

TREDINGTON & DISTRICT GARDEN CLUB NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2017

Around the Garden

Welcome back from our winter break! Although still cold and wet, I have made tentative steps to garden, I really want to finish pruning and feeding the roses and take out all the weeds in the patio which have been prolific this winter! What a delight to see the snowdrops in full bloom and other bulbs pushing their noses through the earth. The hellebores are in full bud and I can't wait for them to open, they are late in my garden compared to some I have seen.

Here are one or two jobs to be getting on with in late February/March:

Order your plug plants for an early start. You don't need a greenhouse just put them on a sunny window sill and that should be enough to get them going. Do remember to pinch the tips out as they grow so they become bushy and have more flowers.

If possible, dig in a layer of compost or well-rotted manure into your beds to prepare for the spring. Chicken manure or my favourite fish, blood and bone can be worked in as well. Don't forget to feed trees, shrubs and hedges with a slow release fertiliser; they do need a little help from year to year. Plant summer flowering bulbs if possible - I put mine in containers to fill in those gaps in the borders during summer. Lift and divide established perennial plants now to improve their vigour and create new plants for your garden. Perhaps it's a bit early but if your beds are prepared it should be alright. Sow seeds in the greenhouse or on a windowsill ready to plant out when the frosts have gone.

What a splendid sight the colourful winter shrubs (cornus and salix), but now is the time to cut them to the ground for an even better show next winter, they have done their job! Trim winter flowering heather as soon as the flowers die off, so they can retain their shape. Keep an eye out for slugs, they haven't gone away!

In the vegetable garden sow early broad beans and peas in trays of compost, which you will be able to transplant later when the ground is warmer. Prepare a seed bed, removing weeds, adding manure and then cover it with black plastic. Begin to chit potatoes: put them in egg trays in a dark place. You might even think about growing them in bags - put several layers of potatoes depending whether they are early, main or late. You should have a few new potatoes through the summer with very little effort!

During cold snaps do a little armchair gardening: order seeds and re-design borders, or just lie back and watch Monty Don as he helps new gardeners achieve their hopes and dreams in their gardens. If there is snow, watch out for the conifers, just knock off any snow with a broom, so that the branches are not overloaded and break.

I have just been watching a heron at the side of the pond, it amazing how he keeps so still for so long, as the pond is 6 feet in depth and the fish are at the bottom, I don't think he had much luck, but I expect he will be back when its warmer!

I can't wait for the Spring!

Tredington Trowel

Events

The 2017 NGS Snowdrop Festival includes three local gardens. Elm Close at Welford-on-Avon opens on Saturday 18th February from 1.30 - 3.30pm. Hill Close Gardens in Warwick is open on Sunday 19th February from 11.00am -4pm. The Court at Stretton-on-Fosse is also open on Sunday 19th from 11am - 2.30pm.

The Cheltenham & District Orchid Society will be holding its annual show on Saturday 4th March from 10.30am to 4pm at Churchdown Community Centre, Parton Road, Gloucester, GL3 2JH. There is free parking. There will be displays and plants to buy and you can have your orchid re-potted for £1. Entrance costs £2.50 but if you print off a voucher (see the website or ask Marian) you will get a £1 reduction.

On Wednesday 8th March, Sarah Raven will be appearing at Whichford House for an all day event in aid of the Gynaecological Cancer Fund. She will be giving three talks on the theme of 'The Cutting Garden'. The ticket price is £100 which includes lunch and a voluntary donation of £50. For more information see the flyer on the website or ask Marian.

Gardens Illustrated are hosting their second garden Festival on 25-26 March at Westonbirt School near Tetbury. The event offers a raft of well-known speakers including Troy Scott Smith (head gardener at Sissinghurst, and formerly at Bodnant), Sarah Raven (again!), plantsman Roy Lancaster, herb specialist Jekka Mvicar, several top designers including Tom Stuart-Smith, Cleve West, Arne Maynard & Jinny Blom and planting design specialist Nigel Dunnett who designed the Olympic Park plantings. Lectures cost £14.50 each and include entry to the venue with its shopping marquee, cafe and plant & design clinic. For more information go to www.gardensfestival.com.

Next month

Don't forget that next month is our AGM. Apart from the usual business, Barbara will give us a peak into the work that goes on behind the scenes preparing for the Honington Open Gardens event.

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MARCH 2017

Around the Garden

“The sun was warm but the wind was chill
You know how it is with an April day
When the sun is out and the wind is still
You’re one month on in the middle of May
But if you so much as dare to speak
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch
And a wind comes off a frozen peak
And you’re two months back in the middle of March”

Robert Frost

It has been a miserable grey winter but Gardeners 'World is back on TV, so it must be Spring! Looking at the garden there is so much to do and I find it difficult to know where to start. Stand back and listen to the birds, dream a little of what it might be.....then put on your gardening gloves and head for the worst bit, while enthusiasm is still high. *Health Warning-* don't overdo it! It's probably ages since you gave your muscles and bones a good workout, so start slowly and limit yourself to a couple of hours. Of course I don't take any notice of anything I write and had to crawl up the stairs to a hot bath for my first foray into the garden.

Tidy up any remaining leaves and general garden rubbish. It's home to slugs, snails, vine weevil and woodlice and can introduce disease and infection into your garden.

If you have already put down cloches and black plastic to warm up the earth, now is the time to sow carrots, peas, beetroot, winter cabbages broccoli, salads etc. Marrow, courgettes, pumpkins, squashes and tomatoes can be sown in a heated greenhouse or propagator.

Plant onion sets when the soil is dry and if frost is forecast cover your early potatoes with fleece.

The lawn needs all the help it can get. My lawn is still wet but my nimble next door neighbour has already mown the lawn, so I hope to follow this example soon, remembering to keep the blades of the mower fairly high. Rake out dead moss with a scarifier and then fork over to improve drainage and apply a fertiliser. Dig out as many perennial weeds as possible, I use Feed and Weed, which seems to do the job!

Geranium cuttings should be taken now. Cut off a 8cm (3in) shoot just below a leaf joint (node), remove all but the top pair of leaves and insert the cuttings 4cm (1.5in) into a small pot of potting compost. Gently water in the cuttings and place in a warm, well-lit place.

When they have begun to produce more leaves they can be moved to larger pots, containing general-purpose compost.

Enjoy your gardening!

Tredington Trowel

New plant & seed varieties

I'm not sure if it is new, but this [pale yellow cosmos](#) caught my eye in the Thompson & Morgan catalogue. Another T&M offering is a dwarf foxglove, aptly named '[Knee High](#)', that flowers all summer and is doesn't self-seed. I am slightly ambivalent about it as I like the stately spires of the foxglove even if only short-lived but the longer flowering period and elimination of self-seeding will be welcomed by many gardeners. Also from T&M is this [pink French marigold](#). A perennial to look out for, first released in early 2016, is a white form of the thistle *circium rivulare* '[Frosted Magic](#)'.

Star jasmines (*trachelospermum*) have become very popular over the last few years, particularly in town gardens in London where their less than hardy nature is less problematic. Now a pink variety, [T. asiaticum 'Pink Showers'](#), has become available. There are two types of *trachelospermum*, *T. jasminoides* and *T. asiaticum*. Neither are fully hardy although, *T. asiaticum* is the hardier form. Plants can be ordered from Thompson & Morgan and van Meuwen.

Events

Compton Verney fully re-opens after the winter on Saturday 18th March. The opening includes a major exhibition entitled 'Creating the Countryside' which explores how artists have shaped the vision of rural life and landscape. It brings together works by George Stubbs, Thomas Gainsborough, Claude Lorrain, Stanley Spencer & Grayson Perry amongst others.

Until 31st March RHS members can access the gardens & park at Blenheim Palace for free (normal admission is £15.30). RHS members can also access Waterperry Gardens free of charge during March.

Batsford is running a photographic competition until 31 March 2018 (yes, 2018!) for contributions to the 2018 or 2019 Batsford calendar. If you want to brush up on your photography skills, various workshops are being run - more information is available [here](#).

On Friday 7th April there will be a Gardener's Guided Walk at Hill Close Gardens, Warwick. The focus of the walk is on plants of seasonal interest as well as the new developments in both planting schemes and layout of the different individual gardens.

Sunday 9th April sees the first Stretton-on-Fosse NGS Open Garden day from 2.00 - 5.30pm. Two gardens will be open, Court House in Stretton-on-Fosse & Old Beams in Moreton-in-

March. A combined ticket costs £6 for adults, children free. Tea will be available at Court House.

Seasonal recipe

Purple sprouting broccoli is now in season so here's a recipe for this nutritious vegetable.

Ingredients

800g prepared purple sprouting broccoli	40g plain flour
600ml milk	75ml double cream
1 onion, quartered	1/2 tsp freshly grated nutmeg
4 bay leaves	1/2 tsp cayenne pepper
8-10 cracked black peppercorns	Salt & pepper to taste
50g unsalted butter	50g grated Cheddar cheese

Put the milk, onion, bay leaves & peppercorns into a pan and bring them to the boil slowly. Turn off the heat and set aside for at least 20-30 minutes to allow the flavours to infuse the milk.

While the milk is infusing, prepare the broccoli by halving the stems (if they are tough and thick peel the stems too).

Bring the infused milk back to the boil, then strain it into a jug. Discard the flavourings. In a small pan, melt the butter then add the flour to form a roux, cooking it for a minute. Reduce the heat and then stir in the milk, little by little at first. Once all the milk has been added bring the pan back to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for a few minutes. Stir in the cream, nutmeg & cayenne and add salt & pepper to taste. Turn the heat right down, stirring the sauce occasionally to prevent a skin from forming.

Steam the broccoli until it is just tender (approx 3-5 minutes). Turn on the grill. Drain the broccoli, allow the steam to escape and then place it, cut side down, in a greased shallow oven-proof dish. Pour over the sauce and then sprinkle with the cheese. Grill until the cheese is bubbling and turning golden.

TREDINGTON & DISTRICT GARDEN CLUB NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2017

We started last month's newsletter with a poem by Robert Frost, so I am starting this month with a literary theme too. Shakespeare's garden at New Place re-opened last summer. Sir Roy Strong, and honorary fellow of the Birthplace Trust has written a book entitled 'The Quest for Shakespeare's Garden' which looks at the Elizabethan garden, and in particular

considers the development of Shakespeare's garden at New Place and its connections to the origins of garden history. The book is beautifully illustrated and includes many 'garden' quotes from Shakespeare's works.

Other recent gardening books of interest are Michael & Anne Heseltine's account of the development of their garden & arboretum at Thenford, between Banbury and Brackley, over the last forty years. The book is entitled 'Thenford: the Creation of an English Garden'. The National Trust has a new book out, too. Entitled 'Secret Gardens' : it takes in secret gardens, overlooked corners of more famous gardens and re-discovered lost gardens. The RHS meanwhile has two publications of interest. The first is the new edition of the Plant Finder. The second is acclaimed plantsman Roy Lancaster's 'My Life with Plants', an account of his early plant finding in Bolton (!) and how it lead on to travels far and wide.

Tasks in the garden for April

We have just arrived back from a three week holiday and things have moved on in the garden, most notably the growth of weeds and the lawn! Now is the time to start dealing with those pesky weeds so they don't get out of control.

You can also sow hardy annuals now, and sweet peas can be sown outside. Whilst you can start half hardy annuals, they will need to be sown under cover or using a propagator, only being moved outside once the weather is reliably warm both day and night and there is no risk of frost.

Prune slightly tender plants like lavenders, penstemons and teucriums, cutting them just above new, fresh shoots.

Divide any herbaceous perennials that have outgrown their allotted spots in your borders or have become mis-shapen. You can do the same with any perennials which aren't flowering as well as they used to as this will rejuvenate them. Now is also the time to put in place supports for tall perennials.

If you need to plant or move any trees or shrubs now is the time to do this, otherwise this job is best left until the autumn.

Beds and borders will benefit from application of a general purpose fertiliser. Rose and shrub beds should be mulched with organic matter. Feed hedges, trees & shrubs with Growmore or blood, fish & bone.

Remove spent flowers on tulips and daffodils, pulling off both the dead flower and the seed pod.

As the weather warms up, aphids can multiply quickly so keep an eye out.

Seasonal recipe

Any day now, new season asparagus will be appearing and Jersey Royals are already in stock. Here's a recipe incorporating both!

Ingredients

1 bulb wild or new season garlic

good olive oil

12 asparagus spears	100g feta cheese
1 veg stock cube	15g butter
a few sprigs of fresh mint	2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
250g Jersey Royals	1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
1 pack watercress with thick stalks removed	1 tsp each of chopped chives and chopped mint

Method

Preheat a griddle pan. Pre-heat the oven to 200°C.

Wrap the garlic in foil, adding a slug of olive oil. Then cook in the oven for 20 minutes.

Bring a pan of water to the boil. Cook the asparagus for 30 seconds, remove it from the pan and then refresh it under cold water. Add the stock cube, mint and potatoes to the water and simmer until the potatoes are tender. Drain and keep warm.

Drizzle the asparagus with oil and place on the griddle. Turn them every over every so often until they are nicely charred all over.

Arrange the watercress over four plates. Slice the potatoes in half lengthwise. and divide between the plates. Top with the asparagus and roasted garlic before prinking over the feta cheese.

Make a dressing by melting the butter & olive oil in a small pan, mix in the herbs and vinegar.

Drizzle the warm dressing over the salad.

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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2017

On my return from holiday a few weeks back, amid the pile of junk mail & bills, were the latest catalogues from seed merchants & nurseries. My eyes were drawn to the jewel coloured wallflowers - varieties like the Sunset series of red, purple & bronze. By coincidence I came across an old newspaper article by well-known garden writer Val Bourne, written back in 1985, lamenting that wall flowers had gone out of fashion in favour of "winter pansies and over-sized primroses". In the article she mentioned the seed trials which the RHS had been running - the trials that resulted in the Sunset series amongst others.

The most well-known perennial wallflower is Erysimum 'Bowles Mauve'. I had never really thought about the name before but just before I left for my holiday, I was planning a yellow, blue and white border for a client and one of the plants I selected was phlomis 'Edward Bowles'. So who was the Bowles in these, and other, plant names?

Edward Bowles was born in 1865 to a wealthy family near Enfield in Middlesex. He originally studied Divinity at Cambridge with the intention of entering the church but a change in family circumstances changed the course of his career. He set about transforming the garden at the family home, Myddelton Hall. As a keen traveller and plant collector, he brought back many plants from his travels and had a particular interest in crocus and colchicums: by 1900 he had a collection of 130 different species and he went on to write 'A Handbook of Crocus & Colchicums' (1924) which was regarded as the crocus bible for many years. A collection of the remaining varieties of crocus that were bred by Bowles has been created and has now returned to his former home. Only one of the varieties he raised remains commercially available.

In 1908, Bowles had been elected to the council of the Royal Horticultural Society and he continued to serve the RHS until shortly before his death in 1954. After his death, a number of new plant introductions bore Bowles' name. The phlox I mentioned was bred by Hilliers Nursery and introduced in 1967, allegedly using seeds from Myddelton Hall.

Tasks in the garden for October

- Lift dahlia & begonia tubers together with gladiolus corms, remove foliage and store away for the winter
- Plant wallflowers & primroses now for spring
- If your lawn needs repairs, now is the ideal time as the new turf will establish quickly
- There is still time to plant daffodils and tulips or to add bulbs to permanent containers. Crocus.co.uk have a bulb sale on if you need some last minute bulbs. It is also a good time to lift & divide congested bulbs.
- Sow sweet peas now so that they can develop roots, ready to romp away in the spring. Sow the seeds in root trainer pots or 12cm pots. Once sown, place the pots in a sheltered spot outside until the seeds have germinated (give them some winter protection, for example in a cold frame). They will need pinching out in January but by March/April they will be ready to plant out in the garden.
- Cut back any untidy perennials but leave the seed heads of things like achilleas and eryngiums for the benefit of wildlife and for winter interest.
- Cut back tall shrubs, such as buddleia and lavatera, that need hard pruning in spring by about half to reduce the risk of wind rock.
- Now is the best time to plant or re-plant shrubs and hedging whilst the soil still has some warmth.

- In the vegetable garden, cut down the stem of asparagus & Jerusalem artichokes; plant out spring cabbages if you haven't done this yet and plant garlic
- Now that the leaves have started to fall, rake them up to make leaf mould: place either in a wire-netting bin or in pierced bin liners.

Seasonal recipe

Pumpkin cheesecake

Ingredients

200g ginger biscuits	300g pumpkin purée
100g melted butter	500g ricotta cheese
1 tbsp cornflour	600g full-fat Philadelphia cheese, at room temperature
3tbsp vanilla extract	300ml whipped cream
75g golden caster sugar	cinnamon, to dust

Method

Crush the biscuits into crumbs and mix with the melted milk. Press firmly into the base of a buttered deep 8" loose-bottomed tin and place in the fridge to chill.

In a saucepan over a medium heat mix the cornflour with the vanilla extract until smooth. Add the purée and 2 tsp of sugar and bring to the boil, stirring all the time. Simmer for one minute then tip into a bowl and chill for 20 minutes. Mix the cheeses and remaining sugar in a large bowl until smooth. Add in the pumpkin purée mix and combine. Spread over the chilled biscuit base. Return the tin to the fridge for at least 4 hours, or ideally overnight.

Once chilled, release the cheesecake from the tin and smooth the sides with a palette knife. Whip the cream and use to decorate the cake, either by piping swirls or by spooning it over the top. Dust with a little cinnamon if desired.