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R.H.S. LONDON AND WISLEY

We are affiliated to the RHS who's benefits include competitive insurance cover, free gardening advice, a free group visit to an RHS garden, (54 members to visit Wisley club trip in Summer) access to medals (Banksian medal) and show stationery and a free monthly copy of The Garden

magazine (see Brenda Winton if you wish to view). Our membership number is 10564709.

EDITORS NOTES

Brian –Stories to ernestperry33@gmail.com hard copy to Chris

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- SPRING SHOW 12th APRIL
- RHS Malvern Spring Festival – 8-11 May
- PLANT SALE 10th MAY
- RHS Chelsea Flower Show – 20-24 May
- OUT MEETING 2nd June
- SUMMER SHOW 7th JULY
- RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show – 1–6 July
- RHS Flower Show Tatton Park – 16–20 July
- AUTUMN SHOW 6th SEPTEMBER

GARDENING CALENDAR MARCH

March is the time when your gardening routine will begin to speed up – this is the time for mulching, sowing, and repotting.

Deadhead and prune

Don't forget to deadhead early spring bulbs – but don't chop back the leaves for at least six weeks after flowering. Hard-prune bush roses back to 30cm, cutting back to an outward-facing bud.

Weed and mulch

Remove weeds, then mulch beds and borders with shredded bark or compost to help stop them returning. Protect young perennials, such as hostas, with organic slug pellets.

Mow

Pay more attention to the lawn, too. Start mowing your lawn each week if the grass isn't wet. If you can, set your mower's blade height as high as possible for the first four to five weeks.

Plant

This is also your last chance to plant bare-root trees, shrubs and roses until November.

The most important task in March is probably sowing. Seed heads of perennials and place 'grow-through' supports in position. Plant summer-flowering lily bulbs in a hole three to four times their height. Sow hardy annuals to fill gaps in immature beds and borders. Replace the compost in container plants and top-dress with slow-release fertiliser. Plant herbs in windowsill trays. Plant early potatoes, onion sets and asparagus, and when the weather is warmer sow onions, parsnips and the first carrots, turnips, beetroots and salad leaves of the season under cloches. Sow celery, courgettes, tomatoes and cucumbers on the windowsill or greenhouse for planting out once all danger of frost has passed.

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THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Orange & cardamom tea syrup cake

Serves 12

Prepare 20 minutes + cooling Cook 40 minutes

You will need

175ml olive oil, plus extra for greasing

200g Seville Orange No Peel Marmalade

lOOg Polenta Valsugana

150g ground almonds

125g caster sugar

2 tsp baking powder (gluten free if needed)

4 Free Range Medium Eggs, beaten
2 Yorkshire Gold Tea Bags
10 cardamom pods, bashed and seeds ground (reserving the husks)

To do

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C, gas mark 4. Grease a 23cm springform tin and line the base with baking parchment. Melt 75g marmalade. Put the potenta, ground almonds, sugar and baking powder into a large bowl. Combine with a balloon whisk. Add 175ml oil, the eggs and melted marmalade, then whisk together.

2 Pour into the tin and bake for 30 minutes, then lower the oven temperature to 160°C, gas mark 3 and cook for 10 minutes more until dark golden, with no wobble in the centre.

3 Boil 200ml water in a pan and add the tea to brew for 10 minutes. Remove the bags, then add the cardamom and husks and remaining 125g marmalade. Simmer for 8-10 minutes until a little more syrupy. Set aside.

4 Using a skewer, prod holes all over the cake, still in its tin. Strain the syrup, then slowly spoon 5 tbsp over. Decorate with a few cardamom husks, if liked. Slice and serve warm, with more syrup.

HIBERNATING INSECTS

It's time to admire the exquisite wings and appetite for aphids one of our few hibernating insects.

We are all well versed in seeing insects of all shapes, sizes and colours in an English garden but there are amongst them some surprising heroes.

Because of its appetite for plant pests, the green lacewing is a delightful companion for gardeners.

In the UK we have about 40 species of lacewing but only one of them hibernates, the common green lacewing (Chrysoperla carnea). The body of this creature is a little prehistoric in appearance, it has large eyes and long antennae which make it look rather unattractive. However it does have the most wonderful set of wings imaginable. These large wings are translucent and intricately veined, reflecting light at slightly different angles just as you might expect to see from leaded windows.

To gardeners the green lacewing is a good-guy because it is a potent predator of aphids and so should be welcomed into our gardens. The more lacewings we can support through the winter in our gardens, the bigger head start they will have when it comes to tackling aphids in the spring and summer. To help them, we need to think about where they like to hibernate.

Adults can be seen in gardens, flower beds, parks, meadows, farms, and fields at dusk, when they are all at their peak.

Larvae eat almost any insect they encounter, and aphids (smaller flying insects that can harm plants) are their favourite.

Adult flying adults are born in the summer, when a few tiny larva are laid in the spring.

They can be found in the spring and summer and have a significant impact on insect control.

This slightly odd-looking insect is harmless.
Even in mild winters life for a small insect in Britain is extremely difficult. For this reason most insects survive the winter as eggs, caterpillars or chrysalises which lie dormant in tree holes, amongst leaf litter or even underground. There are a few, though, that over-winter as adults, hibernating through the worst of the weather and waking when temperatures rise.

Generally lacewings hibernate amongst leaf litter so if you tidy leaf litter away from paths consider leaving it in a corner of the garden until the spring, maybe use it as a mulch but don't pack it tightly into a compost bin from which the insects will never be able to emerge.

It is possible to buy, or make, insect hibernating 'houses' and some of these are specially made for lacewings but, such structures are no substitute for wildlife-friendly gardening. If you do have a lacewing house, it is important to remember to clean it out in early autumn, earwigs often take up residence in summer and will kill any lacewings as they arrive.

WOODS AND HEDGES

HONEYSUCKLE Lonicera periclymenum This is a climbing shrub often trailing over other bushes in an untidy sprawl, or twining (always in an anti-clockwise direction) around their stems, to a maximum height of 6m. The simple leaves of honeysuckle appear early in the year when spring is some weeks away, but the flowers do not show themselves before June. When they do they are spectacular, growing in dense terminal heads or bunches, each flower with a narrow corolla up to 5cm long, broadening into an upper and lower lip from which the anthers and stigma protrude. The outside is pink or flushed with purple, the inside starts white but turns yellow after pollination. In autumn, translucent red berries are produced.
The flowers release a heavy evening scent, startlingly rich and powerful on a still night, which attracts long-tongued hawk-moths — especially the elephant hawk.

BLUEBELL Hyacintlwides non-scripta Individually, the bluebell is not especially exciting, but in hazy oceans beneath a woodland canopy it conjures a vision of the British countryside at its best. Nothing like it exists anywhere else. Bluebells grow from bulbs to a height of 20—50cm, the stem or scrape carrying a raceme of bell-shaped sky-blue flowers. The flowers are made up of six perianth segments and two blue bracts fused at their

base. They are usually at their best between late April and late May. Proper wild bluebells always droop slightly.
Although so characteristic of woods on slightly acidic soils, the bluebell also grows on grassy or bracken-covered hillsides, especially those close to western coasts. In times past, the slimy sap from the stem and bulb was used as a glue, notably by arrow-makers when flights.

HOSTA's

These hugely popular shade-loving plants are primarily grown for their beautiful foliage. There's a vast range to choose from, with leaves in all shades of green, as well as dusky blues and acid yellows, sometimes variegated or flashed with cream or gold, ruffled, smooth or distinctively ribbed. Many also produce small trumpet-shaped mauve or white flowers in summer. Hostas are notoriously irresistible to slugs and snails, but are also much loved by gardeners, who often amass large collections.

Where do hosta's grow best?
All hostas give their best in moist soil in partial shade, certainly away from bright sunshine whether in the ground or a container. In general, though, yellow-leaved cultivars prefer some sun, along with a few hosta's that are tolerant of sunny conditions.
Do hosta's grow better in pots or the ground?
Hosta grows better in containers as opposed to garden beds because they do not have competition from weeds which can be hard to remove without harming the roots of the plants. Container hosta's are easier to grow in shady areas as well. You can move them around if the sunlight is too strong.
Will hosta's return year after year?
Hosta's are reliable long-lived perennials. When planted in the right spot and cared for properly, they will come back year after year, often getting bigger and better with each season - something which is a huge attraction to gardeners who collect different varieties.
What month is best to plant hosta's?
You can plant hostas all year round, but spring and autumn are preferable. It's best to avoid planting in mid-summer, when temperatures are high and

the water table is low, as this can prevent the plant from establishing well. Mid-winter is also a bad time to plant hostas, as the ground is cold and often frozen.

Do hostas have a lifespan?

Hosta's require little care and will live to be 30 or more years if properly cared for. While most known for thriving in the shade garden, the reality is more nuanced. The ideal situation is dappled shade.

Do hostas multiply on their own?

Hosta's can spread, either through underground runners or seeds. Rhizomatous Hostas that spread underneath the soil are the worst offenders. These varieties will spread almost indefinitely. Non-Rhizomatous varieties will grow in clumps that reach a mature width.

What should I do with hosta's when they get too big?

Using a spade and/or garden fork, dig six to eight inches outside of the crown of the plant. Depending on the hosta variety, the root system may extend eight to 18 inches deep. Starting from one side and working your way around, dig beneath the roots, then ease the clump out of the ground.

Do hostas lose their leaves in winter?

By winter hosta's will have entered their dormancy stage and the leaves will have completely died back. You don't need to do anything with your hosta's over winter, they are completely hardy and do not need bringing inside or frost protection.

How deep should you plant hosta's?

Perhaps deeper than many think. Dig a hole, at least 12 inches deep and almost twice the size of the mature plant. Mix in a good layer and layer of organic matter.

How do I protect my hosta's from slugs?

Slugs and snails love hiding in crevices and behind stones. Take their hiding places away. Try putting your hosta's in pots, then protect the pots with Vaseline or WD40 which make them greasy and prevent slugs and snails from climbing them.

WINTER WONDERLAND

Hallelujah! Days are longer, fair-weather gardeners are emerging from their burrows and green shoots are shooting everywhere.

Hellebore-hunters are active. Galanthophile gurus are on their hands and knees, rear end uppermost -bottomising, says a botanist \ friend. But Lent lilies and snowdrops aren't the only flowers.

Of the several winter-flowering honeysuckles - shrubby, steadfast, easily grown, easily sourced - Lonicerafragrantissima unfailingly braves the February elements, sporting small, creamy-white flowers, which are, yes, fragrant. It's been in British gardens since 1845, when Scottish plant-hunter Robert Fortune hauled it back from one of his China exploits.

A close relative, L x purpusii, is also worthy of a favoured spot, where its perfume can be huffed. It has a couple of named improvements: 'Spring Romance' and the similar, exceedingly free-flowering 'Winter Beauty'. Go on. Buy both. Sweeten future Februarys.
Find fragrance too among the daphnes - more expensive but worth their pennies; sorry, guineas.
A clue to its sweet odour is embedded in the species Daphne odora. It's another Far Eastern shrub, for which the mighty and wholly reliable Hillier Manual of Trees & Shrubs advocates some winter protection but nevertheless considers it 'hardy enough to withstand frost of considerable severity'. That's my kind of plant. And Hillier will guide you to many another.

We gardeners are perhaps tempted by too much exotica; it empties our wallets, as well as our gardens. Don't let sarcococca's tricky spelling put you off. These smallish evergreen shrubs with fine stems and foliage amply repay the purchase price with a prolonged annual abundance of petite yet terrifically strong-scented, white flowers.

They're happy in the shade too, \ against a north-facing wall. A few blossoming sprigs in a vase bring more than the promise of spring indoors.

Camellia sasanqua is among the earliest of its V clan to brighten mid- to late-winter days. It bears numerous progeny' (Hillier Winter again), appreciative of some honeysuckle shelter against a south- or west-facing wall. I'd say its many varieties are too costly to experiment with. But, if tempted, satisfy your yearning with 'Crimson King' and/or 'Narumigata'. Leave the plentiful others to folk with heated glasshouses, in which they can bask in something akin to a Mediterranean climate.
Two more woody must-haves where space is available: Garrya elliptica 'James Roof for its intriguing pale grey catkins up to eight inches long at this time of the year; and any of the hamamelis (witch hazel) fraternity whose 'spidery' flowers, from the palest yellow to rich ruby red, adorn naked branches throughout these chilly weeks.

But, here again, you'll need a deep pocket if you want a group of them, although there's no risk of their being slayed by any of winter's full-on blasts.

Heathers I don't do. But if you must, garden centres will be happy to oblige. They'll be flooded with them right now.
Lamentably leaving aside hellebores and snowdrops - the gardening press overdoses on them at this time of year -

Alternative delights for years, I've grown Iris reticulata, whose ball-bearing-sized bulbs I pot up as soon as they reach the shops each autumn. It's their clear blues of a spring sky that I crave, beautifully realised in the varieties 'Harmony', 'Blue Planet' and the newish Alida'. Try them intermingled with sunny yellow J danfordiae and stand by for swathes of uplifting colour on six-inch stems.

And what better promise of a forthcoming spring than the equally failproof splendour of the diminutive crocus? Common, perhaps - but so are roses in their season.
Plant hundreds come September. Their plenty nourishes the soul.

COMING UP ROSES

Social media assures us that we can grow a rose cutting in a raw potato. James Wong goes looking for any evidence this works

SOMETIMES it is the really counterintuitive ideas in horticulture that ironically turn out to be the most effective. So about a decade ago, when the internet was suddenly flush with a curious new technique for using potatoes to propagate rose bushes, I was keen to test it out.

Here is the basic idea: instead of inserting the snipped ends of rose cuttings into bare soil as is standard practice, you poke them into whole, raw spuds, which are then buried in pots of compost. Supposedly, this gives home gardeners better results.

Raking up millions of views, posts espousing this idea soon spawned all manner of variations, some involving a coating of honey, and a few devotees not burying their potato-rose union at all, just sitting it on a windowsill. There are even viral time-lapse videos purporting to show these roses miraculously blooming just weeks later. A decade on, and this interest has made it out of internet memes and into mainstream newspapers, today seemingly part of standard horticultural advice.

Now, it doesn't help the potato-rose cause that most of the viral videos popularising the idea are poorly produced fakes, showing roses sprouting the roots of bean plants, or flowering at impossibly small sizes. But the weirdest thing about these memes is that they don't even explain what the benefit of doing this is. Do more cuttings survive when using spuds? Do they root faster? Are they more resilient to drying out or to fungal infection? Maybe all four?

While I could find no published trials in academic literature, and no explanations of how this technique might be beneficial, after some digging, I did find one or two historical accounts of using potatoes to help prevent

the sliced ends of cuttings from drying out when transported long distances. Indeed, some of the first Japanese flowering cherry trees to reach Britain in the early 20th century were transported as cuttings of dormant twigs in this way, on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

So I decided to run a small home trial. I planted three cuttings each of three common rose cultivars, both using the spud technique and the traditional method. I am afraid to say the results were
boringly predictable. None of the spud-poked rose cuttings worked, drying up and turning brown within a week or so, while the traditional cuttings had a 100 per cent success rate. In fact, the only things I successfully grew by the potato method were the potatoes!

OK, this was admittedly a minuscule trial by academic standards, but the hallmark of good science is reproducibility. And today, if you try searching "rose cutting potatoes" on X, guess what? You will be faced with posts from people all over the world showing pots of very healthy potato plants - but absolutely zero living rose bushes.


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ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB TRIPS 2025

Saturday 19th April 2025. Visit Dunsborough Park, Ripley GU23 6BZ

https://dunsboroughpark.com/

Leave Victoria Hall at 12:00pm returning 4:30pm approx. Cost £16.50 includes both travel and entrance fees. Refreshments are available. £5 deposit secures a place. Details of paying below

Sunday 29th June 2025. Visit Shere Open Gardens, Shere GU5 9JA

https://www.shereopengardens.co.uk/

Leave Victoria Hall at 1pm returning 6pm approx.. Cost £16 include both travel and entrance fees Refreshments are available. £5 deposit secures a place. Details of paying below

Sunday 13th July 2025 . Visit RHS Wisley

https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley

Leave Victoria Hall at 1pm returning 5pm approx.. Cost £6 if you travel on bus, FREE if you use your own transport. Meet at entrance to collect your tickets at 1:30pm .

If you want to go on any trip please see Ian at the rear of the Hall, or email him on ian@chant.org.uk or telephone 07850 498544

payments can be done on line

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