

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 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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THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Hack your mac'n'cheese

You won't need to make a flour roux for your macaroni cheese if you cook your pasta in milk rather than water, says Sam Wong

What you need

For 3 to 4 servings:

300 g macaroni

600 ml milk

350 ml water

65 g butter

1tsp salt

75 ml double cream

350 g grated Cheddar

CHEESE sauce is one of the first things I remember learning to cook as a child. You melt butter in a pan, whisk in the flour and cook for 2 minutes. Then, gradually add the milk, whisking vigorously to avoid lumps. Simmer until it thickens, then mix in the cheese.

I must have made macaroni cheese this way dozens of times, but I might never do so again since learning of an ingenious shortcut.

Before I get to that, let's consider why we need flour in a cheese sauce in the first place. The starch in flour plays two important roles here. One is to thicken the sauce. When heated up in milk or water, starch granules swell and burst, releasing amylose and amylopectin molecules throughout the liquid. These long

chains of carbohydrate get tangled together, forming a loose matrix that raises the liquid's viscosity.

Starch's other role is to stabilise the melted cheese. Cheese contains water and milk fat, which has a tendency to separate out when it melts, forming a greasy layer on the surface. When cheese is heated up, the molecules of the protein casein it contains can link together with calcium to form long chains, making the cheese stringy.

Processed cheeses contain salts such as sodium citrate that stabilise the emulsion, helping to ensure they melt smoothly rather than splitting. The negative ions in the salt associate with calcium ions in the cheese, preventing the latter from forming links between protein molecules and thus preventing stringiness. Starch performs a similar role, albeit less effectively. The starch matrix helps the fat globules remain dispersed, so the fat doesn't separate, and ensures the protein molecules can't easily link together.

You can buy sodium citrate and use it to make a smooth cheese sauce without flour. But you can also ditch the flour by relying on another source of starch: pasta.

Pasta releases lots of starch into the water as it cooks. Chefs often add a splash of this starchy water to oil-based sauces to help them emulsify and become creamy. Cacio e pepe - pasta with cheese sauce the Italian way - isn't made with a flour roux, but by mixing grated pecorino romano with starchy pasta water, along with some olive oil or butter.

That brings us to the clever shortcut to macaroni cheese:

instead of making a flour roux,
cook the pasta in milk,
then stir the cheese into the same pot.

The starch released from the pasta will emulsify and thicken the sauce **without having to add any flour.**

This makes for a sauce that tastes more cheesy and less floury.

I learned this from Noor Murad and Yotam Ottolenghi's Shelf Love.

Here is a basic recipe using the same technique. Put the pasta, milk, water, butter and salt in a large saucepan. Bring to a simmer, then turn the heat low and cook for 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in the cream and cheese, check the seasoning and serve.

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THE FLOWER-POWER YEARS

David Wheeler

I've rediscovered my 1967 gardening diary.

I was 21 that year, blessed with all the world's energy and a garden to spend it on. My father had died in 1964, vacating family, home and garden at the agonisingly early age of 51.

I had gardened beside him throughout my childhood; his tools became mine; his modest stretches of tilled earth passed to me.

That 1967 Boots Scribbling Diary recalls my first visit to Kew Gardens on 20th March, a 140-mile round trip with a friend in her cramped Austin A30. Admission was thruppence - 2p in new money, with the purchasing power today of 45p. Should I venture thus far now, Kew would relieve me of around £20 for a day's sojourn.

I was no scribe in those days. I now painfully read (spelling corrected) that 'T was revealed a world of both European and tropical splendour'. I was seemingly excited by calceolarias, cinerarias and coleus under glass, and a 'glorious' forsythia, camellias, rhododendrons 'and all the species of the Prunus family' growing outside.

I recorded magnolias with 'enchancing fragrance' and swooned over daffodils 'naturalised on grassy slopes under fine specimens of world-wide trees'. Youthful exuberance...

That 100-word diary entry, scribbled with a fountain pen, closed with the regret that 'if only there were time to see all - but I'm sure there will be - on a future occasion'.

Future occasions there were. Many of them. Three years later, newly employed by the Observer newspaper in London, I found lodgings within two miles of Kew and became a frequent Saturday visitor.

Nowadays I use my phone camera to record plants and horti adventures. Date, time and place are logged automatically, leaving me simply to tap out a short caption for later ID purposes.

My 1967 gardening diary fizzles out in mid-April that year: 'Tulips coming on fine'; 'All clarkia seedlings lost owing to lack of attention' (what, I'd love to know, distracted me?); 'Attended pansy bed which cats have done their best to destroy'; 'Fed roses with Rose Sangral at 1 dessert-spoon per gallon of water'. Last entry (April 8): 'Put germinated aster [seeds] back under cloche'.

At the back of the diary, on a page headed 'Memoranda for 1968', I noted the 41 varieties of fuchsias I was growing and the payment of my membership to the

British Fuchsia Society (founded in 1938 and still going strong, without my support).

I was growing seven hybrid tea and floribunda roses, including the fragrant, dark red 'Chrysler Imperial', the then ubiquitous 'Super Star' and French-bred 'Tzigane'.

I also grew a few roses as standards all those years ago - a now seemingly passe form of cultivation, last coming my way when I interviewed the late great rosarian Graham Stuart Thomas in the mid-1990s at his home near Woking. (By the way, make a note to see, in June, Thomas's nonpareil collection of mostly old roses in the walled gardens at Mottisfont Abbey in Hampshire - admission £18 if you're not a National Trust member.)

I see, too, that in 1967 I bought 'a hydrangea' (variety unrecorded). While I've turned my back on fuchsias and hybrid tea roses, I revel in hydrangeas, harbouring some 200 different varieties which are settling in happily in this near-coastal garden in South West Wales. Hydrangeas like it wet- 'nuff said.

I had no idea until a few weeks ago that my 1967 garden diary had survived. Some 60 years, I'm still digging, buying plants and scribbling

SEED SCOOP!

New Trust scheme seeks the Cinderella tree species missing from our woods

KAREN RUSSELL IS Britain's tree-hunter supreme, and she's embarking on her greatest mission yet - to scour 80 Woodland Trust woods for the seeds we need to reforest the nation.

Government targets suggest that to hit UK net zero, 1.5 billion saplings must be planted by 2050. But there's a problem: the supply of many native species can fall woefully short, because their seed is hard to find or unviable to collect and grow. Now the Trust has scooped £153,000 from the Forestry Commission to help plug the gaps - and hired Karen to do the legwork.

"I have eight priority trees on my hit list," says the Cambridgeshire consultant. "They include neglected species like whitebeam, wild service and small-leaved lime, which had fallen out of fashion in planting schemes. But also common ones like holly and hazel, where too much seed is currently sourced from a narrow geographical gene pool - not great news for the long-term resilience of

our woodland habitat." Last month Karen embarked on a grand tour of Trust woods right across England, bent on finding stands of trees where seed can be collected. Her search extends from Shank Wood, north of Carlisle, to Ausewell, near Torquay. "The Trust estate is an untapped reservoir for seed collection," she explains, "so my target for each species is to get four stands on the official UK register, and ten for hazel. I'm braced for many miles of walking, and a fair bit of scrambling over woodbanks and ditches!"

The story won't end there. Together with the charity Fellowship of the Trees, the Trust is also launching a sister project to get forgotten species propagated and grown. Bankrolled by a further £157,000 from the same funder, this will train and equip a network of community tree nurseries across four English regions - the North West, the East, East Midlands and South West.

"We'd like to get about ten nurseries involved," says our tree supply chief Matthieu Baudry, "and will match them up with local seed sites we've identified. There is a social dimension too - we want to support small growers and engage volunteers, rather than simply putting more business the way of a few large tree nurseries."

This second strand echoes a Trust initiative in Wales. Now in its third year, CommuniTree has tooled up 11 nurseries from Cardiff to Conwy, in tandem with the community woodlands group Llais y Goedwig. The scheme has laid on 25 work-shops and woodland visits so far, and volunteer seed-gatherers are roving out in Wales's Celtic rainforests to supply them with hagenuts and acorns of local provenance (left) - vital if saplings are to thrive once back in the wild. » Fancy getting involved? More collecting days are planned this autumn, including at Coed Bryn Meurig, near Bangor, and Coed Cwm Einon in Ceredigion: visit celticrainforests.wales/events.

WOODS AND HEDGES

Britain was once covered with trees, and surviving fragments of this original 'wildwood' often provide the most exciting habitats for wild flowers. Places that have had thousands of years in which to develop plant communities are likely to be richer than recently established areas, but this does not mean that the best woods are untouched or forgotten. In fact regular management, the cropping of mature standard trees and the cutting or coppicing of underwood, increases the light reaching the herb layer and benefits the flowers. Also, ancient woodland often appears in unlikely places, not always in extensive blocks but in tiny scraps in field corners, on steep banks and as farm shelter belts.

In the south of England the pedunculate oak is the dominant native tree, providing a classic wildlife habitat on clay soils. But there are some fascinating beechwoods too, mainly on chalk, and & on the limestone hills in the west and north Midlands there are some fine ashwoods. In the north, sessile oakwoods fill many steep gorges, and in Scotland there are superb birch and pine forests. All of these different types of woodland have their own special beauty. More recent mixed plantations should not be dismissed; there will always be something of interest. Even the dullest conifer plantations, with their rows of shadowy spruce trees destined to be clear felled and pulped, may actually have been planted over the remains of an ancient wood and be full of flowers along forest rides and clearings.

In many ways hedges are little more than linear woods and have most of the flowers that thrive in clearings. Some hedges are actually the remnants of long-vanished blocks of wildwood, or were planted in Anglo-Saxon times so that they are of historic as well as botanic interest.

Woodland flowers can tolerate some shade but respond well to sunlight, so rides, pathways and clearings are the best places to look when the canopy is closed and the forest floor is in shadow. Spring or 'vernal' species avoid the problem by flowering before the trees are in leaf, carpeting the ground for two or three weeks and producing one of the most magical sights of the British countryside.

WOOD ANEMONE *Anemone nemorosa* Wood anemone is a flower of the early spring, carpeting many old woods but especially abundant in places where coppicing is still practised. It also occurs in pastures and on mountain slopes. The anemone gets its name from the Greek anemos meaning wind, and it is still known as the windflower in many parts of the country. The flower, about 3cm in diameter, is composed of 5, 6 or more sepals, white in colour but tinged purple/pink. These radiate out from a bunch of yellow stamens with a core of green carpels. The leaves are deeply forked, a group of three half-way up the flower stem with other groups, springing from roots or rhizomes, appearing nearby.

The effect of coming upon a glittering sea of anemones in an otherwise wintry and leafless wood is breathtaking. In cloudy or dull weather the flowers half close and nod, but in sunshine they open fully, extending the plant to a height from 5—30cm. The flowers are virtually scentless (but give them a try, according to Geoffrey Grisgson they are supposed to smell 'rather unpleasant.. . yet.. . intriguing'). They produce no nectar and are pollinated by bees and wasps intent on stealing pollen.