
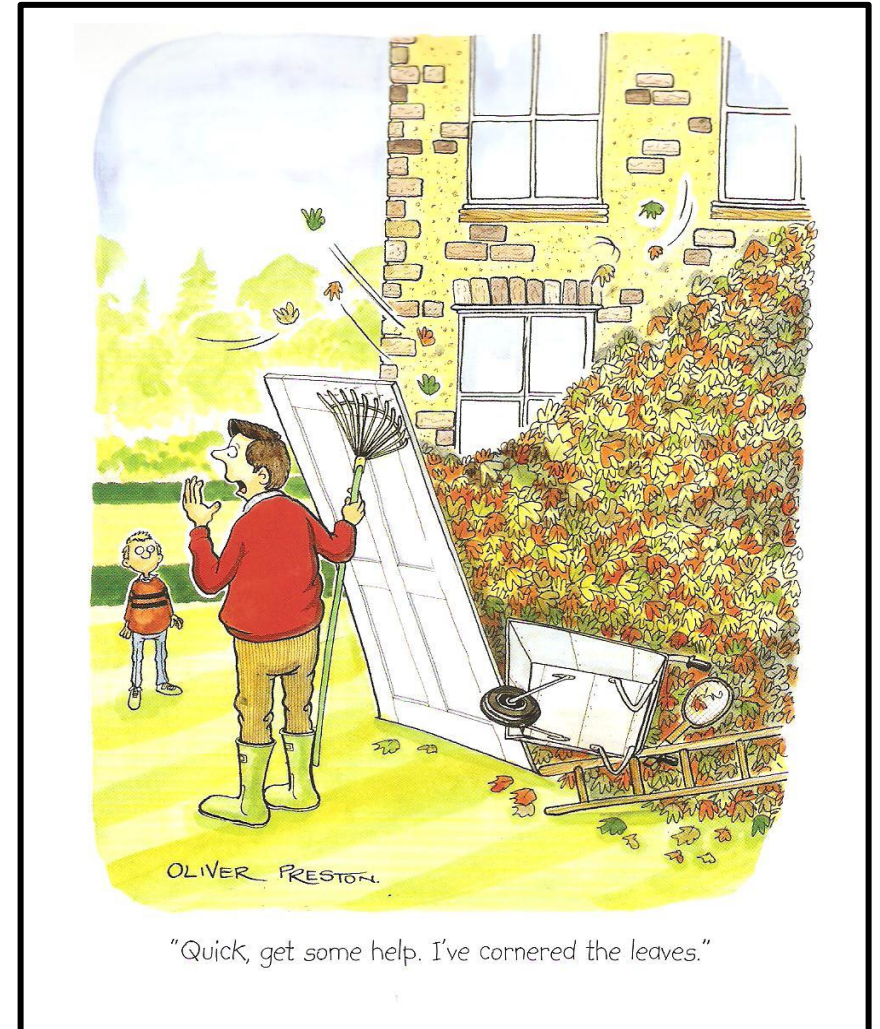


# Ash Parish Garden Club

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

 ash parish garden club



Monthly Newsletter Nov 2020

**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

It is with sadness I must report that Ida Rogers, a long time member of Ash Parish Garden Club sadly died on 12th October. She had just had her 100th Birthday the week before. She was proud to have received the usual letter from the Queen.

## 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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## SAGE

SIMON COURTAULD

During autumn, my local market was selling four varieties of sage plants: green, purple, golden and variegated. All are suitably flavoured for the kitchen, and can be kept in pots before planting out in spring. Tricolor is an attractive variety: the green leaves have white edges; the new growth is tinged pink and purple.

Sage is an undemanding herb, requiring only well-drained soil and sun. It can be grown from seed, if you have the patience to wait. Our common grey-green sage has been growing here for at least ten years, although one is advised to replace sage bushes after three or four years with young plants grown from cuttings.

But ours continues to thrive, having been clipped and shaped each year after summer flowering and again in early spring, when the woody stems may need to be cut back. A mature bush can be earthed up with soil, allowing the buried stems to root. These can then be lifted in summer, cut from the main plant and placed in a new permanent position.

Its name, salvia, is derived from the Latin solvere, 'to save': sage was formerly regarded as a universal remedy for all ills. It was used as an antiseptic, and supposed to cure the palsy, strengthen the sinews, improve memory, stop hair falling out and increase the circulation of the digestive system. An infusion of sage leaves was often used before tea arrived from China.

More relevantly today, with the approach of Christmas, we might raise a glass to 17th-century naval commander, scientist, astrologer and diplomat Sir Kenelm Digby. Also quite a philanderer, he supposedly enjoyed the favours of two queens -Marie de' Medici and Henrietta Maria.

Aside from these various pursuits, he developed the modern wine bottle and wrote dissertations on food; his recipes were published as a cookbook shortly after his death. More than 350 years ago, it was this distinguished polymath who gave us sage and onion stuffing.

**THE BONFIRE OF THE NINETIES**

DAVID WHEELER

The whiff of wood smoke beguiles me still, in domestic bonfire measures, of course, not the suffocating Amazonian doses.

When driving through a misty-blue cloud, I open the car's windows and am taken back decades to a childhood enthrallment of an aroma - nay, a fragrance - of autumn prunings and spent vegetation assigned to the flames.

'Remember, remember, the Fifth of November,' goes the nursery rhyme commemorating the 1605 plot. Gladly, though, Guy Fawkes's events tend not to include any cordite; although, with shooting parties in headlong pursuit of pheasants, gunpowder is not unknown hereabouts at this time of the year.

Originally 'bonefire' - yes, for burning bones - such 'celebratory' conflagrations these days are handy for the disposal of garden refuse, although the British government website asserts that 'You cannot get rid of household waste if it will cause pollution or harm people's health. This includes burning it.' And you could be fined if you light a fire that causes smoke to drift across the road and become a danger to traffic.

But gardening and bonfires seem eternally linked, the residual ash used on soils where, usefully, lime-loving brassicas will grow. Our last significant inferno (apart from my setting alight an obviously unswept chimney soon after we moved into this house 26 years ago) was on the night of 31st December 1999 - the new millennium's eve when, in common with just about everyone else on the planet, we set flame to a heap of combustibles in our redundant, four-acre donkey paddock.

The following day saw the glorious initiation of a project that continues to excite and reward me: the planting of an arboretum. In the fading mid-afternoon light, I raked over the cold ashes and planted a single tree, *Acer davidii*, and a clump of snowdrops. That maple was the first of a range of exotic and indigenous trees and shrubs that now exceeds some two thousand specimens.

I began collecting such plants for their showy autumn garb with appropriately fiery foliage and Technicolor berries: sorbus, liquidambars, ever more maples and aronias. A few evergreens helped to clothe the tableau in winter's depths, and, as these began to settle in my attention, I turned to spring-flowering woodies: sweet-smelling creamy-white viburnums, lilacs, ornamental cherries, dogwoods (many with a burgundy, crimson and orange autumn sheen) azaleas, stewartias, crab apples and feral roses.

Only later did an irrepressible love of hydrangeas begin to show itself. Ardour grew quickly, triggered when a solitary plant with undistinguished, dirty pink flowers began, in its second year, to bear heads approaching a clear blue. Aha, acid soil. Hooray!

But that's not all blue-flowering hydrangeas need. They require aluminium, either naturally occurring in the soil or applied in the form of aluminium sulphate. In subsequent years, that plant's blue intensified and buying sprees brought many different varieties into my collection, it mattering nought if they had pink or red flowers, for, indeed, we had aluminium in the soil.

Thereafter I acquainted myself with serious hydrangea growers in France and elsewhere, begging cuttings of commercially-unavailable varieties. I now cultivate more than 250 different kinds, with flowers ranging from pale cerulean to deepest indigo. Some reds and pinks lurk where a brick pigsty once stood, leaving behind a lime deposit. What next? A National Collection? No, the bureaucracy would numb me, but I am making plans to popularise further the glorious and enduring qualities of these amazingly variable, easy, surprisingly hardy and long-lived plants.

I must just remember to keep bonfire ash well away from them if they're to remain (apolitically) True Blue.

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## **POETS CORNER**

### ***The Garden***

The world's a garden; pleasures are the flowers,  
Of fairest hues, in form and number many:  
The lily, first, pure-whitest flower of any,  
Rose sweetest rare, with pinked gilliflowers,  
The violet, and double marigold,  
And pansy too: but after all mischances,  
Death's winter comes and kills with sudden cold  
Rose, lily, violet, marigold, pink, pansies.

***JOSHUA SYLVESTER (1563-1618)***

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**THIS MONTHS RECIPE**

Thought this might make an alternative to Christmas pudd.

**MINCE PIE STREUSEL TART**

Serves 8 | Prepare 20 minutes, plus chilling and cooling | Cook 45 minutes

**You will need**

- 1 Jus-Rol or similar Shortcrust Pastry Sheet
- 35g plain flour
- 35g light brown soft sugar
- 35g jumbo rolled oats
- 35g unsalted butter, chilled and cut into cubes
- 1 easy peeler mandarin, zest
- 1-2 x 410g jars traditional Christmas mincemeat

**To do**

1 Unroll the pastry sheet and use to line a 20cm fluted loose-bottomed tart case (you may need to roll it out a little to help it fit). Leave any extra pastry hanging over the edges and lightly prick the base with a fork. Line the case with a large circle of scrunched-up then smoothed-out baking parchment. Fill with baking beans, then chill for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 200°C, gas mark 6.

2 Blind bake the pastry case for 15 minutes, then carefully lift out the parchment and beans and bake for 8-10 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool slightly. Meanwhile, make the streusel topping. Put the flour, sugar, oats, butter and mandarin zest in a mixing bowl with a pinch of salt, then rub together with your fingers to make a clumpy crumble.

3 Use a serrated knife to trim the excess pastry from the case. Spoon in the mincemeat, leaving a gap about 0.3cm at the top. (Depending on your tin, you might not need the second jar.) Sprinkle over the streusel and bake for 20 minutes. Serve cool, dusted with icing sugar, if liked.

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**GARDENING CALENDAR NOVEMBER**

Autumn is a busy time for gardeners.

**Plant**

Plant up bare-root trees and shrubs throughout November. To enjoy some colour during the winter, plant up tubs and baskets with evergreen perennials, ornamental grasses, winter pansies and polyanthus.

**Protect**

Trees over 1m will need staking for support, especially in exposed locations. November is a rainy and windy month, and frosts are not uncommon. Protect roses from wind rock by pruning them, and protect any container plants in non-frost-proof pots by wrapping bubble wrap around them. Your furniture will need protecting at this time of year, too – cover any wooden pieces, or move them into the conservatory.

**Maintain lawns**

November is the last chance to create new lawns from turf; choose a dry day when the soil's not frozen or waterlogged.

**Prepare ahead**

It's also the time to dig over your veggie patch; leave soil in large clumps and let the weather break it down into a crumbly finish.

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**SEASONAL TRICKS AND TREATS**

DAVID WHEELER

Love him or hate him, Jack Frost is almost certain to make an appearance in northern European gardens from now on.

If he can stay his hand for a few more weeks, October consigns to the garden a cornucopia of gilded riches. But not all is lost for, should he prove impatient, his crystal rime will beautify the plant world's death and decay. Winners both.

When rising from the mercury's lower depths where ol' Jacko dwells, he wages immediate war on dahlias and chrysanthemums - taming their fat, still-to-bloom buds into soggy, beige pate. Most fuchsias dislike him, although some are tough enough to fight back. He wreaks havoc among late-season half-hardy and tender perennials - salvias, canna lilies, begonias, coleus, pelargoniums... He kills stone dead summer-long flowering annuals, bringing tears to the eyes as cosmos, tobacco plants, calendulas and tagetes perish in his icy caress. In short, he brings down the curtain on the year's Act III: Autumn.

Yet, on his first and more clement visits, JF throws a magical, renegade gauze over the garden; something translucent, fugitive, only mildly injurious and, with luck, brief - exiting stage right before the gardener's mid-morning coffee break.

Like March, the third month of the year, October, three months from the year's end, is capricious.

It can proffer a few gloriously benign weeks of warm sunshine; an extension to the gardening season that sees a burnishing of stems and foliage, brilliantly splashed with dashes of sapphire and lapis lazuli, as blue hydrangeas continue to illuminate the shadows, and patches of autumn-flowering gentians spread their upright trumpets beneath trees and shrubs. Or it can be thoroughly mischievous -remember the Great Storm of 1987 that felled countless millions of trees in a swathe of south-east England that extended from Dorset to East Anglia?

And it is to trees and shrubs that I turn my attention during this month. There's no better time to plant them: the soil is moist (some might say sodden) and it's warm enough for fresh roots to develop, penetrate new surroundings and start to anchor themselves securely.

During lockdown, it was nigh on impossible to go nursery-hopping and even in recent weeks, now more used to staying - contented, perhaps, to stay -at home, I've found new ways to satisfy my acquisitive traits. As a late comer to Instagram (I still eschew Facebook and Twitter), I've discovered a world of private gardeners willing to share both knowledge and plants. Best of all, this kindly army of green-fingered beings stretches far beyond our own shores.

While respecting individual countries' regulations about sending and receiving foreign plants and seeds, I have built a network of law-abiding swappers who have supplied my beds, borders, potting shed, greenhouse and propagating cases with a wealth of horticultural treasures.

Polite requests from an amateur like me or professionals employed by the large estates and botanic gardens are seldom refused. After all, we gardeners know that if we want to save a plant, we must give it (or, more realistically, its progeny) away.

Little envelopes filled with specks of seed is the adult gardener's equivalent of a child's excited pre-dawn discovery of a bulging Christmas stocking at the foot of the bed. I love, too, the accompanying little notes offering advice on how and where to sow, how to nurture, when to transplant...

And if any questions remain, there's that social-media link whence further information can be gleaned. The smart phone has become an essential addition to the gardener's paraphernalia.

David's Instagram account is @hortusjournal

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