**Herbaceous Clematis**

At the July meeting we were treated to a presentation about herbaceous clematis by Everett Leeds.

We began with the history of these plants – until the time of Elizabeth I, there was only one type of clematis in the UK, and this was the well-know wild flower, known as Old Man’s Beard. During Elizabeth’s reign a few more ornamental varieties were introduced from overseas, such as Viticella. In 1858, Jackman’s Nursery in Woking created Jackmanii, with very big flowers, new colours, and a very floriferous habit. Then in 1880, red flowers were introduced for the first time – Texensis from Texas.

Clematis suffers from mildew and black spot in the wild, and as the ornamental varieties are hybridised from these, the same problems occur in garden varieties. Then in 1900 ‘Wilt’ appeared – spread by an airborne pathogen , which enters the stem. This can only be addressed by chopping infected stems – the individual stem if only one is affected, or all stems to 6 inches if more widespread.

Herbaceous clematis are different from the clematis we are mostly familiar with. They don’t suffer from Clematis Wilt, as they have thicker stems. They don’t need support, as they do not climb, instead forming a shrub-like plant, but they do need good drainage. They don’t like to overheat, and Everett suggested lining pots with bubble wrap if they are kept in pots – where they will need considerable TLC. They should be fed using food with high Potash content, such as rose fertiliser or Tomorite, using a weak solution once a fortnight in growing season. Feeding should stop once the buds are fingernail-sized, so they do not rush through flowering.

Everett took us through an illustrated exploration of very many different herbaceous clematis, some of which he had bred himself, and gave advice on positioning, care, and propagation. They range greatly in size, colour, and perfume, and in their garden applications, from small plants similar to alpines, or suitable for hanging baskets, to massive shrubs up to 9 ft across. They are not easily available – they are not well enough known to be sold in garden centres, and so are mainly purchased from specialised growers.

The evening concluded with a sale of plants, light refreshments and a raffle. The next meeting will be on **Friday 16th August,** when Martyn Denny will talk about "Cyclamen in the wild and in cultivation”.

Jo Myland