

Ash Parish Garden Club

www.ashparishgardenclub.org.uk

 ash parish garden club



Monthly Newsletter July 2021

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS

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EDITORS NOTES

It is with sadness that I have to report that Trevor Brodrick (a member of Garden Club for many years) has sadly passed away last week. Trevor and his wife Muriel were always present at our monthly meetings and came on our day and week end trips, he was always present at our AGM's. He was liked by everyone and will be sadly missed. No further details are yet known.

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

RHS Hampton Court	6 - 11 July
RHS Tatton Park	21 - 25 July
AUTUMN SHOW	TBA
RHS Chelsea	21 - 26 Sep

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.

POETS CORNER***Tulips***

Let tulips trust not the warm vernal rain,
But dread the frosts and still their blooms restrain
So when bright Phoebus smiles with kindly care.
The moon not sullied by a lowering air,
Early the beauteous race you'll wondering see,
Ranged in the beds, a numerous progeny:
The tulip with her painted charms display
Through the mild air, and make the garden gay;
The tulip which with gaudy colours stained,
The name of beauty to her race has gained,
For whether she in scarlet does delight,
Chequered and streaked with lines of glittering white,
Or sprinkled o'er with purple charms our sight;
Or widow-like beneath a sable veil,
Her purest lawn does artfully conceal,
Or emulate, the varied agate's veins,
From every flower the beauty's prize obtained.

ABRAHAM COWLEY (1618-1667)

FAREWELL, MY LOVELY GARDEN

DAVID WHEELER

In early April, I spent many hours selecting and then digging and potting up dozens of our finest-coloured hellebores. I lifted a few rare hydrangeas from my collection of more than 250 different varieties, and these too were gently transferred to containers filled with ericaceous compost. One or two of our darker-blue pulmonarias ('Blue Ensign' and 'Mawson's Blue' especially) were similarly uprooted and rehoused, as were a few young Japanese maples, planted less than 12 months ago and thus able to withstand careful disturbance.

From cracks between herringbone bricks on the sunny south terrace I have teased seedling stocks - the grey-leafed *Matthiola incana*, with its summer-long succession of fabulously scented white flowers. I've popped a few of its seedheads into a brown paper bag, too; belt-and-braces for a happy continuation of this hardy indispensable.

Our orchard full of pale blue *Iris sibirica* 'Papillon' - thousands of them - came into my life in the late 1980s, when I bought a few to mingle with an unknown, darker variety given to me in the early '70s when I was gardening on the Hampshire-Surrey border.

They bulked up quickly and while the clumps should ideally be dug and divided every few years, I've been too lazy. Neglect has not troubled them. But some have now been lifted and transferred to deep plastic pots, where the moisture in which they thrive is best retained. These procedures would best have been carried out last autumn when the plants had the optimum chance to settle into new - albeit temporary -housing while the soil remained damp and relatively warm.

Recovering from major back surgery two years ago, I went on a buying spree at several private nurseries. We have three within an hour's drive, each worth a much longer journey. All plants from these unique enterprises - the Walled Garden at Treberfyd in the Brecon Beacons National Park, Wildegoose Nursery and Mynd Hardy Plants in south Shropshire - have thrived, allowing me to chop off chunks and assign them to pots. You may well ask why I'm doing this now, at quite the wrong time of year.

We're moving.

Well, at the time of writing, we have put our house up for sale. Two bachelors no longer require ten bedrooms, and the maintenance of an eight-acre garden (set in 30 acres of pasture and arable) is taking its toll. We've had almost 30 years at Bryan's Ground, arriving those decades ago on the Herefordshire-Radnorshire border with amounts of energy and ambition that today seem unbelievable.

We first tackled the three acres of unkempt formal gardens laid out when this Arts & Crafts house was built in 1913. Within two months, we had planted an orchard, divided up the old tennis court into four separate garden rooms with yew hedges, built umpteen ponds, and planted, planted, planted.

On 1st January 2000, I put in the first tree in a four-acre former donkey paddock, which now cradles some 2,000 ornamental trees and shrubs.

Our decision to move was taken jointly and amicably. The upkeep of a properly such as this is expensive and demanding. We are no longer young. We don't want to see all our hard work degraded. Nor, heaven forefend, do we want to stop gardening. An acre would be manageable and if/ when disabilities encroach, we could probably scrape together enough dosh to employ the kind of fitness and drive we once had ourselves.

Who knows? By the time you read this, we may have relocated - with all those special plants potted up in March tasting the delights of a new home.

MEMBERS OPEN GARDEN

One of our members, Peter Myles, recently opened his garden under the National Garden Scheme. It was a great success and Peter would like to thank the members of Ash Parish Garden Club for their support at his open garden event over the weekend - we had around 90 visitors and raised nearly £1000 for the national garden scheme and Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Raspberry ripple cake

Serves 10-12 . Prepare 20-30 minutes Cook 50-60 minutes

You will need

4 Medium Free Range Eggs

300g caster sugar

100g butter, plus extra for greasing

225ml milk

2 tsp vanilla bean paste

250g plain flour

2 tsp baking powder

250g raspberries, plus extra to decorate

300ml double cream
1 tbsp icing sugar
Raspberries, to decorate

To do

1 Preheat the oven to 160°C, gas mark 3 and grease and line a 23cm round cake tin with baking parchment.

2 Place the eggs and caster sugar into the bowl of a stand mixer and whisk on a high speed for 8-10 minutes, or until tripled in volume.

3 Meanwhile, heat the butter, milk and vanilla paste in a saucepan over a low heat until the butter has melted and the mixture is steaming.

4 Whisking all the time, carefully pour the hot milk mixture into the eggs, aiming around the edge of the bowl. Sieve the flour and baking powder over the top and then fold in. The mixture will be quite runny.

5 Crush the raspberries to a paste with a fork. Pour the cake mixture into the lined tin and gently ripple half the crushed raspberries through the batter. Bake for 50-60 minutes or until risen, golden brown and a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. Allow to cool completely.

6 Whip the cream with the icing sugar into soft peaks and swirl through the remaining crushed raspberries. Pile over the cooled cake and top with fresh (if using) and freeze-dried raspberries before serving. This cake will keep refrigerated for 2-3 days, but is best served straight away.

LET'S GO WILD

Sue Whigbam takes a look at the charity Plantlife's initiatives to study the nation's wildflowers

Last month I managed to book myself into two Zoom lectures at the same time I've obviously been at home too long. But the one that was so special came from the Rye Harbour Nature Reserve's Barry Yates. He talked about all manner of flora and fauna to be found down at the Reserve: 4,355 different species, 300 of which are very rare. This tally included 508 flowering plants, 144 different lichens and 34 fungi. I talked about Viper's bugloss in relation to shingle gardens last month but what I didn't mention, because I didn't know, is that these plants are home to four of the rarest insects on the Reserve. Three micro moths and a weevil! He spoke of plants with wonderful names, among them the tiny Common whitlow grass, and Coltsfoot which was and is used to treat all manner of respiratory conditions.

The Woodland Trust has a database called Nature's Calendar where they ask for sightings of Coltsfoot (sometimes known as horse hoof or 'the son before the father' in that their cheery bright yellow daisy-like flowers appear before the leaves). They are using the information provided by the public to gauge the effect of climate change but haven't yet resolved whether this plant is flowering earlier as our

springs warm up (yes, really!) or whether they are appearing later as a result of the previous autumn's temperatures. They can begin flowering as early as February but this year, surely, that must be doubtful.

One of the other plants he mentioned is Danish scurvy grass which is effectively a seaside plant as it thrives in salty conditions. Hence being spotted at Rye Harbour. Interestingly, the plant has started moving inland due to the salting and gritting of some of our roads and can now be found in profusion on the side of motorways. Believe it or not, the turbulence caused by fast traffic is useful in that the seeds are spread far and wide as a result. As the name implies, the leaves of scurvy grass are full of Vitamin C and were eaten by sailors between journeys to treat their scurvy.

Plant life, a British conservation charity, celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2019 and now owns nearly 4,500 acres of nature reserves across the UK where at least 80% of wild flowers can be found. Prince Charles is its Patron and he instigated, with Plant life, the Coronation Meadows Initiative to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Queen's Coronation. And as a result of this project, over a thousand acres of new meadows have been created over the UK. Children were involved in the sowing of the wildflower meadow in Green Park, London. What a project for them to be part of. Maybe this will go some way to improving on the lamentable fact that we have lost 97% of our meadows since the Thirties.

The charity owns a large reserve up near Rochester on the North Downs called Ranscombe Farm and it's best known for its arable cornfield flora which of course with years of heavy use of chemicals and constant ploughing have been struggling across the country. It seems that in the late 19th Century one of the most common plants there was the tiny fine-leaved fumitory (*Fumaria parviflora*). It disappeared but was found again in 2013 as its seeds had laid dormant on the site for years. 2019 was a good year for the plant but it disappeared again last year. I've mentioned it because for the first time we've found three plants, in flower, in the vegetable patch here but there is just one problem and that is that a rather pretty lady pheasant is sitting on a clutch of eggs in my raised bed. We're going to have to rig up a net over the fumitory so we can collect seed later in the year rather than let her brood lay them bare when they hatch.

The Spotter Sheets that Plant life provide on their website are really useful. (They also have a new App). We've printed off April and May's so far and their count list gives 72 species to spot. Perfect for children (and us) to find and perhaps learn something about. One spotted in Brede High Woods this week was Greater Stitchwort; one of its names being 'pop-guns' as later in the year its ripe seeds explode noisily when they are ripe and go in all directions! It is also a sign of an ancient hedgerow.

Last year the charity's Every Flower Counts lawn survey had participants finding over 600,000 individual wild flowers in a total of 9,100 square metre patches of

lawn. This year they are launching No Mow May and Every Flower Counts will be taking place at the end of May. So I think it would be fun to mark out a square metre of garden and see what comes up or leave parts or all of your lawn to itself. It would save time, reduce your carbon footprint and of course, save money. Maybe like a friend in Benenden who gardens on green sand, lucky thing, a lizard orchid might appear. She reports that hers is on the way up now and I can't wait to see it grit. Self-seeding then becomes a happy accident and looks natural and unforced. The problem is that the plants are choosing where they want to grow and this may not be where you would plant them. Judicious weeding becomes the order of the day - and this is sometimes harder than it seems; there's something unkind about weeding out healthy, happy plants, even if they are growing in the wrong place. Methods of seed dispersal vary wildly and evolution has come up with some ingenious methods for this. Many seed capsules are triggered to literally explode, because the purpose is to propel the seeds as far away as possible. This can make collecting seed frustrating, as the timing in some situations needs to be just right - collect too early and the seed won't be ripe, collect a second too late and the capsule has burst and hurled its contents to the wind.

The other method is to collect the seed and sow it yourself - either in pots to plant out later, or in situ. Labour intensive, but keeps you in charge of the show. A few very basic pieces of equipment are needed; paper bags or envelopes, a pen for labelling, kitchen paper for drying, a sieve or sheet of paper for separating seeds from the pod - and a nice dry, windless collecting day.

Biennials are hardy plants and are sown in late spring to midsummer - you can sow the seed into a pot or seed tray, or directly into the ground. I often find a bit of space in the veg patch and sow a few rows of foxgloves, Sweet Williams or wallflowers into a sort of nursery bed. Once the seedlings emerge, thin them out to give each one a bit more room to grow. In the autumn they can be carefully lifted and transplanted to the place where they will flower in the following spring.

Packed with nectar

I would happily grow biennials for their sheer charm, but they are very good for wildlife too. Biennials are brim full of nectar - they are insect pollinated and their only job is to set seed as soon as they can, so they make it as easy as they can for the insects - many are scented to lure in a wide range of creatures including night pollinators such as moths and beetles. Flowers like foxgloves even advertise the route to their nectaries with little bee landing strips - often in the ultra-violet end of the spectrum and not always visible to us, but look closely and you will see the speckled insides of the tubular flower is in definite rows leading deeper inside. Biennials appear just as insect numbers are building up and this coincides with the main bird nesting season. Give the insects plenty of nectar and you will also be feeding the birds.

THE FICKLE NATURE OF DIETS

There has been a sharp change in what some people consider healthy to eat and a lot of it flies in the face of the evidence, writes James Wong

IN OUR information-saturated digital age, where we can pick and choose our own narrative about how the world works, I have often wondered if this has an impact on the rate of cultural change. As an ethnobotanist trained to study our cultural attitude towards plants and their uses, I have been witnessing with total fascination what seems to be a rapid shift in how plants are viewed in received nutritional wisdom. I wonder if this may be a sign of things to come.

I first noticed the trend about 15 years ago with the emergence of the "paleo" diet movement. This largely repackaged ideas from the ultra-low carbohydrate diets that came before it, but underpinned them with a "return to nature" narrative. According to the paleo school of thought, in order to be truly healthy, we need to eat as our hunter-gatherer ancestors did, ditching as many carbohydrates as possible. This meant a diet based predominantly on meat, with a few low-carbohydrate vegetables like leaves, stems and flowers. Pretty much all fruit, however, was off limits due to its sugar content.

Many questionable justifications have been used to support this. For instance, in our deep Palaeolithic past, fruit was available, but highly seasonal. So, the argument went that, while consuming restricted amounts in a short window in the summer was fine, today's hyper abundance and year-round availability was the root cause of chronic diseases.

It might be easy to dismiss these ideas as only belonging to a particularly devoted set of niche dieters. However, such thinking quickly started popping up in different guises in the mainstream and even, albeit in a diluted form, as government health advice in some places.

"If we are only meant to eat things that 'want' to be eaten, I have really bad news for meat lovers"

What is interesting about the paleo diet idea to a botanist is that it assumes all early humans lived in the world's temperate zones where fruit is seasonal, as (perhaps unsurprisingly) do the creators of these diets. It is almost like humans aren't a species that evolved in the tropics at all. This Western-centric focus is often extended to the idea that you should specifically avoid "tropical" fruits as they are higher in sugar. That is another curious claim, as there doesn't appear to be any data that supports the generalisation. In fact, the highest sugar fruits I can think of, like dates and grapes, aren't tropical, but temperate in origin. That is before we consider that animals in temperate climates are subject to seasonal availability too.

Think of bird eggs and spawning salmon. Does that mean we should avoid these too?

So it was an enormous surprise that, over the past few months, leading lights in the paleo and carnivore diets community have seemingly reversed some of their most central beliefs about plant foods. Several are now saying that adding fruit to their diets over the pandemic has transformed their health, including many who claimed cutting out fruit had the same effect just a year or two ago.

To justify this change of heart, they are pointing to (actually often very sound) evolutionary reasoning, such as our excellent red-green colour vision compared with that of many animals, which is thought to allow us to detect ripe fruit faster. Voices that once described fruit as "bags of sugar" are now pointing to our instinctive preference for sweet flavours as justification for eating it.

From a scientific point of view this cultural shift all seems like a positive step. That is because the research consensus is that consuming fruit is beneficial for our health, but the vast majority of us aren't eating enough of it.

However, cultures are funny things. The fruit U-turn seems to have coincided with some paleo diet devotees calling for the exclusion of vegetables. It is now argued that these are full of potentially toxic compounds designed to deter herbivores, and so can be harmful to our health. Appealing to imagined ideas of human evolution, proponents are now arguing that fruit is safe as plants "want" these parts to be eaten in order for the seeds they contain to be spread around in faeces, hence they don't contain these toxic compounds.

Leaving aside the fact that the distinction between "fruit" and "vegetable" isn't based in any kind of botanical reality, but is just a cultural quirk, it is true to say the many common edible plants do contain toxic compounds. Yet these are at very low doses for us and toxicity is dose dependent. More fundamentally, if we are only meant to eat things that "want" be eaten, I have really bad news: anyone who consumes meat.

In the past, profound dietary shifts like this could take decades even centuries to take hold. However, in the internet age, this seem to be unfolding in a matter of months. Given how quickly radical ideas can diffuse into more mainstream culture, I wonder if we'll see them become widely accepted in years to come, despite the lack of evidence.