


Ash Parish Garden Club

www.ashparishgardenclub.org.uk

 ash parish garden club



"OK you bugs and beetles, weeds and weevils, remember me from last year? Well, I'm back!"

Monthly Newsletter Feb 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.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

SPRING SHOW	TBA
PLANT SALE	8 th May
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

EXTINCT DATE PALMS SPROUT AGAIN*Thanks to ancient seeds*

2000-year-old seeds found in the Judean desert near Jerusalem, are being studied by Sarah Sallon at the Louis L. Borick Natural Medicine Research Center in Jerusalem and her team previously grew a single date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) from one of the seeds. The team has now managed to grow a further six. These are the oldest seeds ever germinated.

Genetic analysis showed that several of the seeds came from female date palms that were pollinated by male palms from different areas. This hints that the people who lived in the area at time used sophisticated plant breeding techniques.

Historical accounts of the fruits from these ancient palms suggest they may have been superior in some ways to dates harvested from modern palm trees. The Roman scribe Pliny the Elder, for example, wrote that their "outstanding property is the unctuous juice which they exude and an extremely sweet sort of wine-flavour like that of honey".

Sallon and her colleagues hope to get the new trees to fruit by pollinating female palms with pollen from males. Alice Klein

POETS CORNER**The Winter rose**

Midwinter, and the dead earth Suddenly parts to give birth
To thick clusters of stiff flowers
Whiter than scattered pear tree showers,
Marble monuments or morning milk,
Smoother than pebbles or old silk,
I touch each blossom, where they lie
With polished leaves and golden eye,
The hellebore of the January snows,
The plant I call the Christmas rose.

LEONARD CLARK (1905-1981)

GARDENING CALENDAR FEBRUARY

A lot can be achieved in your garden during February, particularly on days when the ground isn't frozen or waterlogged.

Plant

Plant bare-root trees and shrubs, and 'in-the-green' snowdrops (snowdrops with leaves). This is also a good month for planting Jerusalem artichokes, shallots, raspberries and blackberry canes, if weather conditions permit.

Prune

February is also the time to hard-prune your hedges, if you didn't do it in the autumn. Deciduous garden hedges can all be cut back fairly hard now. Make sure the frosts haven't lifted newly planted trees and shrubs, re-firm around them lightly using your hands or heels if necessary.

In terms of plant maintenance, now is the time to cut back deciduous grasses, ideally down to 15-20cm before new shoots emerge. Deadhead winter bedding plants for bushier displays later in the year, and start preparing seed beds for spring vegetable sowings.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE**Date, orange & raspberry spelt loaf cake**

Serves 10 *Prepare* 15 minutes *Cook* 55 minutes

You will need

Sunflower oil, for greasing
165g pack pitted dates
3 tbsp clear honey, plus a drizzle to serve
3 Large Eggs
100g half fat creme frache, plus extra to serve
Finely grated zest and 4 tbsp juice from
1 large orange
150g ground almonds
100g Organic Spelt Flour
1.5 tsp baking powder
0.5 tsp bicarbonate of soda
2 tsp ground mixed spice
75g raspberries, plus more to serve

To do

Preheat the oven to 180° C, gas mark 4
Grease and line a 900g loaf tin with baking parchment or a tin liner.
Boil the kettle.
Put the dates, honey and 5 tbsp freshly boiled water into a food processor
Process for about 1 minute until creamy and smooth.
Scrape the sides of the bowl a few times with a spatula as you go.
Add the eggs, creme frache, orange zest and juice (if your orange doesn't give enough juice, top up with water) and pulse again to combine.
Mix the almonds, flour, baking powder, bicarb, mixed spice and tsp salt,
Sift into the processor bowl. Pulse to a smooth, loose batter.
Scrape it into the tin, then scatter with the raspberries and press them in just a little.
Bake for 55 minutes until dark golden, risen to the middle,
When ready, cool for 15 minutes in the tin, then remove to a cooling rack.
Serve warm or cold, drizzled with a little more honey, and with more creme frache and raspberries on the side.

FUTURE-PROOF FRUIT

Blackcurrant bushes struggle with increasingly warmer winters, but there are new varieties that will fare better, says Clare Wilson

IF YOU think your garden or gardening skills aren't up to growing fruit, think again. Blackcurrant bushes are very easy to care for and they take up little space - perhaps a couple of square metres each.

I do little to my own plant, apart from throwing some garden netting over it every summer for a month or so to stop the birds from stealing the crop. I hold the netting away from the fruits with a ramshackle structure of bamboo canes, which can be taken down once the berries are picked.

Blackcurrants' weakness, though, is a potential vulnerability to climate change. If the winter isn't sufficiently cold for long enough, this interferes with flowering and leads to a smaller crop. "If they haven't received enough chill, they still think they're in winter," says Hamlyn Jones at the University of Dundee, UK.

Although the average temperature in the UK has risen by only about 1°C since the 1960s, winters have warmed more than summers. Plus, a small increase in average temperature tends to give a disproportionately large fall in the number of hours spent below 7°C, a common measure of how much winter chilling a fruit crop has had.

Fortunately, some varieties can get by with less winter chilling than others. This year, commercial growers have seen the first harvest from a new variety called Ben Lawers, which has been bred to cope with warmer winters. You can see the "chilling hour" requirements for many varieties on the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board website, for example, and it also lets you look up how many chilling hours different regions in the UK experienced last year.

A variety called Ben Hope that is popular with home growers is also tolerant of warmer winters and is ideal for gardens in the south of the UK. But those in cooler regions might be better off with a variety like Ben Lomond, which needs more chilling hours but flowers later in the year and so is less likely to suffer if there are late frosts.

Late autumn and winter is the ideal time to plant a blackcurrant bush, in the dormant season - just avoid doing so if the soil is frozen or very wet. Once in the ground, brutally lop off all the stems down to a few centimetres. In 18 months, the summer after next, you will have your first harvest.

Blackcurrants aren't usually sweet enough to eat straight from the bush, but you can boil them up with sugar to make a delicious coulis for ice cream or Greek yoghurt. If I have a good crop, I also make blackcurrant sorbet by straining out the skins and pips, putting it in a tub in the freezer and mixing up the slush three or four times to stop large ice crystals from forming - no ice-cream maker

THE BEAUTY OF THE WINTER GARDEN

For many, winter is the season where we forget about the garden - we tidy it in the autumn and put it to bed until spring - but it needn't be so. A well-planned winter garden can be just as striking as your spring and summer show, raising the spirits even when the weather doesn't.

Flower, Leaf and Stem

Winter-flowering plants are less abundant than those that bloom in the summer, but they offer a lot. Exquisite colour and form are often complemented by amazing scent -an evolutionary race to attract the sparse pollinators at this time of year.

Hamamelis, or Witch Hazel, are medium to large shrubs or small trees with delicate and spiderlike flowers in fiery tones of red, orange or yellow. Borne on bare branches after the attractive autumn foliage has fallen, the flowers are highly fragranced. Underplant with hellebores whose glossy green foliage sets-off beautiful single or double blooms. The *H. niger* and *H. x ericsmithii* varieties flower before Christmas and are usually white, while *H. orientalis* types flower later but offer different shades - reds, pinks, purples, yellows and even slate grey. Other great options for underplanting include hardy cyclamen, winter aconites and of course snowdrops - *Galanthus nivalis* is the common snowdrop but there are many varieties to choose from.

A fine stand-alone shrub, *Mahonia japonica* has leathery, spine-toothed, evergreen leaves which often colour

up in autumn and winter as the plant flowers. The flowers are usually yellow, some varieties orange, and are held in clustered racemes above rosettes of foliage. As a bonus, small, purple fruit follow, extending the season of interest.

For a smaller space, or to clip into a low hedge, *Sarcococca confusa*, or Christmas Box, is a fine choice. The glossy evergreen foliage stays mid-green all year round and the stems are graced by masses of tiny white fragrant flowers in December. Plant near a path to get the benefit of the glorious scent.

If you are planting against a wall or trellis, try tying *Chaenomeles* (or ornamental quince) for masses of flower power or *Jasmine nudiflorum* (winter jasmine) for a reminder of the golden sunshine of summer.

For stem colour it is hard to beat the dogwoods with varieties such as *Cornus alba* and many others.