

**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](mailto:ernestperry33@gmail.com) hard copy to Chris

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## TRIPS FOR 2022

Please note the **OUT Meeting for Garden Club Members on 1st August** is being split into 2 separate visits. 1 in afternoon and 1 in evening.

The garden we are going to cannot cope with over 30 people at the same time. So we are visiting in 2 shifts

1 Bus leaving Hall at 2pm and returning to Hall approx. 5pm **NOW FULL**

2 Bus leaving Hall at 6:30pm and returning to Hall approx. 9:30pm

Cost is free to Members (sorry no non-members on this trip), Teas etc available at garden to be paid for by members

Due to limitation of numbers can you please BOOK your place with me for 2nd Bus. On a first come first served basis

**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**

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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show – 4–9 July

RHS Flower Show Tatton Park – 20–24 July

**AUTUMN SHOW MOVED TO 17th September**

**GARDENING CALENDAR JULY**

July is a time of vigorous growth and flowering – and for the gardener, this is the time for properly managing all that growth.

**Weed, feed and dead-head**

Continue vigilant weed control. Up the feeding: seasonal patio displays and baskets will do well with a weekly dose of liquid tomato fertiliser.

Dead-head bedding plants to encourage more flowers; cut back delphiniums and geraniums after the first flowers to encourage a second flowering, then feed with Blood, Fish and Bone. Tie in vigorous climbers firmly to their supports.

**Water**

July often brings the hottest summer weather, so up the water for the plants that need it. Bedding plants, leafy vegetables, seedlings and new plantings are most prone to drying out. Ideally, water your plants early in the morning or in the evening; avoid watering during the hottest part of the day.

**Protect**

Some pests thrive in hot summer conditions, so check susceptible plants – such as roses – for blackspot, mildew and rust, which can be rife right now.

**Maintain water features**

Water features will need care, too: use a rake to thin out any overgrown oxygenating plants and algae from ponds. Top up ponds in hot weather, ideally with water-butt water.

**Don't mow**

If it's dry, stop mowing the lawn, or, if possible, raise the height of cut. Brown patches in hot spells are inevitable but the lawn will quickly recover, so there's no need to water.

**Paint**

Dry summer weather is good for your garden outbuildings and fencing: paint wooden sheds, fences, arches and arbours now.

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**PAKCHOI**

SIMON COURTAULP

Sweden produced two outstanding botanists in the 18th century: Carl Linnaeus and the slightly less-well-known Pehr Osbeck.

Before in later life becoming a vicar, Osbeck spent time in China and brought back hundreds of new plant species, including the seeds of a vegetable now known as pak choi or bok choi.

Seed sown under glass this month (March/April) may produce enough leaves to cut after five weeks. The thinned plants may then be transplanted into the ground, or grown on in pots.

Alternatively, sow the seed outside from May onwards, and the pale green or white stems should be ready for harvesting in two to three months.

But beware of bolting. There are varieties of pak choi described as bolt-resistant, but all are in danger of running to seed if the soil temperature is too low in the early stages of growth and the plants are short of water during the long June days. Perhaps the best advice is to treat the immature leaves as a cut-and-come-again vegetable, and to wait until after midsummer before sowing seed for a mature crop.

Like other greens with a tendency to bolt, pak choi will benefit from an August sowing, as long as the soil is mulched with garden compost or horse manure and given regular watering. The plants will thrive in warm temperatures and with shortening days, and are unlikely to run to seed. One variety, Joi Choi, it is claimed, can be sown until October and is resistant to frost. But it is likely to need some protection.

As with all brassicas, oriental greens are prey to pigeons, caterpillars and cabbage root fly. If East and West are to be kept apart - 'and never the twain shall meet' - an attractive Chinese patch can be grown in a separate area of the kitchen garden. The seeds of Chinese cabbage, mizuna and

komatsuna (spinach mustard), together with pak choi, could be mixed and broadcast over a bed of well-prepared soil that has plenty of moisture.

When the leaves are ready for cutting, they may then be stir-fried, Chinese style, with garlic, ginger and soy sauce.

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## **THE MESSAGE OF THE GARDEN**

### **The Magic of Photosynthesis**

Inside all the beautiful green leaves of the plant kingdom, magic occurs. Some call it science, but really it is both. Photons of light bounce off chlorophyll molecules, setting off a chain of events that produces plant energy in the form of glucose, and the by-product of oxygen. Because of this 'technology' created by plants 450 million years ago, we are alive today. We grow photosynthesis factories in our gardens. Whether you regard the process as purely scientific or a miracle, or both, you tuck little seeds into soil as an invocation of photosynthesis. A garden or a farm is a request of the universe to please transform sunlight, carbon dioxide and water into energy that we can use to dance and dream and love. Most of the time, this request is honoured, and we get both fresh air and salad in the process. Miraculous!

Plants photosynthesize without thinking about it. They don't have to try to make sugar, they just do. Perhaps we can learn from them in this - be grateful for the natural processes our bodies carry out without conscious effort, and express our gifts just as 'something we do'. Sometimes our gifts feel easy to execute, and we feel nourished by them. At other times, they feel more like a chore, or expressing our gifts pushes against self-doubt or fear. We can remember the plants photosynthesizing for the good of all, and settle into our own gifts without fear.

### **A MATTER OF BALANCE**

Photosynthesis is a balance of give and take, which is something I am learning to do myself. I'm a giver, having taken on the role early in life to care for everyone around me; but givers can easily slip into

over-giving without even realizing until they are exhausted, cranky and have a headache. Plants have no choice in the matter; if there is not

enough light, enough water or enough carbon, they cannot produce glucose and oxygen. There has to be a balance. Of course, the same is true for human giving and receiving, but the breakdown occurs more slowly than in a plant. Humans who give and give eventually fall apart and can give no more. Their bodies demand care and attention. Is there a way we can learn from plants and other natural systems of balance to take care of ourselves now, before we crash? One way we can nourish ourselves is by eating plants, literally taking the products of photosynthesis into our own bodies. One of the quickest ways to balance and health is to eat lots and lots of plants.

We are not plants, but perhaps we can gain more balance in our own giving and receiving by being more like a plant for a moment. Sitting still, breathing, being in this moment only. In other words, practising mindfulness. When we are mindful, we allow ourselves to settle into observation of what I ebb and flow. It is then that we more readily notice in what ways we have 'efforted' ourselves out of balance, and we can gently see how to right ourselves. By gently witnessing our resistance to what is, we can begin either to dissolve that resistance or to take calm steps towards changes that need to be made. We seek to return to the balance that a healthy plant naturally expresses.

#### EXPRESSING OUR LIGHT

Photosynthesis is respiration in reverse. Respiration is essentially breathing, and it means to re-spirit, to re-breathe. We breathe, and we are filled with spirit again and again. Whether we breathe mindfully as we sit still as a rooted plant, or we re-spirit as we garden in a moving meditation, we reflect the natural processes of energy production and transformation of light. In spiritual teachings across cultures, we are also made of light, the bright light that glows within. Expressing our gifts - in a balanced dance of give and take - is a way we share this light with the world. 'Synthesis' means to put together, so we perform our own version of photosynthesis - putting together light - when we take the experiences we have had, our natural gifts and the skills we have developed, synthesize them and share them with the world.

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**THIS MONTHS RECIPE****How to make juicy jam**

We all love home-made jam, but getting it right means grappling with the chemistry of pectin, says Sam Wong

**What you need**

1 kilogram of fruit such as strawberries, blackberries or raspberries

1 kg sugar

Pectin (or use jam sugar, or add an apple to the fruit)

MAKING jam is a great way to enjoy a glut of summer fruit. Sugar preserves work rather like a salt cure, with the high concentration of sugar drawing water out of microbial cells. Because sugar molecules are heavier than sodium and chloride ions, you need a lot more sugar to do the job. That is why jams are often made with a roughly equal weight of sugar to fruit.

The moist yet solid consistency of jams and jellies comes from the physical structure of a gel, a sponge-like network that traps water molecules in separate pockets. The network is made from pectin, a polymer made of long chains of sugar molecules, found in plant cell walls.

Fruits such as quinces, apples and citrus fruits are high in pectin. For other fruits, you can add pectin to ensure that the jam sets - there is even a special jam sugar containing pectin for this purpose, though adding an apple to a batch of low-pectin fruit also works.

To make the jam, start by heating the fruit gently with a little water to soften it. As it is heated, the pectin chains come loose from the cell walls and dissolve in the fluid released. In water, pectin molecules become negatively charged and repel each other, so they need help to join together into a gel network. Adding sugar when the fruit is cooked aids this: it helps the gel to form by attracting water molecules to itself, so the pectin molecules are more exposed to each other.

Acid released when the fruit is heated neutralises the negative charges, allowing the pectin chains to bond. Bringing the mixture to the boil to evaporate water also helps bring the pectin molecules closer together. Some recipes call for lemon juice to be added at this stage, which provides additional pectin and acidity.

The most challenging part of jam-making is knowing when to stop cooking the mixture and pour it into jars. Too early and the mixture won't have "reduced" enough for the jam to set; boil it for too long and the pectin breaks up too much, stopping it from becoming jam.

One way to tell is to use a thermometer: the more water that is evaporated, the hotter the mixture gets. When it reaches 105°C, this indicates a sugar concentration of about 65 per cent, normally about right for the pectin molecules to join together (though that does depend on acidity and other factors). Another way is to chill a saucer in the freezer, then place a blob of jam on it. If the surface of the jam mixture "wrinkles" when you poke it with your finger, the jam will set and you should stop cooking.

If it fails to set, it may be because there wasn't enough good-quality pectin in it, or that the pectin was damaged by prolonged heating. Or perhaps the mixture lacked enough acid. Re-boiling it and adding liquid pectin or more acid may help.

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## **HARRIDAN OR HEROINE?**

### **The life and times of a gardening genius**

Ellen Ann Willmott is remembered for her grouchiness rather than her horticultural talents, but the plot has thickened as biographer Sandra Lawrence sets the record straight in a new book. She talks to Emma Higginbotham

Miss Willmott's Ghost - official name *eryngium giganteum* - is a type of sea holly. Invasive and prickly, it's named after an equally prickly horticulturalist, Ellen Ann Willmott, who carried its seeds in her pocket to spitefully sprinkle in other people's gardens. Or so the story goes, and they get more colourful the deeper you dig.

A sharp-tongued eccentric, Miss Willmott was infamous for keeping a gun in her handbag, booby trapping daffodils and being horrible to her gardeners. Someone even accused her of strangling a budgie.

But gardening writer Sandra Lawrence isn't so sure. She's spent the last five years rifling through Ellen's archive of damp letters, dusty photographs and mouldy paraphernalia to uncover the real story. The result is a new book, *Miss Willmott's Ghosts*, a fascinating riches-to-rags tale of humour,



heartbreak and some seriously green fingers. "There are things Ellen did that I can't defend, but its important not to just erase somebody because there are bits about her that, frankly, we would cancel today," says Sandra. "I realise that she has some serious feet of clay, but she also has some really amazing qualities, and I want to celebrate both."

Born in 1858, Ellen Willmott was one of gardening's greats. She was famed for her spectacular collections of prize-winning daffs and roses and, thanks to a stupendously rich godmother, owned glorious gardens in France, Italy and at home in Warley Place, near Brentwood, Essex. Hugely important in its time, the 30-acre site featured an alpine ravine with streams and grottos, and more than 100 gardeners tended its thousands of rare plants. Today it no longer exists, having long been swallowed up by nature.

For Sandra, who grew up a couple of miles away, visiting Warley as a child was always a thrill. "I treated it as my own personal secret garden," she says. "It was only when I grew up that I started thinking: 'Who made this extraordinary place? And why was it abandoned?' "Everybody I asked was less interested than I expected, generally because Ellen's considered to have been 'not very nice', but I just found myself drawn to her." Ellen's true gift was for cultivation. She co-funded plant-hunting trips from China to South America in search of unusual species, "and of the seeds that were sent back, Ellen was often the only one who could grow them," says Sandra. "She did a lot of plant breeding, and won stupid amounts of cups, prizes, medals and certificates. And she had these three extraordinary gardens."

In addition to Warley, Ellen's cliff garden at Boccanegra, near Ventimiglia on the Italian Riviera brimmed with succulents, spiky plants and huge aloes, while her hillside garden at Tresserve, in the French Alps, featured wisteria-draped pergolas, ornamental gourds and vines, as well as 12,000 roses of 900 different varieties. Yet in spite of her prowess, Ellen became persona non grata at the Royal Horticultural Society. In 1897, she and Gertrude Jekyll were the only two women (and 58 men) to win the inaugural Victoria Medal of Honour, gardening's highest award - but Ellen didn't turn up. It was seen as an unforgivable snub.

After unearthing eyebrow-raising love letters, Sandra believes she knows why. In 1894, it seems Ellen began a relationship with Georgina Mary 'Gian' Tufnell, lady-in-waiting to Princess Mary of Teck. They spent three

blissful years together until, out of the blue, Gian got engaged to a Canadian railroad magnate, with the wedding set for the day after the RHS ceremony. Stung, Ellen hid away.

"I'm fully expecting to be shot down by Willmott aficionados that can't possibly imagine she had an affair with a woman, but all I can do is look at what I've found and try and make sense of it," says Sandra. "And for me, if it's nothing to do with gender, it's just good, old-fashioned heartbreak."

Ellen's problems spiralled. Rheumatism left her with crippling back pain, her sister left Essex for Worcestershire with her husband, then her mother died. Lonely and depressed, she fell out with neighbours (one threatened to shoot her), and spent her entire inheritance on gardening obsessions. She became known as a miser who refused to pay bills, employees and tradesmen. The truth was she'd run out of cash. Her reputation as a cantankerous oddball seemed set, yet from newly discovered documents, Sandra sees a talented, misunderstood woman in a man's world, who maintained her dry sense of humour until her death in 1934.

"Ellen was a difficult character, but if you were her friend, you were really her friend," she says. "She'd give you sackfuls of plants to put in your garden, and send you nice things, from mushrooms to Bovril. She genuinely wanted to be generous and helpful." It's also thanks to Ellen that we have RHS Garden Wisley - she was the one who persuaded her friend, Sir Thomas Hanbury, to buy and donate it to the Society.

As for maliciously spreading sea holly, Sandra doesn't believe that story. "It'd be nice to imagine she was the first seed bomber, but I can't imagine she'd do it regularly. Ellen liked it. She even had its portrait painted." Perhaps she was sprinkling it out of kindness.