


Ash Parish Garden Club

www.ashparishgardenclub.org.uk

 ash parish garden club



Monthly Newsletter Nov 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.

NAKED ATTRACTION

Jo Arnell strips the garden back to beautiful winter basics

Winter can stretch on into spring sometimes, remaining colourless and drab for longer than necessary, dragging its grey heels even as the days lengthen and the green shoots start peeking through. Bare branches and tree tracery stand out against the winter landscape and although the buds are swelling on woody plants, they won't unfurl into leaves for months yet. Look closely at the twiggy skeletons; as you get familiar with them you start to see that each species, when grown unimpeded, has a unique and beautiful silhouette. Let's celebrate the pared back beauty of those that look good naked and maybe even plant some in the garden.

BARE-BARKED BEAUTIES

Our native silver birch is graceful and elegant enough - its white bark fissured with black, thin besom broom branches wafting in the wind — but if you want to grow a really showy white birch, try a Himalayan one: *Betula utilis* var. *Jacquemontii* 'Grayswood Ghost' has stark, bone-white trunks. Some gardeners even wash their trees to remove algae and keep the bark looking perfectly white. They do look stunning, freshly cleaned and gleaming in the winter light. It takes a certain kind of determination to wash trees.

Prunus serrula (Tibetan cherry), has polished, mahogany-red bark that gently peels away in gleaming curls — try walking past without reaching out your hand. This is a good all-year-round ornamental tree, with interest from blossom in spring and lovely autumn foliage too.

I also love the bark on *Eucalyptus*, but it is fast growing and will very quickly escape your clutches to grow into a 50ft monster. There are other trees with irresistibly tactile bark more suited to smaller gardens.

Some *Acers*, known more usually for their foliage, have ornamental bark as well as brilliant autumn colour. The Snake Bark Maple, *Acer davidii*, has green and silver bark in snake pattern stripes. *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku', has gleaming coral-coloured bark, pale lime green emerging foliage and golden autumn tints. *Acer griseum* has shaggy cinnamon-coloured bark

that glows when backlit by the winter light. *A. griseum* is a slow growing tree, eventually reaching a mere 10ft, so it's a perfect choice for a small space. It grows on chalk and on alkaline soil too -something many acers don't like. Most acers are hardy, but prefer a sheltered site, out of the wind and scorching sun.

SHOWING SOME LEG

Carefully pruned, some trees can be crown lifted by pruning out the lowest branches to make the main trunk more visible. Or they can be pruned to have more than one trunk, which turns them into elegant multi-stemmed versions. This works well with birch, cherries and is especially effective with *Amelanchier lamarkii*. The result is elegant and sculptural and still allows for underplanting. Many show gardens at flower shows use multi-stemmed trees as focal points in planting schemes. Overgrown shrubs can sometimes be made into multi-stems, or 'treelets', depending on the elegance of their stems. If you have an old shrub that is about to be radically chopped (or removed altogether), look at it carefully and see whether it could be transformed into a multi-stem. This could be a much kinder and less expensive way of improving the view.

MAGIC WANDS

Cornus (Dogwood) stems will provide brilliant winter colour, especially if you have a large garden and can plant them en masse. Try groups of *Cornus* by a pond, or damp part of the garden. Dogwoods will grow in most soil conditions, and they actually quite like damp or heavy soils. They don't mind shady conditions, but their stem colour shows up best in full sun. Dogwoods will send out suckers, so plant them where they have room to spread. The stems also look good cut and poked into winter containers, bringing height and structure – they may even take root...

For the best stem colour, dogwoods should be cut back hard in mid-spring to encourage the growth of new young stems which have the strongest colour. Some will cope with hard pruning better than others – generally the more vigorous the growth, the harder you can cut back. After pruning, mulch around the roots with compost or other well-rotted organic material, but not right up to the stems, as this could cause them to rot. Mulching will feed and condition the soil - and also help retain moisture.

Dogwoods won't get too tall, because they are regularly pruned to the base. Some of the best for stem colour are: *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica', which has bright red new growth, while the aptly named *C. sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' has young stems that literally look as if they're on fire with shades of red, yellow, orange etc etc.

TRIPS FOR 2022

Sunday 11th September 2022

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

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.

CAN YOU NOT DIG IT?

From novices to hard-core allotmenters, all gardeners could benefit from the "no dig" method, says **Clare Wilson**

Clare Wilson is a reporter at New Scientist and writes about everything life-science related. Her favourite place is her allotment @ClareWilsonMed

OF ALL my garden tools, the one I have used most must be my trusty spade, a lovely small and light one with a comfortable wooden handle. But recently, it has been getting less action because I have been stepping up on the "no-dig" approach to gardening.

All gardeners need to dig sometimes, of course, such as when making holes to put plants in or rooting out weeds. Traditional advice is that we should also turn over all the soil every autumn, to aerate it, improve drainage and mix in soil improvers like manure.

For the past few years, though, I have been increasingly embracing the no-dig approach. On the allotment, I suppress weeds on bare ground over winter by covering the earth to block out light as much as possible.

I used to do this using plastic sheets weighed down with bricks. This year, I have started adopting the system of no-dig advocate Charles Dowding, a UK market gardener and writer. You put down flattened cardboard boxes and cover with some kind of mulch, such as manure or home-made compost. As the cardboard rots, worms take the organic matter down into the soil.

This approach may also be better for the soil. Most plants get help in absorbing water and nutrients from a fine network of thread-like fungi on their roots. A large component of these fungal threads is a sticky protein called glomalin, discovered in 1996. Together, the threads and released glomulin make soil clump into bigger particles.

If soil is dug over, it breaks up the particles and exposes organic material they contain to decomposition by microbes, releasing carbon dioxide. Soil with larger particles retains more moisture and is less prone to nutrients leaching away.

A recent trial in farmers' fields shows that "no-till" boosts soil glomalin and is also likely to reduce soil erosion. On a smaller scale, Dowding says trials in his market garden show no-dig plots give slightly higher yields of fruit and vegetables - as well as being less work of course.

When it comes to garden borders, cardboard coverings may be impractical but there are other ways to boost soil glomalin. You can add the fungi to your soil, either by buying packets of arbuscular mycorrhizal spores or adding home-made compost, a natural source.

Dowding also questions the standard advice for planting new shrubs or trees, for instance, which is to dig a hole two or three times wider than the root ball and loosen the surrounding soil to help the roots penetrate. "It's a myth this is needed," he says.

Instead, we can just dig a hole the width of the root ball to avoid disturbing the soil more than necessary. I can personally vouch the new approach is easier on the back.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

DATE, NUT AND APPLE CAKE

(Submitted by Ann Poole)

You will need

6 OZ. butter or margarine
1 level tsp. ground cinnamon
12 oz. plain flour
Half pint apple puree
6 oz. sugar
1 level tsp. bicarbonate of soda
6 oz. dates, chopped
6 oz. nuts, chopped
2-3 tbsps. milk

For the Topping

1 oz. dates, chopped
Half level tsp. ground cinnamon
1 oz. nuts, chopped
2 level tsp. sugar

Oven temperature: moderate (350°F., mark 4)

To do

Grease either an oblong cake tin 240mm by 140mm, or a round 200mm cake tin.

Rub the fat into the flour and add the sugar, dates, nuts and cinnamon. Stir in the apple puree.

Lastly, dissolve the bicarbonate of soda in the milk and add to the mixture all at once; mix well and put into the tin.

Mix the ingredients for the topping, sprinkle over the surface and bake the cake in the centre of the oven for about 75mins.

Cool on a rack. Note: This cake may be served sliced and buttered.

STARTING WITH A BLANK CANVAS

Harry Rich

A new garden project for a new growing season

My brother Dave and I have been working on a design for my garden, and over the winter we finished all the hard landscaping. But we haven't had a chance to put in any of the new planting yet, so the soft, vanilla-yellow primroses that I've inherited here got the year off to a good start, despite the mud that's now everywhere!

I'm fortunate that my garden is backed by woodland, and I want to link to that as much as possible, while also using contrasting elements. For example, we've built a series of walls to divide up different spaces, and evergreen hedging will ensure the garden has structure and shape.

But even these contrasting elements have strong links with the garden's natural surroundings.-Our stone walls echo the remnants of walls still to be found in the countryside here, and on our first walk after my wife and I moved in, we came across some beautiful wild crab apple trees (*Malus sylvestris*). They've inspired me to use the variety *Malus 'Evereste'* in the borders, to frame views and stop the eye. They will be pleached (trained on stilts to form a high, narrow screen), which is rather formal, but their canopy is naturally informal so it should work well.

I was keen to include some magnolias too, but we get quite late frosts here so they needed to be later-flowering varieties - my favourites, *Magnolia sieboldii* and *wilsonii*, fit the bill perfectly. Hawthorns will play an important part in the garden too - I've fallen in love with them on the common nearby, and their small leaves and beautiful flowers remind me of Japanese cherry blossom.

Fabulous swathes of cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) grow in the hedgerows around here, but the native variety can be a bit of a thug and tends to take over in the border. So I'll be using the better-behaved 'Ravenswing', which has lovely dark foliage, and also its relative, the beautiful pink cow parsley *Chaerophyllum hirsutum* 'Roseum'. I'll be planting these alongside the grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* to replicate the way cow parsley grows with grasses in the wild.

As well as the primroses that we inherited when we bought the house, there's also a fabulous flowering currant (*Ribes sanguinewri*) that we'll be keeping as I've fallen in love with it. It flowers in April and is an amazing raspberry colour makes a great specimen shrub in any garden, and we've woven some *Ribes* into an

informal hedge we've just planted so that there are si echoes of it there too.

My brother and I spend a lot of time designing gardens for other people, so it's been great for me to finally have the chance to design my own. I've found it quite hard at times to be my own client, though! With so many possible options, narrowing down a final design wasn't easy for me. But now I couldn't be happier with what Dave and I have decided to do. This year's focus will be on planting all the trees, shrubs and hedging and I'm really looking forward to getting that all in place before we start prepping the planting beds.

Harry runs a garden design business with his brother and they present BBC's Garden Rescue

COASTAL POTATO FARMERS HOPE FOR TRIAL BOOST

It's one of our favourite potato varieties with a fluffy white texture that's good for chips, roasties and mash. But Maris Piper is also susceptible to common potato scab - a cosmetic issue that causes dry patches on the skin.

It doesn't affect its flavour, but does result in more-waste potatoes going for animal feed or to anaerobic digestion. Long dry periods of weather make it worse.

Usually the remedy is to water at the potato's tuber-forming stage in early summer, but some farmers find it harder to access water than others and end up losing more of their yield.

Now a group of farmers, scientists and agronomists have come together on the south Lincolnshire coast for a trial to see if salty water could be used for irrigation.

"In this area it's particularly difficult to provide irrigation because it's drained land," says Anne Stone, project coordinator at the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board. "Water in the drains is often running a bit saline - it's brackish water - we're about a mile from the sea and seawater creeps in."

The trial at Holbeach Marsh makes use of drip irrigation, delivering water of different salinity levels just where it's needed underground, away from the leaves.

"Potatoes are salt intolerant," says Mark Taylor, of Nene Potatoes, a grower-run potato group that supplies Waitrose and is involved in the trial. "If we sprayed highly salty water on the foliage we'd set the potatoes back dramatically as a crop."

Once all the results are in this spring they can be shared widely and hopefully inform farmers on the best ways to irrigate and make use of local water sources.

The trial is part-funded by Innovative Farmers, a not-for-profit network that promotes farmer-led research run by the Soil Association.

POETS CORNER

For Bonfires

The leaves are gathered, the trees are dying for a time.
A seagull cries through white smoke
In the garden fires that fill the heavy air.
All day heavy air is burning, a moody dog
Sniffs and circles the swish of the rake.
In streaks of ash, the gardener drifting ghostly,
beats his hands, a cloud of breath to the red sun.

EDWIN MORGAN (b 1920)

CHRISTMAS COMPETITION 2021

This years competition is for a home made Christmas Cracker

The Cracker should be NO LONGER than 15 inches

Crackers should be brought along to the Christmas meeting (6th December) ready to be displayed and Judged

Crackers will be Judged on the evening by the members.