

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

TRIPS FOR 2022

All deposits are non returnable

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

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 JUNE

June garden jobs

June is all about regular, consistent maintenance of your plants; in short, remember to weed, water and feed your plants, and do it often.

Feed

Pay special attention to container plants, bedding plants and veggies. Liquid-feed tubs and baskets every two weeks if you haven't already mixed in controlled-release fertiliser. Feed

tomatoes, peppers and aubergines with a high-potash feed such as Tomorite every two weeks (also useful for feeding pelargoniums).

Harvest

June is also the time for harvesting onions – the right time is when the leaves turn yellow.

Bring indoors out

To maximise on summer blooms, move any summer flowering house plants into the garden.

THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDEN

Roots:

Real and Metaphorica

As gardeners, we are always putting down roots. The plants we partner with stretch their own roots deep into the soil in search of nourishment and water. In tending the plants, we also put down roots energetically wherever we garden. People who relocate to new houses often feel more grounded to a place by planting even a few herbs in a pot on the patio or windowsill. Farmers, of course, root their families so deeply to place that it becomes a part of who they are. The longer the lifespan of the plant, the greater the sense of connection and commitment to the land. By planting asparagus, fruit trees or roses, for example, you sign up for a long-term relationship with the land. As you tend the soil, the land supports you. If your garden contains edibles, you literally become a part of the land as you consume the gifts of the earth. This connection through gardens is true of communities as well as individuals. When neighbours create a community garden, they create common ground. We all ground through putting down roots.

A NUTRITIONAL POWERHOUSE

Roots are a plant's primary way of gaining nourishment. Tiny hairs on the root reach out into the soil, using ion exchange to absorb nutrients. A plant that has been in the soil a long time has grown a great beard of hairy root filaments, not unlike the

connections we form as members of a community. All those filaments and folds help connect a plant not only to nutrients in the soil, but also to other organisms around the plant. Through fungi in the soil, plants' roots of the same and different species can exchange nutrients and chemicals. When you pull up a root, many of these finer threads break off and remain in the soil to decay, adding organic matter.

In soils where nutrients are scarce, the roots' length can far exceed the height of the plant. These root structures help build the soil as well as the plant.

Roots not only suck up nutrients, they also act as the plant's root cellar. In winter, plants store sugars, starches and nutrients in their roots while the rest of the plant goes dormant. For us gardeners, this translates as improved taste and nutrition in root vegetables, such as carrots and potatoes, that have been left in the soil through a frost or two. We crave root stews in autumn and winter because roots store well, but also because consuming a plant's roots gives us Earth medicine at a time when we seek the grounded stillness of winter. In traditional Chinese medicine, root vegetables are balanced and nourishing, neither too cleansing nor too rich. Many root vegetables are said to clear toxins, cleanse the blood and support digestion.

The following meditation explores your own energetic roots. You may want to keep in mind the above thoughts as you feel your own roots and sense deep into the Earth.

ROOT MEDITATION

Sit in a place where you will not be disturbed. Outside is best, but not necessary. Sitting with your back against a tree or near a favourite plant would be a perfect place to practise this meditation on your own roots, but sitting on the floor indoors or even on a chair is fine.

Close your eyes and feel your sitting bones press into the ground. Notice how the ground presses back against you. Now reach your awareness past this connection, sensing into the space below you. Reach your awareness down until you enter the soil beneath you. Feel any change in your body as you connect your energy into the Earth.

In your mind's eye, see the image of the Tree of Life, a tree with branches reaching upwards balanced by roots reaching down. Impose this image over yourself until you become the Tree of Life. Your body is the trunk, your energetic branches reach into the energy space around and above your head, and the energy you reach downward into the Earth is your roots. Breathe for a few moments as a great tree, connecting Earth with body with sky. Breathe and trust whatever feelings arise. You are rooted to the Earth.

What do your roots feel as they reach into the soil? Does it feel good to be rooted, or do you feel stuck in one place? Can you gently open your energetic roots to the nourishment of the Earth? Allow yourself to connect deeply to the ground beneath you.

When you are finished, pull your energy back into your body but stay connected by a few strands with the Earth to keep you grounded. Breathe and come into your normal senses.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Summer pudding

Serves 6

Prepare 20 minutes + chilling Cook 5 minutes

You will need

- 1kg mixed summer berries (strawberries, blackberries and raspberries), plus a few strawberries and redcurrants to garnish (optional)
- 125g caster sugar
- 8 thin slices bread cut from a white loaf, crusts removed

To do

1 Quarter or halve the strawberries, depending on size, and put them in a saucepan with the blackberries and raspberries.

2 Add the sugar and heat gently. Cook for 4-5 minutes, stirring frequently, until the sugar is dissolved, the fruits are soft but

still retain some of their shape, and there are plenty of juices in the pan.

3 Use about 6 slices of the bread to line the base and sides of a 1.2-litre pudding basin. Cut and trim the slices so the basin is lined in a fairly even layer with no gaps. Using a ladle, drain off 150ml of the juice from the fruit and chill until needed. Ladle the fruit and remaining juice into the basin and cover with the remaining slices of bread, cutting to fit.

4 Cover with a saucer that fits just inside the rim of the basin and weigh down with a heavy kitchen weight, or food cans weighing about 1kg. Put in the fridge to chill overnight.

5 Turn the pudding out onto a serving plate and pour over the reserved juices, then garnish with the extra strawberries and some redcurrants if using. Serve in wedges with clotted cream or single cream, if liked.

GREAT GARDENING COUPLES

David Wheeler

Books by Margery Fish, of East Lambrook Manor in Somerset, have never been far from my reach.

During my prolonged hospital incarceration a dozen years ago, they choked my bedside locker. She was an unshowy writer but doled out stimulating paragraphs about the plants she knew and grew, gently encouraging benign covetousness in a swelling band of readers.

I passed the manor's gates a couple of weeks ago, quietly saluting her memory while speeding to a funeral in Yeovil.

Queen Victoria ruled over us at the time of Margery's birth in 1892, but she survived into the Swinging Sixties (though I doubt she ever swung), signing off in March 1969, when her garden - for she adored spring-flowering plants - must have looked superbly well furnished.

The first five of her eight books are the best of them, starting in 1954 with *We Made a Garden*. Was it the editorial 'we' or an inclusion of her husband, Walter?

According to Margery's nephew Henry Boyd-Carpenter, in his foreword to the 1970 paperback edition, the book started life as *Gardening with Walter*, 'but the publisher to whom it was shown

took one look and declared gruffly, "Too little gardening and too much Walter".

The Fishes were opposites in just about every way, except they both had Fleet Street careers. Walter was a news editor and then editor of the Daily Mail, while Margery, 'the much softer personality', had proved herself an indispensable assistant to, among others, Lord Northcliffe, the Mail's proprietor. Master of all he surveyed, Walter took a leading and dominant role in the making of the manor's garden. His preference for summer-flowering plants, especially dahlias 'the size of soup plates', meant Margery had to coddle secretly her 'tiny, unassuming, even difficult plants', for which she had great affection.

Only several years after Walter's death in 1947 was *We Made a Garden* published. By that time, 'all the borders had been reworked to include spring and late-autumn flowers, which he would never countenance'.

Most importantly, as Catherine Umphrey (in 'Companion Planting' in the winter 1993 issue of the gardening quarterly *Hortus*) went on to record in her brilliant analyses of Walter and Margery's years together, 'Margery Fish's gardening genius had been liberated.'

And that sense of liberation, a vital expression of imaginative individualism, is essential to any artist worthy of the name. Yes, notable creative couples do succeed - think Rodgers and Hart, Flanders and Swann, Hinge and Bracket - and in today's gardening world you'll find countless duos (in a cocktail of gender pairings) working in double harness - though, like the Fishes, not always comfortably.

I have gardened with the same partner for more than 30 years. And rather like Harold and Vita at Sissinghurst Castle (there all comparisons must end), we play different parts. I enjoy the fabulous gifts of a talented landscaper, who in turn allows me to run free with plants to fill an abundance of gorgeous spaces. In time, of course, couples learn from each other. Roles mutate and lines of demarcation blur, often resulting in exchanges of exciting and fabulously unexpected ideas.

Mrs Fish's books remain in print. They belong on every gardener's bookcase, dusted off frequently for the sheer satisfaction of good, straightforward garden writing. Score-settling and sage-like, let the evergreen Margery, who ended *We Made a Garden* with these words, be allowed to repeat them here:

'My philistine of a husband often told with amusement how a cousin when asked when he expected to finish his garden replied, "Never, I hope." And that, I think, applies to all true gardeners.'

STOP AND THINK

Alan Titchmarsh cannot understand the current enthusiasm for re-wilding

Why do we push consequences to the back of our minds without a thought for the future? Impetuosity? Impatience? Arrogance? Whatever the cause, consequences never fail to make themselves felt, however uncomfortable. Ask any party-goer.

In the garden they often sneak up quietly, but gardeners, more than most folk, are painfully aware of the consequences of our actions. After all, we are always planning ahead: spring-flowering bulbs are planted in autumn. Seeds of summer-flowering bedding plants are sown in spring. Winter cabbage is planted in summer. We live a life predicated on consequences. It is for this reason that I am at a loss to understand the excitement and avid enthusiasm for re-wilding. For a start, the use of the prefix 're' implies that something was that way before when, in the vast majority of cases, it certainly was not.

Let's be clear: there is hardly a square inch of the British landscape which is not managed - whether that be for the cultivation of crops or for wildlife. Humankind has managed land (for good or ill) since we stopped hunter-gathering and built fences to contain livestock and prevent other folk from pinching our Brussels sprouts.

Re-wilding is not simply a matter of 'letting it go', and I suspect that if land were just 'let go' those who espoused re-wilding as a way of beautifying our countryside and improving the breadth of our flora and fauna would be the first to complain at the resulting scene that would turn out to be a far cry from the Arcadian idyll they imagine. Dominant species would force out those of a lesser constitution and prove Herbert Spencer's belief, expounded in 1864, in the survival of the fittest. In the botanical world, the fittest are seldom the most beautiful. The grave

danger of passive re-wilding is that it will result in a reduction in biodiversity rather than an increase.

Before I go any further, let me make it clear that I love with an undying passion our native flora and fauna. My first memories concern the great outdoors. I joined the Wharfedale Naturalists' Society at the age of eight and am still a member.

Later in life the passion has not diminished. I have created and cultivate a three-acre wild-flower meadow and a large wildlife pond around our current dwelling. The native marginal aquatic plants that occupy the edges of the water are cut back annually. Left to their own devices they would march across the pond causing it to silt up and turn into a bog; the roach who have made a home here (not introduced by me) would fail to survive, as would the frogs, toads, newts and dragon flies. Eventually brambles would claim an exclusive hold on the terrain.

The hay is cut from the meadow just once in late summer to ensure that the mixture of perennial wild flowers continues to thrive. The spectacle begins with cowslips in March and April, journeying through a seasonal patchwork of vetches, marguerites, field scabious and knapweed culminating in the purple haze of marjoram in late summer. I have planted, in my lifetime, tens of thousands of trees, for myself and for others. This is not re-wilding; this is the management of land with wild flowers, invertebrates, amphibians, birds, mammals and all other wildlife in mind. Oh yes; and humans, too.

It is intriguing that when so much is talked about mental health, that the effects of having and being in a garden are so underrated. Cultivated flowers feed the soul and are enjoyed by pollinating insects every bit as much as native species.

Recent tirades have been directed at those who like stripes on their lawn (mainly men, it is claimed). They are derided as being irresponsible and diminishing the resources available to wildlife. But what of the improved mental health of the gardener who takes much pleasure in creating the stripes and will have the joy of doing the same next week and the week after? Where's the

harm in that? consequences of dead battery disposal (yet to make itself really felt) what about the loss of carbon-capture where once plants grew, and the subsequent increase in flash-flooding now that more and more front gardens are being paved over? The pragmatist who is aware of the real consequences would have kept the old car until it finally conked out and cultivated plants in the front garden. It is, you see, all a matter of balance.

There. I feel better now. And that is the consequence of getting it all off my chest.

