

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

Sorry everyone my Britain in Bloom article went a bit askew towards the end of the article last month, I will try not to let it happen again. We had our mimosa tree blow down last month and I'm guessing that some of you had problems so perhaps you

could let me know how you got on so that I can do a general report?

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

GARDENING CALENDAR MARCH

March is the time when your gardening routine will begin to speed up – this is the time for mulching, sowing, and repotting.

Deadhead and prune -Don't forget to deadhead early spring bulbs – but don't chop back the leaves for at least six weeks after flowering. Hard-prune bush roses back to 30cm, cutting back to an outward-facing bud.

Weed and mulch - Remove weeds, then mulch beds and borders with shredded bark or compost to help stop them returning. Protect young perennials, such as hostas, with organic slug pellets.

Mow - Pay more attention to the lawn, too. Start mowing your lawn each week if the grass isn't wet. If you can, set your mower's blade height as high as possible for the first four to five weeks.

Plant - This is also your last chance to plant bare-root trees, shrubs and roses until November.

The most important task in March is probably sowing. Seed heads of perennials and place 'grow-through' supports in position. Plant summer-flowering lily bulbs in a hole three to four times their height. Sow hardy annuals to fill gaps in immature beds and borders. Replace the compost in container plants and top-dress with slow-release fertiliser. Plant herbs in windowsill trays. Plant early potatoes, onion sets and asparagus, and when the weather is warmer sow onions, parsnips and the first carrots, turnips, beetroots and salad leaves of the season under cloches. Sow celery, courgettes, tomatoes and cucumbers on the windowsill or greenhouse for planting out once all danger of frost has passed.

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

SPRING SHOW 9th APRIL

RHS Malvern Spring Festival – 5–8 May

PLANT SALE 7th MAY

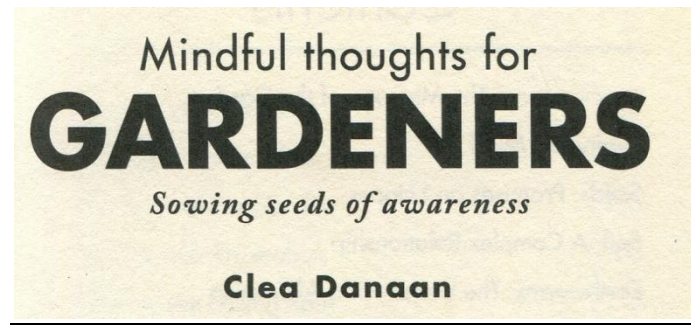
RHS Chelsea Flower Show – 24–28 May

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

THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDEN

Seeds:

Promises and Hopes

A seed is the epitome of hope. Inside a seed rests 'life concentrate'. Everything a plant needs to reach first down into the darkness and then upwards towards the light is held safe in the hard containment of the seed coat. Inside the suitcase of the seed coat waits a tiny future root, a tiny future shoot and all the food the seedling will need to get started. Also inside the little package of life are invisible instructions telling the seed just what it's here to do.

As gardeners, we use seeds as prayers, little promises of what is to come. We humans eat seeds daily: rice, wheat, sunflower, pea, bean, peanut, sesame ... Some seeds are harder to digest than others, as a seed wants to be not consumed but continued, carried on. Some of us can't digest certain seeds at all; my body reads gluten as a toxin, so I don't eat wheat, rye or barley seeds in any form. Perhaps the surge of allergies to various seeds is the planet's way of urging us to respect seeds: stop taking them for granted; stop dousing them with poisons; stop modifying them - respect.

WHAT SEEDS ARE NEAR YOU AT THIS MOMENT?

Seeds are all around us. Outside my office window hangs a bird feeder filled with black sunflower seeds. The chickadees and house finches who visit the feeder each day certainly respect seeds. Watching the black-capped chickadees feed is a meditation in life. A feathery tuxedoed gentleman bird lands on the wire over my patio, chirping about his surroundings. He swoops down to the lip of the feeder, looks about once, then dips into the cage of seeds and chooses just one. He flits back up to the box elder tree, removes the hard seed coat with his beak and eats the

fatty rich seed in a few mincing bites. He scrapes his beak side to side on a branch, cheeps a few times to his companions - they often come in twos and threes - and swoops down for another seed.

From where I sit, even in the middle of winter, I can see this feeder filled with seeds, but it is not the only seed close to me at this moment. On the shelf to my left I see a bag of sunflower seeds for the feeder. Above me waits a miniature pumpkin I've saved, a vault of seeds I will plant in the spring. On the little deck outside I can see a few linden seeds that found their way here on the wind last autumn. I can see a few dried rosehips on the brown and dormant wild rose bushes in the garden. Not far from where I sit, in my kitchen cupboard, I can find all manner of seeds in the forms of grains, flours, nut butters and the like. They are all around us because seeds are life; seeds are nourishment; seeds are promises and hopes and the future. Look around you, what seeds are nearby at this moment?

NOT JUST A METAPHOR

For a gardener who starts at least some plants from seeds, a pile of seeds invokes a giddy excitement. At a community seed swap, I cannot wipe the happy grin off my face as I dig through my friends' offerings. When the first display of garden seed packets appears at the natural food store in spring, I send out a whoop of joy and don't really care what other shoppers think. Few things make me happier. Seeds mean spring and the garden. For people on this planet who can't just mosey into a natural food store or a garden nursery to casually buy a few paper packets of this and that, seeds hold even more importance. To the farmer in Malawi or rural India, seeds mean they and their children will live another year. For them, the seed is not just a metaphor.

And really, the same is true for us all. In developed nations, we can forget that our lives depend on seeds. This is why seed banks around the world store a variety of rare and common seeds, keeping them safe for the benefit of humanity as well as the plants. In 2015, Syrian agricultural researchers made the first withdrawal of seeds from the Svalbard Global Seed Vault - sometimes referred to as 'the doomsday vault' - since its creation in 2008. The seeds were planted in Morocco and Lebanon, after the drought-resistant varieties of wheat were destroyed by the conflict in Syria. We are all united by our reliance on plants and their seeds. By growing, protecting and saving seeds yourself, you are a part of this web

that reaches across all cultural barriers. The seeds that keep us alive depend on us to do the same for them.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE TOWER OF LONDON

THE last time they planted flowers here, the display became an overnight and one of the most wildly popular visitor attractions of modern times. Except that the flowers on that occasion were 888,246 ceramic poppies.

The whole installation was uprooted and sold off soon after the end of events to mark the centenary of the outbreak of World War I in 2014 but this year the great moat of the Tower of London is due to burst into floral colour once again. This time, the flowers will be real and there will be 20 million of them.

What's more, the varieties have been carefully chosen to change colour throughout the summer and they will not be a one-off. They will return year after year. Better still, some of us will be able to immerse ourselves in them as part of a brilliant, lasting tribute to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

The entire royal moat is to become a permanent, giant, undulating flower meadow right in the heart of the City of London and even now, as we watch the muddy preparations in the chilly dead of winter, one can see that this is going to be hugely popular with the millions who flock to one of our greatest national landmarks every year.

The idea is actually a simple one: here we have one of central London's most famous and spectacular open spaces, yet it is largely unused.

Now, however, Historical Royal Palaces have decided to go one further and fill the moat – for good – with millions of flowers. These will burst into life at roughly the same time and last from late spring to late summer, fade come autumn and return the following spring.

They have been carefully planned by a team of urban horticulture experts at Sheffield University to ensure that 29 different species bloom in different colours at different times all through the season.

At the same time, ticket-holders will be able to walk through a landscape which will be very different from the one we are used to.

Tom O'Leary, Historic Royal Palaces director of public engagement tells us

"The aim is to plant by the end of March and then boom! It all comes into flower in time for the Jubilee weekend in June."

But unlike most displays, this one will keep changing over the summer months. It will be pushing the boundaries according to Tom. So the moat should start as a sea of whites and pinks in early June, when the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations begin. But if you come back again in July, you will find that it has morphed into deep blues and purples as a different palette of flowers hit their stride.

Similarly, late summer will see waves of gold, yellow and orange. The whole project is called Super-bloom, after the American desert phenomenon when dormant wild flowers suddenly explode into life at the same time with dazzling results, usually after a downpour. That is a natural occurrence in the wilderness. Here in the inner city, it is all pre-arranged, with the emphasis on encouraging more insects and pollinators to come into the capital.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Mini lemon meringue pies

You can't beat classic lemon meringue pie with its marshmallowy topping and zingy centre. These individual versions are equally delicious

Makes 4 tarts Prepare 50 minutes + chilling Cook 45 minutes

You will need

For the pastry

- 220g plain flour
- 35g icing sugar
- 125g butter, diced
- 1 unwaxed lemon, finely grated zest and juice
- 1 British Free Range Large Egg yolk

For the filling

- 45g cornflour
- 2 unwaxed lemons, finely grated zest and juice, plus juice of 1 from the pastry
- 125g caster sugar
- 60g butter, cubed
- 1 tbsp Limoncello (optional)
- 2 British Free Range Large Egg yolks, beaten

For the meringue top

- 3 British Free Range Large Egg whites (2 from the filling and 1 from the pastry)
- 185g sugar
- 1 tsp cornflour

To do

1 To make the pastry, combine the flour, icing sugar and butter in a large mixing bowl and rub the ingredients together using your fingertips until they resemble breadcrumbs. Add the lemon zest and egg yolk (place the white into a large mixing bowl for the meringue topping) and mix with a round-bladed knife until the dough clumps together. Use your hands to briefly knead the dough to bring to a ball, then shape it into a flat disc, wrap and place in the fridge for 30 minutes.

2 Preheat the oven to 180°C, gas mark 4. You will need 4 x 10cm mini fluted loose-based tart tins. Roll the chilled pastry out to approximately 0.5cm in thickness. Cut out circles slightly larger than the individual tins, then gently place into each tin, pushing the dough right into the edges. Roll a rolling pin over the top of each tart to cut any excess pastry away neatly.

3 Cut 4 squares of baking parchment, scrunch then flatten out into each tart. Fill with baking beans (rice or lentils will work just as well) and bake for 20 minutes. After 15 minutes, remove the parchment and beans. Return to the oven for the remainder of the baking time. Set aside to cool while you make the filling.

4 For the filling, put the cornflour into a medium-sized saucepan. Add the juice from the lemon you've zested for the pastry and whisk to form a thin paste, then add the juice and finely grated zest from the remaining 2 lemons. Stir in the sugar and butter. Heat the mixture over a low heat for 4-5 minutes, whisking all the time, until slightly thickened and the butter has melted. Stir in the Limoncello, if using.

5 Separate the eggs, placing the 3 whites into a mixing bowl and add the 2 yolks to the saucepan. Whisk vigorously to combine. Bring to the boil and cook for a further 3-4 minutes, until the mixture has the consistency of lemon curd. Divide between the 4 pastry cases and leave to set while you make the topping.

6 Preheat the oven to 180°C, gas mark 4. For the meringue topping, whisk the egg whites on high speed until they form soft peaks. Add the sugar a

spoonful at a time, whisking after each addition. Continue to whisk for a few minutes once all the sugar has been added. The mixture should be glossy and hold stiff peak Add the cornflour and mix to combine.

7 Spoon the meringue onto the set filling, using the back of a spoon to swirl it into the edges of the pies to create an attractive topping. Bake for 15 minutes, or until the top is beginning to brown and is crisp to the touch. Allow the pies to cool to room temperature before serving. Store any leftover pies in the fridge, covered, for 2-3 days.

SPRING HAS SPRUNG!

DAVID WHEELER

Spring! There's no more energising word in the gardener's vocabulary.

Spring, wrote Maupassant in one of his 300-or-so short stories, is 'when the awakening earth puts on its garment of green, and the warm, fragrant air fans our faces and fills our lungs and appears even to penetrate to our hearts...'

Spring! 'The fields breathe sweet, the daisies kiss our feet/Young lovers meet, old wives a-sunning sit'- the poet Thomas Nashe said in the 16th century. The words, further immortalised by Benjamin Britten in his Spring Symphony of 1949, keep the season's rapturous potency alive in the music-loving gardener's ear.

It's impossible to conjure up spring's breathtaking miracles in the depths of winter - or, indeed, at any other season. So many nuances: diaphanous morning light, extended day length, rising temperatures, warm rain, sounds, scents and the very greenness of green. Bare twiggy transforms itself into curtains of leaves and petals - hatcheries and food for myriad insects new to the wing. These stirrings mingle and intoxicate us with a cocktail for the senses like nothing else.

You can garden early - before breakfast, if you're a lark - and in the evening, too, when the rest of the world has settled in front of the telly. You don't want to come in until after the last of the blackbirds has piped a tuneful good night.

The glory of spring in our garden in Herefordshire (pictured) is trumpeted by thousands of self-seeded aquilegias -creamy white, rose, lavender, maroon and deep indigo blue. Standing two feet tall, they have skilfully infiltrated all our borders. Like party bunting, they jostle with lime-green euphorbias (many of those self-seeded, too) and a host of

early-flowering perennials such as centaurea, diminutive violets and indispensable lilies-of-the-valley, whose own celebratory day - especially in France - is 1st May.

At dusk, Welsh poppies (*Meconopsis cambrica*) light up dim corners with flashes of cadmium yellow, some petals streaked with an orange flame. Iberis (candytuft) swamps the garden in perfume.

Yet more fragrance emanates from our avenue of 200 *Rhododendron luteum*

- deciduous azaleas with long-lasting yolky-yellow flowers. I bought them a few inches high for less than a pound each from a wholesaler ten years ago. They have now grown as tall as guardsmen, relishing our moist, acidic, clay soil. Thanks to Nature's own hand - not mine
- their skirts are hemmed with cowslips, multiplying pleasingly year by year.

Peonies are full of promise. Arrow-straight rods of burgundy stems, with leaves unfurling in a flush of similar hue, support golf-ball-sized buds that will open in great cups of primary colour. Their long, east-facing bed is shared by murky, midnight-blue and near-black irises and age-old Spanish bluebells, whose bulbs, should we wish to transplant them, are now too deeply buried for easy excavation.

Elsewhere, wide stands of three-foot tall lupins are lodged between pieces of glossy, evergreen box and yew topiary. There's no better 'old-fashioned' plant.

Lupins are enjoying a renaissance as gardeners re-evaluate their majesty and stately, space-filling potential.

Supremely, spring in this garden means apple blossom. Our orchard of 30 different varieties - dessert, culinary and cider - conjures up a froth of pink and white blossom just ahead of their ground-level companions: thousands of pale blue *Iris sibirica* 'Papillion' which peak around the third week of May - hitherto Chelsea Week, but not this year, when Chelsea is moving to September.

Spring! It means, in the 13th-century Wessex dialect and possibly the oldest of English songs, that 'Soomer is icoomen in'. As Gershwin and Ethel Merman sang on Broadway in 1931, 'Who could ask for anything more?'