

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

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

- AUTUMN SHOW 7th SEPTEMBER
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GARDENING CALENDAR AUG

August is the first harvest month; it is also the time to begin tidying up your garden as the early-summer-growing plants begin to finish flowering and collapse.

Harvest

Now is the time to pick sweet corn, tomatoes, peas, beans, marrows, pumpkins, artichokes and glasshouse crops such as chillies and aubergines. Push straw or old tiles under ripening squash and pumpkins to stop rotting on the soil surface.

Protect

Tie in tall late-summer perennials to stop them flopping over.

Prune

Lavender and rosemary will have finished flowering by now, so lightly trim them gently shear the new soft growth, but don't cut into the older brown wood. Likewise, trim off foliage from strawberries once they've finished fruiting. In the middle of the month stop outdoor tomatoes by pinching out the uppermost terminal shoot.

Water & Mow

Water in dry spells, from a water butt or by re-using lightly used bathwater. Mow the lawn at least once a week. Raise the blades if the weather is hot and dry to stop the sward turning brown.

Pick pumpkins this month as well as tomatoes, artichokes and glasshouse crops such as chillies and aubergines

3 HOURS IN THE GARDEN IS EQUIVALENT TO ONE HOUR IN THE GYM.

Dr Richard Claxton, a GP in Kent, campaigns for the provision of nature-based therapies in healthcare settings

If you're anything like me, the arrival of warmer temperatures and longer days leaves me itching to get out in the garden, to get busy so my plot can get off to a flying start. But it's not just the veg plot and borders that will benefit from some attention this spring...

We now know more and more about the benefits that either gardening and/or spending time in nature gives us. And the headline is that time spent out there earns big dividends for our own wellbeing. I know this from managing my own physical and mental health, as well as from the benefits gardening 'on prescription' gives my patients.

Three hours in the garden is equivalent to one hour in the gym – which is great news for those of you who, like me, never really got on with gyms (or lycra, for that matter!). Gardeners as a group are much less likely to be overweight and their healthier lifestyles and grow-their-own diet is less likely to lead to diabetes. They are also less likely to suffer from dementia, and have lower levels of stress and higher levels of wellbeing.

And for those with established depression, dementia or diabetes, there are real benefits from treatment programmes in garden therapy.

We're learning fast about the many ways that these benefits work. Physical exercise of course is good for us, as is a bit of fresh air and sunshine to help our vitamin D levels. Contact with the soil gives us higher levels of serotonin in the brain which lifts our mood. And a spell in the garden leads to lower levels of Cortisol (the stress hormone), blood pressure and heart rate, but amazingly also higher levels of tumour-killing white blood cells.

But for me the benefits are simpler: I love to lose myself in focussing on each task – be it sowing seeds, weeding, potting on or pricking out. To work with nature in creating a beautiful space, to grow my own food and do my bit (in a small way) to help wildlife and biodiversity, and to come in as the light fades with that good ache that tells me that I've done well... these are the things I love the most.

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Stuffed chicken with wild mushroom & brandy sauce

Enjoying restaurant-quality food doesn't have to mean going out. Cook up a chicken dinner with a difference using finest corn-fed chicken, smoky roasted peppers and an indulgent wild mushroom and brandy sauce.

Serves 2 Takes 45 mins

You will need

220g pack Ramiro peppers
2tbsp Cold press rapeseed oil
2 Free range chicken breast fillets
(skin on)
130g baby spinach
1 Eshallion shallot, finely diced
100g wild mushrooms
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
2 tbsp brandy
250ml chicken stock
50ml double cream
Black pepper, to season

To do

1 Brush the peppers with half tbsp oil. Hold with tongs directly over a gas flame, turning until blackened all over. Transfer to a bowl and cover with cling film. When cool, rinse under cold water and peel off the skins. Halve, deseed and slice into strips.

2 Preheat the oven to gas 6, 180°C, fan 160°C. Put the chicken breasts skin-side down on a board, then make a deep slice down the middle (taking care not to cut all the way through). Open out the sides like a butterfly. Season, then lay a few spinach leaves and roasted pepper strips on top. Roll up the chicken around the filling and secure with a cocktail stick.

3 Heat 1 tbsp oil in a frying pan. Fry the chicken for 5 mins until golden all over. Transfer to a roasting tin; roast in the oven for 10-15 mins until cooked through.

4 Add the remaining 1 tbsp oil to a separate frying pan over a medium heat. Fry the shallots and wild mushrooms for 3-5 mins, then stir in the garlic and cook for 30 secs. Take the pan off the heat and pour in the brandy, then return to the heat and bubble

until the liquid has reduced. Stir in the stock and the remaining roasted pepper slices. Cook for 5 mins, then stir in the cream and warm through for 2 mins.

5 Meanwhile, set aside the chicken to rest. Tip the juices from the tin into the chicken frying pan and add the remaining spinach. Allow to wilt for 1-2 mins over a low heat.

6 Remove the cocktail sticks and slice the chicken. Serve on top of the wilted spinach and pour over the sauce.

WOODS AND HEDGES

TUFTED VETCH *Vicia cracca*

Vetches, and their close relatives tares, are members of the pea family but they have finely fingered or pinnate leaves, often separated into a dozen or more leaflets.

Tufted vetch is probably the most noticeable species, having a scrambling stem up to 2m long, branched tendrils curled like coiled springs around any possible support, and dense flower heads of up to 40 blue/purple flowers. These are out from June to August, after which a cluster of pods develops, each pod containing up to six seeds.

Tufted vetch is a perennial, overwintering as a rootstock, and is found at the edges of woods and along hedgerows and roadside verges.

BLACKBERRY *Rubus fruticosus*

Blackberries are a mid-autumn harvest. They are produced at a time when foliage is turning orange or red, hence it is useful to have black fruits which birds, the main agent of dispersal, can see clearly. There are dozens of different kinds of brambles making up an aggregate or grouping of over 300 separate 'micro-species'. They vary in choice of habitat, prickliness of the thorns and the taste of the berries. All but the most eccentric amateur botanists leave the task of identification to the experts.

If left uncut, most brambles grow into scrambling, impenetrable bushes up to 3m in height. The flowers grow in panicles on the tips of the previous year's stems. They are white or pale pink and, along woodland rides, are the most important nectar source for midsummer butterflies. The black 'berry' is in fact a tight cluster of 'drupelets', fleshy fruits like miniature plums or cherries, inside which are cased seeds ('pips!').

SUMMER READING

David Wheeler

I treasure a few indulgent hours in the conservatory on a weekend morning.

I'm fussing over my new pelargoniums, small plugs bought through the post from Allwoods in Sussex at the end of April.

I've ground freshly roasted beans from the Gower Coffee Company at Britain's last surviving Kardomah Cafe (in Swansea). There's a stack of gardening books by the sofa with diversions by Sybille Bedford (Jigsaw) and Jan Morris – I'm enjoying a headlong rush through the final pages of A Writer's House in Wales.

Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream is on the turntable, augmented by birdsong seeping into the room from the old sweet chestnut tree that proffers welcome midday shade.

Grey-leafed, white-flowered stock, Matthiola incana – the most welcome of all our self-seeders – fills these warm indoor cubic yards with a whole Jermyn Street of perfume.

My partner's nearby herbaceous Bower-beds are themselves a refulgent jigsaw – of blues and ellows: irises, aquilegias, agapanthus, salvias, euphorbias, the lovely rugosa rose 'Agnes'...

Midst election fever, I was pondering which way to vote. July begs an X in the box for roses, but should I go instead for the herb garden's summer plenty?

Thyme and marjoram proliferate in ill sun. Tall fronds of green and bronze fennel await the trawlerman's catch of the day for this evening's seafood repast. There's enough basil to fill the freezer with tubs of pesto to sweeten the coming winter's bitter months.

The hydrangeas flourish. My 150 or so different varieties are the bones of a previous larger collection regrettably abandoned when we moved house three years ago. It was August, an impossible month to attempt the successful transplanting of mature shrubs. I brought instead as many cuttings as I could handle.

The soil type varies across our few acres, but I haven't so far hit a patch of aluminium-rich acidic loam, the kind needed for m the bluest hydrangea flowers. Annoyingly, several are an unsatisfactory shade of pink. Given time, I can remedy this, hoping again

to see, within another year or two, mopheads and lacecaps of glorious lapis, azure, navy, sapphire and the deepest indigo.

Meanwhile, I relish the intense monkshood blues. Easily sourced *Aconitum nepellus* or *A. Carmichaelii* 'Arendsii' are pleasing enough, but covetable duskier shades can be winkled out from specialist nurseries. Pale blue 'Stainless Steel' is on my wants list.

Beware, though: these beauties are dangerous, containing a strong, fast-acting poison. If mistakenly ingested, they can induce nausea, vomiting, breathing, heart problems and... worse.

And if such nefarious thoughts appeal, better instead Marta McDowell's latest, *Gardening Can Be Murder* – a deliciously entertaining dark read for the afternoon hammock.

Aconitums keep us going in blue flowers until the baton passes to the Michaelmas daisies, but to think now of such September lovelies is to wish summer away all too soon.

In the closing pages of her book, Jan Morris steps outside her beloved house, Trefan Morys, to give us a peep at the garden. It's in near-coastal North Wales, near Clough Williams-Ellis's Portmeirion (he was a friend and occasional visitor), where the climate can be unforgiving.

There, she says, 'blackberry brambles show signs of aggression. Ferns proliferate not in the domesticated way the Victorians loved, but with an almost drunken abundance... Ivy and Virginia creeper threaten to smother the house.

'If I were a poet or philosopher,' she continues, 'exiled here for my convictions, like Virgil in Constantia, I would be happy enough for the rest of my life.' Perhaps she was, dying there aged 94, just three years ago.

SUMMER SHOW RESULTS

Section 1 Flowers, Fruit and Veg

1st 54pts Ann Poole, 2nd 33pts Hazel Chant, 3rd 30pts Muriel Brodrick

Best Rose exhibit – Hazel Chant

New Exhibitor – 17pts Ruth Sewell