO GROW WITH SQUIRE’S



Above: Pupils from St Mary's Infants School, Frensham during their visit to Squire's Frensham, taking part in Squire's Grow Your Own Chips 2026 initiative.

Pupils from St Mary's Infant School, Frensham, have been rolling up their sleeves and getting their hands dirty this spring as part of Squire's Garden Centres' much-loved Grow Your Own Chips initiative.

During a visit to Squire's Frensham, each child received their own planting kit, including a pot, compost and chitted seed potatoes. With guidance from Squire's knowledgeable Plant Experts, pupils discovered how to plant, nurture and care for their potatoes as they grow over the coming weeks.

The excitement will continue into early summer, when pupils return to Squire's Frensham for the much-anticipated potato weigh-in. In June they will find out who has grown the heaviest crop! The pupils potato harvest will then be turned into freshly cooked chips by the Squire's restaurant team - a true field-to-fork experience, all enjoyed within the hour. The winning grower will also take home a special Squire's goody bag.

Sarah Squire, Chairman of Squire's Garden Centres, comments: *"Our Grow Your Own Chips initiative continues to be a fantastic way to engage children with gardening in a fun and meaningful way. By giving them the opportunity to grow their own potatoes, we are helping them understand where food comes from and how rewarding it can be. We're always delighted to welcome local schools to our centres and hope the experience inspires a lasting curiosity about nature, sustainability and healthy eating."*

As part of Squire's ongoing commitment to supporting schools and local communities close to its garden centres, Grow Your Own Chips 2026 will see 12 schools participate in the interactive learning experience that promotes outdoor activity, environmental awareness and appreciation of homegrown food.

SQUIRE'S TOP TIPS FOR GROWING POTATOES IN POTS:

- Place chitted potatoes in 10-15cm deep of multi-purpose compost, cover with soil, lightly 'firm down' and water.
- Place pots in a bright, sunny position.
- Keep compost moist with regular watering.
- Gradually top up compost as shoots appear.
- Allow time – the best results grow beneath the surface!

Happy Birthday Squires

90 YEARS OF GROWING TOGETHER



Above: Celebrating 90 years – The Squire family: Sarah Squire – Chairman (second from left) with her father, Colin Squire – Chairman Emeritus (second from right) with Sarah’s children, Felicia (left) and Ben (right).

2026 marks a significant milestone for Squire’s Garden Centres as the family-owned business celebrates 90 years since its founding in 1936.

From humble beginnings as a small nursery business to becoming one of the South East’s most respected garden centre groups, Squire’s has spent nine decades helping gardeners grow with confidence. Today, the company includes 17 garden centres across Surrey, Sussex, Middlesex and Berkshire, alongside nurseries in Sussex and Hampshire growing bedding and hardy plants. Yet it remains firmly rooted in its founding principles of horticultural expertise, quality plants and friendly, knowledgeable service.

Squire’s story began when D.J. Squire, a trained gardener and former head groundsman at the Police Orphanage in Twickenham, was made redundant when the orphanage closed. With a young family to support and a deep knowledge of horticulture gained from working on large estates, he set up his own nursery in 1936. During the Second World War, the nurseries were turned over to food production, supported by Land Army girls and later prisoners of war - an early example of the resilience that would come to define the business.

It was the next generation who helped shape the modern business. In 1964, Colin Squire recognised the emerging opportunity for a new kind of retail experience and opened one of the UK’s earliest purpose-built garden centres in Twickenham — on the very site the company still occupies today. From that pioneering step, the business grew steadily across the South East.

Now a proud four-generation family business, Squire’s continues to evolve while staying true to its nursery heritage. At least 85% of the plants sold in their centres are grown in the UK, with many hardy and bedding plants grown at its own nurseries, reflecting a longstanding commitment to quality and sustainability. Its centres have also grown into welcoming community spaces, with restaurants, food halls, events and charitable initiatives sitting alongside its horticultural expertise.

Colin Squire OBE, Chairman Emeritus, Squire's Garden Centres, comments: *"When my father founded Squire's in 1936, his aim was simple - to grow wonderful plants and offer honest, practical advice to gardeners. Ninety years on, those same values still guide the business. I'm incredibly proud of how Squire's has grown while staying true to its nursery roots, its people and its commitment to helping gardeners enjoy their gardens."*

Today the business is led by Chairman Sarah Squire, with the fourth generation, Sarah's children, Felicia and Ben, now also involved in the company.

Sarah Squire, Chairman of Squire's Garden Centres, comments: *"Our family business was incorporated in 1936, so celebrating 90 years is incredibly special - particularly as my father also turns 90 this year. What makes me most proud is that while we have grown and modernised, the essence of Squire's hasn't changed. We are still about great plants, trusted advice and genuine care for our customers and communities. That continuity across generations is something we truly value."*

As Squire's marks its 90th anniversary year, it does so with gratitude, for its customers, colleagues and communities it serves - and with the same care, curiosity and dedication that shaped the business from the very beginning. Ninety years on, the business continues to grow, guided by its heritage and inspired by the gardeners it serves.

ADAM FROST BRINGS GARDENING INSPIRATION TO SQUIRE'S THIS SPRING

Sunday, 26th April 2026 (FREE event; no booking required)

10am - Squire's Badshot Lea, Badshot Lea Road, Farnham,
2pm - Squire's Woking, Littlewick Road, Woking, Surrey GU21 4XR

As part of Squire's Garden Centre's 90th anniversary celebrations, Chairman Sarah Squire will host one of the nation's best-loved gardening experts, Adam Frost, for a day of inspiring horticultural talks and practical demonstrations at Badshot Lea and Woking centres.



Award-winning garden designer and presenter of BBC Gardeners' World, Adam will be sharing his expertise on 'Creating the Perfect Pots and Borders, offering practical advice and step-by-step demonstrations to help gardeners refresh their outdoor spaces this spring.

Visitors can expect expert guidance on plant selection, combining colours and textures for impact, and simple techniques to ensure containers and borders thrive throughout the season. Each session will conclude with a Q&A, giving guests the opportunity to seek personalised gardening advice, followed by a book signing.

Both spring gardening talks and demonstrations are free to attend, with no booking required. Each session lasts approximately one hour.