

# TREDINGTON & DISTRICT GARDEN CLUB NEWSLETTER

## FEBRUARY 2016

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2016. After a very successful programme in 2015, there is much to look forward to in 2016 - the programme for next year will be available soon.

Winter seems to have finally arrived but some of my mid-season daffodils are already out, as are the grape hyacinths, and I have irises and agapantha in pots that have six inches of new growth. Until a couple of weeks ago there were still hundreds of berries on the pyracantha along our house wall but, as soon as the cold snap started, the birds have taken nearly all of them.

Winter seems to have finally arrived but some of my mid-season daffodils are already out, as are the grape hyacinths, and I have irises and agapanthus in pots that have six inches of new growth. The trees are in early blossom too after all the mild weather - let us hope the return to weather conditions typical of this time of year doesn't do too much harm. Until a couple of weeks ago there were still hundreds of berries on the pyracantha along our house wall but, as soon as the cold snap started, the birds have taken nearly all of them. We have also seen an influx of long-tailed tits who only visit us for food when the weather turns cold: I love the fact that they will happily cluster together on the feeders rather than fight each other for access.



It may be cold now, but if anyone is heading for London in the next few weeks you can find a hint of the exotic at Kew where, until 6th March, there is an orchid festival. You'll find more information here: <http://www.kew.org/visit-kew-gardens/whats-on/orchids>



Meanwhile over at RHS Wisley there are exotic butterflies in the glasshouse until 6th March - more details here: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/whats-on-at-rhs-gardens/whats-on-at-rhs-garden-wisley/butterflies-in-the-glasshouse>

The Edible Garden Show returns to Stoneleigh this year from Friday 11th - Sunday 13th March. Speakers include James Wong & Jonathan Moseley. More information here: <http://theediblegardenshow.co.uk/>.

**Marian**

## **TREDINGTON & DISTRICT GARDEN CLUB NEWSLETTER MARCH 2016**

### **Around the Garden**

This is the time of year to get the garden off to a good start although it's really hard work but worth it when you can sit back in Summer admiring your labours.

As we have been told by many of our speakers, feed, feed, feed! I like to use my compost to which I add a slow release fertiliser. Feed the tree, shrubs and hedges and fork in. Don't forget the roses although I usually use manure in the late winter as well. Dig compost, well rotten manure and green waste into your veggie bed so a really good crop is assured! Lift and divide your perennials to encourage vigour and have plants for free. If you have a surfeit remember it won't be long until Newbold Plant Sale, so pot up your spare plants and give them to Gilly. Prune your penstemons now, remove old shoots to the base, but just make sure that new growth has appeared. Trim winter heathers to keep a good shape, as my Grandfather said, just nibble off (**with secateurs**) the growth like sheep do, don't trim back too hard into last years growth!

Deadhead daffodils and tulips, feed, and let the leaves die back naturally to feed the bulb - untidy I know, but they will soon be covered by new growth on other plants. Cover areas of garden, or just patches in the border, with cloches or sheets of polythene to warm the soil for early sowing.

Plant chitted potatoes outside or in bags and don't forget onion and shallot sets, so much better than shop bought. Sow leeks in the first week of April for a wonderful autumn harvest.

To guarantee wonderful pots / hanging baskets on the patio, buy a few plug plant as well as your own seeded trays, and keep in the greenhouse, until planting out. Sow annual climbers. Plant lilies in pots so they can be moved around the garden, good for filling in spaces in the borders. Use good multipurpose compost and half fill a container of at least

12" diameter for 3 bulbs and cover with more compost. Water thoroughly and move to a sunny spot. Remember to feed with liquid plant food weekly and watch out for the pesky red lily beetle. I find it very therapeutic to pick them off the plant and stamp on them.

As well as feed, feed, feed the down side is weed, weed, weed. As our speaker said last month one man's weed is another man's flower or should I say "person's"!

Enjoy your garden this month, back-breaking though it can be!

### **Lancelot (Capability) Brown 1716 – 1783**



© Portrait of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, c. 1770-75, Cosway, Richard (1742 - 1821)/ Private Collection/Bridgeman Images

2016 marks the 300th anniversary of the birth of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, a designer who changed the national landscape and created a style which has shaped people's picture of the quintessential English countryside.

Lancelot Brown was born the son of a land agent in Kirkharle, Northumberland and was educated at the village school in Cambo until he was 16. After school Lancelot worked in the kitchen garden as the head gardener's apprentice on Sir William Loraine's Kirkharle Hall estate. He left Kirkharle in 1739 and moved to Wotton Underwood House in Buckinghamshire, one of many estates owned by Sir Richard Grenville, Lord Cobham.

A couple of years later, he joined Lord Cobham's gardening staff at Stowe, Buckinghamshire as undergardener where he worked under the famous gardener William Kent, who was one of the founders of the new English style of landscape garden. At the age of 26, Brown was officially appointed as Head Gardener at Stowe, earning £25 per year and living in the Boycott Pavilion. He remained Head Gardener for eight years and designed the Grecian Valley at Stowe which is an abstract composition of landform and woodland. Lord Cobham

allowed Brown to take commissions from his aristocratic friends making him well known as a landscape gardener. By the 1760s he was earning an average £6,000 a year (an amazing sum in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), usually £500 per commission. He must have worked quickly and it was said he could “rough out” a plan of the grounds in a couple of hours.

In 1764 Brown was appointed Master Gardener for King George III at Hampton Court Palace and took up residence at Wilderness House in the grounds of the Palace.

Brown was responsible for over 170 gardens surrounding the finest country houses and estates in UK and is remembered as “England’s greatest gardener”. He designed over 170 parks, many of which remain today. We can see many of them today including Croome Court, Blenheim Palace, Warwick Castle, Bowood House, Chatsworth House and Milton Abbey. He reputedly said that he would not work in Ireland as he had not yet finished in England!

‘Capability’ Brown is best remembered for landscape on an immense scale, constructing not only gardens and parkland, but planting woods and building farms linked by carriage drives, or ‘ridings’, many miles from the main house.

Although his work is continually reassessed, every landscape gardener and landscape architect since, both in Britain and across the developed world, has been influenced in one way or another by Brown.

Brown died in 1783 and was buried in the churchyard of St. Peter and St Paul, the parish church of his small estate at Fenstanton Manor in Cambridgeshire.



**Blenheim Palace**

**Trish**

# TREDINGTON & DISTRICT GARDEN CLUB NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2016

## Around the Garden

May is the month that usually brings out even the most reluctant gardener as there is a real feeling that summer is approaching, and with warm showers and sunny weather there is rapid growth in the garden. The trees are in full leaf, many trees and shrubs are flowering but this year the spring bulbs will have disappeared and we will be left with shrivelled leaves. What do you do with bulbs passed their best? For many years I laboriously plaited the leaves and kept the borders looking neat but now I just wait for the leaves to die back and pull them off when brown. Remember to feed the bulbs and keep them moist to promote large bulbs for better flowering next spring. Now is also the time to support taller herbaceous plants: use what you have in the garden, for example birch or hazel twigs, and then just wait for the glorious flowers to arrive.

May is the time to sow hardy annuals in their flowering positions - calendulas, candytuft, convolvulus, helichrysum, nigella, poppies, sunflowers and many, many more. Why not take a strip of your vegetable garden and plant flowers to cut for the house, instead of denuding the borders? Dig the strip, fertilise and rake to a fine tilth, sow the seeds and you will have a constant supply for the summer! Sweet peas can be planted out, make sure they do not dry out and keep weed free. Pinch out the side shoots and tendrils to ensure good sized blooms, sow seeds which will prolong the season.

Now is the time to plant up hanging baskets, keep them in the greenhouse until the last of the frosts have gone. It is a good idea to include in the compost water granules and slow release fertiliser. Please don't put too many granules in the basket as I did one year, when I watered it they grew and came over the sides of the basket and were rather a mess, I had to take the whole thing to bits again! Lift, divide and replant polyanthus and primroses once the flowers have faded. Deadhead pansies and violas to prolong flowering.

In the vegetable garden, earth up potatoes, harvest rhubarb (although I know many of you have been picking it for weeks), harden off outdoor tomatoes, courgettes and pumpkins for planting out early next month. Plant out brassicas and leeks to their final positions. Pinch out the growing points of broad beans as soon as beans start to appear at the base of the plant to reduce the risk of black fly attack. Use 8ft bamboo canes to make supports for your runner beans and support your pea plants with twiggy sticks or pea netting.

This is the time to apply lawn weed killer to your lawn, then feed with a high nitrogen fertiliser to encourage healthy growth. Dare I say, water your lawn during hot weather, particularly newly seeded or turfed lawns, don't mow newly sown grass until it reaches 3 inches. Lower your mower blades to their regular summer cut height.

Remove duckweed and blanket weed from ponds and thin out submerged oxygenators before they take the whole pond over. Feed fish little but regularly.

Its time to clip evergreen hedges but make sure there aren't any birds nesting in the undergrowth.

Most important of all, sit and enjoy your garden and the fruits of your labour.

Would you like to send me your tips for the garden in June, its always good to receive local knowledge? This Saturday, after you have been to our coffee morning, why not pop over to John Massey's garden in Kingswinford (Ashwood Nursery) as it's his open day (well worth a visit) or go to Pershore College for their spring sale, really good plants at low prices!

## Tredington Trowel

### Cutting garden

Tredington Trowel has mentioned creating a cutting garden. Sarah Raven has an extensive cutting garden and has written several books on the subject. Her 'Blue Mojito' collection combines nicotiana alata 'Lime Green' with the blue form of salvia viridis and ageratum 'Blue Horizon'.



As an alternative, or in addition, this zingy zinnia 'Envy' is rather gorgeous. Other salvias to look out for are salvia viridis 'Monarch' and 'Blue Monday'.

A variation on the purple & lime theme could be cerinthe major purpurascens combined with euphorbia and a dash of the bright orange marigold, calendula 'Indian Prince'.





Another good source of seeds for the cutting garden is [higgledygarden.com](http://higgledygarden.com), all produced down in Cornwall without the aid of chemicals.

### **Magnolias at Batsford**

You don't see many magnolias on Warwickshire's heavy, alkaline clay soils but this beautiful variety will grow happily in a large container of soil-based compost on a sunny terrace. It is Magnolia 'Joli Pompom' and it only reaches a height of about 3.5m.



### **Events**

Members are invited to join Ettington Gardening Club which will be running an outing to Wollerton Old Hall and the Dorothy Clive gardens on Wednesday 15th June. The cost is £22pp to include a coach from Ettington and entry to both gardens. The coach will leave Ettington at 9am, going first to the Dorothy Clive garden near Market Drayton, Shropshire where the head gardener will give an introductory talk, before going on in the afternoon to Wollerton. It is expected that the coach will return to Ettington at around 6.45pm.

Both gardens have cafes and Ettington will sort out morning coffee/lunch/afternoon tea bookings.

The Dorothy Clive garden is a south-facing hillside garden covering about twelve acres including woodland areas, a quarry garden and seasonal borders including a rose walk. Wollerton meanwhile, has been developed by its owners since 1984 but in the English tradition. It has a series of garden areas including a rill garden, Long Walk, Yew Walk, Lime Allee and plenty more.

For more information about the gardens visit their websites:

<http://dorothyclivegarden.co.uk/>

<http://www.wollertonoldhallgarden.com/>

**Marian**

# TREDINGTON & DISTRICT GARDEN CLUB NEWSLETTER

MAY 2016

## Around the Garden

What amazing weather we are having and I hope that June will be the same. Its such a pleasure to be in the garden, seeing everything come to life again. In my case there are too many weeds to cope with and it is a constant struggle to dig up all the roots - I have learnt that just taking off the tops doesn't work! Hoeing is the best answer for annual weeds, just leave them on the surface of the soil to die off. Bindweed has returned and I find the best way to deal with this insidious plant is to trail tips into jam jars full of a systemic weed killer. Its not a pretty solution but seems to do the job!

Plant out annual summer bedding plants if the risk of frost has passed, plant up containers and if you have them growing in the greenhouse move them outside to their final position. Lift and divide clumps of snowdrops and bluebells once the leaves start to yellow. Pinch out the tips of your fuchsias to encourage a bushy habit and more flowers. Plant out your sweet peas and when they start to flower keep picking them to encourage more blooms. Dead head and cut back oriental poppies after flowering: cutting them close to ground level will stimulate new foliage. Hellebore seed can be harvested once the seed heads have ripened (squeeze the pod which causes it to split and release seeds). Sow the seed immediately, while fresh, and remember they will need a winter's cold season to break their dormancy in order for germination to occur. Do remember that seed grown plants will differ from the parent plant.

Another constant task around the garden at this time of year is deadheading – remove spent flowers from containers, pots, hanging baskets, beds and borders. At the same time, we need to remember to feed them all occasionally with liquid feed. Stake tall perennials, to prevent wind damage to flower spikes and pot on plants showing signs of being root bound.

I bought a couple of Terri's tomato plants at the coffee morning, and they are now romping away in the greenhouse. Do remember to pinch out any side shoots from your plants and feed once the first truss is setting fruit. If you are able, pot up the side-shoots to create new tomato plants: I have had little success with this but will be trying again this year. Plant out tender vegetable such as courgettes, squash, tomatoes and sweet corn once the risk of frost has passed.

If we experience prolonged dry weather, set your mower blades higher to reduce stress on the grass, water your lawn during hot weather, particularly newly seeded or turfed lawns. Do not let new lawns dry out. As with all plants, feed the lawn with lawn fertiliser( Chempak is a good one being soluble and easy to apply by hose of watering can) to encourage healthy growth.

To conserve water through the summer, water the soil rather than the plants and make “ponds” around individual plants so the water can really soak in. Watering like this supports plants for 14 days, but merely wetting the surface wastes water and encourages weeds. Use water from the water butt as much as possible.

Do make time to visit the Honington Gardens on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June, there is a garden for everyone and the cakes are pretty good too!

Enjoy your garden this June, I really can't wait for the roses to bloom!

### Tredington Trowel

A regular feature in the show gardens at the RHS Spring Show at Malvern earlier this month were geums in all colours but with an emphasis on oranges. The best planting combinations were with purple and bronze-leaved heucheras and bronze grasses.



From top left Geum 'Fire Opal', Heuchera 'Plum Pudding', Heuchera 'Autumn Glow', Geum borisii, Carex comans 'Bronze Perfection', Geum 'Alabama Slammer', Heuchera 'Berry Marmalade', Heuchera 'Marmalade'

Apart from Tredington Trowel's tips, this is also the month to plant out dahlias, once the risk of frost has gone.

Having gone out of fashion for many years, dahlias are now back in a big way. The national dahlia collection is down in Cornwall, near Penzance. Their fabulous new website - <http://nationaldahliacollection.co.uk/> - offers a visual feast with dahlias of every colour & shape. If you are going to either the RHS Chelsea or Hampton Court shows you can visit their display and the nursery is free to visit if you are holidaying in Cornwall. You can order tubers from them from July until March so plenty of time to drool over the gorgeous photos on the website.



D. 'Amira'



D. 'Sylvia'



D. 'Dentelle de Venise'



D. 'Scarlet Comet'



D. 'Tioga Spice'

### **Events**

As we head into summer the NGS scheme gets into full swing.

Local villages with gardens open included Pebworth (29th - 30th May), Tysoe (4th-5th June) and Dorsington on 12th June, the latter celebrating forty years of opening its gardens for the NGS.

Even closer to home, Honington Village Gardens will be opening for the NGS on Sunday 19th June.

**Marian**

## **TREDINGTON & DISTRICT GARDEN CLUB NEWSLETTER**

**OCTOBER 2016**

### **Around the Garden**

It's almost November and winter is on its way. But don't abandon your garden just yet! November is a great time to spend preparing your garden for next year, especially if there is a little sunshine to tempt you into it. My garden is very short of rain: I love the theory that it should only rain at night in the sure knowledge that we could garden all day.

Putting the garden to bed simply means getting rid of the mess, cleaning up what is left, packing away the things you won't need until spring and making sure everything is ready to go when you need it.

Cleaning up debris, scouting for pests and disease and suppressing weeds will mean that much less work to do in the spring, when there are so many other tasks to be done - and all at once. The cooler weather makes autumn an ideal season to spend some time in the garden. Then you can settle in for winter knowing that when you look out the window, your garden will look contentedly tucked in.

### ***How to Put the Garden to Bed***

I've broken it down to: cutting back, cleaning up, planting, protecting and preparing for spring. Don't feel as though you have to do everything. If you've had a bad pest or disease problem, I would focus on that. If you've been meaning to do something about your soil, take advantage of this calm season to get it done. If you have a lot of tender plants you should focus on making sure they are protected.

Bite off a little and be amazed by how much you actually get done. While it's tempting to cut back the whole flower garden in the autumn, it can be nice to leave some perennials standing throughout winter months. The seeds of echinacea and rudbeckia will attract and feed the birds: sedum will hold onto snow like icing. There are also plants that like the protection their foliage provides for their crowns. Chrysanthemums and heuchera are best if cleaned up in the spring.

But some perennials don't handle hard weather well. They won't remain attractive after frost and they have recurrent problems with pests and diseases which will over winter in their fallen foliage and surface in the spring. These perennials are best cut down in autumn. If they are diseased, throw the foliage away, do not compost it.

No one can really pinpoint when frost and snow will come, let's hope the snow keeps away! Many gardens and plants survive brilliantly with no attention at all in autumn, but you know from experience whether this applies to your garden and which plants will see through the winter. One of my favourite jobs is cutting down bearded iris after a hard frost, don't compost in case of disease in the plant. They seem to me relieved to have the floppy leaves cut out and like soldiers ready to battle through the winter.

Don't prune woody plants, trees and shrubs until they are dormant.

### ***Cleaning Up***

Pull dead or declining annuals. I find that hard to do, but they're not going to come back - get it over with. Harvest everything above ground in the vegetable garden and under fruit trees. Don't leave fruits and vegetables out all winter to rot attract animals and set seed. Clean up overgrown areas, to prevent animals and pests moving in and to make it easier in the spring.

Empty, clean, disinfect and bring in containers. An easy way to disinfect containers is by spraying them with a bleach cleaner. I hope we are still allowed to do this! Clean and sharpen tools, before storage. Remove all caked on soil, sharpen edges with a whetstone and give them a protective finish with a light coating of oil.

There is still planting to do. Get flowering bulbs, garlic and rhubarb in the ground, before the ground is too hard. Pot up bulbs for outdoor and indoor splendour. Plant up a pot of herbs to get you through the winter, instead of buying from the supermarket!

Autumn is a great time for planting trees and shrubs, because they can put all their energy into their roots. But those roots will need water. If the ground doesn't freeze, you'll need to make sure they have water all winter. Keep watering if it's going to be dry, your plants may be dormant but they are not dead. If you are lighting a bonfire, do check that there are no animals hibernating in the pile!

Enjoy your November gardening!

**Tredington Trowel**

## **Events**

Batsford is running a Fungus Foray through the arboretum on Saturday 29th October - more information [here](#).

## **Pyracantha - feast for the birds**

I have a pyracantha hedge against a wall in my garden. It produced masses of blossom in early summer and now bears thousands of berries. Last year the berries lasted through to January before the birds finally finished them off but I don't think they'll last as long this year. As I write this I am looking at five blackbirds and three robins all merrily munching through them.

If you want an easy evergreen plant that has wildlife benefits, you can't really go wrong with pyracantha. It isn't fussy about soil or aspect, growing as well on the north-facing front walls of my house as on the sunny south and west-facing walls at the back. In the late spring/summer it is a magnet for bees and hoverflies, and in the winter it helps to sustain the birds. A pyracantha hedge also offers a safe spot for birds to build a nest in the spring. As it is a thorny plant (its common name is firethorn) it is a good choice if you are looking for

plants to provide security. Depending on the variety, you can grow it as a free-standing shrub, leave it as an unstructured climber, create a hedge or train it into layers or as an espalier against a wall so it works in both formal and informal planting schemes. The berries can either be red, orange or yellow although the flowers are always white. Until now, the leaves have always been dark green but in 2015 a new variety appeared, *Pyracantha* 'Golden Paradise', which has golden foliage early in the year which turns lime green in late summer and then in autumn develops a rusty red tinge. The berries are start orange but turn red.

**Marian**

## **TREDINGTON & DISTRICT GARDEN CLUB NEWSLETTER**

**NOVEMBER 2016**

### **Around the Garden**

It has been a busy autumn. I have raked leaves on the patio and the paths to give contrast to those that have been left in the beds. They will rot down among the perennials that are left standing. I have mulched around the roses with manure: the worms will do their work and mix it up with the soil. The bulbs are in and covered in the pots to prevent the squirrels unearthing them - I did see a fox dip his nose into a pot but he didn't like what he smelt! The tender dahlias that cheer up any autumn display have now been tucked away in the garage. Looking closely, there are buds already at the base of the hellebores and, in an act of defiance; the winter-flowering cherries are reminding us that all is not lost. There is promise of spring to come.

For those of us with heavy soils (that could be ALL of us), this is the perfect time to dig, so that winter frosts can help break down newly turned clods. I am afraid digging is too hard for me but I try to give the ground a meaningful fork! It's an ideal time to work in organic matter whether manure, compost or even composted bark.

Although this is an ideal time for pruning, some of the woody plants can bleed if pruned in the New Year. Begin now if you can. Acers, birch and vines fall into this category. Vines can be pruned hard, back to two buds of last year's growth, to encourage fruiting spurs, but acer and birch need shaping carefully, as so much of their elegance is in the delicate growth of their branches. Shape gently and regularly so that you never have to cut into old wood, feathering growth back to a limb further within the canopy.

Apples and pears, currants and autumn-fruiting raspberries can be pruned any time from leaf drop until March, but never prune stone fruit in the winter, as the retreating sap can

draw in the airborne fungus, silver-leaf. I have proof of this as sadly I had to cut down my peach tree this year.

Hardwood cuttings can be taken from willows, poplars, *Cornus alba* and *C stolonifera*, and black mulberry. This is a cheap and reliable method of generating new plants. Willows are so easy that they can be plunged into the ground as whole branches, but the best results are always when the sap is still in the wood, so this side of Christmas is your goal.

If you are looking to propagate perennials, those with fleshy roots such as anchusa, phlox, verbascum, oriental poppy and acanthus lend themselves to root cuttings. Dig up the parent plant with a fork and pick roots that are pencil thick. Cut them into finger-sized lengths and lay in trays of a 50/50 mix of compost and grit. Cover the roots with 3-4cm of compost and put them in a frame, under the glasshouse staging or, better still, on a heated propagating bench. Keep them just damp and new plants will push through in spring.

Keep an eye on temperatures if you have frost protection in your greenhouse. One missed night can be fatal. Throw a rubber ball on to the surface of your pond so that an air hole for fish can easily be made without having to smash ice noisily in a freeze, and wrap water pipes should we get a cold snap. I had a look at the long range weather forecast today and this is the latest update "there is no chance of snow with a green Christmas the favoured outcome for most of the country. However, indications from medium and long range forecasting models continue to suggest an increased possibility of below average temperatures during the first half of the winter. Therefore, we think there is a higher than average chance of a cold snap coinciding with the Christmas period this year. **It's expected to be too mild for snow in the Midlands.**" Well you heard it here first!

Now is the time to open the many seed catalogues that come through the door, sit back and enjoy thoughts of the fruit and flowers that could enrich your garden in the summer.

One last thing, stake up your Brussels sprouts to protect them from wind rock and have a very Happy Christmas!

*The Tredington Trowel*

## Winter planting

Most perennials die back during the winter, ready to emerge anew in the spring. Some, however, carry on through the cold months adding colour and interest to the garden. The Trowel has already mentioned the buds forming on hellebores but what about other perennials that will give interest over the winter months?

Heucheras spring to mind - there are so many with beautiful bronze and purple foliage. I find that some of the darker coloured varieties get lost in the winter garden, a bit like the

beautiful dark pink/purple hellebores where you only see the real beauty of the flowers when you get close up whereas the paler coloured forms, whether white, yellow or pale pink, stand out. For glorious winter foliage, [heuchera 'Cherry Cola'](#), forms a dome of dense vivid foliage with matching flowers in the spring. It has enough vibrancy to stand out where H. 'Palace Purple' or 'Berry Smoothie', would tend to blend into the background. One way of using the very dark foliage heucheras is to mix them with lighter versions: for example, the almost black H. 'Obsidian' looks stunning against lime green foliage, like that of H. 'Lime Rickey', 'Electra' or 'Sunrise Falls'. These will also set off the black grass [ophiopogon 'Nigrescens'](#).

Bergenia has been a much maligned plant for years but some of the newer cultivars are helping to change attitudes to what is a pretty bombproof plant. Many bergenias respond to colder temperatures by developing red, bronze & purple tints - try [bergenia cordifolia 'Purpurea'](#) or [bergenia 'Overture'](#).

With regard to hellebores I think it is hard to beat the Harvington strains, particularly the double forms in [white](#), [lime](#), [yellow](#) and [pink](#) which stand out so well.

## **A Journey through the seed catalogues**

I have been leafing through the latest seed catalogues - always a dangerous activity!

Sutton's has some fabulous new varieties - the first thing that caught my eye was an [agastache 'Liquorice Blue'](#) available as seed now and as plugs from April, swiftly followed by [ammi majus 'Snowflake'](#). On a more modest scale, there is an unusual [armeria](#) too.

Unwins have a couple of rather gorgeous sweet peas, '[Hero](#)' (a deep blue purple grandiflora) and a small very old, highly fragrant bi-coloured wild variety native to Sicily & southern Italy called 'Cupani' after the monk who brought it to British shores. Both Unwins & Thompson & Morgan have a [red French marigold](#) which is rather striking. Sarah Raven has some stunning zinnias in [vibrant jewel colours](#).

**Marian**