

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?

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- **SPRING SHOW 6th APRIL**
 - RHS Malvern Spring Festival – 18-21 May
 - **PLANT SALE 11th MAY**
 - **RHS Chelsea Flower Show – 21–25 May**
 - **OUT MEETING 3rd June**
 - **SUMMER SHOW 1st JULY**
 - RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show – 2–7 July
 - RHS Flower Show Tatton Park – 17–21 July
 - **AUTUMN SHOW 7th SEPTEMBER**
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GARDENING CALENDAR JANUARY

January may seem like the dead of winter, but there is a lot to be done in your garden during this month.

Plants

Your plants will need protection and maintenance during this time of year. Brush snow from evergreens and conifers to stop the branches from bowing, breaking or splaying out under the sheer weight. If wet weather conditions have made ornamental grasses and other perennials fall flat, start cutting these back to give them a fresh start.

Protect

After plenty of rain, mulch beds and borders with leaf mould, manure, compost or shredded bark – a layer of around five to 10cm is ideal. Check protective fleece and straw is covering still-tender plants such as tree ferns.

Feed

Feed new plantings in late January with slow-release fertiliser such as Blood, Fish and Bone, and water, but leave the application of faster-acting organic fertilisers such as Growmore until the beginning of March.

Wildlife also will benefit from your help at the beginning of the year.

Start putting food and water in your garden for hungry and thirsty birds. To stop ponds and bird baths freezing over, leave a tennis ball to bob on top of the water.

Tidy

January is also an appropriate time for tidying your garden and maintaining and repairing your garden furniture and decking. Recycle cut trees by shredding them for mulch or compost. Repair and stain or paint fences, pergolas and wooden furniture if weather conditions permit. Scrub slippery garden decking and paving with hot soapy water; Patio Cleaner is useful for dirtier surfaces. Ventilate greenhouses and conservatories on hot sunny days, and wash the glass of the greenhouse to let in more light.

Be sure to put out feed for birds throughout the winter months

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Nancy Jenkins's gingernuts

This is the classic English dipping biscuit, even though the recipe comes courtesy of a New Englander (thank heavens for the colonies). Makes 2 dozen.

You will need

125g plain flour
1 level tsp bicarbonate of soda
1 heaped tsp ground ginger
1 tsp ground cinnamon
Half tsp ground cloves
1 tsp salt
125g unsalted butter, softened
75g granulated sugar
1 small egg
4 tbsp black treacle (molasses)
To finish
About 100g extra sugar for coating

To do

Toss the flour, bicarb and spices together in a bowl, and reserve.
Beat the butter with sugar till soft and fluffy.

Fork the egg with the treacle.

Fold the flour with the butter and sugar, alternating with the egg and treacle, with a spatula or metal spoon till thoroughly combined.

This is a pastry-like dough -don't be tempted to loosen it like a cake mix.

Cover the bowl with a damp cloth or clingfilm and refrigerate for at least an hour.

Heat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas 4.

Take a tablespoon of the dough, pat it into a firm ball (easiest with damp hands), then roll it around in the finishing sugar till well coated. Continue till all are done.

Arrange the balls about 5cm apart on a couple of buttered and lined baking sheets.

Bake for 15-20 minutes, until the biscuits have collapsed into flat discs with a crackly pattern on top.

Remove from the oven and leave them to rest on the baking sheets for about 10 minutes.

Transfer carefully to a wire rack to crisp and firm.

Store in an airtight tin when perfectly cool.

MINDFUL THOUGHTS FOR GARDENERS

THIS MONTH IS THE FINAL CHAPTER OF CLEA DANAAN'S

Mindful thoughts for Gardeners

The Garden

Under Snow

Under a blanket of snow lies a curled emerald dragon, her breath slow but unceasing. She shimmers like a will-o'-the-wisp just outside your line of sight. We gardeners hear her voice in dreams, whispering promises of what the land will bring in a few months' time as she turns over in her hibernation. She is a pulse of life held in the belly of the Earth. We know she will wake in due time. For now, we watch her domain from inside the house, a mug of steaming tea in our grasp, waiting. We inhabit the realm of the North, of Earth energy and the mind. The garden under snow is the garden of thoughts and plans, dreams and ideas, stone and root. It beckons to us to slow down, settle in and breathe.

The winter garden is the garden of hoping for the best. It is a dream garden of huge plump tomatoes and bug-free broccoli, the one we have yet to plant but can nonetheless taste in our mind. It is the garden of plans: in winter we pore

over seed catalogues, committing to try something new next spring. We mentally move carrots from one bed to another and wonder if perhaps violets might like that spot under the evergreens. We tap in to the dragon's dreams and ask her if there might be somewhere we could tuck another apple tree.

This winter garden of dreams and plans is no less real than the green and growing garden. A blueprint is no less real than a house. An engagement is as real -or more so - as the ring. When we run our fingers over the pages of a seed catalogue, marvelling at the greens and purples and oranges we have yet to grow, we plant seeds in our own mind, seeds of commitment and dreams. If you have ever had a dream and followed it through, you know how powerful these seeds of the mind and heart can be. This, too, is the garden.

CONTEMPLATING

THE GARDEN'S SKELETON

The winter garden covered in snow is a chance to appreciate the slower moving energies of a garden. We think that the flowers and fruits we get in warmer seasons equal the garden. But as I gaze out of my window at the snow-covered landscape, I see other energies, the garden of wood and stem, rock and earth. The snow-covered garden gifts us with the opportunity not just to dream and plan; we also see the land in a new light. With foliage gone and the ugly stillness of winter covered in soft curves of snow, we can see the garden's bones. This gives us a different perspective that can inform our dreaming. What do the stones and pathways, empty arbours and still birdbaths have to tell you? Can you see how energy flows through your garden and listen to the suggestions that a garden skeleton might offer? These perennial garden features are the container that holds the more active garden of green and growing things. In some cases, the stone and wood literally provide the container for our garden, and the fallow earth holds up both the garden and the gardener. The winter pathways and structure are an empty stage, ready to receive the actors and dancers of spring. This, too, is the garden.

More active than stone, but equally still in winter, are the roots of the perennial plants resting beneath the surface. In autumn, a plant pulls its sugars out of leaves and stem and into the roots. These underground vessels ensure the plant can rise again in spring, when water can once again flow. These, too, are the garden.

THE EVER-TURNING WHEEL

As we move around the wheel of time, through the seasons and all kinds of weather, we and the garden grow together. In winter, we can find this waiting, this stillness. Not unlike the still space we reach in mindfulness practice. Here we breathe, and witness as time unfolds. The wheel turns, and the mindful gardener knows to sit with whatever is right now, as well as to welcome dreams. We pack all these discoveries in the wheelbarrow, toting them down the paths of life. We come home to ourselves, as we grow in compassion and understanding. We see how our paths intersect with billions of plant and animal beings. We sit with the stillness and the promise, both, and know that in time the days of spring will come.

CHURCHYARDS

A new plea has gone out to churchyards and burial grounds throughout the south and southwest to re-introduce wildflowers and areas of wildflower meadows.

The call comes from Caring for God's Acres, which works nationally to support groups and individuals to care for and enjoy burial grounds and graveyards, and the Wildlife Trust

"The expansion of interest in wildflowers, re-wilding in gardens and wildflowers meadows in particular has led us to try and motivate more people to look at their local graveyards and see the potential they have to be places of colour and beauty as well as place of remembrance" said a spokesman for Caring in God's Acres.

"In most cases we are just talking about a small area being taken over and managed-in almost a traditional way which will maintain the religious significance of the land."

Churchyards and cemeteries are sometimes the last refuge in the parish for wildflowers.

"Your churchyard or burial site may be the most ancient, enclosed piece of land in a parish, town or city. The grassland will have been relatively undisturbed, reseeding naturally for hundreds if not thousands of years. It will also have been both mown for hay and grazed by animals during its time as a burial ground.

"A benefit of this continuity of management over a very long time is a rich diversity of grasses, flowers and animals.

"Incredibly important remnants of flowery grassland are often found in churchyards and other burial sites where they have escaped the changes due to modern agriculture. They are found in every imaginable situation from mountainside to coast, city centre to rural village."

Important remnants of flowery grassland are often found in churchyards and other burial sites where they have escaped the changes due to modern agriculture.

There are thought to be over 50 schemes in Devon and Somerset alone where communities have decided to do more with the garden element of their churchyard.

"Most communities are very responsible about caring for the churchyards," said the spokesman for Caring for God's Acres.

"The grass is cut, often trees and shrubs are planted but we feel the bigger long-term opportunity is to see these areas as place of potential great beauty and which can support a huge range of wildlife."

Such a scheme is managed at Petrockstowe in Devon when it was agreed to allocate a part of the unused churchyard for conversion into a wildflower meadow. Initially the area of the meadow was small, but this has been expanded as the village sees the range of wildflowers and insects that are using the site. To begin with the designated area was simply left uncut for one season to establish what plants were there, and 20 species were identified in the first year; subsequently some Yellow Rattle seed was collected from another wildflower meadow in the village and sown into the church meadow. This has now begun to establish itself and should reduce the most vigorous grasses allowing other wildflowers to flourish.

Devon Wildlife Trust presented the church with a wooden plaque designating the wildflower meadow, and this can now be seen to the right-hand side of the steps leading to the graveyard opposite the church door.

The practice of leaving flowers at graves began thousands of years ago when the ancient Greeks would honour fallen warriors. They believed that if the flowers rooted into the ground and grew from the gravesite, it was a sign that the fallen had found peace.

START YOUR OWN HOTBED

Can Hotbeds, a Victorian way of growing vegetables, make a comeback? Daniel Rose, a young allotmentee who we featured in the spring issue of Country Gardener thinks so. Daniel is a teenager who started gardening during the first Covid lockdown and has gone on to grow vegetables on his allotment plot in Taunton. Now Dan writes about his interest in the Victorian method of growing using Hotbeds to get an earlier crop of vegetables, and it has proved to be a very successful project.

Hotbeds are an old method of getting early crops at a time when they are normally out of season, and they are most known for their use by the Victorians who used them to grow more tropical plants like pineapples and melons very successfully in the UK. This was useful because it needed no electricity or fuel and was easy to make because manure was plentiful at a time when horses were still a large part of transport.

A Hotbed is a very simple idea-but very effective. It is a layer of decomposing organic matter like manure in some sort of frame such as four pallets put together. A minimum of a foot tall of manure is advised, the effect of this decomposing releases heat. This part is capped with around six inches of growing medium such as compost to sow and plant into, the manure heats this as it decomposes. Though the capping with compost is not always done if the Hotbed is used for propagation where the seed trays or plant pots simply sit on top to be heated, this is useful to bring on small plants before planting out, which is great as it is a totally off grid way to provide heat.

If you don't think you can get the manure, simply make a hot compost heap instead as this will release heat when decomposing as manure does; this is a good alternative for vegans.

Hotbeds can be constructed undercover in a greenhouse or polytunnel otherwise outside a cold frame, cloche or method of protection is placed in top. Hotbeds can be constructed in February and March for early sowing and planting, and later for warmth loving crops like melons.

Last year, in mid-February. I decided to give this method a try, as I received some free, fresh manure, so I made a Hotbed from four pallets and wrapped the inside with polythene to retain some heat. I stacked around two feet of manure, which has now sunk significantly.

I used a large amount because the earlier you construct your Hotbed the more manure you should use. I watered the manure to make sure it would decompose

properly and treaded it down to make sure the heat of the manure would last rather than being a short outburst.

Next, I capped this with around six inches of compost.

The heat of the decomposing manure quickly rose in the next week to around 70°C. I let this cool to around 50°C before sowing and planting.

I decided to pick some of my favourite crops to sow and plant to get some nice early harvests. I sowed two rows of carrots, two rows of beetroot, and planted two potatoes as this is a relatively small space. I placed a sheet of corrugated polycarbonate over the Hotbed to protect the plants from harsh weather. The carrots and beetroot made a quick appearance with most of them germinating, so I gave them a good thin.

The potatoes swiftly followed peeking out of the compost. Despite earthing them up slightly as they were far ahead many leaves were above ground very early in the season, but the protection of the polycarbonate and the warmth of the Hotbed meant there was no frost damage. I kept these watered well and they grew away very quickly.

The polycarbonate was kept close to the plants but not touching and this was made slightly higher each time they touched it to prevent the plants becoming leggy and to lessen the amount of air being heated. Once we were clear of any frosts, I removed the plastic as it was no longer needed, and the plants were becoming too large to be kept under it.

By this time there was still the ambient heat from the Hotbed, but the real heat had gone, although the heat wasn't playing a huge part now, it was very important to get them going to begin with.

In late May, I decided to pull some crops to see how successful I had been and judge how mature the crops had got. I had a nice little crop of potatoes — earlier than usual, some baby carrots and some golf ball sized beetroot.

This was a success and with a couple more years of practising the use of Hotbeds, the size of the harvests will certainly increase.

The use of Hotbed is not common, and I was the only person on my allotment doing one, but I urge anyone to give it a try, as Hotbeds have great potential for gardeners, and hopefully you will be able to get some early crops too.