

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS

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EDITORS NOTES

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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.

SO MANY FLOWERS GROW IN AN ENGLISH URBAN GARDEN

TOM HODGKINSON

As spring turns to summer, a town mouse's thoughts turn quite naturally to his garden. Rural mice spend a lot of time in their garden, digging and attempting to grow vegetables. When I lived in North Devon and wrote books full-time, I was inspired by George Orwell, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and the Epicureans of ancient Athens to try out a little self-sufficiency. A bit of food-producing gardening seemed like a natural partner to literary endeavour.

I managed a few seasons of growing potatoes, broad beans, cabbages, beetroots and so on. When it worked, it was very satisfying, and when it didn't, it was painful, but there was always a pleasant sense of working within a tradition stretching back thousands of years.

O fortunatos nimium sua si bona norint, agricolas (How happy are the farmers, if only they knew it!) So wrote Virgil, who himself lived in an Epicurean commune.

Farmers today also seem to be completely unaware of their own happiness and consider their lot to be rather an unlucky one.

Anyway, running a smallholding is a lot of work; and when we moved to an inner-city terraced house with only a tiny backyard, I actually relished not having to do a single thing in the garden and instead spent my leisure time staring out of the window doing nothing.

This disappointed Mrs Mouse. 'You used to enjoy gardening. You even wrote a book about how everyone should grow their own vegetables. Now you have lost interest and buy potatoes at Tesco. What happened?'

With three school-going children and a magazine to produce, which entailed full-time work in the office, something had to give.

However, over the past few weeks, buoyed by the sun, I have found myself frequenting plant sales and nurseries. And I have started to enjoy gardening in the city. It has many advantages over its rural counterpart.

The main one is that there is far less work involved due to the smaller space. And London gardens tend to be minimal rather than cluttered.

I suggested filling up the front with pots of geraniums and herbs and so on, but my great-aunt came up with the deliciously snobbish comment: 'Oh no. It will look like a railwayman's cottage.' So we left it virtually empty. Far less work for me, and a classy non-proletarian look. Win, win.

It's easier to achieve your ideas in town. My first notion for the backyard was to turn it into a Shoreditch pop-up. We would have fairy lights, blackboards, craft beers, creative, seafood-based burgers and a central fire pit.

We did get a sort of outdoor furnace thing, but the neighbours were not keen on the smoke it produces.

So I moved on to an earlier fantasy, the medieval herber. This is an extremely mannered and stylised garden designed for an aristocratic lady to recline in (while elegant young men with parti-coloured garments play the lute), eat sweetmeats and read poetry. There is a medieval illustration of the 'Garden of Idleness' which I took as my cue.

The features of the medieval herber are simple. It should be small and enclosed. It should feature a trellis with white and red roses. And there should be a bench made of bricks and topped with chamomile or periwinkle. Sweet-smelling herbs should abound - and strictly no pots.

As luck would have it, our backyard already had two planters made of bricks, each about one foot deep and three foot across, which would serve as the turf-topped benches loved by 13th-century queens.

I cut back a horrible old, rambling wisteria which was climbing over the trellis at the back and, to my surprise and delight, uncovered a white climbing rose with lovely small flowers. There was also a honeysuckle and an ivy hiding there.

We planted parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme and Vinca minor, or periwinkle, in the beds, and hauled a giant green man carving a friend gave us years ago up on to the back wall. I have also mounted my Green Man pub sign which my friend Pete Loveday, the hippy cartoonist, made for me.

These give the garden a Glastonbury vibe which Mrs Mouse does not approve of. As do the ornamental snails I have placed crawling along the wall - Mrs Mouse doesn't

like these either, but I point out that snails were a common feature on the margins of medieval manuscripts.

She is lucky that I have managed to resist dream catchers, wind chimes, fairies and cannabis plants.

Thankfully, the yard is covered in York stone and not grass; so, instead of the immense headache of lawn mowing, we just give it a quick sweep. We put a metal table out there with a pot of daisies on the top et voila.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- AUTUMN SHOW 8th September
- Garden Club Trip to Wisely has been moved to September 16th. We will be leaving the Hall at 1pm

APGC SUMMER SHOW RESULTS

Most Points Section 1, Summer Cup

- 1st 42pts Ann Poole, 2nd 40pts John Poole, 3rd 37pts Brenda Winton

Best Rose exhibit

- Class 42 John Poole

GOOSEBERRIES

Paul Dring salutes a delicious culinary anachronism

There seems something almost wilfully old-fashioned about the gooseberry. There's its mouth-puckeringly tart flavour and spiky, forbidding appearance. Then there are the prim euphemisms about playing gooseberry and the gooseberry bush (from which babies miraculously emerge without need of any biological unpleasantness). Finally, there's its alternative moniker, goosegog, which couldn't sound less 21st century if it tried. Talking of names, it seems improbable it's called after geese. More likely, it is an Anglicisation of the German krausebeere (crisp berry). Part of the Ribes family, which includes blackcurrants, it bears no relation to the kiwi or the physalis, despite these fruits being known as the Chinese gooseberry and Cape gooseberry respectively.

HISTORY

Britain's climate is perfectly designed to produce gooseberries - both the tart, green cookers and the sweeter red varieties, which appear later in the season and can be

eaten raw. This possibly explains why they've been given short shrift by our continental cousins. Despite the efforts of one Monsieur Audot, whose *La Cuisiniere De La Campagne Et De La Ville* devoted a whole chapter to them in 1818, they've never really caught on in France the way they have here. The English first cultivated them in the 1500s, when they were apparently used as a medicinal aid for plague victims, although I imagine you'd need a fair few to shift even an entry-level case of Black Death. Their heyday was the 19th century, when gardeners would vie to grow the best in up to 200 competitions nationwide. Today, a handful of these events survive, as at Goostrey in Cheshire and Egton Bridge in Yorkshire. All the same, the gooseberry's popularity has waned over recent decades - a result of their short season, which has made farmers reluctant to grow them, allied perhaps to a falling from favour of the kind of cream-rich puddings they're most often used in...

HOW TO USE

Which is a shame, because gooseberry fool is an inspired piece of culinary simplicity, not least when the berries have been stewed with elderflower, which adds a Muscat-like delicacy to their sharp flavour. The topped, tailed, sugared and stewed fruit is a great base for crumbles, cobblers, or pies. It has its savoury uses, too. Its French name, *groseille a maquereau*, hints at its ability to cut through the richness of oily foods such as mackerel when served as an accompanying sauce. It can also perform this palate-cleansing duty alongside pork chops or even roast goose. Maybe the two aren't totally unrelated, after all.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE**Gooseberry Fool**

Serves: 6

Prep: 15 mins

Cook: 5 mins

You will need

- 500g/1lb gooseberries, topped and tailed, rinsed and drained
- 2tbsp caster sugar or more, if needed
- juice of 1 large orange
- 200g carton crème fraîche
- fresh mint leaves, to decorate

To do

1. In a small saucepan, add gooseberries (reserve a few for decoration), stir through sugar and add orange juice. Heat gently for about 5 mins, or longer if

needed – just till gooseberries start to split and soften. Taste and add a little more sugar, if needed, simmering till sugar has dissolved. This will depend on how tart your gooseberries are and your taste preference. But try not to over sugar them, as they should retain some tang.

2. Add the gooseberries to a food processor and whizz till puréed. Leave to cool, then tip into a bowl and mix with the crème fraîche. Spoon into serving bowls, then top with a few fresh gooseberries and a mint leaf. Put in the fridge to set a little and serve chilled.

Top tip: If topping and tailing the gooseberries seems like a tedious task, omit this stage and then, once softened, pass through a sieve, rather than using the food processor.

APGC TRIPS 2018

Saturday 18th August Great Dixter. Cost £25 each (transport and Entry Fees) Leave Hall at 9:30am, returning approx 6pm. Non Returnable Deposit £10.

<https://www.greatdixter.co.uk/>

The above trip includes a comfort break which will be made in both directions.

Sunday 16th September RHS Wisley Gardens. Please note change of date. Cost £4 each (for those using minibus only) Leave Hall at 1pm, returning approx 5pm. Free for those who meet us at Wisley at 1:30pm. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley>

GARDENING CALENDAR AUGUST

August is usually one of the hottest months of the year - making watering essential. Try to use grey water wherever possible, especially as water butts may be running low if it has been a dry summer. August is traditionally holiday-time, so you might need to enlist the help of friends and family to look after the garden while you are away. When you are at home, take the time to prune summer-flowering shrubs.

Top 10 jobs this month

- 1 Prune *Wisteria*
- 2 Don't delay summer pruning fruits trained as restricted forms
- 3 Deadhead flowering plants regularly
- 4 Watering! - particularly containers, and new plants, preferably with grey recycled water or stored rainwater
- 5 Collect seed from garden plants

- 6 Harvest sweetcorn and other vegetables as they become ready
- 7 Continue cutting out old fruited canes on raspberries
- 8 Lift and pot up rooted strawberry runners
- 9 Keep ponds and water features topped up
- 10 Feed the soil with green manures

FLOWERS

Sowing and planting

Towards the end of August sow hardy annuals directly into borders. They will overwinter and flower next summer.

Cutting back, pruning and dividing

Cutting back the foliage and stems of herbaceous plants that have already died back (e.g. *Dicentra*) is starting to be a priority.

Don't neglect hanging baskets - deadheading, watering and feeding will help them last through until autumn.

Deadhead plants such as *Dahlia*, roses and *Penstemon* and bedding to prolong the display colour well into early autumn.

Don't cut off the flowerheads of ornamental grasses. These will provide winter interest.

Hardy geraniums can be cut back a little to remove tired leaves and encourage a new flush of growth.

Prune climbing and rambling roses that do not repeat flower or produce attractive hips, once the flowers have finished.

Propagation

Pinks and carnations can be propagated by layering. Propagate irises by dividing the rhizomes if not done last month.

Take cuttings of tender perennials such as *Pelargonium* and *Osteospermum*, as soon as possible. A greenhouse, cool conservatory or a light windowsill are ideal to bring them on until they are established.

Rock garden plants, such as *Helianthemum*, *Aubrieta* and *Dianthus* can be propagated from cuttings at this time of year.

General maintenance

Feed containers, and even tired border perennials, with a liquid tomato food each week to encourage them to bloom into the early autumn.

Keep picking flowers from the cutting garden to encourage more flower buds to form and open.

Alpines that have developed bare patches of die-back, or have become weedy, can be tidied up by in-filling the patches with gritty compost. This will encourage new growth as well as improving their appearance.

Most perennial weeds are best dealt with when in active growth, if necessary applying a weedkiller.

Planning ahead

Collect and store seed of hardy annuals and perennials for sowing later in the autumn. Good plants to try include *Calendula*, *Nigella*, *Cerithe*, *Papaver*, *Aquilegia* and hardy *Geranium*.

Buy or order spring-flowering bulbs. Some bulbs can be planted now, such as *Colchicum*, daffodils and Madonna lilies (*L. candidum*).

Pest and disease watch

Inspect chrysanthemums for the first signs of white rust and take immediate action.

Remove and destroy any *Nicotiana* showing signs of downy mildew. This shows up as yellowish blotches on the upper surface of the leaves.

Powdery mildew can be prevalent at this time of the year. Treat with an approved chemical at the manufacturer's rates.

Apply nematodes to control vine weevil grubs, in pots or the ground.

Earwigs can make *Dahlia* blooms ragged. Set traps to reduce damage.

Don't be worried by bright green, heavily-armoured looking insects on your plants - these are harmless shieldbugs which do not require control.

Distortion on *Phlox* could indicate the presence of phlox eelworm.

Discoloured leaves on herbaceous plants such as *Chrysanthemum*, *Anemone* and *Penstemon* may be leaf and bud eelworm.

Lawns

Raise the blades on the mower before cutting fine lawns. This will help reduce drought stress.

Mow lightly and frequently so that short grass clippings can remain on the lawn during hot summers to act as a moisture-retentive mulch. Excess thatch can be

scarified out during autumn maintenance next month. Mulching mowers cut the clippings even finer than normal rotary blades, making the mulch less visible.

Lawns on thin soils may benefit from a high phosphate feed. This will strengthen the roots for winter, rather than encouraging lush top growth that could suffer in the cold and weaken the grass.

Avoid using lawn weedkillers in late summer - they will be more effective in the cooler, damper autumn weather.

Dig over any areas due to be grassed over later in the year. Leave them for a few weeks to allow weeds to re-emerge, and then spray with a weedkiller or hoe off to ensure thorough weed clearance before seeding or laying turf in the autumn.

Summer meadows may need mowing now if they have past their season of interest, especially in areas of the country where autumn comes earlier. In warmer parts of the UK, spring and early summer meadows that have extended their period of interest well into the summer could be cut now if not done already.

Troubleshooting

Browning of the lawn is very common at this time of year. Don't water the grass unless absolutely necessary. It will green up when the autumn rains arrive.

Browning can be partially prevented next year by ensuring that the lawn is well scarified, aerated and drained later in the autumn, and that any soil compaction underneath is remedied before the following growing season.

On amenity and garden lawns, discrete brown patches are usually the product of dog waste, bitch urine, spilt petrol or oil, or weedkiller and fertiliser overdosing.

On finer turf, especially if it is underfed and frequently mown, patches can be the result of disease such as red thread (on sandy soils) and dollar spot (in damp weather). Feeding usually helps eliminate these problems.

LYNTON TRIP by Ann Poole

Everyone's eager so we set off slightly earlier than planned. Andover Garden Centre is great to visit because we all know it's the beginning of a wonderful weekend.

First stop Barrington Court, what an interesting house to have lunch in, the gardens were packed with plants and quite a few weeds.

In the afternoon we had a very hairy ride up and around hair pin bends. Ian does a grand job getting us there safely, Maggie had her eyes closed for a lot of the time (she hates heights).

All settled in ready for our free morning. As we were near the cliff railway it was a ride to Lynmouth, straight down. Strange meeting so many people we knew in the shops and cafes.

The afternoon was yellow book gardens, always a favourite. First garden was a dash to the plant stall. The garden was not that large but packed with interesting plants and a change because it was so steep, she had some really good and different geraniums.

The next garden was a B&B with grounds slopping down to fields. There was a large veggie patch, some wonderful roses and sweet peas good enough to win any show. The cream tea wasn't bad either.

The last garden of the day was a work in progress, and what a lot of work. A very large garden that had some mature shrubs and trees but when they moved in it needed to be tamed. Some beds had been tackled near the house and down one side but it will take a few years to finish.

The next day the sun was still shining and we visited Watermeet. A climb down was too much for a few so Hazel took them by car, the track was only just wide enough, enough exercise for the day.

Then on to find "The Croft" hazel had no trouble finding it but the minibus even drove right through the middle of a farm, not an animal or person in sight. In the garden I almost had to feel the grass to see if it was real, the lawn was so perfect, so was the garden. Lots of very unusual plants with lions, tigers, elephants and giraffes to name just a few. There were koi ponds, tea houses and meringues to die for.

So soon we were on our last day, for me the best was saved for last. We had a bit of room still so off to the plant sale first. Then around the gardens to find what we had brought, and what a garden, I think the best meadow ever down to a large border that just kept giving. Three natural pond, rather empty at the moment but not suffering too much. Everywhere you looked there were unusual plants. Bird boxes on many trees meant that wild life was welcome, not perhaps the deer who one year ate all the hostas just before a visit. She was on her own but managed to water us all and feed us the most tasty cakes.

All too soon we were saying goodbye to Devon, roll on next years trip.

