

The Manor Fields Estate Limited



Garden Newsletter - April 2019

Following an extremely mild winter, Spring is in full bloom and Manor Fields is bursting with colourful spring bedding, bulbs, cherry blossom and Magnolia flowers.

Armstrong Boundary

Work has started on the boundary parallel to Armstrong House. This is a challenging site to design with traffic noise, pollution and an easterly orientation, exposed and susceptible to cold winds. A double Hornbeam hedge has been planted to produce an instant screen this summer. Hornbeam is a native tree and resistant to honey fungus. The only disadvantage is that squirrels love juvenile leaves of hornbeams, so the area has been underplanted with wild garlic which they really do not like.

Clump-forming bamboo is also being planted, to reduce the noise of the traffic and to act as a visual screen. Orange Polyanthus from the window boxes of Selwyn and Glenalmond have been incorporated into the planting on the left of Armstrong gate, which makes an ideal contrast to the green Euphorbias.

Wildflower Areas

Areas to the right of the greenhouse, the rear of Bede and the sundial lawn have been sown with wildflower seed. Like most of London, Manor Fields is on heavy clay and the soil is too rich for wildflowers. However, Jo's research identified a Lincolnshire company which specialises in wildflower seeds for acid soils and most of the seed mixes can also tolerate dappled shade. The seed mixes selected contain no grass seed, are 100% native flowers including many hedgerow plants and have the benefit of encouraging pollinating insects. We expect to see the first flush of flowers in June, so watch this space!

Woodland Glen

Work has begun on a new compost area. The new heavy-duty structure incorporates steel joists and railway sleepers which should see us through for the long term, with an extra bay for turning the compost to encourage it to break down more quickly. This cost-saving and environmentally positive feature is the envy of several neighbouring estate visitors.

To accompany our two bug hotels, bird boxes and various insect boxes have been installed around the woodland glen to attract lacewings, butterflies, ladybirds and similar.

The cottage cream Primroses from the window boxes will be planted in the area when the boxes are replanted with summer bedding in May.

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Heath Gate Roundabout

The roundabout by Heath gate is looking extremely colourful at the moment with the spring bedding containing Pansies, Bellis, Myosotis and Polyanthus, interplanted with tulips. A frequent question from residents is: what happens to the bedding when removed in May? The roundabout, main entrance and window boxes are bedded out twice a year with winter/spring flowers and summer bedding. The summer bedding plants are tropical in origin, mostly South African, which cannot tolerate our cold winters. However, the winter/spring bedding is perennial, and we incorporate it around the estate in suitable locations after May, creating further permanent colour. Tulips are lifted and left to dry out in the greenhouse until October when they will be replanted around the front of the flats. Our gardeners take every opportunity to reuse and recycle plants and to grow from seed which helps to contain costs.

Pond

The corners of the pond are being redesigned to incorporate mostly native but non-invasive plants. Additional double-flowering water lilies and oxygenating plants have been purchased with the aim of covering 1/3rd of the water surface. They create more and increasingly needed shade for the fish in summer and discourage the growth of algae, a growing challenge with our changing weather patterns.

It has been observed, particularly last year, that frogs were so exhausted after finally managing to find an escape route from the deep pond walls, that we had a few casualties around the paved area. After some research to discover that frog ramps actually existed and were inexpensive, ramps have just been introduced to help frogs and toads escape the pond after the spawning season. These ramps are also used by local councils to assist frogs and toads out of drains. It is good to give nature a helping hand.

Main Lawn

Unfortunately, last year we lost the small *Mimosa* tree on the main lawn to honey fungus as previously recorded. This has now been replaced nearby with a *Parrotia persica* (Persian Ironwood) which can tolerate honey fungus. The tree has striking leaf colour in autumn that is often compared to stained glass with colours ranging from bright yellow, burnt orange to a deep red. Although currently small, the tree grows as wide as it does tall, reaching 4m at maturity, so a suitably sized tree for that location.

And finally, some words from the Allotment Group

It has always been company policy to encourage residents to take interest in the gardens, notably by adopting small areas in back/peripheral areas. The last example of this was Lorna Roberts' adoption of the area called North Grove, originally maintained by a past Girton resident. We have a new initiative this spring and here is the Allotment Group's update:

"The allotment is well underway and has proved an enjoyable and self-funded community activity. Thanks to the efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers the raised beds are in place. Vegetable crops were sown in March and other seedlings will be planted out when large enough. Crops include cabbage, tomatoes, leeks, chard, peas, broad beans and salad items. Produce will be available to residents on Saturday mornings for a suggested donation to cover costs and if any profit is eventually made, it will go to a designated local charity. Do have a look: it is on the left of the greenhouse, behind Bede House.

If you would like to participate in the scheme or want more information, please contact me by telephone on 0208789 9976 or by email at valerieferguson123@gmail.com."