

# Comment

The Garden, RHS Media, Churchgate, New Road, Peterborough PE1 1TT



RHS / TIM SANDALL

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

### Just what is it to garden?

Editor of *The Garden*, Chris Young

What exactly is gardening? Is it more than just a hobby? For many, gardening is about personal pleasure, creating a place that suits their taste; for others, it is about growing fruit and vegetables; for a select few, it is caretaking a National Plant Collection or heritage property; others simply enjoy the pleasure of nurturing and growing beautiful plants.

For me, this range of interests is gardening's greatest joy. But for some, such diversity means confusion. Where does gardening start and finish? As well as an appreciation of plants, how much comes under the banner of 'gardening' – plant husbandry, science, design, wildlife, fresh food, garden centres, media...?

In July the RHS announced the launch of National Gardening Week, 16–22 April 2012 (see News, p10). Backed by a growing number of supporters, including the Horticultural Trades Association, it already has several objectives. But what do you think a national gardening week should do? Should it inspire and encourage those already gardening, or

promote it to non-gardeners? Is it a chance to remind those in power that horticulture, gardening and all associated trades are a credible career choice, vital for 'UK plc'?

Ultimately, the success of such an event will be the support from us gardeners. Our collective passion, in all its forms, is the strongest message; the personal enthusiasm each of us has for this subject is just the point that we need to get across. The RHS is looking for ideas to make the week a convincing success, so please do send suggestions.

Celebrating this diversity in horticulture and gardening has been at the heart of redesigning *The Garden* magazine. As RHS President Elizabeth Banks explains (p7), innovation and new approaches have long been the lifeblood of the Society. Magazines evolve, keeping up with changing reading patterns and interests. But, as you will see this month, an ongoing passion for plants, gardening, gardeners and practical advice continues to be our editorial driving force. We hope you enjoy this issue. ●

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Why do flowers have patterns?

Author: **Mike Grant**, Editor, *The Plantsman*

Flowers with colourful or complex markings often appeal to gardeners – think of the coloured veins on mallows, penstemons, violas and *Geranium*, especially *G. psilostemon* and *G. renardii*. As with most things in nature, there is an evolutionary reason for these markings. They are nectar guides and serve to direct pollinating insects to the pollen and their sugary reward.

Guides on some plants, such as *Iris variegata*, are so prominent and directional you would think the plant is taking no chances. But look at all these flowers under ultraviolet light and the guides are much more visible – insects can see the ultraviolet spectrum better than us.

Not only are lines nectar guides; coloured blobs at the bases of petals on daylilies, gazanias and poppies serve the same purpose. Remember that flowers with nectar guides are less dependent on scent to attract pollinators – so if you want fragrance, avoid patterns.

✦ *The Plantsman* is sister publication to *The Garden*; [www.rhs.org.uk/plantsman](http://www.rhs.org.uk/plantsman); 020 7821 3401

## FROM THIS ISSUE

*As the weather cools, in September and October bulbs make a significant contribution to the garden display.*

John Grimshaw: Autumn springs to life

» Pages 43–48

*This garden is the antithesis of the featureless melds of concrete and stone chippings that fill many front gardens these days.*

Phil Clayton: Tear up the tarmac

» Pages 57–59

## Gazania markings



RHS / REBECCA ROSS



# Letters

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postal address)

## Against the odds

I was amazed at the profusion of glorious flowers in my garden, in June, after two cold winters. Worst affected by last winter were hebes and escallonias, and I lost a *Euphorbia mellifera*. My *Cistus* plants have sailed through the cold unscathed, and irises have flowered better than ever. Last year, my *Iris sibirica* (below) produced 33 flower stems – this year there were 68. Triumph against adversity!  
**Wendy Angrove, Devon**



## Toads in gardens

I was surprised to read that toads rarely breed in garden ponds (Wildlife diary, July, p455). I live in a village and have a garden of almost an acre, including four ponds of various sizes. The

largest is used as a breeding pond by toads and this year I counted 100 adults in and around the pond on one busy night (frogs seem to prefer another pond). The garden is managed with wildlife in mind, but designed to be attractive enough to open for occasional charity events, proving that wildlife habitats don't need to be overgrown messes.  
**Graham White, Oxfordshire**  
❖ **Andrew Halstead, RHS Principal Entomologist, replies:** *Toads generally favour larger, deeper ponds than frogs as breeding pools. Most garden ponds (and gardens) are relatively small and therefore less attractive as breeding grounds for toads.*

## Put into practice

After months of drought in Cambridgeshire, advice about watering (*The Garden*, July, pp483–485) was timely. On a recent trip to Istanbul we saw the techniques you describe practised to perfection. The whole of a broad area of flat land between the 1,500-year-old outer walls of the city is managed as a series of market gardens. The defensive ditch was always clear to allow city guards to have an unobstructed view of potential attackers.

Now, in the ditch, seed beds are flooded in exactly the way described, with neat retaining walls of soil holding the water. It is an imaginative use of an outstanding World Heritage Site. By allowing market gardening, the site is treasured and used by local people. The whole area is safe and attractive for visitors, and the city has a productive green oasis. Istanbul authorities should be congratulated.  
**Tom Ambrose, Cambridgeshire**

## Welcome wasps?

Unfortunately, Stuart Logan's comments about wasps (*Garden talk*, July, pp447) did not appear in time for our wasps to read. They have been eating our raspberries and gooseberries since mid-June, making harvesting hazardous.

A small nest remains undisturbed in the glasshouse; I hope its residents will do more good than harm. Perhaps these are a different species, or have been suffering from thirst in the exceptionally dry weather.  
**Hugh Rice, Indre-et-Loire, France**

## Heuchera planting

It is a pity that Graham Rice's article on heucheras (*The Garden*, July, pp456–459) did not show more photographs of



their use in gardens. Here's a view of a shade area in my Pennsylvania garden (above) featuring *Heuchera* 'Plum Pudding' (a richer colour than *H. villosa* 'Palace Purple') with *H. 'Caramel'*, a beautiful orange. Companion plants here include ferns, hostas and the silvery foliage of *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost'.  
**Derek Fell, Pipersville, USA**

## Ursula's hornbeams

Many thanks to Ursula Buchan for the column inches she has used to discuss all manner of subjects. In her final contribution (*Garden talk*, July, p446) she mentioned *Carpinus betulus* 'Fastigiata' trees growing along an avenue of the A40 north of Oxford – finally I was able to put a name to the double row of trees that I enjoy every time I take that route. Inspiring and informative to the last.  
**Wulf Forrester-Barker, Oxfordshire**

## The moral garden maze

In June (*Viewpoint*, pp410–411), Lia Leendertz discussed whether all gardeners should grow at least some food – and asked if it is morally wrong to cultivate just ornamental plants. Here are some of your responses:

❖ I agree that it is important to use our gardens as ecologically as we can, and have gardened organically for 35 years. But ornamentals are also important in carbon reduction and any planting is better than a concrete or brick area. I applaud the RHS for taking a stand on issues such as alternatives to peat and encouraging us to 'grow our own'. We grow as much produce as we can, and look after five National Plant Collections. I watch bees work a sea of *Polemonium* at the allotment, while we munch on freshly picked strawberries. Being sustainable can also be enjoyable.  
**Dianne Nichol-Brown, Polemonium Plantery, County Durham**

❖ There is no moral case for gardeners to answer. A garden is either an antidote to the demands of life – and that may or may not include growing food as the pleasure takes us – or it is a measure of our worth in the world as it ought to be rather than as it is. If it is the latter, as Lia seems to suggest, then there is no room for gardening for pleasure while places in the world suffer in poverty.  
**James Gatenby, Merseyside**

❖ At last someone has confronted the negative effect gardening can have on our environment. For years I have been uneasy about the lack of concern many gardeners show for the damage that is being done by gardeners' activities, especially the damaging effect that the use of peat is having on global warming. However, I am unsure that ornamental gardens are less environmentally friendly than vegetable gardens. Home-grown



vegetables can only meet a fraction of our requirements, and they require fertilisers, insecticides and watering during dry spells. Ornamental gardens can be fertilised by the use of a compost heap, and can attract their own predators if grown organically. Insects drawn to such gardens act as pollinators, in turn attracting birds to visit and nest, bringing further benefits. Ornamental gardens are also an important food source for bees. A mature ornamental garden, with trees, is able to absorb more carbon dioxide per square metre than a vegetable garden.  
**Anthony Brooking, Devon**

❖ To an extent, Lia is preaching to the converted – it is easier to persuade a gardener to grow food. People who grow no food, instead relying on supermarkets (regardless of cost, to themselves or our planet), should be her focus. It may be possible to find an alternative source for some food. Long term, co-operative schemes could be a partial solution – pooled labour produces bigger quantities of local foods, and surplus could be sold to the local community. This could be widened to include livestock, providing meat and milk. If well organised, it could reduce dependence on supermarkets and create a more sustainable food supply. There might still be space in the corner of our gardens for ornamentals – edible ones of course.  
**Vince Lucas, Cambridgeshire**

**More from RHS Online** For more letters on this topic, choose 'September 2011' at: [www.rhs.org.uk/thegarden](http://www.rhs.org.uk/thegarden)

## BELIEVE IT OR NOT

## Does planting by the moon work?

Author: **Matthew Biggs**, garden broadcaster and writer

Since the ancients peered from their caves at the constellations to mark the passage of time, man has believed that the moon exerts a profound influence on the earth. In the 4th century BC, Pytheas, a Greek geographer and explorer, was the first to record that tides were influenced by the moon.

In the 1920s, Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner proposed his theories on biodynamic agriculture, including the idea that the moon, just as it affects tides, has an effect on water in people, plants or wherever it may be. This was developed in a series of sowing and harvesting experiments by Maria Thun in the 1950s and further summarised in a paper by Nicholas Kollerstrom and Gerhard Staudenmaier in 2001.

Devotees, such as HRH The Prince of Wales and John Harris, Head Gardener at Tresillian House, Cornwall, claim that sowing vegetables that crop above ground during a waxing moon, and root crops as the moon wanes, produces better, healthier crops and is part of an environmentally friendly treatment of the earth. For others, however, this is lunacy. In the 21st century we demand hard evidence. Yet statistical analysis suggests that the moon is also responsible for such diverse events as starting fights in pubs and successful depilatory waxing. So why not sowing by the moon?

## The verdict

Things instinctive or spiritual cannot always be explained – as anyone who has seen a ghost or has fallen in love will tell you. Those who believe in planting by the moon have a gut feeling that it just might be true. Yet the science is lacking to support their claim. Those gardeners who need facts to support their practice simply argue, 'How can the world be influenced by a ball of cheese?'

WWW.RHS.ORG.UK



## Highlights from RHS Online

### Your nearest community gardening group is now mapped out

The RHS has launched an easy-to-use web page for people looking to get involved in community gardening activities. If you would like to support your local community or school gardening group, visit [www.rhs.org.uk/getinvolved](http://www.rhs.org.uk/getinvolved)



## Find the perfect plant

Now with thousands of plant profiles, the web-based RHS Plant Selector will help you choose just the right plant for a specific spot in your garden. Hunt by name, garden aspect, soil type or even season at [www.rhs.org.uk/plantselector](http://www.rhs.org.uk/plantselector)

## The work of the RHS

Find out more about the working and breadth of charitable activities that the RHS undertakes. Click 'About us' on the RHS homepage. ❖ Read highlights from the Annual General Meeting in our new RHS Life section, p83.



## RHS on Twitter

Keep up-to-date with the latest information, news and comment from across the RHS on social networking site [@The\\_RHS](http://www.twitter.com)







Above: *Colchicum* 'Waterlily', from the RHS Lindley Library collection, painted in 1928 by Dorothy B Martin.

# Making judgement on plant trials

Garden writer and broadcaster Nigel Colborn on the first International Trials Conference

A perfect cocktail should contain only the best ingredients, blended expertly and served in a stylish glass. For three days in July, RHS Garden Wisley was the comely vessel from which ideas poured out and were mulled over by a distinguished gathering of plant breeders, nurserymen and scientists from across the globe. The first International Plant Trials Conference may take time to yield results, but it is likely to benefit gardeners worldwide.

I came away buzzing with questions, and with one certainty: with tidal waves of new cultivars engulfing the plant market each year, effective trialling has never been more important. And the RHS needs to be at the heart of plant-assessing activities.

Easy to say, but how do you test new introductions when they come so thick and fast? Trials are costly and time-consuming.

Annuals take a full season to assess, perennials need at least two years, while shrub trials might run to a decade. Pots and baskets are popular, so facilities for container trials must also be extensive. Glasshouse space, too, is essential for trialling tender plants – something the RHS currently lacks.

Information gathered over the life of each trial has to be distilled and the results presented. That used to be a leisurely process, but now results need to be delivered fast, 'on the hoof' during each trial, otherwise cultivars could disappear before any awards are made. There has been a steady shift, too, in the way people buy plants. Great Dixter's Head Gardener, Fergus Garrett, delivered an impassioned case for

looks good in garden centres and will be ever tempted by novelty. Hence this year's success of *Petunia* Black Velvet ('Balpevac'), a plant of negligible value: interesting in photographs, but presenting mounds of foliage disfigured by big, black holes.

The 'quick buy' sentiment isn't limited to home gardeners. Garden writer Anne Wareham, in her book *The Bad Tempered Gardener*, declares that she dislikes nurseries but loves garden centres. Plant trials should provide guidance to customers such as these, helping them choose plants with proven performance.

Meanwhile, growers and retailers need to maximise sales. They want their merchandise to look enticing, as well as fitting comfortably on the multi-tiered 'Danish trolleys' used to move them.

That has motivated breeders to develop cultivars that look tempting on display. But for how long will they perform after planting? Are they weather-proof? Have they any bonus characteristics, and what about wildlife value? These questions can only be answered by trialling them for lasting garden worthiness.

That is why it is so important for the RHS to work more closely with the horticultural trade; not cosily hand in glove, but to find out which plants have true garden value and can be given that stamp of enduring quality, the Award of Garden Merit (AGM).

And thereby hangs another issue. Can a 'one size fits all' award, the AGM, be usefully applied to plants as diverse as whopping great rhododendrons, classic perennials and fast-changing annuals? A topic for discussion but, as a New World delegate said to me, 'that's a whole other thang'.

*'If current trends continue, coming generations won't wait. They will buy what looks good in garden centres'*

long-term trials. With season-long picture sequences he showed how – with benefits such as fine foliage or desirable characteristics – some cultivars had more lasting value than their peers. 'These are the cultivars we'll buy,' he said, 'but we can't know how well they'll perform without trials.'

As well as taking guidance from trials, knowledgeable gardeners like Fergus research the plants they want. They will root out suppliers and are happy to wait until their desiderata are available. But if current trends continue, coming generations won't wait. They will buy what



RHS / NEIL HEPMORTH



# I had to give up my lilies. Is box next?

Garden writer and columnist Lia Leendertz



RHS / NEIL HEPWORTH

This has been my second summer without lilies, and I still miss their innocent looks so saucily combined with that sultry, almost bawdy, scent. What I do not miss is the constant search for their nemesis, lily beetle (*Lilioceris lili*), and I am truly delighted to be free of squishing

the faeces-covered larvae just before they strip the entire plant of leaves.

It was three summers ago, washing larvae poo off my hands for the third time in as many days, that I reached a tipping point. Annoyance was outweighing pleasure, so I gave them up. Just like that. Onto the compost heap: beetles, larvae, sexy perfume and all.

I like a puzzle in the garden, and this felt oddly creative – the realisation that just giving up, stopping battling, can solve a problem, particularly if you want to be organic (and I do) and the only other way to turn is towards chemicals.

It is relatively easy to give up lilies, the fancy baubles and trinkets of gardening. They make a garden pretty, but they don't make it. I recently visited a *Buxus*-heavy garden – as mine is – where the hedges and topiary are sprayed three times a year against box blight, the scourge that is turning emerald gardens across the country patchy and straw-coloured.

Sprayed *three times*. This is such an alien idea that I almost laughed out loud but, on the other hand, what would I do without box? If lilies are the Accessorize bangle, then box is the wedding ring, stamping tradition and acceptability onto whatever odd or naff thing I do in the rest of the garden.

The organic, forward-thinking thing to do would be to start a programme of replacement of my ticking-time-bomb box plants. I'm not keen. I don't know the answer, but I do know that the most important plant in my garden is the one most likely to test my organic resolve, and my new-found love for giving up. ●

## YOUR VIEWS

Please send comments and feedback to: The Garden, RHS Media, Churchgate, New Road, Peterborough PE1 1TT or email [thegarden@rhs.org.uk](mailto:thegarden@rhs.org.uk) (please include your postal address)



RHS / STELLA ROSS-CRAIG

# New York fills the void left by 9/11

Landscape critic and author Tim Richardson



RHS / NEIL HEPWORTH

Memorials are perhaps the most difficult projects of all to conceive in the world of garden design. This hits home this month as the World Trade Center Memorial Plaza, in what was Ground Zero, is opening to visitors in time for the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

How do you respectfully encapsulate an act of violence as heinous as the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York? Atrocities of war tend to be perpetrated in secret or where there are few surviving witnesses; this catastrophe was played out, live, on the world's television screens and this memorial will of course be sited on the exact spot.

The challenge for a designer is to come up with a response that will rehabilitate the space itself while, most importantly, memorialising those who died. New York's idea was to turn this stricken bomb site into both a place of remembrance and a new business hub even grander than the original Twin Towers.

Within a year of 9/11, I visited the Ground Zero area – not to gawp, but to shop in an adjacent department store which had resolutely stayed open. That 'business as usual' ethic was the most telling response to the attacks, and has clearly informed plans for the new site. Get up, dust yourself off and do it again – that's the American way.

The new site incorporates four new towering buildings as well as two huge, 60 x 60m (200 x 200ft) dark pools on the footprint of the destroyed Twin Towers. A grove of some 400 swamp white oaks (*Quercus bicolor*) will provide shade and a tranquil setting. The names of those who died are to be etched on the pool surrounds.

Creating a space between living and dead is the most powerful way of respecting mourners' emotions. Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe's memorial to John F Kennedy at Runnymede shows that movement through space can lead to a sense of respectful transcendence.

I suspect that the real strength of the World Trade Center Memorial Plaza may not lie in the dreadful black pools at its heart, but in the surrounding grove, where the living will quietly try to come to terms with the appalling events that happened there. ●