

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?

GARDENING CALENDAR OCTOBER

October is the time to start tidying up and preparing for winter in earnest, while still enjoying the harvest.

Harvest

If you have apple or pear trees, now is the time to pick the fruit.

Protect

Move any tender plants, including houseplants, into a conservatory or greenhouse – don't forget to check that any heaters you have are working properly.

Container gardeners should remove any drip trays and raise terracotta patio pots with bricks or special pot feet (from garden centres) so they don't sit in water over winter and crack when it freezes. This is also the time to stop all feeding, as your plants are slowing down for the winter.

Plant

Now is the time to plant up your spring bulbs, excluding tulips, which should be planted up in November.

Tidy

Fallen leaves are an important natural resource, so don't simply discard them: clear up fallen leaves into black bin bags or create a separate pile

next to the compost heap to make leaf mould ready for next October's soil conditioning.

Continue planting spring bulbs, but leave tulips until next month

THIS MONTHS RECIPE

Goats cheese and tomato tart with basil oil. Makes 4

You will need

150g Puff pastry
4 beef tomatoes
1 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
100g rinded goats cheese, crumbled
20g fresh basil, stems removed
60ml extra virgin olive oil
Flour for dusting the surface
Rocket to garnish

To Do

Preheat the oven to 200°C/fan 180°C/gas mark 6. :

1. Roll the pastry out on a lightly floured surface to one quarter inch thick and cut into four 4 inch circles using a pastry cutter, chill for 30 minutes.
2. Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper and place the pastry on top. Prick several times with a fork and bake for 7 minutes, then turn the pastry circles over and bake for another 7 minutes, until golden and crispy. Remove from the oven and leave to cool.
3. Place half the basil, olive oil and some salt and pepper into a food processor and blend well. Pour into a bowl and set aside.

4. Slice the beef tomatoes 1cm thick. Place in a bowl and drizzle with extra virgin olive oil, vinegar and some salt and pepper.
 5. Place some rocket on each plate and top with a puff pastry circle. Layer the tomatoes, goats cheese and basil leaves.
 6. Just before serving drizzle the basil oil over.
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300 YEARS OLD AND STILL BONKERS

LEVENS HALL HAS THE OLDEST LIVING TOPIARY GARDEN IN THE WORLD, COMPLETE WITH GIANT MUSHROOMS AND LOPSIDED LOLLIPOPS. BY FIONA MCCARTHY

VENTURE THROUGH A small gate in the ancient stone wall surrounding the gardens at Levens Hall, near Kendal, in Cumbria, and it feels as if you are entering a world Lewis Carroll and Dr Seuss might have conjured. Filled with teetering wedding cakes, giant mushroom umbrellas, corkscrew spirals, Bauhaus birds and lopsided lollipops, the topiary garden dating to 1694 is a sight "not seen anywhere else", Chris Crowder, the head gardener, says. "It's a satisfying place to stand in the summer, hearing the visitors 'Ooh' and 'Aah', because it's quite a contrast to the surrounding landscape."

Levens Hall, a grade I listed Elizabethan mansion built around a 13th-century defensive pele tower, is in the custodial hands of Richard Bagot, 43, whose family have been here for five centuries.

The Hall is also home to the oldest topiary in the world. Many of the hundred or so intriguingly clipped yew, box and beech hedges are in the same shapes that were dreamt up by the 17th-century royal gardener Guillaume Beaumont, who was commissioned by Bagot's ancestor Colonel James Grahme, a keeper of King James II's privy purse, to bring the newly hot European craze of topiary to the Lake District.

The garden remains so popular that Bagot came up with the idea of World Topiary Day during lockdown in 2020. Celebrated on May 12, it draws international interest, attracting those eager to learn about the social

history embedded within the ancient walls. "We're just carrying on the tradition, maintaining the shapes somebody set out hundreds of years ago while adding new trees and shapes every year," Crowder says.

More than 35,000 flowers are planted annually, among and underneath the topiary, from double daisies and pansies in the spring to sways of purple, blue and yellow blooms in the summer. "I think of the topiaries as sculptures and these beds as colourful plinths for them to sit on," says Crowder, who has been in charge of the gardens since 1986 and is only the 11th gardener in the Hall's history.

Each topiary has developed its own personality over the years. "Gravity has taken over so they're not quite as they started out, but that's nice because every shape is its own unique thing," Crowder says. "Here they are like characters peopling the garden. We've even given them nicknames - Queen Elizabeth and her maids of honour, Judge's Wig, Homer Simpson and Darth Vader - and because they are evergreens they have a great presence all year round."

These living sculptures are only one part of a ten-acre garden that is open to the public from March to October. There are bee, vegetable and herbaceous borders, an orchard and a nuttery, a fragrant rose garden, and a fountain garden bordered with pleached limes that were planted by Bagot's parents, Susie and Hal, to mark the Hall's

WOODS AND HEDGES

BARREN STRAWBERRY *Potentilla sterilis*

Superficially like wild strawberry but more closely related to the cinquefoils, barren strawberry does not grow a succulent fruit — hence its common name. It is a perennial of dry wood banks and open hedgerows, growing from a woody rootstock to a height of about 10cm. It often flowers very early and is at its best in March and April. The leaves are trifoliate, blue/green and

silky. The end tooth of the middle leaflet is short, not projecting beyond those on either side as is the case with wild strawberry. The white-petalled flowers are easy to distinguish too: the petals of the wild strawberry are slightly pointed and touch each other, whilst those of the barren strawberry are notched and have gaps through which the five green sepals show clearly.

DOG ROSE *Rosacantha*

The flowering season of wild roses is all too brief, usually just a few days in the middle of summer, so it is worth stopping a car or delaying a picnic to enjoy their fragile beauty.

Dog rose is the biggest of the wild roses, often growing to a height of 3m and sending out a cascade of arching branches over other hedgerow vegetation. The branches are covered with curved, broad-based thorns (some other roses, such as the lovely downy rose, *R. mollis*, have long straight thorns). The flowers grow singly and are large, up to 5cm across, with a simple rosette of pale-pink petals. The leaves are composed of 5 or 7 leaflets and are sharply toothed.

ENCHANTER'S NIGHTSHADE *Circaea lutea*

An imaginative name for a very unobtrusive plant. Enchanter's nightshade is a perennial herb, 30 to 70cm tall, which grows in damp woodland on basic soils and is usually to be found in dark and gloomy places. The leaves grow in opposite pairs up the stem. They are oval, tapering towards the tip, and are slightly toothed. The flowers appear between June and August, grow on a tall slender spike and are rather small, consisting of two deeply forked petals, pale pink, 3 to 4mm long.

How the plant got such a romantic name is obscure as it is totally unrelated to the true nightshades such as deadly nightshade and bittersweet (page 79). A sleeping draught was once made from it. The scientific name is *Circaea*, Circe being an enchantress in Greek mythology

TEA

The tea gardens of Tregothnan, near Truro, Cornwall, have been producing tea from camellia leaves [*Camellia sinensis*) for nearly 20 years.

The bushes were started in a protected kitchen garden above the river Fal, on an acidic soil with a microclimate of warmth and mist where winter is largely avoided. Growing these leaves in a garden at home isn't recommended, but tea from the flowers of camomile is a more feasible proposition.

German camomile is an annual which grows to twice the height of the perennial Roman variety. Grown from seed, the latter can be sown in autumn, and should produce small, daisy-like flowers the following spring. The plants will tolerate drought, and tea can be made using the flowers, fresh or dried. Apart from its refreshing taste, camomile has been used as a herbal medicine for centuries.

There are also links with Cornwall, through Mary Wesley's novel *The Camomile Lawn*, set a few miles from Land's End, and the variety *Treneague*, which does not produce flowers and is therefore suitable for a lawn. You may walk on it when attending a Buckingham Palace garden party.

Mint tea is always welcome, and the less hardy herb which I like to grow every year for tea-making is lemon verbena. Do not confuse it with lemon balm, which we have in the garden. It spreads, self-seeds everywhere and I cannot get rid of it.

Lemon verbena, originally from South America, has highly scented leaves and may have pale pink flowers in late summer. It is best grown from a plant in spring, ideally in a pot which can be moved close to the house and given protection in winter.

If the verbena does not survive, it can be replaced by cuttings taken the previous summer and overwintered indoors.

This is one of the best herbal teas, yet I have never found it in English supermarkets, where all manner of fruit teas are sold. I have often had verbena leaf tea abroad, verveine in France, where the herb is sometimes used in making a sauce with fish.

NEW FOR OLD IN THE ROSE BED

Tony Bracegirdle

OCTOBER is a good month to replace any rose bushes that have started to under-perform or lose their vigour due to old age.

But gardeners often experience problems when planting new bushes into soil that has contained roses for many years – it's a condition that's often called rose-sick soil. I don't think that there's any such thing. A lot of research has been done on this problem and no proof has emerged that rose-sick soil exists.

I believe that problems arise with replanting because the soil is nutrient deficient. Roses have absorbed all the goodness, so newly-planted roses are unlikely to survive in such a nutrient-deprived environment.

I've grown roses on the same piece of land for the past 40 years and during that time I've swapped and changed varieties without removing or changing the soil.

However, once I've taken out the old rose, I always build up the soil's nutrient content to meet the new plant's growing requirements and to give it a good start in life. This means enriching the soil with plenty of organic material such as well-rotted horse manure mixed with bone meal, leaf mould or spent potting compost.

If you're still concerned, you can build up the soil and pot up the new bushes in a strong cardboard box using John Innes No 3 compost. Simply plant the box into the old soil and by the time the cardboard has rotted away, the roots will be so well established that they won't have a problem venturing into the old soil.

Another way to combat the replant problem is to incorporate Rootgrow mycorrhizal fungi (www.rootgrow.co.uk) into the planting hole. Ensure that the rose's roots are in direct contact with the fungi which will attach themselves and send out fungal filaments into the surrounding soil.

They are more effective at collecting water and nutrients than the plant's own roots and increase the volume of soil explored by the plant by up to 700 times. Within a few weeks, the rose bush will have developed a secondary, more efficient, instant root system.

This is also the perfect time to move rose bushes around the garden. About a week before removing the rose, water it well and prune the bush quite hard to put it in a stressed situation. Take it up with as much root as possible and plant into well-prepared soil with added mycorrhizal fungi to help it establish more quickly.

impressive newcomer

This year, I've tried an impressive, new, bright red hybrid tea rose from America called 'Let Freedom Ring'.

It grows about 1m (3ft 3in) high and 80cm (32in) wide with mid-green, semi-glossy foliage and seems quite healthy, although a couple of leaves near the base showed early signs of black spot.