

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS

OFFICE	OFFICERS	TEL NO
Chairman	Mr J Poole "MEADCOTT" Badshot Lea Rd	01252 319621
Secretary	Mrs. B Ames 97 Longacre, Ash	01252 686303
Treasurer	Mr. Ian Chant 54 Aldershot Road, Church Crookham	07850498544
Show Secretary	Mrs. B Winton 2 Elm Hill, Normandy	01252 333756
<u>Social</u> Secretary	Mrs. H Chant 54 Aldershot Road, Church Crookham	07754888994
Victoria Hall Rep	Mr. Brian Perry 9 Drake Avenue Mytchett	01252 542341
Mag Editor	Mr. Brian Perry 9 Drake Avenue Mytchett	01252 542341
Prog Secretary	Mrs P Slack 16 Firacre Road, Ash Vale	01252 311210

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EDITORS NOTES

Brian –Stories to ernestperry33@gmail.com hard copy to Chris

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.

TRIPS FOR 2022

All deposits are non returnable

21st May Wisley

Meet at Victoria Hall at 1pm.

Cost for people on Minibus £5 each. No cost for those using own Transport that meet at Wisley Entrance at 1:30pm. Return to Victoria Hall approx. 5pm **Deposit £5 to reserve your place on the Bus**

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

RHS Malvern Spring Festival – 5–8 May

PLANT SALE 7th MAY

RHS Chelsea Flower Show – 24–28 May

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 MAY

May is when the garden really begins to wake up – and it's the time to gear up for the summer.

Lawn maintenance

Now's the time for active lawn maintenance – and the last chance to sow or lay new lawns until autumn without using sprinklers. The lawn will need weekly mowing from now until autumn, and the edges will need trimming.

Plant

Pay special attention to tender vegetables and soft fruit. The end of the month is the best time to plant out tender courgettes and aubergines if you have a kitchen garden, as well as planting our summer bedding plants.

May is also the time to repot pot-bound container plants in pots 7-10cm bigger than the current ones. Remember to tie in long climber shoots to their supports with soft string.

Protect

With insects becoming much more active as temperatures rise, be especially vigilant about pests. Pick off scarlet lily beetle from your lilies; their larvae rapidly defoliate plants. Watch for vine weevil in container plantings – irregular-shaped notches to leaf edges are tell-tale signs. The young grubs in the soil eat roots, and fast. Use natural nematodes to control them. at the end of the month.

Cover soft fruit bushes with netting to prevent birds eating the fruit, and if you are growing strawberries, put straw around or under them.

Prune

Don't forget about the plants that have just finished flowering; prune spring-flowering shrubs.

Feed

Feed spring bulbs with Growmore or blood, fish and bone.

Cover soft fruit bushes with netting to prevent birds eating the young fruit

THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDEN**Earthworms:****The Underworld Alchemists**

A soil's health derives from its ability to embrace and transform death. The decomposition rate of soil - the transformation of fallen leaves and dead bugs into more soil - determines soil health, or its ability to support more life. It's hard for us to see this actually happening, for it does so microscopically and at a slower pace than we humans like to do things. But as much as soil is a thing, it is a process, constantly changing. One of the key players in the game of soil is the earthworm, slowly pushing its way through the damp darkness to churn organic matter into soil.

Have you ever placed a worm back on a garden bed after rudely plucking it from the soil and watched how it searches about and then returns back from whence it came? I wonder what it is looking for precisely as it winds this way and that, choosing just the right spot to re-enter the earth. Not an opening, for it seems to just be absorbed by the soil through its own accordion action. A softer bit? A tasty bit? When it finds what it's looking for, it doesn't really use much muscle to move what seems to me to be very dense soil. It doesn't seem to push its way into the soil the way I might push through a crowd. It just sort of becomes the soil. And yet I do not see it eating, not in the way I have watched a wasp scrape at wood or a caterpillar chomp a leaf. It is quite literally one with soil. It rebecomes one with the soil when it returns from our light and airy world to the dense dark of earth and stone. The worm can teach us about being one with our own surroundings, as we breathe the air, press our feet into the soil and soak sun into our skin.

THE EARTH TRANSFORMED

Atop the soil, we can see what the worm leaves behind, called castings. The worm is a piece of intestine without a greater body cavity, and it churns the soil through its intestine body and pushes it out its back end. In some ways the earth itself is the worm's body, as well as the thing it consumes. The worm is the earth transforming itself. Somehow in the magic of this process, the soil that comes out of a worm is transformed: it contains fewer toxins and more available nutrients than earth that has not been 'wormed'.

Sometimes earthworms are too effective. In some forests where invasive worm species have moved in, usually because humans bring them there (as when a fisherman disposes of his unused bait at the side of a lake), the worms eat up more of the leaf litter than is good for that forest ecosystem. The trees' roots end up exposed, tree seedlings get eaten by deer and there is less nutrient matter to slowly sink into the soil. Worm casting provide good, quick nutrients; in our garden, these feed fast-growing annuals like petunias and cabbage. In a slower growing forest, however, nutrients need to break down and release slowly, over a much longer stretch of time, thus the importance of leaf litter.

CONTEMPLATION ON A WORM

So an earthworm is a meditation on transformation, but also on how transformation needs to happen in its own just-right time. We can learn from the worm about taking in the world around us and transmuting it into nourishment and wisdom we can use for more growth. We can learn, too, that sometimes that process of change needs to go more slowly than we would like. To transform toxins, we need time. We need the support of the world around us just as the worm needs the weight of the land. We need the good stuff to be greater than the toxic bits. And then, in time, we can release what we no longer need. We can move forward, and we can share what we've gained with the world, perhaps helping to serve life in ever-widening circles around us.

In contemplating worms, I'm reminded of the childhood song, 'The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out, the worms play pinochle on your snout!' Worms, and their lesser known companions the nematodes and other microorganisms, are the underworld alchemists. They take what could not support life force anymore and turn it into a gift for the living. In supporting worms in our wormeries and beds, we too take on the role of the alchemist. With compost and water, we nurture the process of transformation. The gold we end up with comes in the form of carrots and marigolds, and the cycle continues to unfold

THIS MONTHS RECIPE**Scones**

You will need

8 oz. self-raising flour

2 oz. butter

Half tsp. salt

Quarter pint milk

To do

Put the flour into a bowl with the salt.

Add the butter - cut into small pieces;

Rub it into the flour until evenly blended.

Make a well in the centre and add the milk.

Draw the mixture together until you have a soft ball of dough.

Place the dough onto a floured surface and roll out to the thickness of half in.

Cut into rounds with a pastry cutter - using whatever size you prefer.

Place on a buttered baking tray and cook for about 10 minutes at gas mark 7 or 220°C (425°F). Cool on a wire rack.

To serve, cut horizontally and spread with clotted cream and raspberry jam or butter and strawberry jam or whatever else takes your fancy.

For savoury scones, add any of these to the dry mixture, before adding the milk:

1 tsp. baking powder

4 oz. finely grated Cheddar cheese

Half tsp. dry mustard

Some black pepper

Teaspoon paprika

Chopped chives

Finely grated onion

Chopped fresh sage

Small chunks of diced apple

WELSH WIZARD

David Wheeler

Quite how I navigated myself to Farmyard Nurseries for the first time 30-odd years ago, Sans Satnav, I'll never know.

Its shop lies secluded among the Carmarthenshire hills, accessible for the last mile on a narrow single-track lane. But find it I did, and on several occasions hauled back to Herefordshire great quantities of hellebores when we began making the garden at Bryan's Ground.

The shop stocks garden sundries only - no 'designer' tea towels, overwhelming potpourri or tacky knick-knacks. It has extensive, well-stocked plant-display areas - with propagating polytunnels - and a woodland garden.

Hellebores are the passion - well, one of many passions - fostered by farmyard's owner, Richard Bramley. As a 21-year-old some four decades ago, he migrated from Leicestershire to south-west Wales to help on his father's 100-acre dairy farm.

But the milking parlour was not for him. It had to be plants, plants and yet more plants - coupled with a compelling desire to set up his own nursery to propagate and sell them. Largely self-taught (as the best gardeners seem to be), he began by buying from a local wholesaler who seemed to specialise in everything. He also begged seeds from merchants whom he repaid with more seeds when the plants he raised successfully fruited. Like Topsy in Uncle Tom's Cabin, the nascent nursery grew as he also began to pick away at his father's acreage. Richard, his partner, Hazel, and daughter, Ruth, live nearby. I asked if he "d another, private garden at home. 'Yes, do live off site but the word "live" is a bit of misnomer; "sleep" might be a better word, for at the nursery - seven days a week.'

It was his grandmother's white-flowered orientalis hellebore that triggered his addiction to the genus. On one of my recent visits, I was shown tunnels housing some 5,000 young hellebores for sale this spring. It seemed a lot to cash in on in such a sparsely populated corner of the world. 'I could sell 20,000,' he cries, unhesitatingly.

How? Why? His seed-raised youngsters in four-inch pots retail for just £2.99. More mature plants cost between £6 and £8. For his highly desirable doubles, he asks no more than a tenner - a fraction of the price asked by big commercial garden centres. Farmyard's sensible and highly successful pricing policy extends across the whole nursery.

Apart from his treasured hellebores, Richard holds National Heritage Collections of Sarracenia (carnivorous plants) and the unspeakably beautiful, spring-flowering Primula sieboldii alongside large specialist collections of auriculas, asters, crocosmias, day lilies, begonias and

impatiens. You might be surprised how beautiful and varied these are, beyond the ubiquitous hanging-basket kinds. There are hostas, salvias and sempervivums, too.

Trundling around the nursery, you'll find an assembly of little-known roscoeas and enough saxifragas to satisfy the most avid of collectors. And I haven't even mentioned the trees and shrubs. Any regrets, Richard? He laughs: 'I should have started earlier - maybe at the age of one... apparently I was a gardener at the age of two. Seriously, though, I would have loved to be involved in some sort of plant-collecting escapade... they sound amazing.'

And what gets you out of bed each morning? 'Being able to indulge in my hobby every day of the year... and to get whatever plants I want under the pretence of business, many of which are totally unprofitable - but who cares about that?'

Green fingers: Richard Bramley of Farmyard Nurseries

GREATER STAG BEETLE

Keep watch for one of our most impressive insects as stag beetles venture out in search of a mate. Find out how you can help them and why you should love them.

Lucanus cervus

DID YOU KNOW? Once a stag beetle grub (or larva) is ready to develop into a pupa in the soil, it makes a cocoon as large as an orange, which can take up to three weeks to build, it emerges as an adult in autumn, but stays underground until the following spring. Expect to see adults from May onwards - the males, which grow to around 75mm long and have large antler-like mandibles, emerge first. You are unlikely to see them feeding, as scientists think that they don't eat during the adult stage.

DIET stag beetle grubs are beneficial garden inhabitants, feeding on decaying wood and releasing the useful minerals into your soil, so they can be taken up by plants. They prefer well-rotted wood, as less energy is required to break up the wood fibres. They particularly favour broad-leaved trees, such as oak and beech. Although the adults are not known to eat during their short lives, they (to take drinks from rotting fruit and tree sap.

LIFECYCLE Stag beetles spend most of their lives as grubs underground, taking up to six years to become adults. The grubs have a C-shaped cream body with an orange heads and sharp mandibles. After pupating, they emerge as large shiny black beetles and move about mainly at night. The males fly around looking for a female to mate with. The urge to mate is so strong that up to four males can attempt to mate with a single female. The males raise their huge 'antlers' to see off other male rivals. but they also use them during courtship to impress the females. Once the smaller female has mated, she finds some dead wood and lays her eggs close by. Adults only live for a short time and by late summer most will be dead.

HABITAT Living in woodland edges, hedgerows, parks and gardens where there is a supply of dead wood, they are found mainly in southern England, the Severn Valley and parts of the south west They are not found in Ireland.

AT RISK With the loss of woods and hedgerows, and the tidying up of wood in parks and gardens, stag beetles

SPRING SHOW RESULTS

Most Points in Section 1

- 1st 50pts Hazel Chant
- 2nd 36 pts Ann Poole
- 3rd 31 pts Kathy Wagstaff

Best Daffodil - Class 6 Hazel Chant

Best Spring Container Class 8 Margaret Neate

New Exhibitor – Laura Bavin

Most Points Section Cooking –
Tie with 3 people all with 5 pts
Mary Lamont, Chris Perry, Brian Perry

Best Cookery Exhibit – Brian Perry

Most Points Handicraft

- 1st 23pts Hazel Chant
- 2nd 10 pts Ian Chant
- 3rd 9 pts Kathy Wagstaff

Most points in whole Show

- 1st 73pts Hazel Chant
- 2nd 41pts Ann Poole
- 3rd 40pts Kathy Wagstaff