

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS

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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

GARDENING CALENDAR NOVEMBER

Autumn is a busy time for gardeners.

Plant

Plant up bare-root trees and shrubs throughout November. To enjoy some colour during the winter, plant up tubs and baskets with evergreen perennials, ornamental grasses, winter pansies and polyanthus.

Protect

Trees over 1m will need staking for support, especially in exposed locations. November is a rainy and windy month, and frosts are not uncommon. Protect roses from wind rock by pruning them, and protect any container plants in non-frost-proof pots by wrapping bubble wrap around them. Your furniture will need protecting at this time of year, too – cover any wooden pieces, or move them into the conservatory.

Maintain lawns

November is the last chance to create new lawns from turf; choose a dry day when the soil's not frozen or waterlogged.

Prepare ahead

It's also the time to dig over your veggie patch; leave soil in large clumps and let the weather break it down into a crumbly finish.

MY GARDEN SECRET

Candida Crewe is ashamed to confess it to her friends – she hates gardening

Kingsley Amis once said gardening is like washing up outside. So true. Just more bloody housework – only with weather. I have never been a fan of gardening but have finally learned to admit to it.

Recently, a friend came to supper and looked out of my window into the 'garden' or, rather, the long and narrow outdoor space at the back of my small terrace house.

There he saw a few ugly breeze blocks fashioned by my adult sons into structures on which they can barbecue T-bone steaks; a blackened frying pan; bits of old newspaper; empty beer cans; cigarette butts; and some chicken wire.

No 're' about the 'wilded' weeds and ivy everywhere; the muddy ground, odd tarpaulin, metal incinerator like an old-fashioned dustbin, broken, wooden chairs and, consuming the whole back third of the 'garden', a giant dustball of brambles so vast that it has swallowed a whole shed that hasn't been visible for years.

Inside, my house is immaculate – I'm teased for having OCD. My favourite sound is the ktsss-k, ktsss-k of antibacterial spray, followed by wiping. Outside, it's like a mini-New Age travellers' site somewhere between Bath and Stroud, c 1993.

My aghast friend has a notable castle with a garden of gasping beauty open to the public. The look on his face on staring out at the grim plot was memorable. I have never seen a man at such a loss as to how to arrange his expression. Despite all his charm and for all his consummate manners, he just couldn't contain his horror.

And I do not blame him. The truth is that no middle-class Englishwoman of a certain age in the history of the world has ever neglected a garden so manifestly. He was unable to compute that anybody whom, like me, he had known since he was at university 30 years ago, could be so wanting in the green finger department – and concomitant moral stature.

To give him his due, I don't know a single other woman who doesn't at least have a pot or two at her front door with geraniums or a camellia, a window box or a tiny terrace with some sort of foliage requiring watering. Let alone one who neglects her outside property so wantonly.

Gardening may not actually feature among the symptoms of the menopause listed on the NHS website. But it absolutely has a place alongside the hot flushes and mood swings.

I'm 60, don't grow a sprig of rosemary and can only just identify a peony. It's unique – especially given that my parents had a fabulous garden, when I was a child, in the Queen Anne house of my infancy. They had a gentle, full-time gardener who created a rose garden I still remember distinctly though we left when I was five. Further gardens followed, in London and the country, my mother keen and not unknowledgeable.

My friends took up the mantle of their own parents' gardens. My old friend Sarah Raven, author of *The Cutting Garden*, did the flowers and bouquet at my wedding and I marvelled at her skill. My stepmother edited *House & Garden* for 21 years. My boyfriend is one of this country's leading gardeners, whose knowledge of all living plants, flowers, shrubs and trees astounds and delights me every time we go for a walk.

I may add that he is, in turn, delighted at my disinclination and ignorance. He couldn't stand to be with a gardening fanatic – he'd be bored rigid. I often remind him how lucky he is to have found me – female middle-aged gardenphobes are a rare species indeed. Why has the bug passed me by?

Well, I lived in flats in Notting Hill till I got married. No outside space; only a communal garden that wasn't mine to tend.

Our first house in Brook Green had a triangular garden the size of a supermarket Parmesan. Later, divorced, with my ex-husband living in Belfast, and with three young sons, I had no time, energy or spare cash for a pot of basil, let alone a garden-centre habit. Gardening is expensive in anyone's language. I could do it all myself. My now-adult boys are abroad and/or working full-time. But that is back-breaking and soul-destroying to us impatient people. Everything but weeds takes so darn long to grow. I'm physically lazy and would rather be inside by the fire, on a sofa with a book. And, even if I did tackle it alone, without teeth-rattlingly expensive help, I would still have to fork out arms and legs for gardening tools, plant pots, decking, gravel, turf, shrubs and roses. And before I had 'finished', I'd have to start all over again, like painting the Forth Bridge.

I love and appreciate a beautiful garden with the best of them. Most of my best friends are gardeners, amateur and pro.

But shoot me now - I'm with Kingsley Amis. I hate washing up - inside and outside.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Boozy autumn pudding

If you don't have sloe or damson gin, use gin mixed with creme de cassis. As frozen fruit is available all year round - and you can't tell the difference if it's cooked anyway - this is a great option for autumn and winter

Serves 8

Prepare 15 minutes + chilling Cook 25 minutes

You will need

350g plums, stoned

200g dessert apples

180g pears

2 tbsp lemon juice

8 tbsp damson or sloe gin, plus more, if liked

185g caster sugar

500g mixed berries and currants (raspberries, blackberries, redcurrants and blackcurrants), frozen or fresh

350g thickly sliced white bread (I used a white tiger bloomer)

Extra thick double cream, to serve

1 Cut the plums into quarters. Peel and core the apples and pears (leave unpeeled if you prefer), cut the flesh into chunks and toss, in a bowl with the lemon juice. If cooking the fruit immediately you don't need to toss them in lemon juice.

2 Put the plums, apples and pears into a saucepan with 4 tbsp gin. Add half the sugar and bring to a simmer for 10 minutes. Stir and make sure the mixture is moist enough.

3 Add the berries and currants and remaining sugar, then cook for 10–15 minutes more. The mixture should be tender with the apples and pears still holding their shape, and not totally collapsed. Set a large sieve over another saucepan and spoon the fruit into it, collecting the juice. Transfer the cooked fruit to a bowl. Bring the collected juice to a simmer and reduce until you have about 300ml. Add the remaining gin – plus a little more if you want – and let this cool.

4 Cut off the bread crusts. Cut out a circle the size of the base of a 1.5L pudding basin. Dip briefly in the fruit juice – don't let it get too soggy, it must hold its shape – and put in the base. Cut the remaining bread into fingers. Dip each finger into the juice and line the pudding basin with it. Overlap and use smaller pieces of bread to plug any gaps – you need to line the whole thing.

5 Spoon half the fruit into the basin, then lay fingers of bread on top, dipping them into the juice as you go. Spoon the remaining fruit on top, then cover

with more bread fingers dipped in the juices. Cover the top with clingfilm (not tightly). Put a plate that will fit onto the pudding, and weigh it down with heavy tins. Chill the pudding in the fridge for 24 hours.

6 To turn the pudding out, run a knife between the bread fingers and the basin. Set a serving plate on top and invert the pudding, giving it a good shake to turn it out. Serve with any remaining juice and extra thick double cream.

CHERRIES

SIMON COURTAULD

In April, when the large cherry tree here was clothed in more white blossom than in previous years, I was reminded of the lines from A E Housman's A Shropshire Lad:

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

By the beginning of June, lots of pale green fruit had formed which, if one assumes it's an acid Morello cherry, can be used for making puddings and jam. They are usually too sour to be eaten raw.

Sweet cherries used to be grown mainly in orchards in southern England, but recent breeding in Canada has brought varieties that may be grown in smaller gardens and in cooler conditions.

A few varieties of sweet cherry are self-fertile, such as Stella and Sweetheart, but most need to be pollinated by a compatible variety, which maybe a Morello.

Most cherries nowadays are grafted on to Colt rootstock, producing trees of about 15 feet in height and spread, but which can be restricted as bushes or fan-trained against a wall or fence.

Containerised trees may be planted at any time, bare-root trees between November and early spring. It is important to choose a site for maximum sun, to stake freestanding trees and to net them against birds when fruit is about to appear.

So long as pollinating insects can get at the flowers, netting is also advised in a cold spring to protect the blossom. Large pebbles placed around the base of the trees will generate warmth in the sun and help the fruit to set.

Of the many varieties of sweet cherry, most will ripen in late July or August and should then be pruned. Summer Sun -despite its name - is suited to cooler, sunless summers and more exposed areas.

A dark red cherry, eaten fresh from the stalk, is one of the joys of summer, though one may doubt the words of the song - life is rather more than just a bowl of cherries.

COMMON ROCKROSE

Helianthemum nummularium At its best on chalk downland or on the sunny slopes of limestone dales, this is usually a lime-loving plant found in open grassland or among light scrub. It is a perennial growing from a creeping root or tap root and woody stem to a height 5–30cm. The leaves are narrow, paired opposite, and persist for most of the year. The plant is in flower for a long time too (from June to September), the striped buds of to produce

MAIDEN PINK *Dianthus deltoides* This is one of the least common flowers to be mentioned in this book but it represents a large and distinguished family. Pinks or wild carnations are one of the finest sights of Alpine and Pyrenean meadows, and also struggle to survive in this country. The maiden pink is the only species to be widespread, found locally on dry undisturbed pastures or sandy slopes at low altitude throughout Britain.

A perennial with a creeping stem, maiden pink grows in tufts or clumps to a height of 20 or 30cm. The leaves are narrow, grey-green in colour with fringes of fine hairs along the edges and underneath the main vein. The

flowers are out from June to September. They are usually solitary and measure about 18mm across. Maiden pink has no scent, unlike several closely related species, but it is still pollinated by insects, especially moths which have long tongues and can reach down the calyx tube. The five rose-coloured petals have a tooth edge or fringe. At their base there is a darker line marking a delicate ring around the opening of the calyx, and outside this there is a dusting of pale freckles.

BORDER CONTROL

DAVID WHEELER

Autumn has arrived and the thoughtfully planned flower garden still blazes on. Many late-season perennials just can't stop giving, animated by flowering grasses swaying to autumn's nascent tunes.

I hanker for excess at this time of the year, to fortify myself against winter's onslaught. I crave plants with tireless flower power or an unexpected second coming, magicked by delphiniums and campanulas having a repeat 'go' if their spent June and July spikes are snipped off.

Still looking good are tall, pale yellow yarrows and comely flat-headed umbellifers. They contrast elegantly with the likes of stout blue monkshoods (*Aconitum*) or meld themselves among stiff pokers (*Kniphofia*) in citrus shades of lemon and pale orange.

Here too belong purple bobbles of good ol' lanky *Verbena bonariensis*, caged among burnished stems of such refined grasses as the pennisetum, stipa, miscanthus and panicum clans. The latter – thankfully clump-forming, not spreading – do well in poor soil. In varietal names such as 'Dallas Blues', 'Prairie Sky' and 'Shenandoah', they reflect the wide open plains of the American midwest, where they roam freely among goldenrods (*Solidago*) and asters.

Sun-loving salvias, whether annual, biennial or perennial, are among the aristocrats of the late-summer border. Easily identified by square stems

and, in many of them, a whiff of blackcurrant from their leaves, they bear long stems of uplifting, ripe-cherry-coloured flowers.

They bring valuable blasts of deepest purple, sapphire, pure indigo, ultramarine, cobalt and lapiz. They emerge from coal-black calyces in many varieties, especially 'Argentine Skies', 'Purple Majesty', the open and wiry 'Nachtvlinder' (Night Moth) or - with anis-scented foliage this time - any that carry the word guaranitica on their label.

Vastly different, rodgersias also claim some noble blood. Grown in moist soil in partial shade, principally for their majestic palmate leaves, they nevertheless bestow handsome though less showy plumes of flowers, ranging from white to pink and dark red. I especially value them for plugging gaps left behind by such earlier flowerers as lupins, whose remaining foliage is by now most likely mildewed and fit only for the compost pile.

Phloxes have unaccountably seldom featured in my late-summer borders. I grew some white ones in an all-white border a few years ago. I'm now ready to try some of the blues in a new interlocking series of blue- and yellow-themed beds. Phlox paniculata 'Blue Paradise' - seemingly more violet than true blue, and with a magenta eye - comes highly recommended. It's fragrant, too.

The wholly reliable and inspirational Marina Christopher of Phoenix Perennials in Hampshire (open by appointment) singles out 'Blue Evening', 'Cool of the Evening' and, to my ear, the Pernod-and-Gitanes-sounding 'Toits de Paris'. If it's pink you're after, try 'Utopia', 'Monica Lynden-Bell' or 'Rosa Pastell'. They'll grow to between three and five feet tall.

When licked by the flames of fiery crocosmias, heleniums become indispensable at this time of the year, in a range of long-lasting, daisy-like flowers strongly pigmented deep yellow, burnt orange, rust, red and almost

brown. The Chelsea chop (cutting them back to half their height in late May) will result in manageable plants of about three feet in height.

I can't imagine a late-season border worthy of its name without the likes of 'Moerheim Beauty' (reddish brown), 'Dunkelpracht' (rusty red), 'Rubinsberg' (mahogany red) and, best of all, 'Sahin's Early Flowerer'. It shows striations of ochre, red and Dundee marmalade in a heavy crop of flowers which will continue until the first hard frost.

But I must stop. I could go on until the sun finally sets on these gilded borders and the first cold nights bring the curtain down on September's floriferous pageant.

CHRISTMAS COMPETITION

This years Christmas competition is:-

“Christmas tree decoration made from yarn”

Have a go, lets see how clever you are.