


Ash Parish Garden Club

www.ashparishgardenclub.org.uk

 ash parish garden club



Monthly Newsletter Apr 2021

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS

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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.

GET SOWING

With the seed-sowing season upon us in earnest, now is the time to buy seeds from your local garden centre or a reputable online UK seed supplier. At the same time buy some seed-sowing or multipurpose compost and some small seed trays and get sowing!

Heated propagators are not essential, but they will dramatically increase the range of plants you can grow. The instructions on the seed packet should make it clear whether or not extra heat is required. If you do use one, remove the seedlings when they appear then grow them on somewhere with plenty of natural light and, often, a fair degree of warmth.

A common problem is algae covering the surface of the compost when you sow slow-germinating seeds. Using a freshly opened bag of compost and mains water reduces the chance of algae getting into the seed tray, and make sure your watering can is really clean. A thin layer of vermiculite on the surface of the compost can also help.

Seeds come in an amazing array of shapes and sizes. Tiny seeds like begonias and lobelias must be more thinly spread or a congested thicket of seedlings competing for light, food, water and space that is more prone to diseases will result. Buy yourself some fine horticultural silver sand, make sure it is thoroughly dry and then mix the seed from the packet in about half a teaspoonful of sand before you sow. Play sand used in children's sand pits works well too.

I always recommend sowing seed into compost before you wet it and then, once the seeds have been sown, water the seed tray or pot by standing it in the sink or in a tray of water, with the water about 1cm in depth. This will allow the moisture to be taken up without disturbing the seeds' position.

Prick seedlings out when they are large enough to handle, but take care. Wait until there are the two seed leaves (larger, chunkier and differently shaped from the true seedling leaves) plus a pair of true seedling leaves.

With tiny seedlings I tend to transplant or prick them out in blocks, gently easing them apart slightly as I pop them into their new compost. Make sure the compost is moist but not saturated to minimise root damage.

Use a small dibber (or a pencil) to carefully ease the roots out, handling the top part of the seedling by the seed leaves, never by the stem. Make sure you put the seedlings into their new home immediately and water them in from the base, so that the compost and its moisture are in close contact with the fine roots.

Pippa

POETS CORNER

Auriculas

See how the Bears Eares* in their several dresses
(That yet no poets pen to hight expresses)
Each head adorned with such rich attire.
Which fools and clowns may slight, whilst skil'd admire.
Their gold, their purples, scarlets, crimson dyes,
Their dark and lighter hair'd diversities.
With all their pretty shades and Ornaments,
Their parti-colour'd coats and pleasing scents.
Gold laid on scarlet, silver on the blew
With sparkling eyes to take the eyes of you.
Mixt colours, many more to please that sense,
Others with rich and great magnificence,
In double Ruffs, with gold and silver laced,
On purple crimson and so neatly placed.
Ransack Flora's wardrobes, none sure can bring
More taking Ornaments t' adorn the spring.

SAMUEL GILBERT (17th century)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

SPRING SHOW	TBA
PLANT SALE	8th May (Not at Hall). Send orders to Hazel
RHS Malvern (spring)	6 - 9 May
SUMMER SHOW	TBA
RHS Hampton Court	6 - 11 July
RHS Tatton Park	21 - 25 July
AUTUMN SHOW	TBA
RHS Chelsea	21 - 26 Sep

GARDENING CALENDAR APRIL

April is a transitional month that can often bring unpredictable weather, so what will need doing in the garden is largely dependent on the weather conditions.

Plant

As a general rule, this is the time for planting up, supporting young plants, and for forward planning ahead of the summer. Sow tomatoes, runner beans, basil, green pepper, marrow, courgettes and sweet corn in individual modules undercover for planting after the frost.

April is the best time for creating new container displays. If there's space, pot plug plants into larger pots – cheaper than buying bigger pot plants in a month's time. Plant up summer baskets and grow undercover before positioning in late May. Sow half-hardy bedding plants in seed trays or cell trays undercover.

Maintain water features

If you have a water feature in your garden, now is the time to give it its annual round of post-winter maintenance. Clear out ponds: take out planting baskets and fish (keep in buckets of old pond water), bail out the water, remove sludge and refill. Rainwater is best, but let tap water stand for a week before putting fish back in. Plant new pond plants using special pond baskets from garden centres.

Protect

Now is the time to watch out for early pests and diseases – hit them hard now to avoid problems later on. Use fine Environmesh to protect young carrots from carrot root fly.

April can still bring frosty nights, so protect tender flowers and vegetables from late frosts – keep horticultural fleece on standby. Young, upright-growing plants will need some form of support: stake tall perennials such as delphiniums and sunflowers with 'grow through' supports.

Go indoors

Don't forget the house plants, either: water and feed more often now they're actively growing.

CHINA WATCH

Crops with roots in space produce heavenly results
Technology plays vital role in combating rural poverty
BY ZHANG ZHIHAO

Humanity's desire for high-yielding crops is as old as civilization itself. In China, this is best illustrated by the fact that 41 of the country's 56 ethnic groups have their own myths about the creation of fertile seeds, according to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Ethnic Literature.

The Dong ethnic group believe that seeds were bestowed by deities showing compassion to mortals; according to the folklore of the Wa ethnic group, they were spat out by a world-devouring snake slain by the Heaven God.

Now, modern technologies have produced quality seeds from an equally fantastic source: outer space.

These seeds have produced a range of crops, from vines that can sprawl across 150 square meters (1,610 sq. ft.) of land and bear 10,000 tomatoes, to giant black-eyed pea sprouts measuring nearly a meter long, the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp said.

This progress has been achieved through space-induced mutation breeding, also known as space mutagenesis. In China, hundreds of varieties of space crops have been planted nationwide. They are a key pillar supporting food security, as well as an innovative approach to improving farmers yields and combating rural poverty.

The International Atomic Energy Agency defines space-induced mutation breeding as a technique in which seeds are taken into space and exposed to strong cosmic rays – high-energy particles travelling close to the speed of light – as well as other conditions such as vacuums, microgravity and low levels of geomagnetic interference.

This method does not involve transferring genes from one organism to another, as is the case with genetically modified food. Instead, it generates random but potentially useful traits by using a plant's genetic material, mimicking the natural process of spontaneous mutation, albeit at a significantly accelerated rate, the agency said.

Since the 1920s, seeds have been exposed to radiation or chemicals by scientists to induce greater yield, stability and adaptability to climate change. More than 2,500 varieties of plants bred through mutagenesis have been officially released, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization, a UN agency.

Space is a new setting to conduct this time-tested breeding method, and the IAEA, FAO and the World Health Organization consider space crops safe to consume, as long as they pass rigorous testing and approval processes.

In the 1960s the United States and the Soviet Union carried out space mutation breeding for scientific research and to make living in space more sustainable for astronauts.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Coffee & walnut cake

Serves: 8 Prep: 20 mins Cook: 30 mins

You will need

For the sponge:

- 225g unsalted butter, softened, plus extra for greasing
- 225g caster sugar
- 4 eggs, beaten
- 50ml strong espresso coffee
- 225g self-raising flour
- 75g walnuts, crushed but not fine

For the buttercream topping:

- 125g unsalted butter
- 200g icing sugar
- 50ml strong espresso coffee
- 12 walnut halves, to decorate
- 2 x20cm/8in round cake tins - lined and greased

To do

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/Fan 160°C/ Gas Mark 4.
2. In a bowl, beat the butter and sugar together until very light and pale.
3. Gradually add the eggs, incorporating each addition before adding more.
4. Add the espresso to the mixture, stir.
5. Fold in the flour and walnuts.
6. Spoon the cake mixture into 2 lined and greased 20cm round tins.
7. Bake 25-30 min's until springy to touch and comes away from the sides.
8. Remove the cakes from the oven, leave in tins for 5 min's before turning out, leave to cool on a wire rack
9. To make the butter cream topping beat the butter and icing sugar together until pale and light.
10. Add the espresso and mix well.
11. Spread the buttercream over the top of each cake, then place one cake on top of the other.
12. Decorate the top of the cake with the walnut halves and serve.

THE TULIP

DAVID WHEELER

TULIP BULBS ARE 'easily held in the hand, a thin dry papery layer protecting the softer tissues within'. Thus Helen and William Bynum in their highly readable *Remarkable Plants That Shape Our World* (Thames & Hudson in association with Kew, 2014), who go on to say that 'great potential lies deep inside. For here, in the centre of the scales that will provide its nourishment, is a new stem. At its tip is the embryonic flower bud ... [opening eventually] for a glorious two weeks or so of unbridled beauty'.

I know many gardeners who treat their tulips as annuals, digging up the bulbs and discarding them each year after flowering in the firm belief that the following year's blooms, if they appear at all, will be much diminished. This of course is not the case with wild tulips

- the species plants found naturally occurring in a vast tract of land centred on the Middle and Near East. These -generally desirous of poor, well-drained soil and minimal disturbance - have different needs from our popular cultivated garden tulips. True, many of these, commonly procured in the autumn from shops and by mail order, don't do so well repeatedly in the garden, but planted sufficiently deep -12 inches is not too much, although you might need to hire some young muscle to do the planting

- they should give generously of themselves for half a dozen years at least. The variety 'Abu Hassan', deep mahogany red with flashes of outrageous orange, has unfailingly popped up over the past decade in our wettish north Herefordshire garden.

The elegantly tall April-flowering cheap-as-chips 'Purissima' (aka 'White Emperor'), with petals the colour of old ivory piano keys, will run for a good stretch longer if the bulbs are given that initial deep burial. A while ago I persuaded a friend to plant them beneath cushions of lavender to get both a spring and summer show from one (formal) bed. My chum's gardener objected and had to be convinced but, perennially, that combination swings on, the tulips nosing their way triumphantly each year through the lavender's tough and woody superstructure.

Tulips play a large part in my life at the moment. Halfway through writing a book about the parks and gardens of Istanbul I insist on going there at this time of the year to coincide with the city's annual Tulip Festival. It centres on Emirgan Park on the European side of the Bosphorus, where a recent conversion of old Ottoman stables and carriage houses now accommodates the state-of-the-art air-conditioned Istanbul Lale Vakfi (Tulip Foundation), hosting an on-going programme of, principally, tulip-related exhibitions and talks. Throughout

Istanbul during March and April you'll find tulips everywhere, the green-fingered municipal authorities having encouraged displays that render excessively ambitious British town councils green with envy.

Domestic gardeners have several hundred different, easy-to-grow tulip varieties available. Just a few in a window box (less is more) can rival a torrent of them throughout the entire garden. I'm keen to experiment with new colours and combinations of types (lily-flowered, parrot, Darwin, etc) each year, finding the best way to do this is to grow a handful of each kind in a pot and move them about when they're in flower to see what excites. With a tulip flowering period from late February to mid May it's vital that dreamt-up combinations strut their stuff at the right time. Alternatively, you might prefer a succession of flowers, a pleasing, ever-changing rainbow guaranteed to lift the spirits for anything up to twelve or so weeks. Who says Tulipomania was a thing of the past?

PREVENTING SCABBY POTATOES

I spotted this in Garden News recently and thought it might be useful for you potato growers.

I had a very bad infection of scab on my potatoes last year on both early and late varieties. Is there something I can treat the soil with to guard against it? *William T Pierce, Gwynedd.*

Scabby lesions on potato skins are caused by the bacterium *Streptomyces scabies*. Although it looks horrible, the disease is only skin deep and won't spoil the crop's eating quality, even though the tubers are useless for showing.

The problem is usually worse in light, alkaline soils and where organic matter is in short supply. You can reduce the problem by working in lots of compost or rotted manure, particularly if your soil is limey or excessively light. Moisture also helps to reduce scab, so in dry times, keep your potato crop well irrigated to help prevent scab and increase yield.

There's no chemical cure or soil treatment, so the only way you can control this disease is by adopting the management practices I've mentioned. Avoid liming soil where scab is problematic, and look for scab-resistant varieties such as the old, but delicious 'Ulster Sceptre', 'Accent', 'Desiree' and 'Pixie'.