



PlantNetwork
Connecting gardens, sharing skills

PlantNetwork COVID-19 Meeting Wednesday 27th May 2020, 14:00-15:00

Summary of Discussion

The session started with an outline of the 'unlocking gardens' survey which commenced last week: see the survey results in the newsletter. It was clear from discussion that in a few days, the situation has moved along considerably!

The latest discussion addressed gardens reopening, with a number of issues raised:

- The public can now visit gardens in England: "...you can now: visit gardens and land maintained for public use as an alternative open space to spend time outdoors, although buildings and amenities such as cafes will remain closed and access may be limited to members or those with tickets to ensure social distancing. You should check ahead and follow social distancing guidelines" see the [Coronavirus – guidance on accessing green spaces safely webpage](#) and recent article from HortWeek: [Fee-paying heritage and botanic gardens to reopen](#) (behind pay wall).
- Many gardens are now planning to open in early June, rather than July as proposed late last week. Those likely to be among the first to open are the National Trust, RHS and RBG Kew but no dates are yet publicly available. Most if not all will adopt a pre-booked timed ticket mode of entry and some might open to members/ticket holders first (as a trial).
- There is uncertainty what gardens will open first and exact opening date, although this might be clearer towards the end of the week.
- Some are already open, with take-away refreshments and with shop also open. See [The Newt in Somerset](#) as an example.
- Scotland likely to be given green light to open later.
- Some gardens have already welcomed back volunteers but have strict policies in place for physical distancing. Other gardens are planning to invite volunteers to return, where facilities exist or can be re-purposed.
- [Candide](#) are supporting gardens with pre-booking ticketing and other tech support.
- Bartlett Tree Experts provided an insight into how they have kept working through the lockdown with social distancing and other measures in place to ensure safety of all staff. Bartlett are also keen to hear from gardens regarding their tree care during lockdown – has it changed or have trees been impacted from measures put in place to ensure social distancing is possible? Contact [Rebecca](#) with any case studies.

Positive outcomes of the lockdown were also discussed including:

- Increased use of and engagement with social media (although there is tendency to ask when the garden will reopen!)
- New working practices and an opportunity to overhaul old systems and methods of doing operations

- Online sales have been started – something a number of organisations/gardens had considered for a while but have been incentivised by the lockdown
- New online learning opportunities have developed as people become more used to video conferencing software. Two examples were highlighted: [Plant Heritage online talks](#) and online courses aimed at the public such as the offers from [Morris Arboretum](#). An opportunity to reach new audiences – even after the lockdown.
- A National Trust survey has indicated that people simply want to visit gardens as they are interested in them and not necessarily for events or other offers. This is very hopeful for all gardens as events programmes are unlikely to be a feature of 2020. See the '[In pursuit of paradise](#)' blog from PlantNetwork which identifies a similar outcome....
- Interest in plants and gardens appears (from social media and other media coverage) to be high as people have been forced to refocus on their own gardens or neighbourhood green space. This is a definite positive – and one that gardens can develop further through increased online offers as well as through the garden. Getting back to horticultural basics....
- More space – and opportunity – for wildlife
- A 'rest' for the garden – especially those that have heavy foot fall.

Numbers of visitors and hence income for gardens will most definitely be down as social distancing measures are likely to remain for some time. But there are plenty of opportunities open to gardens interested in developing the surge of garden interest – an opportunity to think outside the box.

PLEASE KEEP SHARING! Tell us what works for you – and what isn't working – so we can develop a sector-wide approach to managing gardens with physical/social distancing.