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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](mailto:ernestperry33@gmail.com) hard copy to Chris

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## **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.

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## **KEEP POINSETTIA HAPPY AFTER CHRISTMAS**

What will you do with your festive poinsettia after Christmas? Some will simply say: "bin it and buy another one next year", but there is a sustainable, and money-saving, alternative.

The small plants that we bring into our houses for the festive season are in fact descended from *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, a large shrubby spurge native to Mexico and Central America. In those warmer climates it can reach a height and spread of 4m. The bracts surround a central cluster of small greenish flower structures known as cyathia. Given the right care, our poinsettias can live on as house plants for many years, especially now that recent breeding has produced cultivars that are both naturally compact and tolerant of lower temperatures. They make attractive foliage plants through the year, and can colour up once again in response to the shorter days of autumn.

Paying attention to the sustainability of your poinsettia can start with sourcing it from a reputable grower, and in the last decade there has been an increase in the number of poinsettias produced in the UK. Typically, rooted cuttings arrive in June taking up glasshouse space vacated by summer bedding. In the past, poinsettias were treated with dwarfing hormones but by selecting naturally compact varieties, these are no longer essential.

Look for healthy plants whose true flowers (the cyathia), as well as the bracts and leaves, look well. Avoid plants kept in cold temperatures, with soaking wet or bone-dry roots, or with yellowing leaves. Poinsettias hate sudden exposure to cold, so make sure yours is well wrapped for the journey home and never left in a cold car.

The ideal position for a poinsettia is a spot in bright but indirect light, at a fairly constant temperature above 13°C, away from direct heat and draughts.

Water only when the compost is dry up top. When doing so, add enough to soak right through the compost. Return later to empty any excess from the saucer. There should be enough fertiliser in the plant's original compost for the festive period.

Feed monthly from January to March, using a well-balanced liquid feed, in late March, prune by about three quarters (wearing gloves to protect your skin) and make sure the plant receives plenty of light to encourage regrowth. Wait for new shoots to show before potting on.

Once it's back in growth, move it into a slightly larger pot. Make sure the plant's rootball is reasonably moist first. Use John Innes No.3 compost with a little added potting grit, water in gently. After a month, resume feeding.

To colour up well, poinsettias need total darkness for at least 12 hours a day for eight weeks. To achieve this, put them in a room with no artificial light.

Avoid touching the sap of poinsettias as it can be a skin irritant.

Given the right care, poinsettias can live on as house plants for many years

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## **THIS MONTHS RECIPE**

### **You will need**

100 g (4 oz) butter or margarine

225 g (8 oz) self raising flour  
pinch of salt  
100 g (4 oz) sugar  
50 g (2 oz) currants  
50 g (2 oz) sultanas  
30 ml (2 tbsps) chopped candied peel  
2 eggs, beaten  
about 60 ml (4 tbsps) milk

**To do**

Line a 18-cm (7-in) cake tin.

Rub the fat into the flour and salt until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Stir in the sugar, fruit and peel.

Make a well in the centre, pour in the egg and some of the milk and gradually work in the dry ingredients, adding more milk necessary to give a dropping consistency.

Put the mixture into the tin and level the top.

Bake in the oven at 180°C (350°F) mark 4 for about 1 hour, until the cake is golden brown and firm to the touch.

Turn out and cool on a wire rack.

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**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

- **SPRING SHOW 11th APRIL**
- RHS Malvern Spring Festival – 8-11 May
- **PLANT SALE 9th MAY**
- RHS Chelsea Flower Show – 20-24 May
- **OUT MEETING 1st June**
- **SUMMER SHOW 6th JULY**
- RHS Sandringham Flower Show – 21–26 July
- **AUTUMN SHOW 12th SEPTEMBER**

Please note Hampton Court is now a bi-annual event & Tatton Park is now every 3yrs

## **M25 WISLEY JUNCTION**

Wisley and Ockham Commons the world's first lowland heathland wildlife bridge.

Not everyone in Surrey has taken pleasure in the behemoth re-construction of the M25's intersection with the A3 at its infamous 'Junction 10' at Wisley. This National Highways project has tried the patience of drivers in their thousands, not least myself, over the past five years. And of course, many of us have been concerned about its environmental impacts. From the outset (and mindful that these nationally-sanctioned works would proceed with or without our engagement) SWT has worked hard to minimise their impact, and indeed fight for a net positive outcome for nature.

A decade in the making

Early on, the Trust's position was essentially one of ambivalence (thus reduced to 'supportive' in planning-speak) as to the worthiness of the proposed J10 improvement scheme.

However, we accepted its road safety justification and saw the opportunity to push for compensation gains for wildlife - especially by accelerating the reclamation of more natural lowland heathland biotypes from barren postwar Scots Pine plantations. We pressed on, calling for the maximum area of heathland restoration and creation that could be claimed as 'necessary' under the circumstances.

Although never part of the official quid pro quo to compensate the current scheme's impact on the area's protected heathlands (originally quadriseded by construction of the M25 in the early 1980s), the 'green bridge' was always part of Surrey Wildlife Trust's opportunistic 'ask' dating from the scheme's inception in 2016. Even before this, the Trust had been approached by then-Highways England to contribute various ideas for wildlife enhancements on its national estate, when we suggested the opportunity for retrofitting 'green' decks to existing bridges to coincide with any related disruptive works. We saw that such bridges could permit dispersal, for example, of isolated Sand Lizard populations to enable the

future expansion of these rare reptiles. So when it became clear that all existing bridges would be replaced due to the widening of both motorways, the stage was set to advance our green bridge(s) agenda...

### **Sub-par precedents**

The Trust, as the bridge's chief advocate and as wildlife managers of the Ockham & Wisley Commons Site of Special Scientific Interest/SPA for their owner Surrey County Council, was offered a key role in researching design options from examples around,

In comparison with much of Europe and North America, the UK has a poor track record installing dedicated wildlife bridges. There are various reasons, but principally this is because much of our road infrastructure predates growing perceptions of their necessity. A tunnel is the ultimate 'bridge' and of course we do now have one of those, taking the A3 under the Devil's Punchbowl SSSI at Hindhead. Although more green bridges do now exist, with others planned, most have been at best largely cosmetic and not the strategic habitat-connectivity design solutions they could have been.

### **Design and delivery**

Helping Dames Adler – our then Director of Land Management – was Claire-Anne, a French intern tasked with researching the literature, which fed into the engineering consultant's (AtkinsRealis) feasibility study. It was quickly realised that the bridge's width was the most important feature at stake, especially as it must also provide a vehicle-width track and public bridleway. On principle, wildlife bridges should be as wide as possible and moreover, largely free from human disturbance. For ease of costing, three potential width specifications were considered: 10, 25 and 50 metres. That summer, it was all in the balance and we quickly mounted a mini-campaign, garnering support for the bridge and its minimum width at 25 metres. Local MPs, councillors and eNGOs were all approached and most supported us. This helped National Highways' case for signing-off the necessary funding and the green bridge was finally given the 'green light'.

**A bridge thus far** This will be England's first wildlife 'habitat' bridge to present as lowland heathland. The footings at either end have been carefully re-graded to promote its use by reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. Mammals, including even bats, are also likely to be safely guided over the A3 by the bridge route. The heathers and gorse used to

vegetate the bridge have been sourced as turves cut from both commons. They have been grown especially for this and will leave behind important bare ground areas for reptiles and invertebrates in their original locations. We are now carefully designing monitoring protocols to be able to assess the success of the bridge for nature. We will use standard methods to detect and count all the bridge's users and colonisers and intend to involve volunteer citizen scientists, including from the biological recording community, as well as academic research collaborators wherever possible. Our aim is to not let any organism entering or crossing the bridge go unrecorded! There is to be informative signage on the bridge, to include a fitting tribute to the late James Adler for his invaluable work lobbying for and guiding its creation. I can feel an appropriately wide, green, ribbon-cutting opportunity coming along sometime soon in 2026.

If things go to plan, from 2026 it will be possible to walk between Wisley and Ockham Commons using the world's first lowland heathland wildlife bridge. Director of Research & Monitoring, Mike Waite explains the role of SWT in this initiative, which will make the re-connection of fragmented heathland habitats a reality

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## **HEATH, MOOR AND MOUNTAIN**

**MARSH VIOLET** *Viola palustris* An unusual violet in its choice of habitat, this species is most often found among saturated bog moss alongside moorland burns and becks. It is a perennial, producing a long creeping rhizome from which grow loose tufts of leaves. The leaves are long stalked, broader than the heart-shaped leaves of other violets and up to 4cm across, looking almost round or kidney shaped. They are a similar dark green, with dimpled or bluntly toothed edges.

It is as well that the leaves are so distinctive because the flowers, which are a subdued lilac or off-white with purple veins, are often absent even during the main season of April to July.

**MOSS CAMPION** *Silene acaulis* Most real mountain flowers are compact and brightly coloured, and this campion is an excellent example. It forms dense diminutive cushions of mossy foliage with simple lance-shaped leaves; the whole plant grows to about 10cm tall, the individual leaves about 1cm long.

By comparison, the flowers are large, about 1cm across, bright rose-red in colour and five petalled. They are similar in structure to other campions and the male and female flowers are carried on separate plants.

Moss campion flowers in July and August and is found on spectacular mountains in the west and north, from Snowdonia to the Scottish Islands. It also grows at sea level in the extreme north.

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## **BLUEBELLS**

David Wheeler

Rewilding is not gardening; gardening is not rewilding. Nor are they the two sides of the same coin.

Yet... they have one thing in common. Plants. Yes, wild flowers - our familiar, blue-blooded, botanical treasure, rooted in remote valleys and uplands, motorway embankments and less manicured churchyards (more of these, please), in shade or part sun, in damp soil or dry.

Two supreme examples top a long list: primroses and bluebells. I grew both in a north-facing London window box more than 50 years ago. One primrose plant, three bluebell bulbs - an umbilical tie to the family garden I had recently vacated.

I've grown them ever since, in great swathes, for 40 years; less prolifically (but equally devotedly) now in a town garden.

To the late Geoffrey Grigson, the primrose {*Primula vulgaris*) was the favourite of favourites: 'The symbol of spring... wild and in the garden; the flower of banks and hedges and sheltered cliffs, where it blossoms down to the edge of the sea.'

Its name, says poet Grigson in his *The Englishman's Flora* (1955), comes from the medieval *prima rosa*, the first flowering plant of the year (which it isn't, but no matter). Its popularity can be measured by its umpteen common/ regional/ vernacular names: butter rose, golden stars, Lent rose, early rose, Easter rose...

It blooms almost throughout the year 'in sheltered Cornish hedgebanks and Sussex copses', said England's foremost nature writer, Richard Mabey. He added that the primrose's 'pure yellow flowers and tufted habit - arranged naturally into the form of a posy - have made it a universal token of spring'.

In his *Flora Britannica* (1996), Mabey quotes a Gloucestershire woman telling him that 'A 90-year-old friend... remembers her mother's spring wedding, when wild primroses and cowslips were strewn all along the church path for the bride to walk on.'

To prosper, they ask for no more than moist soil and some shade. They're evergreen perennials (recurring annually), which, left to their own devices, will seed around modestly.

The primrose is unmistakable. But when it comes to bluebells, ambiguity steps in. Here we insist on 'English' bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), not the paler, stouter Spanish bluebell (*H. hispanica*) - a regrettable intruder.

'Our' bluebell's Atlantic and Oceanic distribution pins it to Europe's western fringe, denying it (according to Grigson) any history or 'warrant from Greece or Rome'. It inhabits all of the UK, from Cumbria to Cornwall, from Conwy to Carmarthen, throughout Ireland and Scotland.

But cross the border from England, and to the Scots the bluebell becomes a different plant altogether. There, the name refers to the harebell, the beautiful, delicate *Campanula rotundifolia*, one of the 'most catholic [wild flowers] in its choice of habitats' (Mabey), flowering in late summer and into autumn.

True bluebells flourish in open woodland and in gardens tucked into shrubberies and beneath deciduous hedges. Green shoots rise from gobstopper-size bulbs early in the new year and hold their spectacular flowering until late April or May. The few in my London window box quickly and pleasingly multiplied, allowing me to pot up a few for chums with more generous spaces.

Writing recently about bluebells, botanist John Akeroyd called them a 'national treasure one of the great spectacles of Nature'. Who'd disagree? Don't dig up wild plants for your own garden. Instead, buy seeds, bulbs or young plants from trusted suppliers. Thankfully, they're not the only wildlings to find sanctuary in cultivation. Think, too, violets, pasque flowers (*pulsatillas*), species roses and hundreds more.

We gardeners are thoroughly blessed.

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**APGC TRIPS FOR 2026****Lord Wandsworth College,**

Long Sutton, Hook, RG29 1TB, 18th April, Leave Victoria Hall at 10:30, return by 4pm. Cost £14 per person, includes Transport and Entrance fees. Café on site

**Wisley** May 16th , Leave Victoria Hall at 1pm, return by 4pm. Cost £8 per person, includes Transport and Entrance fees. Café on site. If you travel in your own vehicle, meet us outside entrance to Wisley. There is no cost when using own transport.

[www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley](http://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley)

**Waterers Garden** 1st June (To Be Confirmed) 43 Ambleside Road, Lightwater GU18 5TA Leave Victoria Hall at 6pm (prompt), return by 10pm. Cost £5 per person, includes Transport and Entrance fees. Teas available at own cost on site

**Belvedere,** Garden close lane, Newbury, RG14 6PP, on 11th July (To be confirmed),

Leave Victoria Hall at 11am return by 6 pm. Cost £18 per person, includes Transport and Entrance fees. Teas available at own cost on site. Stopping on the way at Hilliers Garden Centre, Aldermaston

**Titsey place and gardens,** Pitchfront Lodge, Water Lane, Titsey, Oxted, RH8 0SA, 30th August [www.titsey.org](http://www.titsey.org)

Leave Victoria Hall at 11:00am return by 6 pm. Cost £24 each,, includes Transport and Entrance fees. Teas available on site. Stopping on the way at Knights Garden Centre Oxted Rd, Godstone RH9 8DB