

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- SPRING SHOW 8th APRIL
RHS Malvern Spring Festival – 11-14 May
 - PLANT SALE 6th MAY
RHS Chelsea Flower Show – 23–27 May
 - SUMMER SHOW 3rd JULY
RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show – 4–9 July
RHS Flower Show Tatton Park – 19–23 July
 - OUT MEETING 7th AUGUST
AUTUMN SHOW 9th SEPTEMBER
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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.

THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDEN

The Joy of Compost

Where I live, east of the Rocky Mountains at the beginning of the American Great Plains, my soil is solid alluvial clay. It speaks of the southern edge of glaciers, and before that, of an inland sea. Now rivers snake their way across the hard-packed soil, telling the tale of farmers who came to the new city of Denver when gold and coal called the masses. The alluvial clay can be hard to grow plants in. One of the gifts that makes gardening here at all possible is the miracle of compost. It never fails to delight me that one takes kitchen scraps, chicken droppings, dryer lint and hair from the hairbrush, mix it all together and get perfect soil. In climates with fluffy dark soil to begin with, compost is a convenient way to reuse what would fill up the rubbish bin, reducing your carbon footprint and transforming life's flotsam into wealth. Compost is an allegory of all of life: transforming waste into gold, with each little creature playing its part.

DOING WHAT NATURE DOES NATURALLY

I wonder why we call it something different from soil, for that is what compost is. The word comes from Old French and Latin for 'something put together', which speaks of the process of making compost. But really we are just doing what nature does naturally. In a forest with enough moisture and an abundance of soil microbes, compost just happens. Healthy soil and compost are no different, though compost is richer in organic material than most soil found in your garden. Perhaps we differentiate one from the other not just because we

humans mechanically pile up waste products for microbes to do their thing, but also because those things we toss in the pile aren't all from one ecosystem. My pile has eggshells from my own chickens, but also from store-bought eggs that come from all over. It contains banana peel and avocado skins as well as vegetal waste that might actually grow here naturally, such as raked-up grasses. Like us humans, my compost is a mush of cultures and nutrients. It is yet another example of the power of diversity.

A MATTER OF DEATH AND LIFE

Without soil microbes turning death into life, life as we know it could not exist on Earth. One gram of garden soil can hold up to a billion bacteria. As compost moves through its stages of transformation, the varieties of bacteria and fungi change. The first wave of creatures breaks down the soluble components of soil, producing heat in the process. This is what warms a heap. This first community is replaced by heat-loving microorganisms, which break down fats, protein and cellulose. When they have transformed what they can, the heap cools again and the first wave of bacteria returns. Compost is a dance. It is a waxing and waning of energetic transformation, a rising and falling of life and death. It is a process where each tiny being has a purpose, just as does every other being on Earth. We can be reminded that to everything there is a season, and for every process there is a gift.

When the heap looks like garden soil from a magazine (or as close as we can get it), we spread it around the base of our plants. It is fertilizer, mulch and soil all in one. The pH of compost hovers perfectly in the middle, not too acidic or alkaline, so it helps to balance garden soil. It is a perfect metaphor for balance, a sort of Goldilocks Amendment.

CREATING LIFE COMPOST

The release of nutrients from compost happens slowly over time, a gentle nursing of the plant's roots. Because it's been broken down in multiple processes, compost is light and fluffy, creating space for water and air.

Compost continues transforming, inviting more life to flourish in the form of further bacteria, fungi, worms and insects. Compost is that sweet spot of nourishment that all life longs for. It is a reminder that all is provided in time, that nature wants to nurture, and we can be a part of this process in the garden. Perhaps we can develop metaphorical compost in other areas of our lives, drawing on the lessons of compost to make our lives richer. Mix the odds

and ends of advice from friends with events from the past and snippets of inspiring articles, aerate with a deep cleansing breath, churn the mix in the pile of dreams and in time you will have fluffy, light nourishment to keep you going. Life compost.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Flapjacks

You will need

1 tbsp. golden syrup
4 oz. demerara sugar
6 oz. British butter
4 oz. sultanas
A handful of chopped dates
About 8 glace cherries, halved
1 heaped tsp. ground ginger
A little orange or lemon zest
8 oz. porridge oats

To do

Soak the sultanas in boiling water to allow them to swell.
Melt butter gently with sugar and syrup in a saucepan.
Add ginger and zest.
Drain the sultanas and add them to the saucepan with the dates and glace cherries.
When the butter has melted, remove saucepan from heat source.
Add the oats and stir well. Spoon into a 9 in. square baking tin.
Cook for about 20 minutes or until cooked and golden.
Allow to cool slightly before cutting into slices, squares, wedges or fingers.

APGC TRIPS

April 15th 2023

Visit to see Arundel Castle Tulip Festival
Leaving Victoria Hall at 9:30am.
Arriving back to Victoria Hall approx. 6pm.
Cost £24 each (includes travel and entry fees)

Wisley 22nd July 1:00 pm

Our annual visit to Wisley, Free entry to all members. Minibus leaves Victoria Hall at 1pm, returning approx. 5:30pm, cost for those on minibus £6 each. If you wish to use your own transport, then meet us outside at reception at 1:30pm for your Free Ticket. Please let Ian know you are going so he can get sufficient tickets

TULIP FEVER**DAVID WHEELER**

They're planting tulip bulbs in Istanbul. Hundreds of thousands of them - millions, more likely... billions, perhaps.

And I, in common with many a Turkish bahqwan (gardener), can be found trowel-wielding right now on hands and knees, cursing our stony ground as I struggle to bury the little onion-like globes several inches deep.

Following the late Christopher Lloyd's advice, I should of course be sinking the blighters to a depth of about ten inches if I want them to repeat their flamboyant flowering for several years to come. But that's too deep for this old back.

My seasonal reward after a fatiguing day's bulb-planting is a few bedtime pages of Anna Pavord's *The Tulip* (1999). The tulip's origins, intriguing history, influence, turns of fortune and overriding beauty are nowhere else better told.

Istanbul became a favoured destination ever since my first stop-over there on a small cruise ship returning from Crimea with Oldie readers and fellow contributors in 2011. An early-morning porthole view of its bustling maritime traffic ensured an almost immediate return visit.

I was bewitched by zigzagging ferries, merchant vessels bearing alien registrations and countless flotillas of private craft navigating the choppy waves that swish around Topkapi Palace and the Galata Bridge, where the waters of Europe fuse with the two-directional Bosphorus. (Bosphorus currents flow simultaneously in both directions - southwards on the surface, from the Black Sea down the strait towards the Sea of Marmara and on to the Aegean and Mediterranean seas, above a deeper undercurrent of heavier, saltier water flowing north from the Med. Don't even think of swimming there.)

Subsequently, several times a year, until COVID stepped in, I haunted Istanbul's parks and gardens and its city-wide April tulip festivals. In a large

hall overlooking the Golden Horn, in November 2013 I sat in on the fifth World Tulip Summit. I was among an international flock of tulip aficionados from as far afield as Kew, mainland Europe, the United States and the wild tulip's native terrain: eastern Anatolia and Central Asia's arid steppe.

Regrettably, few of us grow *Tulipa acuminata*, the so-called horned or needle tulip. It is immortalised on Iznik ceramics and pictured everywhere throughout modern Istanbul in stylised form adorning public transport and advertising billboards. Its bulbs are not hard to source in this country; nor are they tricky to grow, although, because of their delicate appearance, I rear them indoors in pots. They age gracefully, like nonagenarian Hollywood divas.

Plumper in all their parts, the still elegant April- and May-flowering *liliflora* (Oily-flowered) tulips partly resemble the *acuminata*, and might well have a dash of the Ottoman in their bloodline.

But their colour range is seductively varied, unlike the latter's constant red-and yellow-petalled striations. 'White Triumphator' is probably the best known of the lily-flowered group. 'Red Shine', 'Burgundy', 'Purple Dream' and apricot-coloured 'Ballerina' are among the best single-coloured varieties; while 'Green Star' (white with a prominent green stripe) and 'Fire Wings' (like a well-fed *acuminata* on speed) are two of the loveliest bicolours.

Still new to this garden, I'm unsure about the possible longevity of any species tulips that I'm planting. In drier parts of the country - and as a youngster in the old family garden on the gravelly Hampshire coast - I'd previously built up colonies of these wildings. We might be a tad too wet for them now. Still, in August we were officially classified as being in drought, with a hosepipe ban slapped on the whole of Pembrokeshire and nearby west Carmarthenshire.

Wet Wales, indeed!

PUT YOUR SOIL TO THE ACID TEST

Finding out your soil type means you can choose the plants that suit it and maximise their chances of thriving, says Clare Wilson

What you need

A soil pH test A lump of soil

HAVE you ever wondered why some plants in your garden thrive, while others barely grow no matter how tenderly they are nurtured? It may not come down

to your green fingers, but to whether you have chosen the right plant for that spot.

Most people know they need to consider their local climate and how much sunshine any particular site gets. But you should also choose the right plant for your soil type, which depends on your area's geology and history. You can find maps of soil type online, but gardens can differ at a local level.

A first step is to find out the soil pH, or how acidic or alkaline it is. You can buy simple test kits that enable you to scoop a small quantity of soil, mix it with a chemical and compare the resultant liquid to a colour chart. Most soils in the UK are neutral or very slightly acidic, and this allows a wide range of plants to grow.

If your soil is especially acidic or alkaline, you could theoretically change it by adding lime or iron sulphate respectively. But it is easier to just buy plants that suit your soil pH, and to use pots or raised beds if you have any favourite plants that need different conditions.

My own garden soil is slightly acidic, which may explain why alkaline-loving lavender plants have never done well there. I love azalea bushes for their gorgeous spring flowers, but they need even more acidic soil, so I grow them in pots of special compost.

Another factor that affects plant health is the size of the soil particles. Smaller grains, known as clay, hold more water, which can lead to plant roots getting waterlogged and means that the soil is harder to dig. Larger particles are called sand, and medium ones are called silt. Sandy soils are free-draining, but they can be less fertile since nutrients will get washed away much more easily.

While most soils have a mixture of particle sizes, you can find out which one predominates in your garden if you don't mind getting your hands dirty.

Take a handful of soil, wet it and see whether you can form a ball, a sausage, a horseshoe or a ring without breaking it. The more mouldable the soil is, the more clay particles it contains.

You could also find out how many earthworms are in your soil, a good sign of its fertility, or even how compacted it is. But just knowing the pH and texture of your soil is probably enough when it comes to choosing plants. That said, nearly all types of garden soil will be improved by adding lashings of organic matter, such as home-made compost or well-rotted animal manure.

If this seems like too much work, a simple rule of thumb is to see which plants are growing well in your neighbours' gardens. After all, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

CACTI & SUCCULENT CARE

Cultivation - The General Rules

- The growing season for most cacti & succulents is March to Sept.
 - Most cacti and succulents prefer to dry out between each watering.
 - Water every 5-14 days during main growing months April -August, adjust for light and heat.
 - Water less often in March and September.
 - No water at all during the winter months unless grown in a warm house then water sparingly.
 - Very few cacti and succulents are cold hardy, we recommend a winter minimum of +5 Celsius.
 - Re-pot cacti and succulents in a free draining compost every 1-2 years and feed regularly during growing season. We use J1 No. 2 and Horticultural Grit in a 60:40 ratio.
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- All my plants are grown in a glasshouse for as much light as possible; this promotes flowering and keeps the plants compact.

Haworthias

- Can be watered throughout the year (even in winter).
- Must dry out between each watering.
- Slightly shaded positioning preferred.

Lithops

- Must not be watered from the end of September until the following spring when the leaves divide to produce a new set from the middle of the plant.
- Only once the new leaves are larger than the old leaves can they be watered.

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Of course there are some exceptions to these guidelines, why not learn more with the BCSS who have branches nationwide. www.bcsc.org.uk