

Comment

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



RHS / TIM SANDALL

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

People behind the gardens

Editor of *The Garden*, Chris Young

One of the things I love about the gardening world is the people in it. The stories and personalities behind a plant's introduction or a garden's creation are often as enthralling as the places they tend – and this month, much of *The Garden* recognises this.

Whatever your passion or ability, it is the variety of people that make things so interesting. At the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show (3–8 July), the RHS will present its highest honour, the Victoria Medal of Honour, to four leading but different people – from a scientist to a plants expert, nurseryman to a former herbarium curator (see News, p12). In addition, other RHS awards, such as the Associate of Honour, recognise show judges, full-time gardeners and taxonomists. It is an opportunity to stop and celebrate the people who enhance our gardening world – directly and indirectly.

Others, either working alone or collectively, are also considered in this issue. As John Sales points out in his Comment piece (p23), many of the more influential British gardens are a result

of two people working together – one may be the plantsperson, the other the designer; one the visionary, the other the detailer.

Among the most significant contributions two people have made, outside the glare of publicity, are those of Sibylle Kreutzberger and the late Pamela Schwerdt – formally joint Head Gardeners at Sissinghurst Castle Garden, Kent. In their private garden in the Cotswolds (pp34–38), their taste for planting combinations and knowledge of a plant's requirement has created a special, private retreat with all the quality of their former garden's grace.

But gardening is not necessarily an individual pursuit: as Tim Richardson finds, the role of community groups (such as RHS Britain in Bloom, pp47–50) gives people an introduction to gardening, as well as clearly benefiting the local environment whether financially, aesthetically or culturally. It is both a shared activity while also being individually rewarding.

Whether on your own or in a group, let the gardening blossom and the personalities shine. ●

FROM THIS ISSUE

Gardens that live on, after the house has been lost, often have an air of faded glory. Not so Easton Walled Gardens.

Bunny Guinness: Lost and found

» Pages 54–59

The revealing statistic is that 13 percent of these offenders later chose to come back to work on the projects voluntarily.

Tim Richardson: Growing together

» Pages 47–50

DID YOU KNOW?

Gender issues

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

If you ever wondered why some of your ornamentals were not producing fruit then now is the time to investigate the gender of dioecious plants in flower. 'Dioecious' means those that have male and female flowers on separate plants; only females bear fruit, and then only if a male is nearby. *Ilex* (holly) is the classic example, so make sure you know whether you are buying a male or female cultivar. Don't be misled by the names, however: *I. 'Golden King'* is female and *I. 'Golden Queen'* is male.

From an evolutionary perspective, it is thought that female plants diverting energy from pollen production into producing a higher density of fruits allows foraging by birds to be more efficient.

Other dioecious shrubs include *Aucuba*, *Pittosporum* and *Viburnum davidii*. Sexing them requires a bit of practice, but a good rule of thumb is that prominent anthers bearing pollen indicate a

male whereas a plump ovary with no, or vestigial, anthers means female.

Dioecy is not restricted to woody plants. Herbaceous examples include *Aruncus dioicus* (goat's beard), *Datisca*, *Humulus* (hop) and *Petasites* (butterbur). With these, the ornamental value is in the impact of the flowers. Males of *Aruncus dioicus* are more showy but, for the last three, females have the edge for their persistence in fruit. ●

✦ *The Plantsman* is sister publication to *The Garden*; www.rhs.org.uk/plantsman

Ilex 'Golden King'.



RHS / GRAHAM TITCHMARSH

Letters

CONTACT US

Write to: The Garden, RHS Media, Churchgate, New Rd, Peterborough PE1 1TT or email: thegarden@rhs.org.uk (please include your postal address). Letters on all gardening topics are welcome, but may be edited for publication.

Why do we plant?

Mary Keen reflected on 'What triggers us to plant' (Comment, May, p27), but I think there is another reason why we garden.

The larger 'moment in nature' of which Mary speaks is perhaps not so much a general 'shared subconscious memory of the natural world' but specifically the knowledge that has been gathered during 1.8 million years of hunter-gatherer existence. This, with the changeover to Neolithic farming in only the last 10,000 years, is human evolution.

Humans have spent so much time managing to stay alive, using a wealth of knowledge about and working with plants to survive – this must surely be hard-wired into people today?

When I garden, as when I put to use a shell or a branch, I am happy to think I am doing just what my ancestors did.
Anna Rahman, East Sussex

QR codes

I am so pleased to see that RHS Garden Wisley has started to use QR codes on their signage (inset). With the rapid increase in the use of smart phones, using QR codes has become easy. They provide extra information to make visits more interesting. I hope that QR codes can soon be included with plant labels so that we can also be better informed about the plants that interest us. Please continue the good work of bringing the RHS into the 21st century.
Peter Kerry, Kent



Pesticide use

I am shocked that RHS Advice condones use of Bayer Provado Ultimate Bug Killer (RHS Advice, April, p31) for dealing with leaf-mining insects. This

product contains neonicotinoids, pesticides linked by scientists at Reading University to bees not being able to find their way home if they come in contact with it. The RHS has done excellent research into peat

alternatives, so what about a ban on pesticides containing neonicotinoids?
Anne Morris, Wiltshire

❖ **Andrew Halstead, RHS Principal Scientist, Entomology,** replies: 'Like all pesticides, this product has undergone extensive testing before permission was given for it to be marketed. Part of this research is concerned with what environmental effects are likely, and includes testing on honeybees to see what effect it will have on bees foraging on treated plants, and also on bees

within the hive itself. The Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD) assesses new products and, if satisfied with the safety and environmental data, grants approval for sale and use in the UK. Monitoring of pesticides continues after they have come into use. If the CRD decides that new research results are significant and relevant to the ways in which these pesticides are used in the UK, action is likely to be taken. The RHS does not undertake this type of research and so we follow the decisions of the CRD expert panel.'



RHS / ANDREW HALSTEAD

Mole plants

Matthew Biggs' column on *Euphorbia lathyris* as a mole deterrent was interesting (Comment, May, p23).

Roger Turner's authoritative 1995 book *Euphorbias* – A Gardener's Guide references the historical 'medicinal' usage of *Euphorbia* sap as an attempt to cure warts on the skin (highly inadvisable). He also says, 'The suggestion that seeds of *E. lathyris* may be buried in the garden as a deterrent against moles is probably the result of confusion between use of the latex against moles on the skin and moles in the ground. The chances that your disruptive garden or field mole will happen to come across the few seeds of caper spurge you have buried seems remote, and this no doubt accounts for the mixed success reported for this remedy.'
Stewart Hall, Horticulturist, RHS Garden Wisley

Honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) on *Telekia speciosa* (left). There has been concern over the possible impact that the use of the neonicotinoid group of pesticides may be having on bees foraging on treated plants.

Some mixed-seed packs, such as baby-leaf salad mixes (below) which contain different types of vegetable, are now contrary to EU regulations.



RHS / TIM SANDALL

Salad seed mixes

The European Union (EU) ruling that 'some seed mixes sold in the UK contravene its regulations' smacks of bureaucracy gone mad yet again (News, May, p12).

The EU is adding to global environmental issues by insisting that certain salad mixed leaves must be contained in separate foil packets within the main packet. This adds extra cost to produce and buy these seeds, and adds to the waste packaging mountain from which we are already suffering.

When will some common sense come out of EU rulings? Perhaps we should be looking at the content and the wording of an MEP – it should be 'Make Extra Packaging'.

Derek Mephram, East Sussex

Comment

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Coffee grounds vs slugs: does it work?

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

Slugs are one of the most unanimously disliked pests in gardens, so any technique to eradicate them is often welcomed. Coffee grounds are one such idea. Caffeine is toxic to slugs and snails, so using coffee grounds as mulch is said to protect plants. It is not legal to use coffee as a pesticide, but people do experiment.

Robert Hollingsworth, from the United States Agricultural Research Service in Hawaii, found that spraying a 1-2 percent caffeine solution on soil killed slugs and snails within two days. A cup of filter coffee contains about 115 milligrams of caffeine, espresso and percolated coffee about 80mg per cup, and instant coffee even less – so filter coffee proved most effective.

He found that concentrations as low as 0.01 percent were enough to deter slugs, and compared the difference between the impact of coffee grounds and solution around plants. Using grounds as mulch repelled slugs but caffeine solution, watered onto the soil, was far more effective.

There is also evidence that the texture of coffee grounds acts as a moderate deterrent to slugs; however, they are time consuming to apply and have to be replenished after rainfall.

The verdict

Even though Hollingsworth's research showed that a coffee solution watered onto the soil is far more effective than coffee grounds used as a mulch, it is still technically illegal to use it in such a way. In addition to this, other research has contradicted his findings, so slugs may rest easy for the time being. However, grounds are high in nitrogen, so small amounts can be added to compost heaps to balance woody clippings... ○



RHS / BOB MARTIN

In defence of snails

In May, Penelope Bennett defended garden snails (Comment, p27), describing their shells as an 'exquisite piece of moveable architecture... every shell is different in colour and design'. Here are some of your responses:



❖ As an artist and gardener I have recently been collaborating with snails as partners in making drawings. The focus of my art has long been landscape, both in terms of its physical representation in maps, and the evidence left on it by living forms such as snails and plants.

My 'Snail Series' relies on the help of garden snails, which move over powdered graphite, leaving a record of their paths on paper. The snails are unharmed and are then released back into my garden to do their worst.
Jenny Wiggins, London

❖ I read Penelope's comments with guilty interest. I have been in the habit of throwing snails onto the centre of the lawn for the birds to eat, but never again. Now I will walk them down to

the end of the garden and deposit them in the adjoining woods. They will probably follow me back down the garden, but so be it.
Gloria Horwell, Surrey

❖ Penelope is right about the beauty of snails. My garden is overrun with them – in all colours and sizes. I admire their versatility, scaling high walls and fences, and passing over the grit and metal strips I use to protect my plants.

But I am not in favour of snails – I cannot grow lupins, delphiniums or hostas because they always get eaten off to ground level. I have tried many deterrents, but their numbers never seem to be reduced. I suppose snails have every right to live and eat – but why in my garden?
Brenda Colegate, Kent





Geranium sanguineum painted in 1918 by Lilian Snelling (1879-1972); the RHS Lindley Library holds more than 600 of her works.

Your local park: use it or lose it

The Garden columnist Lia Leendertz on why we should love noisy parkers

There is a park 20 minutes away from me in Bristol that has it all. A classic Victorian park criss-crossed by pathways and shaded by mature trees, it is overlooked by large, handsome Victorian villas. There is a sandpit, a paddling pool, and fancy new basket swings that you can clamber into with your kids. A small, mobile café bedecked with bunting serves tea in vintage china cups to mums sitting in dappled light. It is cosy, comfortable and quite delightful.

It also happens to be two streets away from the house I grew up in, and although I am now most likely to be found having a sedate picnic by the paddling pool, I am always aware that I once tobogganed down that hill on a tea tray in the dead of night. On summer evenings under those trees I got giggly on cheap cider. And I remember trying to look so cool on the swings while fighting back the horrible, choking sensation of my

first rebellious drag on a cigarette. Of course this park draws people to it to do proper park things – sunbathe and throw Frisbees and the like – but it is also a place where people play out their real, messy lives. It feels loved.

In all its well-maintained glory, it has nothing to fear. If someone tried to create a new retirement complex on its northeast corner, the middle-class outcry would be heard all the way to the Dordogne and back. It is secure, but not all parks are so lucky.

Week of action

At the end of this month is Love Parks Week, organised by parks charity Greenspace. According to them the equivalent of 67 football pitches worth of park, playing field and allotments have been sold off by London boroughs alone in the past three years. The week is designed to encourage people into their local parks through a series of events (fun days, nature trails, even jazz nights for those so inclined). 'By holding, or simply attending a Love Parks Week event, you can help drive the message that our parks and green spaces are essential to healthy, happy and strong communities,' goes the blurb. Essentially: use it or lose it.

It is such an important message. There is another,

more troubled park, much closer to where I now live. The remnant of a once-large chunk of ancient common land, it is sliced through by a main road and nibbled away at by housing. Its name – Horfield Common

– derives from the old English for 'filthy open land' and it once had a reputation as a place of lawlessness, where thieves and vagabonds lurked. It has none of the gloss of its more popular neighbour and – one suspects – none of the cachet among the local authority officers.

Open and wind-swept, with a touch of the bleak, there are far-reaching views across Bristol to the hills on the other side. This may not be the spot for cosy dappled picnics, but it isn't bad at all for booting a football as far as you can, for flying a kite, and for allowing over-exuberant kids to run until they're exhausted. But two years ago a corner of it was earmarked by the local authority for potential sale for development, based on their idea that it was only used by a few dog walkers. A massive and heroic effort by a Friends Group saved it, but here's the thing: it was representations from the Scouts groups that practice their camping skills on it, the local boys club that plays football on it and – yes – the dog walkers that walk dogs on it that pulled it back from the edge of becoming Park Crescent and Common Close. The message is clear: if you want your park, use it. Have picnics in it, set up tents along its edges, toboggan down its hills, listen to jazz in it, smoke your first cigarette on its swings (obviously don't really, kids: smoking kills), drink cider under its trees. Make it a part of your real, day-to-day life, and make it feel loved. ●

❖ Love Parks Week, 21–29 July 2012; www.loveparksweek.org.uk



RHS / NEIL HEWORTH



Two minds are better than one

John Sales, VMH, RHS Vice President and former Head of Gardens for the National Trust



SUE SPIELBERG

However implausible, the myth persists that our great gardens have been made by inspired characters formulating plans alone. Original genius may be the inspiration for gardens as works of art, but it usually springs from creative tension between individuals; partnerships

are important to garden design, development, cultivation, adaptation and upkeep.

History indicates that great gardens are rarely made and perfected by an individual, more often by two committed people of complementary talents working together. At Hidcote Manor Garden in Gloucestershire, Lawrence Johnston designed the structure and assembled the plants, but it was Norah Lindsay who devised colour schemes and textural effects. At Hestercombe in Somerset, Edwin Lutyens created the structure, Gertrude Jekyll the planting design, while Sissinghurst Castle Garden in Kent was made by husband and wife – Harold Nicholson influencing structure and Vita Sackville-West supplying inspired plantsmanship. Other gardens such as Great Dixter have even more complicated pedigrees.

Pamela Schwerdt and Sibylle Kreutzberger were a committed gardening partnership, working and living together. They studied at Waterperry College near Oxford, intending to set up a nursery together, but were tempted to Sissinghurst, where Sackville-West appointed them joint head gardeners, passing on her vision and gardening style.

Acquisition by the National Trust ensured the garden's future, but created challenges as visitor numbers soared. Pam and Sibylle continually raised their standards of horticultural artistry, renewing the garden's structure, making it stimulating throughout the season. They honed their skills, becoming members of the RHS Herbaceous Plant Committee and judging trials.

This experience was brought to bear in their own exquisite garden in the Cotswolds, rich with the best plants, arranged with artistry and discrimination; where, as they put it, 'we don't have weeds'. ●

✿ See pp34–38 for an appreciation of the garden created by Sibylle Kreutzberger and the late Pamela Schwerdt (right).



RHS / TIM SANDALL

DO YOU AGREE?

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WILDLIFE GARDENING

See pp66–69 for Part 4 of Living Gardens, *The Garden* series about gardens and the environment.

Win back the moral high ground

The Garden columnist and garden writer Nigel Colborn

Gardeners have an image problem. According to James Hitchmough of the University of Sheffield, horticulture is seen by ecologists as an environmental pariah. Speaking at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show, he described the disregard in which such scientists hold gardeners.

And he should know since, more than anyone, he acts as an interface between gardening and ecology.

No-one would dispute that nature is in deep trouble. Dutch MEP Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy recently described biodiversity loss as 'Europe's silent crisis'. 'We need to enrich our national accounts with natural capital,' he wrote. So, those who occupy even the tiniest piece of land should be concerned.

We must also re-educate scientists. Some ecologists, according to James, see exotic garden floras as wildlife deserts. Ignorance, or perhaps arrogance, must have prevented them from looking over their laboratory walls. Gardens, and not merely those of wildlife enthusiasts, can be surprisingly life-rich. Gardeners may not love all nature but most welcome butterflies and birdsong. And those who can tell a chiffchaff from a willow warbler also recognise how rich garden habitats can be.

Hoverflies and bees may prefer dahlias to native plants; elephant hawk moth larvae will feed as readily on fuchsia as on wild willowherb, so are such species therefore less valid? Even Spanish bluebells, reviled by organisations like Plantlife, can be beneficial. In gardens miles from wild woods – making unwanted hybridization with native bluebells impossible – their pollen and nectar replaces that of the cowslips and buttercups ploughed up by arable farmers or destroyed by development.

Urban landscapes need to be greener, softer and more life-rich. Parks must enhance their wildlife habitats, perhaps even doubling as nature reserves. But, as James Hitchmough pointed out, horticulture should be steering those changes and must win back the moral high ground. I would go further, though, and suggest that it is time some ecologists learnt a few more lessons from us gardeners. ●



RHS / NEIL HEPWORTH