

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- ☒ RHS Flower Show Tatton Park – 16–20 July
 - ☒ AUTUMN SHOW 6th SEPTEMBER
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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.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE**ANNIES FRUIT CAKE**

This one was given to me by a friend

You will need

1Lb Dried fruit

1 Mug strong black tea

1 Egg beaten

6oz S.R. Flour

1tsp Mixed spice

To do

Soak the fruit overnight in the tea

Next day add all the ingredients

Do not drain off the tea

Put into a loaf tin lined with greaseproof paper

Preheat oven to 4/180c/350f & place cake in the middle

Cook for one hour

Annie says turn out allow to cool then ENJOY

THE HAROLD AND VITA SHOW

David Wheeler

'So they began to search the Weald of Kent and Sussex for another house where they would be unmolested by chickens or commuters, and where they could make a new garden. They found Sissinghurst Castle.' Thus Nigel Nieelsen's annotation following his father's diary entry of 4th March 1930 in which the diplomat, author, diarist and politician bewailed the news of a poultry farm being set up next to his and his wife Vita's idyllic Long Barn – a worry, incidentally, that didn't materialise but which led, eventually, to the creation elsewhere of what many people regard as England's finest garden.

In 1913 Harold Nicolson (1886–1968), dapper and 'by temperament an aristocrat', married Vita Sackville-West (1892–1962), aristocratic by birth. Both led 'colourful' lives well enough chronicled in 1973 by younger son Nigel's page-turning *Portrait of a Marriage*. Harold died fifty years ago, in May 1968, and what follows here can only be concerned with his and Vita's life together as gardeners.

In April 1930 Harold and Vita, with elder son Ben and all the dogs, drove to Sissinghurst: 'We get a view of the two towers as we approach. We go round carefully in the mud. I am cold and calm but I like it.' At around the same time Nigel visited with his mother in the company of poet Dorothy Wellesley, and recalled the estate (through thirteen-year-old eyes) as 'quite impossible'. The Sissinghurst that Vita bought on 7th May 1930 for £12,000 (costing 'another good £15,000 to put it in order', thought Harold) was the remains of a large Tudor and Elizabethan mansion once possessed by her Sackville ancestors. At the time of purchase no room was habitable and the family spent the first night there in the bailiff's house (South Cottage) beside a boy-seout fire with one candle, dining on Harold's least favourite food: sardines, soup from a tablet and tinned tongue. The garden, 'worse than non-existent', was, said Nigel, 'a rubbish dump'.

But, my, how they got to work. The Moat Walk was soon cleared, giving Vita ever more walls for her beloved climbing plants – roses and clematis

especially. Within two years, the courtyard had been cleared and set to lawn and what was to become the famous White Garden (an inspiration for its kind throughout the world) was laid out, and the area known as Delos was filled with vegetables. The Rondel, surrounded by clipped yew, was laid out soon after, and by 1936 paving had been laid in the Lime Walk.

A plan of Sissinghurst reveals the almost total absence of right angles, a potential nightmare for any garden designer. If Vita is credited with furnishing the garden with flowers (choosing the best varieties, a lesson learned from Lawrence Johnston at Hidcote), it was Harold who masterminded its intricacy, expertly connecting each of the garden rooms, inspired perhaps by geometrically precise Islamic gardens seen during his diplomatic postings in Constantinople and Tehran. The result – the maximum informality of planting, combined with the maximum formality of design – is of enduring supremacy.

Harold outlived Vita by eight years; a year before his death, the National Trust acquired the entire property where, today, head gardener Troy Scott Smith is on record as saying that it has lost its way: 'In becoming a totem of horticultural perfectionism, it has forgotten what is really is.'

Its many thousands of garden-minded visitors will not agree. For them it remains the ultimate destination. Bravo Harold, bravo Vita, bravo a succession of spirited individuals who have kept the flame alight, and bravo Troy for addressing its future needs.

HOW TO GROW BASIL- SIMON COURTAULD

In the late 1970s I used to grow quite a lot of basil during the summer months, picking the leaves regularly to sell to a London restaurant. Extraordinary to recall, but in those days it was almost impossible to buy basil in any quantity. I should add that I employed a gardener then, and together we learnt some useful lessons about this delicious herb.

Not only should basil seed be sown under glass or plastic, but the plants should be given protection even when fully grown. They do not need artificial heat, but rain and wind, as well as cold, may turn the leaves yellow. If you are going to plant basil outside, not before the end of this month, a warm and sheltered position in full sun is strongly advised. Basil is also sensitive to wet conditions. If outside, the soil must be well-drained; if in a greenhouse, watering should be done during the day, as the plants do not enjoy having wet 'feet' overnight. When the white tips begin to flower, they should be pinched out to prolong the life of the plants.

These days, there are many different varieties of basil, most of them cultivars of sweet basil, which is rightly lauded as the king of herbs (from the Greek basilikon phuton and Latin basileus).

I have grown purple basil, which looks pretty, with pink flowers, and bush basil, good for edging a vegetable bed; but sweet basil undoubtedly has the most flavour and is the most aromatic. This was the variety grown by Isabella in her pot of basil to hide the severed head of her lover, as described in Keats's poem and so memorably depicted by William Holman Hunt.

One of the simplest ways to grow basil, if not starting from seed, is to buy a pot of growing plants, available in most supermarkets, and divide them into a few larger pots. Keep one or two in a greenhouse or outside against a south-facing wall, and one or two on a kitchen windowsill, which should help to keep flies away

WOODS AND HEDGES

WILD DAFFODIL *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* It came as a surprise to Wordsworth to find daffodils on the shores of Ullswater, but these days it is possible to find patches of cultivated daffodils almost anywhere. The wild variety is not a very common plant now, occurring in a few woods and pastures in most English counties. Where it is found in a natural state it is usually abundant, a riot of nodding heads. Wild daffodils are delicate and short stemmed (up to 35cm high), the flowers finely formed with the

perianth or outer scales distinctly paler and more straw coloured than the trumpet-shaped central tube.

The daffodil is a perennial, growing from a bulb, flowering from March to April depending on the location. The leaves are strap like, grey-green in colour and up to 30cm long.

LORDS AND LADIES *Arum maculatum* Clumps of the broad triangular or arrow-shaped leaves of lords and ladies, often spotted with black or purple, appear in the early spring in woods and shady hedgerows. The flowers follow in April and May. Lords and ladies is known by a bewildering number of local names, many of bawdy origin: cuckoo-pint is probably the most widespread and respectable.

The flower head or inflorescence takes the form of a cluster of female flowers topped by a sequence of male flowers. These are comparatively small, encased in a cylindrical chamber, but this chamber opens out into a large cowl or hood called a spathe. Within the spathe is a purple rod called a spadix. When the plant is ripe the spadix heats up and gives off a scent, slight and not very pleasant, which attracts owl midges. These tiny insects crawl down past a ring of bristles into the floral chamber. If they carry pollen from another plant they pollinate the female flowers, whereupon the bristles wither and the midges are able to escape, picking up fresh pollen from the male flowers on the way out.

When the spadix and the spathe have shrivelled away the ovules develop into a cluster of orange berries, attractive but poisonous. Lords and ladies is a perennial, growing from a fleshy rootstock. In Elizabethan times this rootstock was crushed to produce starch used to stiffen collars.

ASH PARISH GARDEN CLUB TRIPS 2025

Sunday 13th July 2025 . Visit RHS Wisley

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley>

Leave Victoria Hall at 1pm returning 5pm approx.. Cost £6 if you travel on bus, FREE if you use your own transport. Meet at entrance to collect your tickets at 1:30pm .