

**ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS**

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**EDITORS NOTES**

Brian –Stories to ernestperry33@gmail.com hard copy to Chris

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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.

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**WINTER GREENS by DAVID WHEELER**

With our retinas still aglow after a few months of vintage autumn colour, we are left with bare twiggery and 50 shades of green. From now until deciduous trees and shrubs expand their leaf buds in March and April, we must take comfort in whatever verdancy remains.

Worry not. This isn't a plea for the widespread planting of conifers in the garden, some of which, pleasingly, among a largely brutish and gargantuan brigade, do have enviable grace, composure and manageable proportions.

Instead, I'm considering broadleaf evergreens with a gloss that does its best to sparkle on the dreariest of winter days.

Take, for example, award-winning, well-behaved, small- to medium-sized *Sarcococca hookeriana* from China and the Himalayas. One of the commonly named Christmas boxes, it's in the Buxus (boxwood) family but isn't threatened by the two currently rampant destructive forces: box-moth caterpillars and blight.

It's hardy enough throughout the British Isles, although wise gardeners will site it against a wall, where a degree or two of extra warmth will boost the glorious scent of its small, white flowers at this time of year. Self-descriptive 'Purple Stem' has added colour interest.

Despite hailing from Mexico and south-west USA, the hardy, winter-flowering, evergreen *Choisya ternata* freely covers itself with sprays of white, sweetly scented blossom in early spring and often again from late autumn for a few more weeks.

Its other chief joy is its aromatic foliage when crushed, which makes it a pleasure to clip if it begins to outgrow its allotted space.

Unless you wear sunglasses in December, it's best to avoid a variety dubbed 'Sundance', with very bright yellow foliage.

The daphnes take us into an altogether more sophisticated (and, sadly, more expensive) world. Many are famed for their cold-season perfume.

Pink-flowered, all-round winner Daphne bholua 'Jacqueline Postill', raised and named for his wife Jacqui in 1982 by Alan Postill, ace propagator at the world-famous Hillier Nurseries in Hampshire, is described as being a 'splendid and very hardy form ... flowering when in full leaf... with a powerful fragrance'. There's just time to pop it onto your Christmas-present list.

Because of their prickly, holly-like leaves, mahonias are often sited away from paths. Fortunately, the scented ones can distribute their bouquet far and wide on a slight breeze, allowing them to be appreciated while you're standing out of harm's way. They all bear yellow flowers.

M aquifolium (the Oregon grape, so called for its decorative, blue-black berries) is a low-growing spreader -useful for difficult corners where few other plants would thrive.

My particular fondness is for the taller-growing varieties under the name Mahonia x media - less scented but stately, with ruffs of handsome, pinnate leaves and terminal clusters of long, lax racemes in late autumn and winter.

I'd suggest 'Buckland', 'Lionel Fortescue' or the shorter-growing varieties 'Underway' and 'Winter Sun'.

Larger, sweet-smelling evergreens include osmanthus, a group of shrubs that can extend to a height of about 12 feet. O x burkwoodii (pictured) is terrific. Its minute flower buds, scattered over the entire plant at this time of the year, won't open for another couple of months - but when they do, to reveal tiny, white, star-like florets, you'll want to bottle the fragrance.

Hollies cannot be overlooked in this season. Choose them now, when they're berrying; if space is restricted, consider dwarf cultivars such as 'Burford Nana', 'Rotunda' and 'Caressa'.

Finally - how could I not? - mistletoe. But you can't choose this parasite. It has to choose you.

## TRIPS FOR 2022

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Broughton Grange, Wickham Lane, Banbury, OX15 5DS as seen on TV Times and cost TBA

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## GARDENING CALENDAR DECEMBER

As the year draws to its close, and the days are at their shortest, limit gardening work to protecting tender plants and aiding wildlife in your garden.

**Feed** - Keep bird feeders topped up and make water available.

**Water** - Although it makes sense to water plants sparingly at this time of year, do make sure that container plants don't dry out completely.

**Protect** - Protect tender palms and tree ferns. Stuff a few handfuls of straw into the crown, tie up the leaves or fronds, and then wrap the whole plant in horticultural fleece, tying it off securely at the bottom. Don't use plastic sheeting or bubble wrap – on warm days your plants will sweat and rot.

Indoors, keep houseplants happy by moving them away from radiators and into a sunny, cool spot.

**Plan ahead** - Last but not least, take some time to curl up in a warm spot and plan next year's garden

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## THIS MONTHS RECIPE

### FESTIVE SPICED LATTE CAKE

Preparation time: 25 minutes | Cooking time: 50 minutes

Serves: 10-12

#### You will need

250g unsalted butter, melted

300g self-raising white flour

1 tsp baking powder

250g Billington's Light Brown Soft Sugar

1/2 tsp ground nutmeg, plus a pinch more

1/4 tsp salt

1 tbsp instant coffee powder, plus 1 tsp 75ml whole milk  
275g low-fat fresh vanilla custard  
3 medium British Blacktail Free Range Eggs, beaten  
4 tbsp Billington's Golden Caster Sugar

2 tbsp dark rum  
200ml whipping cream

**To do**

Preheat the oven to 180°C, gas mark 4. Use a little of the butter to grease a 23cm spring form tin, then line the base. Sift the flour and baking powder into a large bowl. Add the light brown soft sugar, a pinch of nutmeg and the salt. Mix well with your hands to smooth any lumps in the sugar, then make a well in the middle.

In a cup, mix 1 tbsp coffee with 1 tbsp hot water. Stir into the melted butter with the milk, 175g custard and the eggs; whisk into the dry ingredients until smooth. Pour into the tin and bake for 50 minutes, until risen, golden and a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. While the cake bakes, mix 1 tsp coffee with 2 tbsp caster sugar, 1 tbsp water and 1 tbsp rum to make a syrup; set aside.

Place the cake, in its tin, on a wire rack to cool. After 30 minutes, poke lots of holes into the top using a cocktail stick and brush with the coffee syrup. Once cooled completely, remove from the tin and put on a plate.

Make a frothy topping by whipping the cream with the remaining 2 tbsp caster sugar and 1 tbsp rum until very thick, then fold into the remaining 100g custard. Spoon and spread the topping onto the cake, then use a fine sieve or tea strainer to dust with the remaining 1/6 tsp nutmeg.

**COOK'S TIP**

Making the cake ahead of time? You can keep the cake in an airtight container for a couple of days. When ready to serve, make and add the topping as per step 4 of the method (above).

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**NERINE SARNIENSIS (JEWEL LILIES)*****Exbury Gardens***

Originally found on Table Mountain overlooking Cape Town in South Africa, Nerine Sarniensis flower in a spectrum of colours. From their original orange, scarlet and white, through to new purples, pinks, reds and bronzes.

They naturally scintillate in the sunshine, with gold or silver crystalline flecks that make their petals sparkle.

Exbury Director, Nicholas de Rothschild, has produced hundreds of new hybrids, many of which visitors can view and purchase at the Estate

A guide to looking after jewel lilies

Growth September - March

Flowering October

Dormant April-August

December/January Remove dry stems and flowers

May/June Remove dried leaves

June/July/August Repotting

### **Potting**

We like to use square plastic pots. This is because *Nerine sarniensis* can use lots of energy to grow excess roots when in porous ceramic or clay pots and you want all the energy to go into growing beautiful flowers.

Compost should be open, gritty and free-draining, we like to use a mixture of John Innes No 3.

We replot our nerines every 4-6 years but they can happily thrive in the same pot for many years. Plant new bulbs with about 1/3 of the bulb above compost level and firm compost to prevent newly flowering bulbs from falling over.

### **Temperature**

These nerines cannot tolerate frost and need to be kept in a greenhouse or conservatory. They do not need to be heated but must be kept above freezing point.

### **Watering**

Water fortnightly from mid-August, beginning with a good soaking and then another one a week later. Keep pots damp throughout winter but do not overwater. From August onwards, water fortnightly until mid-April. Use a weak liquid tomato fertiliser mixed with water, every second watering. Stop watering in April, when leaves have turned yellow. Give one good soaking of water around midsummer just to keep the old roots a little longer and then leave dry until September.

### **Pests**

Keep an eye out for mealy bugs during growing season. Small quantities can be removed by hand or by spraying alcohol spirits.

More information can be found at [www.nerines.com](http://www.nerines.com)

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## **TAKING CARE OF THE LITTLE ONES**

I've always loved bugs, from the ants in my garden to the huge rhinoceros beetles that wander our woodlands. Concerned by their alarming signs of decline, I've tried to share my love and encourage everyone to do what they can to help save them.

We can all benefit – humans and bugs alike – by rebugging our lives and homes; starting with how we think and view bugs, to how we eat, garden, what we buy and even how we talk about them

Wildlife is all around us: it's not just out in the countryside, in woodlands or other remote wild places. It's in our towns, our gardens and even our homes! Here I explore – and celebrate – some of the tiniest housemates that have moved in with us, either permanently or just for a short stay (and that you might not even know about)..

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## **SHARING YOUR SPACE**

Your home and garden can be wonderful places, and not just for you. Thousands of creatures, visible and hidden share these spaces with you. From the fly catching spiders sheltering in the corners of your bedroom to the worms wriggling through your garden soil, the teeny pollinating wasps in your window box, and the cavity-nesting tree bumblebees tucked into a gap in your eaves. Not only do these creatures live peacefully and often unnoticed around you, but they also contribute much to your life. They are gardeners that help your flowers flourish, farmers that lend a hand with your home-grown veg and bouncers that get rid of other less welcome house guests.

### **Nooks for nature**

The cracks and crevices around our houses are important for our bugs. They serve as everything from a nesting place for bees and wasps, to a lurking space for others. One species that may move in is a centipede. Centipedes, whilst harmless to us, use their huge jaws to feast on other bugs you won't want around like silverfish, carpet; beetle larvae, and cockroaches. They will hide in cracks around your house, in drains and damp dark spaces. If you spot a centipede scurrying from its hiding place, take a close look as they are fascinating to watch

### **Eight-legged lodgers**

Do you shudder with fear when you see a spider giving that reaction a rethink, as these wonderfully diverse and useful creatures are very unlikely to harm you. You are a far bigger threat to them and if you can resist the urge to hurt them, that's a great start. Your home and garden provide cosy spaces for these handy housemates.

Spiders make great neighbours as they munch through huge volumes each year including ants, mosquitoes, cockroaches, aphids, flies, and even fleas. They are food too for your garden birds. Welcome the spiders with open arms (even if it is at arm's length)!

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## POETS CORNER

from Kensington Garden

A flower that first in this sweet garden smil'd  
To virgin sacred, and the Snow-drop styl'd . . .  
Mid frosts and snows triumphant dares appear,  
Mingles the seasons, and leads on the year.  
THOMAS TICKELL (1686-1740)

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## THE HIDDEN UNDERWORLD

Your garden soil is home to many The soil in which we grow most of our food is created largely by the guts and jaws of worms, mites, springtails, termites, beetles and many more. If you can imagine the recipe, the bugs basically do all the cutting grating mashing grinding and, given their role in moving fungus and microbes about they ensure fermentation happens too. They also help draw down air. water and nutrients; your flowers, grass and spuds would not grow without the huge array hard working hidden beasts beneath your feet.

**Vicki Hird** has been working on environment, food and farming issues for over 25 years. She explores more insect stories in her new book, *Rebugging the Planet: The Remarkable Things that Insects (and Other Invertebrates) Do— And Why We Need to Love Them More*

*Happy Christmas and all the best for the New Year*