

REGISTER NOW for the
Palmstead Soft Landscape Workshop



“What have plants ever done for us?”

Wednesday 21st September 2016

Palmstead’s annual soft landscape workshop this year will focus on the health and well-being benefits of plants and how certain plants can enhance human health while others can really make people sick.

By asking **“What have plants done for us?”** we hope to stimulate a very timely debate. Plants can make us all better and we need to make informed choices to achieve right plant right place.

The appliance of science: could it be used to create a more beautiful garden?



Ahead of the workshop we spoke to **Dr Mark Spencer** an acknowledged expert in environmental change and its impact upon the UK’s flora. Till recently, Herbarium Curator at the Natural History Museum, he is also a forensic scientist who advises the police utilising his botanical knowledge.

Dr Spencer appears regularly on television talking about his work but early on in his career he was a professional nurseryman and gardener. He studied at Kew Gardens where he became particularly interested in the history of gardening. That interest has continued to the present day and Mark has significant knowledge of the 17th and 18th century botanic gardens of Europe and their role in the development of medicine, agriculture, horticulture and empire.

Interview with Mark Spencer, the ‘Quincy’ of the plant world.

‘Biodiversity is good for us’; but what is ‘biodiversity’ and how does it impact upon our lives, gardens and landscapes? I hope to answer these questions at Palmstead’s soft landscape workshop in more detail but, as we more fully enter the Anthropocene, we all need to make balanced decisions about how we interact with our environment. Problematically, desirable outcomes, such as ‘wild-life friendliness’, ‘sustainability’, ‘adaptation and mitigation’, that are required when creating aesthetically pleasing places are not all necessarily entirely realisable. Whilst not

presenting a complete 'solution' to these problems I will explore some examples and discuss how methodologies such as the 'centrifugal phylogenetic method' used in biocontrol programmes could be used when selecting plants for created environments.

Wow - that sounds scientific! Can you break it down for me: Basically, I will be speaking about accepting the proposition that biodiversity is good for well-being. As we know, landscape and environment are the bedrock of human cultural identity. Biodiverse landscapes tend to be more enriching for humans in general and in a way without it we'd be up the swanny!!

How do you pull 'biodiversity' into a modern landscape and horticultural environment? Quite often, people's expectations around aesthetics provide conflict: and these aesthetics become complicated when we start to look at how you integrate horticulture with the biodiversity agenda. It's important for the industry to talk about how we can use science to develop plants which are appealing to the human eye but are also enriching for insects in the horticultural environment that aren't going to get out and cause problems in the environment.

How can science help inform our understanding of biodiversity? When we use scientific principles understood in other fields (such as evolutionary biology) we can apply these principals when considering what is good horticulturally and manage impacts upon the landscape and wider environment. For example, an application of the knowledge of the tree-of-heaven's origins and evolution would have helped predict it's invasive potential.

What more can we do as an industry to engage with the scientific community? An understanding of the existing ecology and biodiversity of the landscape we are working in should be a prerequisite when considering change. I believe that closer ties between the nursery trade, landscape designers and the wider scientific community would yield significant benefits.

Existing partnerships with ecologists need to be broadened to encompass the wider skill set that the amateur natural history and professional scientific communities have to offer.

Please could you share with us your 3 favourite trees and reasons why!

Chinese yellowwood - Cladrastis sinensis - because it is very beautiful and reminds me of my time at Kew

Ash - Fraxinus excelsior - because it is one of our most important native trees and it is yet another example of humanity's hubris, this is a species which faces a bleak future due to our poor record on plant quarantine.

Plane - *Platanus* spp. - this plant is one of the planet's great survivors and amazing it's closest surviving relatives are proteas and lotus.

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Speakers at the 9th Palmstead Workshop held at the Ashford International Hotel in Kent, will include landscape and garden designer Jinny Blom, botanist and natural historian Dr Mark Spencer, urban greening specialist Anne Jaluzot, RHS research fellow Dr Tiana Blanus plus medics turned garden designers Jackie Herald and Shenagh Hume from Allergy UK. Plus, the HTA's head of horticulture Raoul Curtis-Machin will outline the biosecurity threats approaching we need to know about.

Sign up here: www.palmstead.co.uk click on events.

Delegate booking fee £36 includes lunch & Vat. Timings on the day 09:00 – 16:00 approx.