

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB OFFICERS

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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.

EDITORS NOTES

Brian –Stories to ernestperry33@gmail.com hard copy to Chris

Firstly apologies that we missed last month's magazine which were due to production problems

NEW PROGRAM SECRETARY

Program Secretary Mrs Penny Slack has arranged for the 2024 speakers but in order for a program to be organised for 2025 a new program secretary needs to be found. Any volunteers?

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show – 2–7 July
 - RHS Flower Show Tatton Park – 17–21 July
 - **AUTUMN SHOW 7th SEPTEMBER**
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GARDEN CLUB TRIPS 2024

Saturday 6th July 2024, Visit Godinton House and Gardens, Ashford Kent TN23 3BP

<https://godintonhouse.co.uk/gardens/about/>

There is small café on site Leave Victoria Hall at 9:30am returning 5:30pm approx. Cost £30 each, includes travel and entrance. There will be a comfort break stop on outward journey

GARDENING CALENDAR JUL

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.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Ginger sponge with rhubarb sauce & custard

Comfort, cheer and speed. Within 20 minutes, you can whip up a classic steamed sponge, plus a big puddle of bright pink, syrupy rhubarb. I would complete the triumvirate with some Vanilla Custard. This could also be briefly warmed in the microwave while the pudding is being turned out, although I'm partial to pouring it cold

Serves 4

Prepare 10 minutes

Cook 8-12 minutes, depending on microwave wattage

You Will Need

For the rhubarb sauce

- 400g rhubarb, cut into 2cm batons
- 1 tbsp caster sugar
- 2 pieces stem ginger, finely diced

- 2 tbsp stem ginger syrup, from the jar

For the sponge

- 125g butter, at room temperature, plus extra for greasing
- 125g self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting
- 125g golden caster sugar
- 2 British Medium Eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- Vanilla Custard and/or extra thick double cream, and/or ice cream, to serve

To Do

1 Combine the rhubarb, caster sugar, stem ginger and syrup in a microwaveable container large enough to hold the rhubarb, no more than 2 pieces deep. Place a lid or plate on top and microwave for 90 seconds to 4 minutes at medium power, until some of the batons start to soften. Stir, then replace the lid and microwave at medium power for 1 minute, in 30 second increments, adding more time if needed, until half the rhubarb is soft. Seal and set aside to gently steam, soften and share their colour while you make the sponge.

2 Grease a 1L microwave-safe pudding bowl with a little butter, then dust with flour. Using a stand mixer, electric hand mixer, food processor or elbow grease and a wooden spoon, cream together the sugar and butter. Add 1 tbsp flour, then 1 egg at a time and continue to beat to incorporate the eggs into the butter mix, followed by the vanilla, the remaining flour and ginger.

3 Spoon the mixture into the prepared basin and stand it on a microwave-safe plate (in case it overflows). Place a plate on top of the pudding, face down (to give the sponge more room to expand), then microwave at full power for 5 minutes 30 seconds (1,000–1,200W) to 6 minutes (806W), until evenly risen. Remove from the microwave and leave covered to continue steaming for 90 seconds more. Check it is cooked by inserting a skewer into the centre (it needs to come out clean), then run a thin knife around the edge (which should already be pulling away) and turn the pudding out onto a serving platter.

4 Serve immediately, with spoonfuls of pink rhubarb and plenty of custard, and/or thick double cream and/or ice cream.

ED'S TIP

This is something to make last-minute, as although sponges are a classic microwave hack, they do harden-up fairly quickly.

WELSH WONDERS

On a recent cold and blowy afternoon I spent a few hours in a series of greenhouses, sniffing exotic scents and marvelling at the sheer abundance of flowering bulbous plants

I was just a mile from the National Botanic Garden of Wales in south ' Carmarthenshire, in a hilly landscape renowned for its high rainfall – higher than ours nearer the coast, just half an hour away.

My hosts are retired from the hellish nine-to-five tedium, now seemingly spending all their waking hours tending plants and running various local and national horticultural societies and their events. They're travellers, too, imminently off botanising in the surprisingly floriferous wastes of Kurdistan.

Their assembly of mostly alpine bulbous plants is perhaps the UK's largest privately-held collection, possibly exceeding in both number and rarity those at Kew and the Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley

From books, a lifetime's gardening and my own comparatively few horticultural travels, I could easily identify miniature daffodils and dwarf tulips, diminutive irises and the fritillary, snowdrop and cyclamen clan. But of the individual species I was ignorant. I was trawling the pages of a botanical encyclopaedia, reading labels stuck into pots beside unspeakably beautiful plants, whose names were known to me only from rarefied periodicals and obscure websites.

Moreover, almost everything laid before me was grown from seed, from collecting excursions over many years to Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, the wild Stans and the Great Game's distant steppe – places on the map I'd be hard put to lay a finger on.

The glasshouses were not heated, although some of the myriad pots they contained were plunged up to their rims in deep beds of sand through which warming electric cables had been laid. But most of the plants are cold-tolerant; lingering damp is their foe. Ventilation is therefore crucial. Some, needing more light than a Welsh sky can bestow, were helped along by overhead lights familiar to all you cannabis-growers. Beyond the glasshouses there are several acres of intensively planted trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials and, yes, ever more bulbs. Hellebores of known and unknown provenance proliferate.

Snowdrops of many different kinds mingle with scillas, corydalis, trilliums, erythroniums, alliums and narcissi. Some Himalayan white- and buff-stemmed birches and a venerable magnolia afford midsummer shade, while in March and April plentiful camellia bushes sway in full flower. A few rhododendrons were at the party, as was one of my own springtime favourites – *Corylopsis pauciflora*, decked out in small, primrose-yellow flowers on a mesh of bare twigs.

As with so many gardeners, generosity was at the fore. 'We've got several pots of this – would you like one? That allium you admired, can I dig you a clump? Oh, and we have a

surplus of cyclamen coum seedlings raised from seed from a recent trip to Greece. I'll fetch some for you.'

While I learnt a great deal about little-known plants that afternoon, I discovered even more about the pleasures of obsession. Dedicated to their botanical and horticultural interests, my chums threw Latin names at one another like competitive, well-tempered professors, exchanging fragments of plant stories dear to them both. Their memories are keen; their recall impressive. It keeps them young. It beats sudoku.

Over tea and cake in the warm kitchen, we reminisced about our various travels. At different times, we had covered some of the same ground – memorably the Golan Heights, mindful of unexploded ordnance, and that flank of south-eastern Lebanon studded with Crusader castles perched among groves of wild flowers.

Alas, my passport gathers dust in a drawer these days; theirs do not.

WOODS AND HEDGES

GREATER STITCHWORT *Stellaria holostea*

Picking stitchwort is supposed to provoke thunderstorms and it was, as the name suggests, used as a remedy for sharp stabbing pains. There is no scientific evidence to support either belief!

Greater stitchwort is a perennial and grows from a creeping rootstock to a height of between 20 and 60cm. The stems are thin, square (or rectangular) and brittle, and tend to lean on other woodland vegetation to gain some protection from the wind and rain. The leaves are thin, rough edged and taper to a fine point, giving the whole plant a grassy quality. The flowers appear from April to June. They are very attractive, up to 30mm across and composed of five white petals each deeply notched or divided to approximately half its length.

HERB ROBERT *Geranium robertianum*

Perhaps its habit of growing among the shadows of old gardens and forgotten woodland tracks has led to the long association of this innocuous plant with the darker side of country life. The name probably has its roots in Robin Goodfellow, a mischievous fairy who was always close at hand to tip over the milk pail or unlatch the chicken coop.

Herb Robert is an annual, sometimes persisting over winter into a second year, growing to a height of about 40cm. The leaves are attractive, composed of five leaflets deeply fingered and notched, giving the foliage a lace-like quality. Often the whole plant is bright red – leaves, stems and all. The flowers, appearing throughout the summer, are

five Detailed and 15–20mm across, pink with red veins. As with other members of the crane's-bill family the seeds develop in long 'beaked' fruits.

SWEET CICELY

SIMON CPURTAULP

The perennial herb sweet cicely, having died down in November, is said to be the first to show itself each year, around the middle of February. It is a close-run thing with lovage, which should be about to appear above ground, and both are welcome harbingers of spring.

With its fern-like leaves and white flowers, sweet cicely can be confused with cow parsley. Now is the time to sow the seed or, better still, buy a young plant which, when established, will self-seed and spread, growing up to five feet tall. It prefers a damp, well-drained soil and the leaves should be available in every month of the year except December and January.

Sweet cicely is a very hardy plant, untroubled by disease and pests, and needs little attention. It is often grown among tulips in spring, when its flowers will be at their best. In autumn, the seed pods will turn almost black.

The plant gives off a strong aniseed scent, and the flavour of the leaves has also been compared to that of fennel and star anise. John Parkinson, botanist and apothecary to James I, was a great fan of sweet cicely, saying that it gives a better taste to any other herb put with it.

Another herbalist of the time, John Gerard, recommended it for oldies, as 'it rejoiceth and comforteth the heart and increaseth their lust and strength'.

Sweet cicely can be a useful and healthy substitute for sugar. The leaves have the effect of reducing the acidity in tart fruit, such as unripe gooseberries, currants and rhubarb.

This herb is also known as garden myrrh – its Latin name is *Myrrhis odorata* – though I am uncertain of its connection to the dried resin brought by the wise men for the infant Jesus.

In the Middle Ages, sweet cicely was strewn on the floors of churches to release its scent, and the seeds were used as an aid to digestion.

An infusion of the leaves was popular as a herbal tea, and they are among the ingredients of the Scandinavian aquavit.

RHS GARDEN ROSEMOOR

Apples from RHS Garden Rosemoor's Devon Collection orchard have been sampled this spring as part of a research project led by the University of Bristol and Sandford Orchards. The project aims to find the DNA fingerprint – or genotype – of apples from as many West Country orchards as possible, in order to find rare or genetically useful cultivars.

"We're especially interested in finding 'survivor' apples – that is, any cultivar that's found in more than one location," says Lawrence Weston, Professional Work Placement Student at Rosemoor, who helps care for the orchard and is helping take the leaf samples. "If you find two apples that are genetically identical in two separate places it suggests that, historically, someone has grafted the tree because it has a nice habit, great fruit, or has a really good apple for storing. It's a really good indicator that the apple's genes are potentially valuable."

The project could also find early-fruiting cider apples to extend the harvest season.