

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS

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EDITORS NOTES

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

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.

TRIPS FOR 2022

All deposits are non returnable

21st May Wisley

Meet at Victoria Hall at 1pm.

Cost for people on Minibus £5 each. No cost for those using own Transport that meet at Wisley Entrance at 1:30pm. Return to Victoria Hall approx.

5pm **Deposit £5 to reserve your place on the Bus**

10th July Penshurst Place Gardens <https://www.penshurstplace.com/>

Leave Victoria Hall at 10am. There's a Café on site. Return to Victoria Hall approx. 5pm Cost £23 each **Deposit £10 to reserve your place**

11th September Broughton Grange as seen on TV

<https://www.broughtongrange.com/gardens>

Meet at Victoria Hall at 9am. Return to Victoria Hall approx. 6pm. Comfort stops in both directions. There's a Café on site. Cost £30 each

Deposit £10 to reserve your place

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

SPRING SHOW 9th APRIL

RHS Malvern Spring Festival – 5–8 May

PLANT SALE 7th MAY

RHS Chelsea Flower Show – 24–28 May

SUMMER SHOW 4th JULY

RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show – 4–9 July

RHS Flower Show Tatton Park – 20–24 July

AUTUMN SHOW 10th September

GARDENING CALENDAR APRIL

April is a transitional month that can often bring unpredictable weather, so what will need doing in the garden is largely dependent on the weather conditions.

Plant

As a general rule, this is the time for planting up, supporting young plants, and for forward planning ahead of the summer. Sow tomatoes, runner beans, basil, green pepper, marrow, courgettes and sweet corn in individual modules undercover for planting after the frost.

April is the best time for creating new container displays. If there's space, pot plug plants into larger pots – cheaper than buying bigger pot plants in a month's time. Plant up summer baskets and grow undercover before positioning in late May. Sow half-hardy bedding plants in seed trays or cell trays undercover.

Maintain water features

If you have a water feature in your garden, now is the time to give it its annual round of post-winter maintenance. Clear out ponds: take out planting baskets and fish (keep in buckets of old pond water), bail out the water, remove sludge and refill. Rainwater is best, but let tap water stand for a week before putting fish back in. Plant new pond plants using special pond baskets from garden centres.

Protect

Now is the time to watch out for early pests and diseases – hit them hard now to avoid problems later on. Use fine Environmesh to protect young carrots from carrot root fly.

April can still bring frosty nights, so protect tender flowers and vegetables from late frosts – keep horticultural fleece on standby. Young, upright-growing plants will need some form of support: stake tall perennials such as delphiniums and sunflowers with 'grow through' supports.

Go indoors

Don't forget the house plants, either: water and feed more often now they're actively growing.

TREE ENTERPRISE

David Wheeler

New Year's resolutions fail me. Good (intentions about diary-keeping, diets and demon drink all evaporate before Epiphany. Except... except when it comes to garden matters.

For the past 30 years, I've kept an acquisitions book, logging every plant bought: its provenance, size and, most importantly, cost. Plant prices, like very thing else, have escalated since my first jottings I note particularly fine specimens of scarlet and red oaks (*Quercus coccinea* and *Q rubra*) bought in 1993 for a couple of used fivers, the five-foot tall youngsters brought home in the family car.

The equivalent today would set me lack a bunch of crumpled tenners [except the new ones don't crumple). A recent internet search shows one UK nursery selling 16-inch *coccinea* tiddlers for around £30 each; another wants more than £100 for a juvenile *rubra* no taller than 2ft 6in. Perennials - and we bought thousands - were commonly 1.50 to £2. Today? Well, you know.

Money apart, the acquisitions book can also be read as a travelogue, charting journeys to far-flung nurseries and Specialist growers. I can look back on a car full of unfamiliar shrubs (costing little more than £30 for the lot) from two famous Cornish nurseries involving - don't tell the COP cops - a 500-mile round trip. Journeys hauling back plants from Scotland and Ireland burnt excessive amounts of fossil fuel. Let's not think of the air miles for imports from Italy and southern France.

But over the years I have planted something approaching 2,000 specimen trees and shrubs and another 20,000 hornbeam, beech, yew and box saplings, to create hedges and decorative enclosures. Might Greta consider that an attempt to balance the carbon ledger?

A new acquisitions book has now been inaugurated, following our move from Herefordshire to 12 wooded acres in Carmarthenshire a few months ago. Given my age, I doubt I'll fill its 250 pages, although two are already fully inked up. As Alexander Pope, 18th-century landscaping genius (and more), famously said, 'Hope springs eternal.' After all, gardeners are - or should be - perpetual optimists. Mariana is my reliable mantra.

My gardening years have taught me many modest money-saving skills - the making of new no-cost plants being the most rewarding.

I don't rate myself highly when it comes to raising plants from seed. I'm too impatient and perhaps too heavy-handed. When it comes to cuttings, though (I'm seldom happier than when slaving over a heated propagator), or the creation of new plants by division or layering, I excel in wizardry.

As a 14-year-old, I took cuttings at a time when, instead of the 'top-shelf magazines my peers were beginning to explore, I bought (and hid from my mates) Amateur Gardening every week. Oh, the untold thrill of sending off for and receiving nurserymen's catalogues in response to the small ads that choked the back pages. My passion then was for easy-to-propagate fuchsias, bought from a hugely overweight pensioner. He filled his garden with them and seemingly lived entirely for the joy of teasing newly rooted cuttings from sheltered beds of moist black compost and selling them for a penny each.

The years have also taught me to conquer my shyness about requesting cuttings, especially if the plants I crave are mature or plentiful and their owner seems kindly disposed. Similarly, I'm flattered if someone asks me for cuttings. I've even dug up whole young plants to give away when I've had duplicates and if the person making the plea is someone I respect or deem worthy of the gift.

This free dispersal of plants and cuttings remains my one enduring New Year's resolution.

THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDEN

Soil:

A Complex Relationship

Though we call it 'dirt', and refer to something impure as 'soiled', we depend on the complex matrix that is soil for our lives. Plants can be grown in controlled conditions in water, but most of the food we eat, and virtually all of the oxygen-producing land plants, grow in soil. Black, humusy soil; thick red clay; dusty light-brown silt - soil varies immensely, depending on where you are and how it was formed. You can smell some of its history simply by scooping up a handful of earth. Metals and rocks smell tangy and dusty, while the sweet smell of organic matter comes from certain kinds of bacteria. Bits of decaying organic matter like shredded leaves smell like the wet and mossy forest floor. Threads of fungus give off a mushroomy smell. Soil that has sat untouched and too wet can give off an unpleasant decaying smell, which comes from the lack of oxygen. What does the scent of your own garden soil tell you about your land and

climate? What images or associations spring to mind when you take a deep whiff of your soil?

As gardeners, we can deepen our understanding of the process of gardening by looking into the network of relationships that makes up the soil. It isn't just dirt, but a fluctuating dance of microbes, bugs, minerals, plants and even ourselves. Understanding and cultivating this relationship consciously, we enter into our own rich darkness. Touch, smell and maybe even taste the soil, and your body sinks a little deeper into the groundedness of the garden. We sense more deeply the complexity of life, the dynamism of soil and gut and decay that all lead to growth and life. Not just the yin and the yang, but the swirl and flow between these poles, the strands of the web of relationship that is a garden.

NOURISHING THE DANCE OF LIFE

When we nestle a tiny seed into the soil, we plant a prayer. We ask the soil to protect and nourish this seed of life. Then we wave our magic wand - the kind that water comes out of - and whisper a spell that sets off a series of relationships that will eventually lead to a salad or a soup gracing our table. We pray: grow. The soil wraps its damp darkness around this little seed, this promise, and when the seed bursts its skin and reaches out with a tiny root filament, the soil says yes. The roots grasp on to tiny particles of sand and stone, and the soil hugs back. It affirms the life of the sprout, holding it in place and time. It gently feeds it nutrients and water in just the right amount. Slowly the sprout turns into a seedling, then a plant, eventually producing a fruit. All of this growth is supported by the soil tucked around its roots.

We nourish the dance of life when we build garden soil. Adding compost, manure, minerals and other amendments feeds the network of bacteria, fungi, nematodes and earthworms. Eventually, this care will resonate into macro communities as the soil feeds plants and the plants feed animals, including us humans.

The nourished soil, together with the ancient minerals present since before life began on Earth, feeds that seed you planted. It holds and nourishes it like a mother holding her child. As the child of the Earth, the plant grows bigger and stronger, it reaches deep down inside this support network. Only with strong support is it able to also stand tall and reach into the sky, like a dancer, strong and lithe. Eventually, the plant is ready to gift itself to the flow of life.

When you pull a carrot from the soil, dust off the earth and hand it to your neighbour, you are participating in the vast strands of life that begin in the soil.

Perhaps we, too, feel a similar support when we participate in this dance. The soil holds us. It literally holds our weight. It nourishes our food, which in turn nourishes our bodies. It accepts what we give it, and gives us back the gift of green and growing

things. Because of the complex darkness of living soil, we have shade from the oak, the sweetness of strawberries and even each breath of fresh air. And when our journey is complete, the cells that make up our bodies will return to the soil, eventually gifting our nourishment to the cycle of life.

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR WASTE WITH COMPOSTING

Transforming household and garden scraps into goodness for the soil is hugely rewarding for you and the planet. Clare Foster, who's been doing just that for 25 years, shares her tips

Composting is one of the most rewarding and efficient ways to recycle food waste and do your bit for the planet. Not only are you cutting out a large proportion of your weekly household waste by recycling it yourself, you are also creating something hugely positive from it.

As gardeners, the more we grow the more we deplete the soil, and that goodness somehow has to be put back. Homemade compost is exactly what we need to enrich the soil, and there is something incredibly satisfying about transforming a load of unpromising kitchen scraps and garden waste into a tangible, life-giving substance.

I have been composting ever since taking on my first allotment in London 25 years ago. Picking up tips from fellow allotmenters, I have tried various methods, from worm bins to compost tumblers, and composting is now second nature to me. Today, I have a larger garden so I use the traditional three-bay method with wooden bins where the compost can be moved from each heap.

I have always been fascinated by the science of composting. What magical process takes place to morph banana skins and spent flower stems into the brown, crumbly goodness that is compost?

In making it, you are in effect speeding up the naturally-occurring cycle of decomposition, a process facilitated by a whole host of tiny organisms. The idea is to set up the ideal conditions for these microscopic creatures. The four elements that these organisms need are carbon, nitrogen, air and water - getting the right balance is the key to success.

The carbon-nitrogen content provides the 'food' bacteria need to thrive, and a good 50:50 mixture of both is essential. Carbon-rich materials (brown) include straw, dead leaves, woody stems and cardboard, while nitrogen-rich materials (green) include vegetable scraps and soft green plant waste. Layering the greens and browns then further mixing them up by turning the heap to add oxygen, will help to speed up the process. The final ingredient is water. Decomposition will slow down if the heap is either too wet or too

dry, so you have to keep an eye on it to make sure the balance is right. It's like cooking - the recipe, the stirring and the seasoning are all crucial to the finished result.

People make excuses not to compost, and the most common phrase I hear is: "I can't compost because of the rats." This is a valid concern, but if you make compost in a robust plastic tumbler that is raised above the ground, the rats won't get a look in. Another frequent excuse is lack of space. Fair enough, but you really don't need much space to put a worm bin outside your back door - or even in a corner of your kitchen. This method works with vegetable waste from your kitchen without the need for added garden waste, so it's perfect if you have a balcony or small courtyard or don't have a garden at all.

Another method is the Bokashi system, which composts meat and dairy scraps as well as vegetable waste using a special inoculated bran to ferment the food and turn it into a rich liquid plant food. This means that you can recycle 100% of your kitchen waste, further reducing what you send out to municipal recycling or landfill.

Whatever your situation, recycling food waste is a simple thing all of us can do to help the planet. And the end result will make your garden thrive.

SURREY SMALL HOLDINGS –

our resident gardening and veg growing expert Jo Arnell goes behind the scenes at The Small Holding where she finds out how chef Will Devlin's back-to-basics approach is paying off in his quest for the ultimate home-grown flavours

Where does an appreciation of good food start? Fundamentally, and maybe surprisingly, it all starts with the soil. When you start to think about it, the answer to everything – to life itself even – lies in the ground beneath our feet. So it is an unexpected delight to meet Will Devlin, owner of The Small Holding restaurant in Kilndown, who understands this and is as passionate about soil health as he is about the food he serves.

As a chef, Will knew about provenance, and about how important it is to be able to source the best quality ingredients. "It's all about the flavour," he says, "and we are a restaurant first and foremost." Using a carrot as an example, he explains the complexity in achieving the best flavour from food. "This carrot tastes amazing - the taste comes from how it is cooked, the type of carrot and what soil it was grown in." So many vegetables are grown for quantity, uniformity and speed, often without a thought about flavour. "Years ago as a chef I was on about heritage this and that, without

having a clue about what it really meant," he says, explaining that heritage vegetables, although grown more slowly, are less perfect looking and lower yielding, have the best flavour and, especially if grown in the best rich and organic soil, are packed full of nutrients too.

Until he bought The Small Holding (one of three restaurants that he and brother Matt now run) and the one acre plot of land next to it, Will hadn't thought that much about growing his own food. He was too busy making it taste fantastic. As I sip my delicious and locally roasted coffee (from Bean Smitten, just up the road) there's an evangelical gleam in Will's eye.

He understands the principles of No Dig, which means just that: no rotavating or digging, because it is bad for the soil, disrupting the delicate ecosystem, releasing carbon into the atmosphere and bringing weed seeds to the surface. The best thing to do is to add organic matter in the form of a mulch and let the worms and the micro-organisms incorporate it into the soil and create an aerated and nutritious welcome for the plants.

They make their own compost here, but not enough to be self-sustaining. Will would like to extend his control of provenance to compost too, as he finds that the quality of imported organic matter is variable. They are hoping to be able to set up a community based compost system next year, and will probably be deluged, given that the local council has stopped the green waste collection. Will is keen, and sees the future of this sort of community action being at the heart of sustainability. "If you want to change stuff you have to start from the bottom."

This approach is fundamental to their business ethos and it is being recognised. Among other awards, earlier this year The Small Holding won a prestigious Green Michelin Star, which is only awarded to restaurants with the highest focus on sustainable principles. Commendable stuff, made even more impressive when you learn that Will and his brother Matt only opened their restaurant in 2018 (just four days before Will's first child was born) and have had to contend with the disruptions caused by the pandemic - and the steep learning curve of learning to grow and harvest his own ingredients. Forget the simple adage of plot to plate, this is complex - from mud to Michelin Star.

Outside, where there was once just a small field and two football goals, is the beautifully laid out and high yielding vegetable garden. On the plot we meet head gardener Jenny, who shows me round, explaining that the key to an ultra productive vegetable garden is to sow in succession. The vegetables are grown according to organic principles and the neatly laid out raised beds are carefully rotated to maintain plant health. Many of the beds are still packed full with tidy rows of late season crops, the empty

ones looking invitingly full of rich, dark soil ready and waiting for the next batches to be planted out. Sowing in such rapid succession can be tricky to manage, especially when the weather, like earlier this year, is unpredictable. Luckily they have room for a couple of polytunnels, which give some protection and help to extend the season.

We peek inside the polytunnels, where seedlings are grown in modules and where interesting new varieties are trialled. "We grow them in small quantities and trial pots before we commit to a whole bed," explains Jenny. They are particularly excited about tiger nuts right now. "They taste like a nut," says Will, "but they grow underground, so they're a tuber. It means that people with a nut allergy can eat them. They're a superfood and really nutritious." The team are even experimenting with milling them into flour, as - believe it or not - The Small Holding has a mill directly above the restaurant where they produce flour from all sorts of nuts, seeds and grains.

Within the one acre plot they also have, in true smallholding style, chickens, ducks and some pigs - a variety called Large Blacks, which grow slowly and organically, eat leftovers from the plot and then, when it is their turn to be added into the cuisine, Will, who is also a charcutier, is able to use the whole pig, and then some, to make salamis, terrines and pates.

"It's not just about producing great food," Will says, "but great service and great people too." True to his bottom up approach, the whole team are involved and help to come up with solutions and ideas. "Our ethos is built around 'why'. Every Thursday we walk around the plot and discuss what's going on, what's working, what can be done even better."

Building on the success of The Small Holding, the brothers have opened two other restaurants locally, which are run along the same principles. The Curlew in Bodiam and, very recently, Birchwood in nearby Flimwell. Birchwood is part of Flimwell Park, a sustainable development built from local timber and designed by architect Steve Johnson of the Architecture Ensemble. Flimwell Park was designed to have positive environmental impact, be low energy and to be run on an ecological basis. Birchwood is open for breakfast and lunch, with many of the dishes incorporating foraged food from the nearby woods - romantic sounding ingredients like mushrooms, elderberries, wood sorrel, blackberries and birch sap. The rest is sourced from the plot at The Small Holding, or local suppliers, ensuring that there is no unnecessary packaging or transport costs.

Not only do they grow over two hundred varieties of vegetables at The Small Holding, but they also make room for herbs and fruit. As we walk back up through the carpark, Will points to a grassed area in front of the

terrace. "We're going to have an edible flower garden here," he says, "and a wildflower meadow next to the carpark. We'll let the grass get long and grow things for the bees." There will be enough space on the other side of the meadow for a mini orchard too.

So next summer, if you are eating out on the terrace at The Small Holding, you'll be able to gaze across a pollinator filled patch, packed with nectar-rich and edible flowers to the vegetable plot beyond. What a wonderful way to enjoy a slice of Small Holding heaven.

To find out more about The Small Holding, visit the small holding restaurant, The Curlew thecurlew.restaurant and Birchwood birchwoodrestaurant.com.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

LEMON AND WHISKY MARMALADE

You will need

One & half lb lemons

3lb sugar

Two & half pints water

1 miniature bottle Whisky

To do

Scrub lemons cut in half, squeeze out the juice and pips and cut the peel into thin strips.

Put peel and juice into a large pan with the water.

Tie pips in a muslin bag and add to pan. Cook gently for about 1.5 hours or until peel is soft.

Remove bag of pips and stir in the sugar. Stir until sugar has dissolved, then boil

quickly until a small amount when placed on a cool plate crinkles when pushed with a finger.

Remove scum then stir in the Whisky. Allow marmalade to cool for about half hour, then pour into sterilised jars, seal and label.

Yields approximately 5lbs.

Miss H. Maunders
