
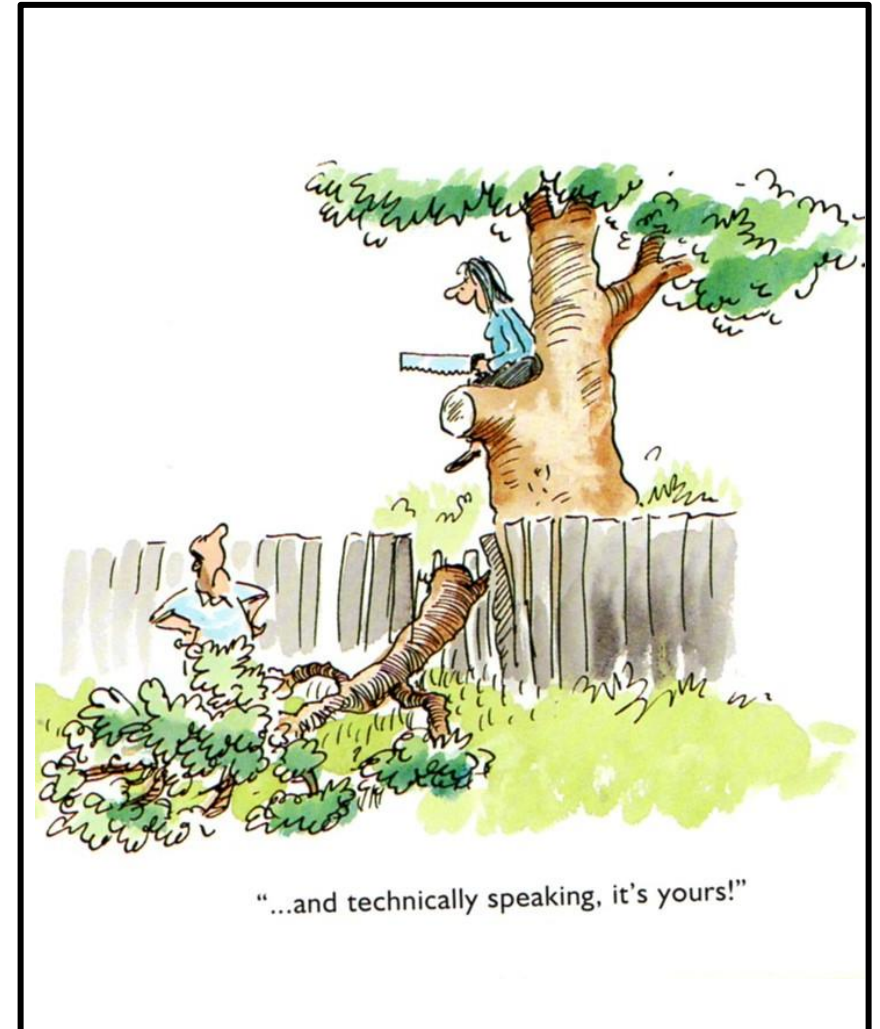


# Ash Parish Garden Club

[www.ashparishgardenclub.org.uk](http://www.ashparishgardenclub.org.uk)

 ash parish garden club



Monthly Newsletter August 2021

**ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS**

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**EDITORS NOTES**

Brian –Stories to [ernestperry33@gmail.com](mailto: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.

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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

AUTUMN SHOW	TBA
RHS Chelsea	21 - 26 Sep

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## GARDENING CALENDAR AUGUST

August is the first harvest month; it is also the time to begin tidying up your garden as the early-summer-growing plants begin to finish flowering and collapse.

### Harvest

Now is the time to pick sweet corn, tomatoes, peas, beans, marrows, pumpkins, artichokes and glasshouse crops such as chillies and aubergines. Push straw or old tiles under ripening squash and pumpkins to stop rotting on the soil surface.

### Protect

Tie in tall late-summer perennials to stop them flopping over.

### Prune

Lavender and rosemary will have finished flowering by now, so lightly trim them gently shear the new soft growth, but don't cut into the older brown wood. Likewise, trim off foliage from strawberries once they've finished fruiting. In the middle of the month stop outdoor tomatoes by pinching out the uppermost terminal shoot.

### Water

Water in dry spells, from a water butt or by re-using lightly used bathwater.

### Mow

Mow the lawn at least once a week. Raise the blades if the weather is hot and dry to stop the sward turning brown.

*Pick pumpkins this month as well as tomatoes, artichokes and glasshouse crops such as chillies and aubergines*

**POETS CORNER*****Floral Tribute***

*(Stimulated by listening to a laverock or lark, while fishing for a chavender or chub)*

The monkey-flower, or mimulus,  
The mimulus, or musk,  
That grows beside the Imulus,  
The Imulus or Usk,  
Is humble and subfimus,  
Is modestly subfusc.  
Yet, when at evening dimulus,  
When at the falling dusk  
I chew the bitter himulus  
Of life, the bitter husk -  
Harder than any rimulus  
(A rimulus, or rusk),  
Such as might crack a timulus,  
An elephantine tusk —  
Then to the stream I bimulus,  
All eagerly I busk,  
To gaze on thee, O mimulus,  
And from thee draw a stimulus,  
A stimulus, or stusk.

**CHARLES JEFFRIES (late 19th/early 20th century)**

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**Fungi**

**(?mushrooms) were in the mix 715 million years ago**

THE oldest confirmed fungi fossils have been identified in a Belgian museum, providing new evidence for how life on Earth evolved.

The fossils are between 715 and 810 million years old, making them more than 250 million years older than the previous confirmed record holder. Steeve Bonneville at the Free University of Brussels says the fossils had been in Belgium's Royal Museum for Central Africa for decades without anyone analysing them, having been originally discovered in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Bonneville and his team were initially unsure if the fossils, which are trapped between pieces of rock, were fungal or bacterial. The fossils are dark and characterised by networks of filaments. The key to determining their fungal origins was

to find out if these networks are made of chitin, a polymer that is in the cell walls of all fungi but not in those of bacteria.

By using powerful microscopy to identify the presence of chitin, the researchers were able to show beyond reasonable doubt that these fossils are fungal (Science Advances, doi.org/ggjdbk).

The discovery sheds light on early life. Fungi were always suspected to be partners of the first plants to colonise the planet, says Bonneville, but previously confirmed fungi fossils were too young to support this idea.

Jonathan Leake at the University of Sheffield, UK, says he believes that even older fungi fossils have been discovered but haven't yet been chemically confirmed to be fungi. Jason Arunn Murugesu

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## THIS MONTHS RECIPE

### Five spice plum tarte tatin

*Spice with plum draws out a warm, complex flavour and when nestled in caramel topped with buttery pastry, it means you're onto a winner. Collect and serve the plum juice in a jug alongside the dessert*

**Serves 8-10 Prepare 30 minutes Cook 20-25 minutes**

#### **You will need**

- 6-7 ripe plums
- 100g caster sugar
- 1 tsp Chinese five spice
- 25g butter
- 320g sheet all butter puff pastry

#### **To do**

- 1 Cut the plums in half and remove the stones using a teaspoon. Place them into a large bowl, toss with 1 tbsp caster sugar and the five spice and set aside.
- 2 Tip the remaining sugar into a 23cm tarte tatin tin (or large frying pan with an ovenproof handle) and heat over a medium heat for 5-8 minutes, or until the sugar has melted and begun to caramelise. Stir occasionally to ensure even

caramelisation. Once the sugar is an amber colour, remove from the heat and quickly whisk in the butter.

3 Arrange the plums, cut-side down into the caramel, packing them in tightly, then set aside to cool for 15 minutes.

4 Preheat the oven to 220°C, gas mark 7. Unroll the puff pastry sheet and roll out to increase the width a little, then cut a circle of around 25cm in diameter (use a dinner plate to help get a perfect circle). Slide the pastry circle onto the plums and tuck it in around the edges. The fruit should be completely concealed by pastry. Use a fork to prick the pastry a few times to allow steam to escape. Bake for 15 minutes, or until golden brown and the pastry is cooked through.

5 Remove from the oven and leave to stand for 5 minutes so the liquid thickens and settles. If you've used a frying pan, wrap the handle with a tea towel to remind you it is hot. If the plums have released a lot of juice, drain off the excess into a small jug to serve with the tart.

6 After 5 minutes, place a serving plate (preferably one with lipped edges) over the pan and, using a tea towel to protect your hands, carefully invert it so the tart drops onto the plate. Serve the tarte hot or cold, with extra thick cream or vanilla ice cream, drizzled with any reserved plum juice.

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## **SWEET POTATOES**

SIMON COURTAULD

Sweet potatoes may have been around when I was young, but I don't think I was aware of them until about 20 years ago. In fact, they have been grown in Europe since Columbus brought sweet potatoes back from the West Indies, half a century before the first common potato arrived here from Peru with the Spanish conquistadors.

Potatoes they may both be called, but they are not related. The sweet potato belongs to the family of flowers that includes morning glory and convolvulus, the invasive bindweed. I have noticed that many of the sweet potatoes sold in shops have been grown in America - they are the state vegetable of Alabama and Louisiana - but China has by far the largest share of the global market.

For the amateur gardener, sweet potatoes are usually grown from what are known as slips - leafy cuttings taken from the tubers and partly immersed in water to promote a root system. This can be achieved from shop-bought tubers, so long as they have not been sprayed with an anti-sprouting agent.

Slips will be more reliable from commercial growers, who can also supply 'super plugs', already rooted, which will grow more quickly. Ready to plant out now, these will probably benefit from a week or two under protective cover if the soil is still cold. Watering and sun are important for successful growth. The foliage and stems will spread around the plant, and after three or four months, when the leaves turn yellow and die back, the sweet potatoes should be ready to be harvested.

Of the different varieties, most, such as Beauregard, Bonita and Evangelina, have orange flesh; Tahiti has purple skin and flesh. Perhaps most importantly, sweet potatoes claim to be something of a health-giving miracle, with levels of dietary fibre and vitamin A much higher than the ordinary potato.

Sweet potatoes are said to help in controlling blood pressure and, with high betacarotene levels, to support the immune system and reduce the risk of prostate cancer. And they make very good chips.

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## **FLOATING REED BEDS**

### **INSTALLED ON THE HANWELL CANAL LOCK FLIGHT**

THE Hanwell Locks Partnership June task party was spent helping the Canal River Trust plant floating reed beds for the side ponds of Lock 97 on the Grand Union Canal.

This new floating ecosystem at the Lock 97 side ponds follows on from a successful installation of similar floating beds at the Lock 96 side ponds in 2020.

The coir floating beds, planted with a variety of native wetland and marginal vegetation, provide a transitional habitat important for the newts residing within the ponds, and an easy means of movement between habitats for amphibians. They also provide a great spawning habitat for fish and habitats for insects such as dragonflies and damselflies.

At the task party the interlocking units were bolted together by IWA volunteers on the lock side before being planted with a variety of sedges, rushes and reeds. Finally, the beds were manoeuvred into the two side pond basins.

A cable system will be used to tether the floating ecosystem to the rear wall of the side ponds, and this is designed to accommodate variations in water level and future operational use of the side ponds by the volunteer lock keepers at Hanwell.

The partnership is a joint IWA West London and Canal & River Trust initiative for the care, conservation and restoration of the Hanwell Flight and Norwood Locks. Its

volunteer activities extend over one mile of the Grand Union Canal from the head of Norwood Top Lock (Lock 90) to the confluence with the River Brent below the Hanwell Flight (Locks 92 to 97).

Norwood Locks and the Hanwell Flight are separated by a 500-metre pound which is the site of Three Bridges, \_ a Scheduled Monument and a rare intersection of canal, road and railway engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

Constructed in 1794, the Hanwell flight of locks together with the lock side ponds and the boundary wall of the former Middlesex County Asylum (completed 1831) is a Scheduled Monument.

The locks and side ponds at Hanwell are recognised as a non-statutory wildlife site due to the intrinsic value for wildlife and the associated connections to other important habitats, including the River Brent corridor and the nearby public open space of Jubilee Meadow and Blackberry Corner, managed by Ealing Council.

The offside of the canal supports a diverse range of wildlife including amphibians, wetland bird species, aquatic vegetation such as reed beds, sedges, rushes and wetland trees including willow and poplar.

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## **PASTURES NEW**

DAVID WHEELER

We're garden-hunting - not house hunting. When we bought Bryan's Ground 28 years ago, we spent two hours outside before setting foot indoors.

Since the beginning of April, we have viewed more than half a dozen properties. There's the 'romantic' - a tea-planter's lodge that's dragged its anchor from Simla to six lush acres in the Shropshire hills, but which needs a deep pocket to modernise (sensitively) and restore its 1950s garden. There's the 'done and dusted' - a Georgian village house with barely an acre: the pipe-and-slippers option.

There's the ill-situated Gothic curiosity - too small and deprived of sunshine soon after midday. There's the former MP's property - perfect were it not plonked on top of a hill 800ft above sea level, exposed to every gale in the northern hemisphere. And there was the ultimate all-rounder, which we tried to buy, but we were left marooned by a vigorous bidding war.

The problem is we can go more or less anywhere we like. We're corks afloat on life's ocean. Boxes to tick are rural situation, no light pollution, no road noise and no nearby intensive-farming sheds. Is that asking too much? No - not on the Welsh



borders or deeper into Wales, the land of my father's where I have previously lived and made a garden.

While most prospective house-buyers aim straight for the kitchen and bathrooms, I hobble around the garden with a pH meter, trying to establish the soil's acidity levels. It needs to register 6.5 or less if I'm to maintain the deep blue colours of my extensive hydrangea collection. The land also needs to cosset a woodland glade filled with Japanese maples, dogwoods, liquidambars, sorbus, flowering cherries and wild roses.

Inland situations mean cold nights, which hydrangeas dislike. At Bryan's Ground, we can expect a damaging frost up to the end of May, and the Last Night of the Proms can bring autumn's first chill. Coastal spots could bestow salt-laden winds prone to 'burning' susceptible foliage. Near-coastal or estuary plots are ideal, but they tend to bear inflated price tags.

We are supposed to be downsizing, but who can resist Shangri-La, tucked away in its own protected landscape? My partner is younger and fitter. Only when the pH meter has given a satisfactory reading do I ask the vendor about other essential details: the nearest railway station (a few London days every month are deemed essential); the whereabouts of the doctor's surgery; the nearest dispensing chemist and the closest hospital with A&E facilities -1 am, after all, approaching my 76th birthday.

The weekly tuck can be delivered almost anywhere these days, but I wouldn't want to drive far to buy petrol for the lawnmower and essential gardening sundries.

A good, local plant nursery and a few exceptional gardens open to the public would be a bonus. While having frequently bought trees, shrubs, perennials, bulbs and seeds by mail order, I need these days to satisfy myself about an expensive plant's health and composure before writing the cheque.

There will be some disappointments. The seedling tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) I planted 20 years ago flowered for the first time last summer. Similarly, the ravishingly beautiful *Davidia involucrata* (the so-called handkerchief or dove tree) flowered only after 12 years. Can I repeat the trick? The answer is to plant with hope and aim for satisfaction - if not one's own, then a future generation's. No effort is wasted.

At the time of writing, the hunt continues. But, by the time you read these words, I may well be found on frail, bent knees, wielding fork and spade anew. Stay tuned.