**Stratford sub Castle Garden Club March 2022**

**Don’t Know a Thing about Gardening?**

**Most of us don’t, really, so come and join us at the Garden Club, enjoy the company and find out more. This is the place to be if you don’t know what to buy at a Garden centre, never used a spade but there is a mess outside your windows or you don’t want to lift some lawn to grow vegetables or flowers in case it all goes wrong.**

Our last meeting was intriguing. We walked in the door and a whole row of colourful bottles were lined up on the table at the front. They contained different kinds of chilli sauce brought along by our speaker, Matthew Simpson, who owns a firm called Simpson’s Seeds. He sells all kinds of seeds but is particularly interested in tomato and chilli seeds, listing ninety five varieties of tomatoes and seventy seven varieties of chilli peppers in his catalogue. He organises tomato tasting sessions at his nursery so that you know which packet (variety) of seeds to buy and you can test and buy chilli sauce so that you can grow chilli plants to make sauces with the amount of heat that you like.

Most of us, when we see clean, attractive packets of seeds for sale, don’t worry too much about how those seeds got into the packet. To get the seeds Matthew has developed an amazing garden so that he can grow all of the plants mentioned in his forty five page catalogue and collect seeds from them. The main focus is vegetables but there is a good range of flower seeds too.

He doesn’t own the land where he grows his plants, rather like being an allotment holder on a big scale, he uses a walled garden on the Longleat Estate and now has over thirty huge raised beds after clearing out loads of rubble from the derelict site. Very old greenhouses have been renovated for use with tender plants, germinating seeds and young seedlings.

He is very keen to get healthy crops and consequently a good yield of seeds to sell. Much of what he told us can be used small scale, in our gardens. For example, Lemon Grass plants are used to repel greenfly and marigolds, grown beside our food crops, can be used as sacrificial plants as they will attract pesky aphids away from our crops, onto themselves. This all reduces the use of chemical pesticides which are best avoided whenever possible, especially on food crops. Matthew had also discovered that the yield from peas and beans was greater if the plants were grown over an arch rather that up tripods.

Last summer a disease called tomato blight swept through Stratford sub Castle. After a wet and windy weekend tomato crops were devastated and had to be bundled into ‘green bins’. With Simpson’s Seeds, two tomato varieties described as blight resistant, which may withstand the disease, are ‘Matt’s Wild Cherry’ and ‘Honeymoon’. The first is a cordon with tiny, red, very sweet fruit and ‘honeymoon’ is a cordon with medium/large pink fruit. These two are something to try.

Our next speaker is Ray Broughton who will tell us how to ‘Make the Most of Your Garden’. Ray trained at RHS Garden Wisley, became Head of Horticulture at Sparsholt College and now teaches staff and students at RHS Wisley and is Chief Examiner there. Make your way to the Reading Room, 7.15 for 7.30 pm on the Thursday, 31st March 2022 where a warm welcome awaits non gardeners, new folks in the village, gardening experts and our regular members, of course. You are bound to learn something!