## 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 DECEMBER

As the year draws to its close, and the days are at their shortest, limit gardening work to protecting tender plants and aiding wildlife in your garden.

### Feed

Keep bird feeders topped up and make water available.

### Water

Although it makes sense to water plants sparingly at this time of year, do make sure that container plants don't dry out completely.

### Protect

Protect tender palms and tree ferns. Stuff a few handfuls of straw into the crown, tie up the leaves or fronds, and then wrap the whole plant in horticultural fleece, tying it off securely at the bottom. Don’t use plastic sheeting or bubble wrap – on warm days your plants will sweat and rot. Indoors, keep houseplants happy by moving them away from radiators and into a sunny, cool spot.

### Plan ahead

Last but not least, take some time to curl up in a warm spot and plan next year's garden

## THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDEN

# Plant
# Intelligence

We humans are just beginning to redefine intelligence and emotion. For so long we have made the idea of intelligence fit into a narrow definition of being able to score well on certain tests. This understanding has blinded us against the different forms of intelligence in our own species as well as

in others, including in plants. Today, many studies exist on plant intelligence, but I suspect they are still regarded with a certain humour and scepticism. Yet intelligence means the ability to take information from various sources, synthesize that information and react in a way that demonstrates understanding. Plants are extremely adept at this process.

Consider the wisdom in your garden. Hundreds of plants communicating with each other and responding to the conditions around them. They send out signals via fungi and root chemicals in the soil, essentially speaking to other plants for quite a distance around them. Through their leaves they send out other messages, such as when your grass tells birds it is being consumed, asking for help against insect invaders. Science fiction story or woo-woo wishful thinking? No - just the smell your grass emits when it is cut by the mower. The scent is a cry for help.

**OUR ROLE IN THE GARDEN**

How can we gardeners tap into this intelligence? In all honesty, as I contemplated this question, my first thought was to wonder if plants try to communicate directly with us. I did exactly what humans have done for thousands of years, focusing on myself as the important part of the relationship with plants. This bias, while innocent and understandable, underlies our current climate crisis. It can lead us gardeners to miss a lot of valuable information. When I abandon my perspective as the centre of the garden, and instead shift it to one part of the whole, my understanding changes.

What is our role in the garden? When I step out of the role of benevolent ruler or artist sculpting the land, when I become part of the garden itself, what do I become? I am the one with hands, tools and motility. I have a perspective of'my' land that includes perspectives the plants cannot have, such as property boundaries, overhead electrical wires and council by-laws. I know what vegetables my children like to eat. I stress about water bills. For me, these thoughts are a part of my garden. To the plants, not so much. These are the thoughts of a creative ruler. What about the plants' ideas?

**A PLANT'S PERSPECTIVE**

First, I have to look beyond the plant as something that serves me, and try to imagine its own perspective. A bean plant is a means to an end when I am Manager of the garden. From its own perspective, however, a bean plant is itself, growing near other plants of its type. It has formed agreements with several fungi in the soil to transform available nitrogen

into a more plant-available resource. The beans it produces are a hope to carry on its life force in future plants. While we could argue about whether or not a plant considers itself a 'self', it does relate to plants, animals and fungi around it as a distinct entity.

I can take this information and use it to my advantage as one who wants to eat beans, providing the bean plant with the right fungi for optimum nutrient absorption, but I can also use this as an opportunity to simply expand my perspective of what a garden actually is. I am a part of a vast network of plants, some of which would grow just fine without me, while others are only growing in this plot of earth because I put them there and keep them watered. I then consider other networks I am a part of that also include perspectives different from mine. My Mexican neighbours, whose days share similarities with mine but whose lives are different in ways I cannot imagine. My Amerindian neighbour, who is also a veteran. The man across the street who was born in Vietnam but was adopted and grew up here. I see them regularly, and we share certain values and hopes, but our lives are different in other ways. We are a garden. Our intelligences overlap, and they differ.

When I consider the intelligence of my garden, or the perspectives of my neighbours, I am filled with respect. I am curious and open. I feel gratitude.

## THIS MONTHS RECIPE

### CHOCOLATE CARAMEL SQUARES

You will need

Base:
5oz plain flour
4oz butter
pinch salt
2oz castor sugar

Rub till "breadcrumbly".
Press into well greased swiss roll tin.
Bake at 335- for approx. 25 mins. Cool.

Filling:

4oz soft brown sugar
4oz margarine
2 level tablespoons golden syrup
small tin condensed milk

Stir all ingredients in saucepan over low heat until sugar dissolves.
Bring to boil and gently boil 7 mins.
Beat well and pour over shortbread base.
When cold cover with melted cooking chocolate, approx. 4oz.

## PATCHY CABBAGE QUESTIONS

Why do cabbages exist?
What is the point of having a tight bundle of leaves that don't attract pollinators and shield each other from the sun? Does its structure affect its ability to photosynthesise?

***JanHorton***
*West Launceston, Tasmania, Australia*

Cabbages exist because humans domesticated them long ago due to them being easy to grow in many climates and keeping well, especially when fermented. To me, and to many others, they also taste delicious, but not all my family agree.

Humans have bred the cabbage so that the juvenile stage is prolonged, because the light inner leaves are sweeter and more digestible than the tough, protective, dark green outer leaves. Once picked, they can be stored for a long time in a cool place, which is all to the good of humans and livestock. However, for the good of the plant, just leave it.

The cliffs are covered in wild cabbages descended from garden escapes, and you can smell them far out at sea, in the ground and keep watering it. In due course, it will develop a flowering stalk, then masses of flowers followed by lots of seeds.
Some relatives of the cabbage are grown for their seed, including canola, which is bred for its high seed oil content.

***Jonathan Wallace***
*Fenham, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK*

The tight rolled-up "head" of cabbage leaves doesn't confer an advantage to the plant, any more than vines "benefit" from having seedless grapes. It has been bred to have characteristics desirable to the grower and consumer.

As to whether the structure of the cabbage affects its ability to photosynthesise, leaves that are inside the head and not exposed to sunlight can't photosynthesise. But cabbages are able to grow to a large size, so the leaves that are exposed to the sun must be able to make enough carbohydrate to meet the needs of the whole plant.

***Chris Warman***
*Hinderwell, North Yorkshire, UK*

Cabbages exist to be eaten, as do cauliflower, broccoli, kale and Brussels sprouts. They are all cultivars of Brassica oleracea, a plant that grows wild on the sea cliffs of southern Europe.

Cabbages with a "heart" - the capitata type, as described by the questioner- are just one of seven main groups of cabbages, which in their turn contain innumerable varieties.

Selective breeding of cabbages may go back for as long as 4000 years and classical writers such as Theophrastus and Pliny the Elder described cultivated varieties, probably loose bundles of leaves resembling collard greens or what the British know as "spring greens". Hearted cabbages were first developed in the Middle Ages.

The original attraction of cabbage is that its thick leaves stored carbohydrates and vitamins through the winter. Wild cabbage is tough and bitter, but natural variations enabled breeders to select for a softer, sweeter leaf. Breeders could also develop curly leaves (kale) and colours ranging from near black (cavalo nero) to near white.

Features that make cabbages desirable to humans would not be advantageous in the wild. This is true of most of our domesticated plants and animals, which are vulnerable to predators and adverse conditions. The modern cabbage needs continual protection from encroaching weeds, ravenous birds and cabbage white butterflies.

The tight heart of capitata cabbages exists because it is supported by the original loose cluster of green leaves that are trimmed away in harvesting. This can be seen in all its glory in exhibition cabbages, which can exceed a metre wide and be as heavy as a small person.

Wild cabbage is a slow-growing biennial or perennial with leathery leaves, sometimes tinged with violet, and masses of yellow flowers. It doesn't compete well with faster growing plants, but it tolerates salt and finds a niche on chalk and limestone cliffs. The cliffs at Whitby and Staithes in the UK are bright with their flowers and you can smell them far out at sea. Genetic analysis shows these aren't the original species. Instead, they are apparently descended from garden escapes.

Incidentally, lettuce has followed a similar course of development to cabbage, although only in the growth of its leaves, which may form heads or be curly and brightly coloured. It was adored by the ancient Egyptians and dedicated to Min, the god of fertility and harvest.

***David Muir***
*Edinburgh, UK*

The cabbage as we know it isn't a natural thing. Over thousands of years, inventive farmers have altered various structures of the wild cabbage. Selective breeding for specific parts of the plant's structure has given us particular vegetables: development of the terminal bud gave us cabbages; the lateral buds, Brussels sprouts; the flowers, cauliflower and broccoli; the leaves, kale and collard greens; and the stem, kohlrabi.
Some cultivars of Brassica oleracea may be of medical benefit. Brussels sprouts and broccoli contain sinigrin, a chemical shown to have anti-cancer, antibacterial, antifungal, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. The bits of the plant that aren't so green also contain valuable nutrients, even if they lack the green chlorophyll required for photosynthesis. Eat your greens!
***Jackie Jones***

*Brighton, East Sussex, UK*

These plants provide a breeding ground for cabbage white butterflies, which lay their bright yellow eggs in neat patches all over the underside of the leaves during summer months until October.

The caterpillars that hatch from these eggs eat large holes in the leaves. Only close-mesh net will protect the members of the cabbage family from the butterfly; they are attracted by the smell of the plant and will travel a long distance to find them.
I made the mistake of growing a summer-harvesting broccoli once and spent ages picking out these pesky caterpillars. I now only grow winter greens; by this time the butterflies have long gone.