Ash Parish Garden Club

www.ashparishgardenclub.org.uk

ash parish garden club

"When your mother remodels the garden,
she doesn't mess around"

Monthly Newsletter Mar 2021

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS

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MAGAZINE CONTENTS

EDITORS NOTES

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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.

THE SEED SAVIOURS

By Katharine Wootton

With two in five plant species now at risk of extinction, we learn about a project collecting seeds around the work to keep them safe in an underground treasure trove

Step inside the sub-zero chambers deep beneath the grounds of Kew's Wakehurst botanic garden in Sussex and you'll find an Aladdin's cave of curiosities. For here in these fire, bomb and radiation-proof vaults, are billions of seeds, carefully collected from around the world and lovingly stored and preserved.

From seeds the size of dust specks to gnarly, hardy and delicate specimens, this vault is an awe-inspiring library where seeds from many of the world's plant species have a safe home.
Set up in 2000, the Millennium Seed Bank was created to act as a kind of botanical Noah's Ark to look after seeds from as many different plant species as possible. The idea is that, whatever the future holds, these marvellous plants could never be totally lost.

As Dr Elinor Breman, Senior Research Leader at the Seed Bank explains: "The vision was that the threats facing many plants, including loss of habitat, over-exploitation for say medicinal or horticultural use as well as the challenges posed by climate change were only going to get worse, so the Seed Bank was established as a way of trying to get ahead of the curve to protect plant life before it's lost."

While the Seed Bank aims to collect a really broad range of species, a big focus is collecting and caring for the plant species that are endangered or that are only known to grow in one particular area, meaning their entire population could be wiped out if something happened in that place.
They also look for seeds that might be economically important or useful. For example, now some popular crops are struggling to deal with the changing climate, finding and preserving the wild relatives of these crops, which may be more drought or heat resistant, for example, could act as a substitute crop and even help feed the world in the future.

Once the Seed Bank and its partners at national seed banks around the world have identified the species that most need conserving, scientists such as Elinor then go on collecting missions to find the seeds they need, which can take them from the Arctic to the Antarctic to anywhere in between.

"We do lots of planning before a mission but once we're there it can take days to actually locate the plant, especially if it's not cunently in flower as you're just looking at twigs and leaves," she explains.

In other cases, it's more about just collecting as many species as possible, such as a recent mission Elinor undertook in Bhutan in the Himalayas where she saved all the flora she could before a hydraulic power plant flooded the whole landscape.

Whatever the situation, usually the country in which the plant is found keeps some of the seeds while the rest go bade to the Millennium Seed Bank. Here, the seeds are dried, cleaned and placed in an airtight container to then be frozen in the vaults at -20°C to help them last for as long as possible.

But that's not the end of the story as Elinor is keen to point out this is by no means simply a museum of frozen seeds. Instead, many of these seeds are soon called upon to come back to life for a variety of reasons. "We send out around 1,000 seed collections each year for research as well as growing many species at botanic gardens so that people have the chance to admire and learn more about these amazing plants that need our protection," she says.

Some of the seeds have also already made the most of their role as an insurance species. This was the case most recently with the clover glycine, a rare plant species native to Australia that has long been listed as vulnerable to extinction. An incredible 1,200 of the clover glycine's seeds were sent to the Millennium Seed Bank 12 years ago for safe-keeping and this year, when bushiires destroyed huge areas of land that were home to the rare herb, scientists at the Seed Bank were able to send seeds back to Australia. The vast majority have now started growing again.

"What's so exciting is that our seed bank collection has the power to be completely transformative," says Elinor. "We understand so little about the natural world and yet here we have a library of plant life that we can explore for its abilities to help humanity. In our collection, we could find the next cure for cancer or the next big food craze. It's amazing."

Now Elinor just hopes she and her colleagues can work with even more countries around the world to save even more species. They're also developing a new cytotechnology, which will see seeds frozen in liquid nitrogen, as a way to preserve plants that typically come from rainforest environments that cannot be frozen in the traditional way, all of which poses big opportunities in the years to come.

If you'd like to support the Millennium Seed Bank you can make a donation at https:// support.kew.org/donate/givetokew You can also visit the seed bank at Wakehurst, Sussex (with social distancing in place). Call 01444 894066 or visit www.kew.org/wakehurst

POETS CORNER

TO DAFFODILS

Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon;
As yet the early rising sun
Has not attained his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the evensong,
And, having prayed together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or any thing.
We die,
As your hours do, and dry
Away,
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
Ne'er to be found again.

Robert Herrick

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 MARCH

March is the time when your gardening routine will begin to speed up – this is the time for mulching, sowing, and repotting.

Deadhead and prune
Don't forget to deadhead early spring bulbs – but don't chop back the leaves for at least six weeks after flowering. Hard-prune bush roses back to 30cm, cutting back to an outward-facing bud.

Weed and mulch
Remove weeds, then mulch beds and borders with shredded bark or compost to help stop them returning. Protect young perennials, such as hostas, with organic slug pellets.

Mow
Pay more attention to the lawn, too. Start mowing your lawn each week if the grass isn't wet. If you can, set your mower's blade height as high as possible for the first four to five weeks.

Plant
This is also your last chance to plant bare-root trees, shrubs and roses until November.
The most important task in March is probably sowing. Seed heads of perennials and place 'grow-through' supports in position. Plant summer-flowering lily bulbs in a hole three to four times their height. Sow hardy annuals to fill gaps in immature beds and borders. Replace the compost in container plants and top-dress with slow-release fertiliser. Plant herbs in windowsill trays. Plant early potatoes, onion sets and asparagus, and when the weather is warmer sow onions, parsnips and the first carrots, turnips, beetroots and salad leaves of the season under cloches. Sow celery, courgettes, tomatoes and cucumbers on the windowsill or greenhouse for planting out once all danger of frost has passed.
Sow celery, courgettes, tomatoes and cucumbers on the windowsill or greenhouse for planting out once all danger of frost has passed

MY ADDICTION TO PLANTS

DAVID WHEELER

If, with ordinary words, we can tell remarkable stories, so too can we make a beautiful garden with ordinary plants. By 'ordinary', I mean the familiar: those we widely grow; those to which even the least committed gardener can put a name.

During lockdown, it was impossible for the insatiable plant-a-holic to visit nurseries in quest of parvenus - unless, that is, we ordered them by post or grew them from seeds dropped through our letter boxes.

If you were self-isolating and relying on family, friends or neighbours to buy your groceries, you'll know that you got only what you asked for (assuming you didn't request flour, yeast or loo rolls).

Compare your possibly austere, little shopping list with what you might have put in your trolley had you gone to the supermarket yourself. It's the same at plant nurseries.

We are seduced by the unexpected or are simply delighted to spot something we have long craved but hitherto been unable to source. We garden-makers need plants the way painters need paint and pianists need pianos. We might opt for more of fewer kinds, or we can take the sweetshop route and bag one of everything that takes our fancy.

I think I probably fall somewhere between the two camps. If I truly like a plant - and, more importantly, it grows well for me - then why not increase its number?

Take foxgloves - there's nothing more ordinary. They self-seed riotously in our garden and, for their sentinel, early-summer bravado and swaying demeanour, I let them loose. It's a second's work to extricate any in the wrong place or of an unwanted colour (some of the lifeless pinks can lower one's spirits), leaving the chosen horde to reign supreme for their allotted time.

Our orchard sprouts perhaps 10,000 mid-blue Siberian irises, and every year, in May, we celebrate their modest increase - more, again, is definitely more.

Similarly, martagon lilies have naturalised themselves in shrub borders nearby, multiplying freely, to the frustration of some visitors who struggle to coax just one bulb into flowering. But then I might well battle with something that those very same visitors claim is a rampant weed with them. That's gardening.

On the other hand, less is more when it comes to the truly exotic, the hard to grow, the unfamiliar and, perhaps, the uniquely showy.

Although living on the sparsely populated border in mid-Wales, we have several outstanding plant nurseries within less than an hour's drive.

Looking at last year's entries in our acquisitions book, I can relive the excitement of buying such lovelies as Amsonia 'Blue Ice', Campanula 'Sarastro' and Penstemon 'Czar'. Being perennial, they adorn the summer garden again this year and are set to do so for many years to come.

None of them is ordinary in the sense outlined above - so a single specimen of each more than satisfies me. They introduce curiosity, subtlety or drama into a particular planting scheme, please or intrigue the casual onlooker and gratify me, the covetous gardener.

As a teenager, taking over the family garden after my father's early death, I wallowed in the ordinary: filling beds, according to season, with primroses and auriculas, tulips, cosmos, dahlias, chrysanthemums and fuchsias (of which I was insanely fond and through which I learned whatever propagating skills I may still have).

Penniless in those days, I raised them from seed or cuttings and divisions scrounged from gardeners older than myself - adolescent boys did not in those days trumpet their horticultural passions. Now, blessedly, it's quite an ordinary thing for them to do.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Bake a cake perfected by Alicia's grand-mother (Alicia Garza editor Stylist)

Traditional American pound cake gets its name from the original recipe, which dates back to the 1700s and required a pound each of flour, eggs, butter and sugar. First seen formally in American Cookery by Amelia Simmons, a cookbook published in 1975, it's a comforting classic that's been reinvented and passed down through families for centuries. This particular recipe comes straight from the handwritten notes of Alicia's late grandmother, and never fails to soothe her when she needs a pick-me-up.

"My grandmother passed away a few years ago but she lived a very full life, and happily her last days were spent close by," says Alicia "She was raised in Mississippi and lived in Ohio most of her life, but when she got ill a few years ago we moved her out to the West Coast because all her kids live here. We loved it because she spent a lot of her time cooking and we got to benefit When she passed, I inherited quite a few things, but her recipe book was probably the most exciting. There are recipes in there from as far back as 1950, pages that she'd snipped out of Good

Housekeeping magazine. She would put the recipes she collected in different envelopes to categorise them, and it's quite a trip to peruse through and know they are from a completely different time. Back then, food was what women corresponded about, so she's got recipes that have been typed up on a typewriter and bear the address of the woman they came from and their notes on how to make it. It's a fascinating piece of history, and that's what I love about this pound cake recipe too: my grandmother perfected it through trial and error, adding her own notes along the way.

RECIPE

Prep 30 minutes
Cooking time: 1 hour 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS (Serves 16)
- 450g butter, plus extra for greasing
- 600g sugar
- 7 eggs
- 450g self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting
- 160ml milk
- 1 tbsp vanilla extract
- 1 tbsp brandy

METHOD
Preheat the oven to 160°C/140°C fan/gas mark 3. Grease a large loaf tin or Bundt pan with butter, then sprinkle with flour.

Put the butter and sugar into a large mixing bowl and cream for 20 minutes, until completely smooth.

Add the eggs to the butter mixture one at a time, stirring until smooth each time before adding another.

Sift the flour three times to remove any lumps, then add half the flour and half the milk to the cake mixture and stir with a wooden spoon until incorporated.

Add the rest of flour and milk, mixing well until incorporated.

Stir in the vanilla extract and brandy. Pour the mixture into your cake tin, then bake until a skewer inserted into the middle comes out clean - about 1 hour and 30 minutes. When the cake is done, remove from the oven and turn out onto a wire rack, letting it cool for at least 10 minutes before serving. The cake will keep in the fridge for up to a week in an airtight container, or up to 3 months in the freezer.

TURKISH ROCKET

SIMON COURTAULD

Last year I bought a small plant of Turkish rocket, not knowing anything about it or how it compares with other rockets. It may have its origins in the Taurus mountains of southern Turkey, or on the shores of the Black Sea, but I have found no information on this.

It is an interesting perennial plant which has grown in my garden throughout the autumn and, at the time of writing, is still sporting vibrant green, pointed leaves - unlike the annual rocket which we pulled up in November. I have removed the large, yellowing outer leaves which were lying close to the ground, and am confident of a lot more young green shoots in early spring.

The large leaves have a slightly bitter taste and are best cooked like spinach. But the young leaves, from the centre of the plant, have a pungent rocket flavour and should continue for much of the winter. I am looking forward to the immature flowering stems in late spring which apparently look and taste rather like sprouting broccoli.

Like Johnny Turk at Gallipoli, Turkish rocket is tough. With a deep tap root, it doesn't suffer in periods of drought and is resistant to frost, disease and all pests, including rabbits. It is not fussy about soil and, once established, will last and continue to grow for years.

But be aware that Turkish rocket is hard to get rid of. It will self-seed and, like mint and horseradish, will spread over a larger area.

Although I started with a plant, Turkish rocket can be grown easily enough from seed; both are available from Pennard Plants near Shepton Mallet, Somerset. Pennard also sell a perennial tree kale which is similarly resistant to pests and bad weather and can grow over two yards tall.

My Victorian walled garden has a range of unusual vegetables, including skirret, a root which used to be given to peasant workers as a cheap source of protein, and the Egyptian walking onion, so called because it moves around by falling to the ground and reseeding.

WHAT USE ARE ANTS?

Ants are fascinating social creatures who work tirelessly for the good of the colony rather than themselves. They're worth observing and can bring some benefits to the

garden -notably localised soil improvement - and are food for birds and other insects, so unless a nest is causing a problem it doesn't need to be destroyed.

The most common ant in the UK is the black ant, which is completely harmless to humans. They don't sting or spray formic acid when on the defensive, and their bite is too weak to penetrate human skin. Other species include the yellow meadow ant, which builds earth anthills above its underground nests, and the narrow headed ant, now so rare it's a protected species. The red ant, whose nests are often found under large stones and paving slabs, can give a painful sting.

In the garden, ants are useful soil engineers, creating tunnels that allow air to be incorporated into the soil, and adding fertility. They prefer sandy soils and sunny spots to build a nest, with a queen ant underground laying eggs and worker ants going out to find food. Workers have two stomachs - one for their own digestion, while the other is a 'social stomach' in which they carry back food for the nest. A nest typically contains 4,000-7,000 ants but can total 15,000 individuals.

Ants love sugary foods and when they've found a good source they lay a trail for their fellows, using chemicals that rub off their bellies as they walk. The sugary excretions of aphids (honeydew), is a favourite food and ants are known to 'farm' aphids, protecting them while they harvest their honeydew.

Once a colony is fully grown (after 2-3 years or so) the queen will begin to lay eggs of winged male drones and queens rather than workers. On a humid day sometime during summer these drones and new queens take flight from the nest, mating in midair. Somehow the ants manage to coordinate their diaries as other nests fly on the same day, mating with each other. New queens then fly off in search of a new nest site, losing their wings and, their only job done, the drones die a day or so afterwards.

"That's Mrs Fisher. She has a sticking throttle..."