

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

NEW PROGRAM SECRETARY

Program Secretary Mrs Penny Slack has arranged for the 2024 speakers but in order for a program to be organised for 2025 a new program secretary needs to be found. Any volunteers?

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

THIS MONTHS RECIPE**Speckled Bread (Bara Brith)**

There are umpteen versions of this recipe; I seem to have tried and tested most of them. Here is just one simple version, not using yeast.

You will need

10 oz. self-raising flour

1 beaten egg

Half pint of strong tea

8 oz. soft, light brown muscovado sugar

12 oz. mixed, dried fruit

To do

Place the sugar and dried fruit in a bowl with the hot tea.

Stir and leave the fruit to swell for as long as you are able.

If you are using tea-bags, remove them at this point.

When ready, stir the flour and egg into the mixture.

Line a 2 lb. buttered loaf tin with cooking parchment.

Mix thoroughly before turning the mixture out into the loaf tin.

Smooth the surface of the cake as much as possible.

Bake in an oven gas mark 2 or 150°C (300°F) for about 1 hour 45mins until firm and well-risen.

Allow to cool in the loaf tin for about 10 minutes before placing carefully on a wire rack to cool thoroughly.

A little butter spread on the cooled, finished product may be a trifle indulgent, but it is delicious.

MINDFUL THOUGHTS FOR GARDENERS**The Harvest**

Most countries or cultures hold a festival to celebrate the harvest, and some have several for individual crops. In the Celtic spiritual calendar, there are three harvest festivals. In the Northern Hemisphere, there's one in August, another in September and the final one in October; in the Southern Hemisphere they fall in February, March and April. The first is Lammas - the mass of the loaf - and while ; usually celebrated on 2 August in the north, it can also be celebrated when berries are ripe. I like this marker, as it follows the Earth's rhythms more closely.

Where I live, summer is still in full swing in August; yet there is a subtle shift in the air. I can feel the edge of autumn. And if I'm lucky, I'll get a few berries

from the garden. Growing up, late summer was all about berries. I lived in a place where blackberries grow thick and wild. We picked as many as we could - ideally, enough to pack the freezer full of succulent dark purple berries to last almost till spring.

I appreciate the berry harvest because it reminds us that metaphorical harvests can come in waves, not just one big yield of insight or return. Wheat, berries, corn, squash and cabbages - the harvest is a parade lasting many months. I find personal insight to be the same. I realize something, integrate it, reveal something more, contemplate that, then harvest further insight later on. Often I don't know what I'm harvesting personally until long after the event. Just as we cannot harvest a fruit before it is ripe, we will not understand the messages of personal growth until these insights are themselves ripe, or until we are ready to receive the harvest.

SURPRISE HARVEST

Have you ever discovered something coming up in the garden and you have no memory of planting it there? Or perhaps you have grown squash plants and when the fruit forms it looks nothing like the variety you thought you were getting. We can approach this surprise mindfully by accepting what is and being open and curious. Maybe the mystery plant will be just what you wanted, or maybe it will turn out to be an invasive weed. The squash might be a fabulous hybrid, or it might be best fed to the chickens. Either way is fine. It just is.

We can bring the same openness to our internal harvest. We don't always know where self-discovery and personal growth will lead. Often when we're trying to heal a past trauma or develop a new part of ourselves, we can be a bit demanding. We expect ourselves to grow faster, be better, be more. From a Buddhist perspective, we become attached to our ideal self, believing it to be more real than what actually is true. In reality, we are all a mix of mystery vegetables and prizewinners, and it's all okay. Mindfulness shows us that what is now is all that is actually real. And even that is illusion. We don't know what is real. All we can do is be present to what is, noticing our breath, our 'self, the strange butternut-spaghetti-pumpkin squash. The garden teaches us we cannot hurry the ripening. We can only sit and allow things to unfold, meeting them where we are with the watering can.

Then out of that noticing, a harvest. It just arises. We might have to water it a little, tuck a little compost around it, but we don't have to effort the squash into

being. It is there. Slowly growing, and then we can pick it and see what we have. Self-fruiting is the same. We are responsible for taking care of ourselves by eating right, getting enough quality sleep, expressing our feelings in ways that honour ourselves and others, and then, our true self arises. It is our spiritual nature, when we are aligned with care and balance, to bloom into our higher selves, one step at a time.

GATHERING IN AND LETTING GO

The harvest time, whether berries or pumpkins or inner growth, is a time of gathering riches, but it is also a time of letting go. In order to harvest something, part of it has to die. Most harvest festivals honour this double-edged sword, life and death as one continuous dance. When we go through personal growth, the same is true. As we rejoice in our new discoveries, we need also to give ourselves time to grieve and let go. And then, when we have fully released our old selves, we can crack open the fruit before us and discover what lies inside: seeds for the future. This is the nature of the harvest: a release of the past, a gift in the present and a promise of hope for the future.

JANUARY 2024 MEETING

Our monthly meetings usually fall on the First Monday of every month, however we are struggling to get a Speaker for January as its NEW YEARS DAY.

We are looking at having the meeting on January 2nd (Tuesday), but this also depends on speaker availability.

We will let you know nearer the time of our decision

CHRISTMAS COMPETITION

Yule Log

Make Yule log using any media you like

WHAT IS MISTLETOE?

Mistletoe found in this country has the Latin name *Viscum album*, which refers to the sticky white berries, and is one of many species of mistletoe around the world. Mistletoe grows on the branches of deciduous trees and draws nutrients from the tree's roots, so is partly parasitic on the host tree, although mistletoe can still produce its own sugars through its green leaves. It does not harm the tree. Mistletoe is distinctive, with forking branches, evergreen leaves, small yellow flowers and unique berries, which ripen in the late autumn.

HISTORY AND FOLKLORE

For centuries mistletoe has been seen as one of the most magical, mysterious, and sacred plants of European folklore. It was considered to have the power of bestowing life and fertility; a protectant against poison; and an aphrodisiac. It is the 'kissing bough' of legend.

Kissing under the mistletoe has long been a part of Christmas tradition but it was first found associated with the Greek festival of Saturnalia and later with primitive marriage rites. In some parts of England the Christmas mistletoe is burned on the twelfth night lest all the boys and girls who have kissed under it never marry.

In the Middle Ages and later, branches of mistletoe were hung from ceilings to ward off evil spirits. In Europe they were placed over house and stable doors to prevent the entrance of witches. In parts of England and Wales farmers would give the Christmas bunch of mistletoe to the first cow that calved in the New Year. This was thought to bring good luck to the entire herd.

FACTS ABOUT MISTLETOE

Traditionally, men can kiss women under mistletoe, provided they give a berry from the mistletoe to the woman with each kiss and when the last berry is gone, there should be no more kissing!

The earliest reference to mistletoe dates back to 77AD with the Roman writer, Pliny.

WHERE AND HOW DOES IT GROW?

Mistletoe grows well in open man-made landscapes such as parks, gardens, small estates, nature reserves and roadsides. It grows on a wide variety of host trees but is most commonly found on lime soil, hawthorn (*Crataegus*), apple (*Malus*) and poplar (*Populus*).

In Richmond, we are blessed with many royal parks and palaces, which were re-landscaped in the 17th Century where lime trees were laid out in formal avenues. This has allowed widespread germination of mistletoe in both Bushy and Home Parks. The most remarkable example is in the gardens of Hampton Court Palace where the avenue was replanted with 200 lime trees in 1987: of which already nearly a half are carrying mistletoe growths.

Birds help to re-colonise the mistletoe, as when eating the berries the sticky berry seeds of the mistletoe tend to cling to the bills of birds. When the birds clean their bills by rubbing them against the bark of trees, the seeds are further spread. The mistle thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) and the blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) are the best-known carriers mistletoe, and they can be up near the growths.

Mistletoe is seen as a symbol of peace and joy, and exchanging kisses under it as a sign of friendship and goodwill.

Mistletoe is associated with Christmas, but the early Christian church banned its use because of its links with Druids.

STAGES OF GROWTH

Mistletoe grows fairly slowly and initially tiny plants are particularly susceptible to being eaten by invertebrates and birds, so many don't survive. However if they do survive, then the mistletoe will establish links with the host tree and begin to grow but you may not see the first flowers, and therefore berries until the fourth or fifth year of germination.

After this, each shoot will double each year, and so it won't be too long before you can see a recognisable bunch of mistletoe.

CONSERVATION AND HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Richmond Biodiversity Partnership has an Action Plan for mistletoe, which is encouraging the conservation and spread of the species by propagating mistletoe on suitable host trees in many parks and open spaces throughout the borough. For more information and to get involved view:

<http://www.richmond.gov.uk/biodiversity>

If you would like to grow your own mistletoe, you need to have a suitable host tree.

You can buy a mistletoe kit, which contains 40-50 berries, which is enough for about

ten sowings of 4-5 berries each.

The best time to start is in February or March, when the berries are ripe.

For more information and to purchase a mistletoe kit, visit:

<http://www.teme-mistletoe.co.uk>

SOMETHING TO DO THESE COLD WET EVENINGS**Christmas Pudding Covers for Ferrero Rocher Choc's****You will need**

Size 8 or 4mm knitting needles, Brown double knitting wool

White or Cream double knitting wool, Red seed beads & red thread

Holly leaf shaped sequins or green felt & green thread or Uhu glue

KEY:- P=purl, K=Knit tog-together, M1 = knit into front and then back of stitch to

make a stitch, sts=stitches

Instructions

Cast on 17 sts in brown wool

Row 1 K2, M1, K3, M1, K3, M1, K3, M1, K2 (21 sts)

Row 2 Purl,

Row 3 Knit,

Row 4 Purl,

Row 5 Knit,

Row 6 change to white & Purl this Row.

Row 7 Purl,

Row 8 Purl,

Row 9 K2, K2tog, K3, K2tog, K3, K2tog, K3, K2tog, K2 (17sts).

Row 10 Purl,

Row 11, (K1, K2tog) repeat to last 2sts, K2 (12sts). Row 12 (K2tog) repeat to end of row (6 sts).

Cut wool leaving approx. 15cm. Thread the end of the remaining wool onto a large needle, making a loop, take the needle through the remaining stitches, starting at the last stitch on the knitting needle. Thread through the loop and tie a knot. DO NOT cut off the wool at this stage, continue using threaded needle to join the side seams with overstitching. Decorate the top with 2 holly leaves & 3 red seed beads for berries.

THE GARDENERS HYMN

The Gardeners Hymn

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,

All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.

But what we never mention, though gardeners know it's true,

is when he made the goodies, he made the baddies too.

All things spray and swattable, disasters great and small,

All things paraquatable, the Lord God made them all.

*The greenfly in the roses, the maggots in the peas, Manure that fills our noses,
he also gave us these.*

The fungus on the goose-gogs, the club roots on the greens,

The slugs that eat the lettuces', and chew the aubergines.

*The drought that kills the fuchsias, the frost that nips the buds, The rain that
drowns the seedlings, the blight that kills the spuds.*

*The midges and mosquitoes, the nettles and the weeds, The pigeons in the
green stuff, the sparrows on the seeds.*

*The fly that gets the carrots, the wasp that eats the plums, How black the
gardener's outlook, though green may be his thumbs.*

But still, we gardeners' labour, midst vegetables and flowers,

And pray what hits our neighbour will somehow bypass ours.

All things are bright and beautiful...