

ZOOM TALKS: SOME TIPS

With the onset of Covid-19 local not-for-profit groups such as Horticultural groups, WI and U3A stopped having meetings and that put paid to us delivering our well-received talks about the National Garden Scheme. Or it did for a while.

As people increasingly took to online forums one particular App came to the fore: Zoom. It provided a lifeline for family and friends to see each other and some people have started to realise that it provides a great, user-friendly platform for presenting talks. The basic version, which gives you 40 mins of airtime, is free.

A number of Counties quite independently had a go and found it worked well. One example is Berkshire, they advertised their talks - the main one they call 'Beyond the Garden Gate' - in their newsletter and got a couple of positive responses to get them started. They now offer a further talk, 'The Perils and Pleasures of Opening your Garden'. They also offer some free coaching for those new to Zoom followed by a short taster presentation on their 10 favourite plants. (if you have a few requests from group organisers you could invite several of them to the same taster session). One of their garden owners, Sarah Pajwani, also delivers gardening talks for the NGS including a ticketed event via the website. Talks around the history and background of the National Garden Scheme are always popular, and can also be tailored by season and area, but any gardening topic that the speaker has knowledge and enthusiasm for can work really well too.

From these various experiences we have put together some useful tips for any and all Counties who would like to have a go at using Zoom. The tips include presentational tips along with tips on getting the best from Zoom. Good luck!

Tip 1

The slides - as always it makes sense to ensure you have up-to-date content and great pictures. Additionally it is worth noting that on Zoom many people won't have a clear view of all of a slide - they may have thumbnail pictures of the group down the far right-hand side of the screen. So, as a precaution, it does no harm to make sure you have no important text, or no key part of a picture, on the far right of your slides.

- Presentation Format: Ideally prepare your presentation in Powerpoint.
- You can find template presentations, NGS fonts and other resources including how to work with Powerpoint in the online Resource Centre
- For a 45 minute talk approx. 70-100 slides may be needed. Make sure you ask permission and credit any professional photographers.
- Good quality photography is key to keeping interest

Tip 2

Presenter notes - you won't be able to see your presenter notes on screen when presenting so you may want to print them or have them on screen on a second device, but ensure any 2nd device such as mobile phone or ipad is not connected to wifi or internet as this may interfere with your zoom connection if it is close by.

Tip 3

Rehearse - it may sound obvious but rehearsal is important. Talking to a screen can feel different than to a live group, timings can also vary (particularly important if you are keeping to the 40 minute limit with the free version of Zoom). When practicing it is good to get used to using the different features in Zoom, such as muting the group, or restricting screen-sharing, until you feel comfortable with them. If you are doing the talk via the groups zoom account make sure they know how to give you permission to screenshare.



Tip 4

The setting - think about the setting around your computer (you can present via an iPad or even a smartphone but it is much easier on a desktop or laptop computer). Make sure it is well lit with the light illuminating your face. Don't have a light behind you. Make sure there is no background noise, nor interruptions (turn your own mobile phone ringer off). Think about what people will see, such as what is just over your shoulder (or use a 'backdrop', which is in a later tip). And make sure the camera is at eye level (most people sit down but some presenters prefer to stand. If you do, raise your laptop to a suitable height). Try and show a branded screen from the start of the presentation – either the 1st 'welcome' slide or the branded zoom backdrop. Any early meeting joiners will then be reassured that they are in the correct meeting place.

Tip 5

The invitation - tell people how it will all work in the email with the link and recommend they put the details in their diary now. Suggest that they join the meeting two or three minutes early as you will start promptly on time (this also allows time to tackle typical problems like people not knowing how to unmute themselves.) Most people have no problem joining by using the link but as a precaution you change your settings to ensure everyone can join whatever their system and whether or not they have downloaded the App. See here for details:

<https://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-to-allow-zoom-meeting-attendees-to-join-without-installing-the-app/>

Ask in your email that the audience please does not record or share the talk.



Tip 6

Consider a backdrop - rather than have your office or kitchen in the background you can load a virtual backdrop, perhaps a high res picture of a garden in your county? Put the picture you want on your desktop. Now open Zoom. At the top right is a little cog symbol for settings. In settings select 'Backgrounds & Filters' then look for the little + symbol on the right. Choose 'add image' and then the image you want. Now you have a backdrop. Beware though, if you step back or move around you may find that you disappear from view! So stay close to the computer.

Tip 7

Getting started - some of this is the same as for a live talk such as telling them who you are, what you will cover, how long it will last and to save questions until the end. There are, however, a couple of additional points to note. Tell them that you will 'mute all' for the presentation in order to stop distracting background noise. You can tell them when and how to unmute themselves later. You may want to tell them how to avoid those thumbnail pictures of people getting in the way but as this works differently on different systems and devices you need to be confident it is not going to bamboozle them.

Tip 8

Mute all - click on the participants symbol at the bottom and a list will come up on the right. At the bottom you will see an option to 'Mute All'. Click this and the group will now only hear you.

Tip 9

Sharing your screen - once you start sharing your screen everyone sees what you see on your screen so make sure there is nothing else in view except the presentation. Select 'Powerpoint' (or Keynote if you are on Apple) and click 'Share'. Now play your presentation. The look varies on different systems but in essence you should now see your slide presentation and some thumbnail pictures of the group, alternatively if you have 'view options' you can select 'side-by-side mode'. You are ready to go. On some systems you may need to advance the slides using your keyboard rather than your mouse.

Tip 10

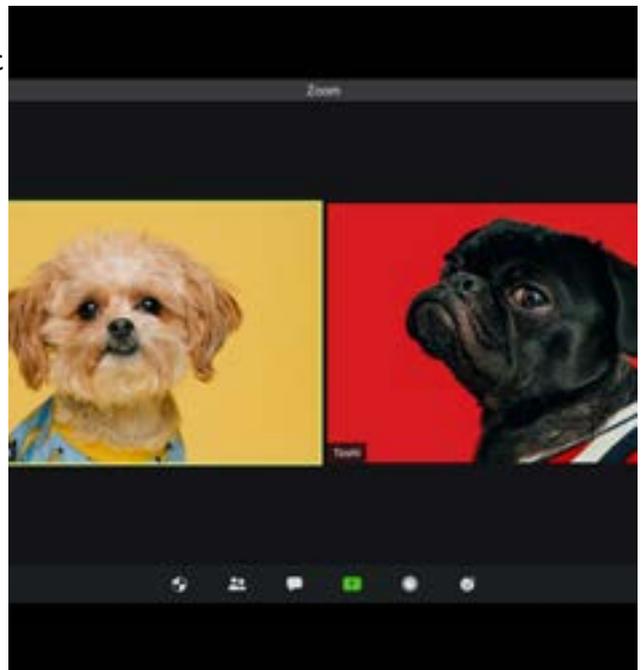
Timing - keep an eye on the time especially if you are limited to 40 minutes or have agreed a time with the group organiser. Do allow some time for questions at the end. Some people who are more familiar with Zoom may ask questions using the 'Chat' facility at the bottom. If they do then that might make a good place to start when it comes to answering questions.

Tip 11

Unmuting - although you can mute everyone you cannot reverse this by unmuting them all. The easiest way is to simply ask people to unmute themselves if they want to speak by clicking on the little microphone symbol at the bottom left of their screen. You are now ready to take questions.

Tip 12

The end - most group organisers will want to say a few words and offer thanks so do leave time for that. Once you are sure it is all concluded click on the end meeting icon at the bottom right. Do follow up with the group organiser with an email especially if you have promised to forward any information. This is also an ideal time to include details of some local gardens open By Arrangement that the group might be able to visit at some time.



Tip 13

Payment - don't forget to give the group organiser the bank details so they can do a transfer. It is up to you whether you wish to still accept cheques in the post. Either way, we work on an honesty system. In Berkshire they charge the same fee for Zoom talks as for live talks but, obviously, without travel expenses.

PROMOTING YOUR TALKS

If you are already giving talks in your County you will have ideas on this, some suggestions from various county teams are:

- If you are starting out with digital talks then do contact all those groups who you gave talks to 'in person' before. Some teams are finding that groups who were reluctant to do a digital talk earlier in the year are now more willing to give it a go.
- Social media can work well, as those using social media tend to already be a little more tech. savvy.
- Do let Jo at Hatchlands know you are giving talks as we will be listing Talks Contacts on the web site. (joanne@ngs.org.uk)
- Include details of Talks and your Talks Contact in any newsletters, or E-newsletters, going out from your team – to both individuals and groups, as members will often make suggestions for meetings content to their groups.
- Include your Talks Contact in your booklet.

And most importantly - enjoy!