

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS

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ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS	1
R.H.S. LONDON AND WISLEY	1
EDITORS NOTES	2
DATES FOR YOUR DIARY	2
IN MY ALLOTMENT	2
GARDENING CALENDAR MARCH	3
THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDEN	4
THIS MONTHS RECIPE	5
TIME TO PLANT A BURST OF COLOUR!	6
A PURPLE PATCH FOR GM FOOD	7

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- SPRING SHOW 8th APRIL
RHS Malvern Spring Festival – 11-14 May
 - PLANT SALE 6th MAY
RHS Chelsea Flower Show – 23–27 May
 - SUMMER SHOW 3rd JULY
RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show – 4–9 July
RHS Flower Show Tatton Park – 19–23 July
 - OUT MEETING 7th AUGUST
 - AUTUMN SHOW 9th SEPTEMBER
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IN MY ALLOTMENT

Danny Clarke

I need to get more disciplined and draw up proper crop plans but, at the moment, I still have brambles to clear in some parts, so it's not a fully functioning allotment yet. That's my excuse, anyway and, so far, a degree of chaos seems to be working out OK!

Back at home, the seeds I've sown indoors need good air circulation to avoid fungal infections, so I always uncover them during the day and never let condensation build up inside the lid. But at night I recover them to keep them warm until they have their first 'true' leaves - the second pair that appear after germination.

Then they need to be moved into bigger pots and, as soon as they start growing well, it's time to begin hardening them off. It's always tempting to leave them in the warm for too long, but I try to avoid it because any further growth will be weak and sappy, and the plants will struggle to cope outdoors later.

So I put them outside in their pots in a sheltered spot for a few hours during the day, gradually increasing the time until they are outdoors all day as soon as all risk of frost has passed.

My greenhouse was wrecked by the high winds earlier this year, but one good thing has come out of that. The soil in the little square where it once stood is

amazing because it was so well fed and had had lots of compost added, so I'm hoping for lots of healthy crops from there until it can be rebuilt.

Once cropping starts all over the plot, I'll be making sure I harvest everything regularly so that the plants carry on producing more - that's especially important with tomatoes, courgettes and all kinds of beans, otherwise they will go to seed. I can't wait!

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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THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDEN

A Sense of Community

In a community of gardeners, each of us has something to bring to the group. Our unique backgrounds, our families, where we are in life and what we are passionate about - all are like ingredients for stone soup. In the story of Stone Soup, a clever fellow asks the members of a community to each contribute to his soup, which so far consists only of water and a stone. Each person brings one item - a carrot, a potato, some salt. In the end everyone gets a bowl of soup and some new friends.

Sometimes gardeners can be more like the stone, sitting alone, doing our own thing. But even for those of us who are natural introverts, connecting with other like-minded gardeners strengthens our gardens and our own lives.

A COMMUNITY IS BORN

In Buddhism, a community is called a sangha. The spiritual sangha is based on the qualities of awareness, acceptance, understanding, harmony and love. An ideal gardening community would also include these qualities. As gardeners, we come from many different backgrounds, spiritual paths and gardening approaches, but we can all come together in a love of green and growing things. Community members can share the joy and pride of growing food or flowers. We can get excited about new techniques and resources. We can support each other when things don't go well. I find that my human gardening community is supportive on many levels, not just in the garden. When a member is struggling, or endures the loss of a loved one, we are there to support that person. When they want to celebrate, we are all there with a healthy dish to cheer them on. Love of the Earth and of each other are the foundations of our connection. Plants are powerful community builders, as we all rely on plants each day.

I didn't always have a human gardening community. My community actually grew out of a desire to legalize keeping chickens in an urban environment. We ended up bringing the largest group of citizens ever to an Aurora City Council meeting in support of legalizing urban chickens, and subsequently many of those people bonded through the experience. We connected online to talk about chickens, gardening and urban homesteading. Out of that group grew at least one small business selling organic feed, straw and honey, and one fledgling

non-profit group supporting local refugees. Local coffee shops have become gathering places for knitting circles, and a local urban farm offers classes in beekeeping, gardening and more. While I have chatted over the fence with neighbours on all sides of me, and with people I meet at the farmers' market or feed store, in my case community came about through social media. But it all started because of three women meeting in the kitchen of a local city council representative who supports green living.

MEETING IN THE ETHER AND IN REAL SPACE

We live in an exciting time. Connections online enable people who might not otherwise connect to find each other. I believe connecting with people from all walks of life and all parts of the globe is bringing us into a new way of life on Earth, one of connection, compassion and awareness. While certainly much of what happens online is not so positive, for the most part a growing community only strengthens our interconnections.

My favourite aspect of these communities is when we meet in real space. A gardening friend let me know she had alpaca manure should I want some. She brought me four bags of the stuff, which I gleefully spread all over my garden beds. I gave her my branch clippings, which she will use to make a hugelkultur bed (a raised bed filled with rotting wood). Each spring we gather at a friend's house for a seed swap; I've acquired seeds from this that I wouldn't otherwise be able to obtain, and encouraged new gardeners while sharing my own saved seeds.

Whether you gather together online, in person or both, connecting with other gardeners strengthens not just your garden and theirs, but our whole world. I have an image of pockets of gardeners, chicken owners, beekeepers and general plant lovers, overlapping circles connected all over the Earth. These overlapping spheres bring the values of love, awareness, harmony and acceptance to wherever they are needed. Even when we begin with just a stone, we can make a nourishing dish to nurture the land and each other. We can cover the Earth with connection and compassion, and with green and growing things to heal the planet and our place on it.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Date and walnut Cake

The pairing of some ingredients is similar to marriages made in heaven. Basil and tomato spring to mind, also egg and bacon and cheese and pickle. Another perfect pair: date and walnut.

You will need

3 oz. British butter

8 oz. dates
Quarter pint boiling water
3 oz. sugar
1 egg
8 oz. self-raising flour
1 tsp. baking powder
3 oz. roughly chopped walnuts

To do

Put the chopped dates into a bowl and cover with the boiling water. While the dates are steeping, you can proceed with the next step. In a large bowl place the butter, sugar, egg, flour and baking powder. Beat until properly blended. Add the walnuts. Add the dates along with the liquid they are in. Stir well. Spoon well into a well-buttered 2 lb. loaf tin. Bake in an oven gas mark 4 or 180°C (350°F) for about 75 to 90 mins. Check that the cake is well-risen and firm before removing from the oven. Allow to cool in the tin before removing carefully and placing on a wire rack to cool.

TIME TO PLANT A BURST OF COLOUR!

Spring-flowering shrubs will bring the garden back to life

Pam Richardson

SPRING flowers come in a riot of bright colours - the acid yellow blooms of forsythia, bright pink flowering currant and brilliant blue spring ceanothus. Even tough *Ulex europaeus* shows its soft side with a shower of golden flowers.

Spring shrubs can be large and imposing, but not all have to be relegated to the back of the border. Careful pruning helps keep them manageable and smaller shrubs such as spiraeas and cytisus can stay neat and attractive in the smallest garden.

When it comes to choosing a spring-flowering shrub look at neighbouring gardens to see what is growing well.

For foolproof spring colour choose forsythia or ribes, viburnum or spirea. Spiraea 'Arguta' is a mass of white blossom in spring and *S.japonica*

'Goldflame' has foliage that sparkles early on, even before its pink summer flowers appear.

Clothe walls with chaenomeles in bright red or play safe with paler shades. Hazels also have glorious catkins in spring and salix sport furry 'pussy willows' or try some of the more unusual spring-flowering shrubs such as Stachyurus praecox or Ribes odoratum, a yellow flowering currant.

When buying shrubs it helps to know what soil type you have. Enkianthus has pretty flowers in spring and thrives on acid soil. Camellias are lime haters and most magnolias need neutral to acid soil, although Magnolia wilsonii will tolerate alkaline soil.

Planting

Water the plants thoroughly and prepare the site by digging it over and taking out any weeds. Enrich the soil with some home-made compost or tree and shrub compost as you dig the planting hole.

Make the hole deep and wide enough to take the root ball without cramping. Gently ease the shrub out of its pot and plant it at the same level it was in the nursery, backfill with soil and firm in gently before watering in.

A PURPLE PATCH FOR GM FOOD

The first home-grown genetically modified food may be on the horizon, in the form of purple tomatoes, finds Clare Wilson

THE end of the tomato season is approaching in the UK, and I am weighing up the performance of the different varieties I grew and deciding which seeds to buy again. Next spring, US gardeners may have a new option to consider: the first genetically modified seeds for home growers could go on sale there, in the form of bright purple tomatoes.

GM food can be controversial, but the scientific consensus is now that plants with modified genes are no more liable to be unhealthy for us than unmodified ones. Foods containing GM ingredients, such as soybeans and maize, have been eaten in the US since the 1990s with no ill effects, but are banned from sale in many other countries. Even in the US, GM seeds are only sold to farmers.

That may change next year, since a GM tomato aimed at home growers has passed a key regulatory hurdle at the US Department of Agriculture. The tomatoes, from UK-based Norfolk Plant Sciences, have been modified to contain high levels of anthocyanins, antioxidant pigments found in other red or purple fruits and vegetables.

Naturally purple tomatoes are already available, but these only have high anthocyanin content in their skin. The GM tomatoes also have high levels in their flesh, leading to 10 times the amount of the compounds per fruit.

Anthocyanins have been shown in animal studies to protect cells from free radicals, highly reactive compounds that are formed when energy is released from glucose. Anthocyanins are said to reduce cancer and heart disease and to be part of the reason why people who eat more fruits and vegetables live longer. This hasn't been shown in randomised trials in humans - although that is also the case for most dietary health claims.

The GM tomatoes won't be sold with any specific health claims, just the vaguer statement that they are "nutritionally enhanced". But these fruits have a benefit that is easier to demonstrate and that I think is more interesting.

The high anthocyanin levels seem to protect them from grey mould, a fungal infection that is often a problem for tomato plants in greenhouses and one that also affects tomatoes after harvest. After picking, the modified

tomatoes have double the shelf life of unmodified ones, research by the developers has shown.

Cathie Martin at the John Innes Centre in Norwich, UK, who co-founded Norfolk Plant Sciences and led the team that developed the tomatoes, says the seeds should be popular as home growers like trying out new plant varieties.

That is true for me. I am now coping with a glut of tomatoes, and they sometimes go mouldy. If it becomes possible to buy seeds for high-anthocyanin tomatoes in the UK, I will be keen to put them to a taste test. I bet they would look fabulous in a salad.