

Somerset Gardens Trust

A member of The Gardens Trust

Issue 76

WINTER 2020

Featuring

Some Remarkable Somerset Gardens,
Landscapes and Plants

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From the Editors

Welcome to this special Winter edition of the Somerset Gardens Trust Magazine. Inspired by the lockdowns, it is designed to excite, interest and amuse you in these confined times. We were happily surprised by the enthusiasm of so many of you to contribute articles on gardens, plants and the landscape. The theme that stands out clearly is the passion you feel. Read it in one sitting or dip into it whenever you feel you need a lift – there is such wealth of human experience and of nature here to keep you going cheerfully until the vaccine arrives!

Christopher and Lindsay Bond

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From the Chairman

Dear Members,

Autumn going into Winter is a time for reflection on the garden: a little moving of plants around the border and planning for the next growing season. And so it is with

the SGT. 2020 has been our least active year (whilst I have been a member). We have had no schools projects to help with, very little surveying (although research on line is always possible) and only one fund raising event. Brian and Dilly Bradley have our very grateful thanks for warmly welcoming us. They made our visit safe and according to regulations, and very enjoyable. As regards Events for 2021, our first enquiries have had very positive and enthusiastic responses. We, of course, await the rules by which we can hold them. More information to come in due course.

In my first year as Chairman I would have attended the County Chair's meeting in London. It would have been a good opportunity to meet other Chairs and exchange ideas, as well as find out first-hand about *The Gardens Trust's* role. As you can doubtless guess, it did not take place this November. However, a remote meeting was held with a small number of folk and these are the main points to come out of the meeting. How did the County Garden Trusts weather 2020 - we are not alone in cancelling our visits and lectures and making up for the lack of social contact with our Magazine. Other key issues discussed were the Government's proposals for reform of the planning system and the *National Trust's* Reset Programme and its current programme of redundancies, both of which *The Gardens Trust* will make responses to. The GT online lectures will continue which we, as Somerset members, can access.

With my very best wishes to all for 2021 and stay safe

Diana Hebditch

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Somerset Gardens Trust visit to Cheshire and North Wales, September 2021

In spite of Covid, lockdowns and general dreariness I think we should be optimistic, have something positive to look forward to, and plan a coach visit for 2021. The idea is to visit gardens in North Wales and Cheshire. It will be a four night stay based at Rossett Hall Hotel, near Wrexham, probably leaving on a September Sunday from Hatch Beauchamp, and returning Thursday evening.

One day will be spent at Bodnant and Bodysgallen, with visits to Wollerton Old Hall and the Dorothy Clive gardens on our journeys North and South. There is a list of many other lovely gardens in the area and a decision will be made after a Spring recce next year. John Townson has agreed to help me plan this trip, which is very kind as he knows it is a lonely business by oneself.

There will be a printed itinerary and costs available shortly after the recce, the number of places available will be limited to allow plenty of space on the coach to keep members as safe as possible.

Members interested in joining this group visit should contact me with their e-mail, phone number and address now so that they receive details when available. It is important that you do so now since I need to know approximate numbers. Registering now does not commit you to come. Please make sure you receive confirmation that I have registered your interest.

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The Wonder of Slopes

Jan Stanton finds a challenge – and opportunities

It's all pleasure, my garden. Technically it is OUR garden, but really it is mine to do with what, when and how I please. Although we have now been happily married for five years, my poor beleaguered Husband has a real problem with my habit of moving things around in the house. He simply cannot understand why it is necessary to introduce one thing, and move ten to accommodate it. Recently semi-retired, and then locked down, he is slowly coming to understand the extent of this activity in what is our first proper garden together.

I move things. A lot. I have just lifted all the dotted-around dahlias, labelled and potted them. Next Spring I shall know which is which, and can replant them accordingly. This Summer they were *“all the right notes in all the wrong places”*.



Particularly ghastly were the huge magenta blooms (vulgar, my best friend declared, enviously) next to a soft orange and apricot



bicolour. Truly, it is not to be borne.

In 2017 we moved from Henley-on-Thames and took on a garden that had, at some stage, been nicely planted with shrubs, roses, and trees, but which had ‘got away’. The bindweed, celandine, brambles and all their friends and relations were rampant, and there wasn't a square inch of grass without daisies, dandelions and creeping everything else. It is less than half an acre on a lumpy hill, so the lovely old hamstone retaining walls follow the contours, interspersed with six sets of stone steps. They all harbour a world supply of snails and leopard slugs, and not quite enough newts, toads and slow-worms to keep them at bay. Home grown *Cosmos* ‘Purity’ reduced from twenty five plants to two overnight. Ten *Nicotiana* ‘Sylvestris’ had three false starts, eventually flowering in late September, and still pretty.

Worst decision: buying this hilly garden with incipient arthritic knees. Best

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“They [the walls] all harbour a world supply of snails and leopard slugs, and not quite enough newts, toads and slow-worms to keep them at bay”

Tips: To remove ivy from a wall, cut the bottom and sort later, turn a long-handled hoe upside-down and push it up the wall under the stems. It is quite easy. Don't cut the bottom and let it die because it sticks, like concrete. Grow *Hostas* in pots and fill their watertrays religiously.

decision: buying this garden (which came with an equally ideal old house) because we love it, and adding a pond. After a month, fish, frogs, newts, dragonflies and bugs appeared and now cohabit happily.

Alternatively, drop the pots into the pond. As long as the water level is under the rim, they will be all Summer gloriously slug-free..... and I do like a bit of friend-envy.

Double Primroses

Caroline Stone, National Collection holder, describes their magic

Double primroses have an old-fashioned feel to them and a history dating back to at least Elizabethan times. The primrose variants like double, hose-in-hose, and jackanapes, were illustrated in *Gerard's Herbal* in 1597 and it was this that endeared them to enthusiasts such as Margery Fish at East Lambrook Manor. Double primroses go in and out of fashion and the plants then become lost forever. It was partly a love of Margery Fish's books that started me collecting them and ended in a National Collection. It was also that they suit my garden. They need shade and damp conditions, both of which I can give in North Cornwall.

A few old varieties continue in cultivation. *Primula* 'Alba Plena', a white double, is thought to be that mentioned in *Gerard's Herbal*. A very pure white with a long

stem, it has a charm lost in more modern varieties which have larger flowers and are more floriferous. *P.* 'Marie Crousse', a cerise-purple, and 'Quaker's Bonnet', a mauve, date to Victorian times. Breeding stepped up from the end of the 1900s with 'Bon Accord' doubles bred in Aberdeen by the Cocker Brothers, of which two or three varieties remain, and in the Twentieth Century, with Florence Bellis, who created Barnhaven Nursery in the 1930s in Oregon. Barnhaven transferred to Cumbria when Mrs Bellis gave up, and is now in Brittainy under its fourth set of owners. Many of the best doubles available now came from Barnhaven. In recent

“Double primroses go in and out of fashion and the plants then become lost forever”

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'Belarina Valentine'

years David Kerley created the 'Belarina' range. They are exceedingly good plants easily found in Garden Centres. 'Belarina Valentine' is a beautiful, velvety dark red with a long flowering period and very tolerant of poor conditions.

Perhaps most dear to my heart are the wild double primroses. They occasionally occur naturally and fascinate me in all being different in the shape and set of their petals. They are not always easy to keep going and a similar effect can be had with an old Barnhaven variety 'Marianne Davey' or with 'Belarina Cream'. Both of those are good in the garden and beautiful. 'Belarina Cream' has a lovely scent to add to its charms.

Given damp soil and shade,

especially in the Summer, double primroses are easy to grow. I find they benefit greatly from doses of well-rotted manure and they do need to be divided frequently. Double flowers are sterile so the only means of propagation is division. When dividing it is important to remove the old woody pieces of root; fresh roots form at the top of the root stock and removing the old root will invigorate the plant.

With careful choice of long flowering varieties, such as 'Sunshine Susie', 'Bon Accord Purple' or 'Petticoat', double primroses can

bring colour to the garden in almost every month of the year.

Caroline Stone

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'Marianne Davey'

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The garden at New Wood House, Ilminster

Julian and Lucy Gibbs describe their many ideas

The specification for the house we were looking for, five years ago, included a large view and a large garden (to keep Julian occupied in his retirement). We were fortunate to find both, on the outskirts of Ilminster. The garden had been neglected for a number of years, but the two owners prior to the last, were keen and creative.

The late Victorian villa sits above a steep slope with a paved terrace over a high wall and two grass terraces below that, before falling away to what is now a mini-arboretum and an orchard. The house faces West over the Ile Valley, its view framed by the Blackdowns and the Quantocks.

During Julian's time as a Curator with the National Trust, he became involved with

the conservation, restoration and improvement of a number of gardens. He learnt a huge amount from head gardeners and gardens' advisers, especially John Sales. Now to have a mature garden to work on is a great treat, and everything we have done or planted follows that early experience.

The garden contains a fine collection of large specimen trees – *Metasequoia*, *Nothofagus*, *Tilia petiolaris*, *Liquidambar*, *Acer saccharinum*, *Cornus kousa chinensis*, bladdernut, *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, *Gymnocladus*, *Liriodendron*, and some yet to be identified – far more exciting than we realized on our first viewing on a dull Autumn evening. So we have a very good tree-escape to work with.

The most challenging area has been the drive, with its deadly 1980s mix of variegated plants, *Euonymus*, *Juniper*, *Agave*, *Cordyline*, *Yucca*, grasses and a *Mugo* pine. This area is slowly being adjusted to contain more interesting plants. Lucy's



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cousin, Stephen Wood, has kept us supplied with a collection of wild-sourced *Acers*, which will ultimately make a wonderful collection here. We have also added a collection of *Crataegus*.

To the side of the house is the ‘wilderness’, dominated by the Kentucky coffee tree and an enormous *Itea salicifolia* growing up it. Then a *Catalpa* leads to the miniscule ‘Himalayas’, planted with large-leafed species *Rhododendron*, *Piptanthus* and bamboos. A path from the ‘wilderness’ leads to the ‘Italian Garden’ on the top grass terrace – so-called for its formal arrangement of Irish yews (imitating *Juniper*), box balls and standard *Phillyrea latifolia* (imitating olives). A line of three *Magnolia grandiflora* (one already there) and two large terracotta pots continue the Italian theme.

The slope from the upper to the lower terrace is disguised by a laurel lawn. The lower terrace, which we created, is

contained by espaliered and step-over apples, roses, Chinese privet, *Spartium junceum* and pre-existing *Rubus odoratus*, punctuated by an olive-oil amphora. A real olive tree grows nearby.

Below this is the mini-arboretum – formerly a field – which will need much thinning if every tree grows up.

To one side we have created a nut walk,

going down to a loggery – variation on a stumpery – which is to become a fernery. Beyond is the new orchard, just getting going.

“To the side of the house is the ‘wilderness’, dominated by the Kentucky coffee tree and an enormous Itea salicifolia growing up it”

The garden is nearly too big for us, but Julian believes that if he can get lots of things into the ground, eventually it might look after itself. But we have no illusions about the need for radical pruning and thinning – and in fifteen years some difficult decisions will confront us or our successors. If any member would like to call in next year, please call us on 01460 258899.

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The Princess, the Duke, the Earl, the Commoner and the Trees of Kew

Anthony Pugh Thomas looks at the origins of Kew

Throughout the early 18th century botanical research and knowledge, were encouraged by experiments of Fellows of the Royal Society, and, aided by Linnaeus's new naming system, and the introductions of new trees and plants by plant collectors. Landowners began to embellish their estates with new arboreta. The 3rd Duke of Argyll, at Whitton Park near Twickenham,

nicknamed "Treemonger" by Horace Walpole, imported large numbers of plants and trees and attracted an enconium from Pope who wrote "*In this small spit whole paradise you'll see, With all its plants but the Forbidden Tree*". The Duke's nephew, the 3rd Earl of Bute, adviser to Princess Augusta, inherited his Uncle's collection. North American trees were popular, being supplied by Peter Collinson in England, and John Bartram in Philadelphia who sent many seeds to be cultivated in England by, amongst others, James Gordon, a nurseryman in Mile End, of whom Collinson remarked "*Before him, I never knew or*



The Oriental Plane (Platanus orientalis) at Kew Gardens

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“The oldest trees from this time are known as the ‘Old Lions of Kew’”

heard of any man that could raise the dusty seeds of kalmia’s, rhododendrons or azaleas”.)

At Richmond, Queen Caroline engaged in planting many native trees and in neighbouring Kew, her son Frederick, the Prince of Wales, was interested in the new botanical discoveries, and greatly extended the gardens. Following his unexpected early death, his Widow Princess Augusta, with the advice of the Earl of Bute, continued the development of the gardens and commissioned William Chambers to landscape the grounds, for which he designed a number of buildings including the Pagoda.

The first small arboretum at Kew was supplemented by some of the trees brought by Bute from his Uncle’s collection in 1762. The oldest trees from this time are known as the ‘Old Lions of Kew’ and include the Black Locust tree (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*) recently rejuvenated by careful cultivation, on the Orangery Lawn, the *Ginkgo biloba* that is expected to survive for another hundred years or more, the Oriental Plane (*Platanus orientalis*) near the Orangery and the Japanese Pagoda tree (*Stylophorum japonicum*) that was one of

the five specimens imported in 1753 by James Gordon. Its popular name derives from its religious significance as it was planted near temples in China and Japan. Developments at Kew continued under William Aiton as superintendent and Joseph Banks, who was appointed as botanical adviser by the King after the Princess’s death. After a period of decline, the garden was transformed into the scientific and horticultural institution of world-wide fame under the directorship of Sir William Hooker and his son Joseph.

The Kew collection, now home to 14,000

“After a period of decline, the garden was transformed into the scientific and horticultural institution of world-wide fame under the directorship of Sir William Hooker and his son Joseph”

trees, is still expanding under the direction of Tony Kirkham, Head of Arboretum Services, who has completed several plant collecting expeditions in East Asia, including South Korea, Taiwan, the Russian Far East and Sakhalin, China and Japan.

For beautiful illustrations of Kew’s trees, see “Treasured Trees”, paintings by Masumi Yamanaka, text by Christina Harrison and Martyn Rix. Pbd Kew. 2015.

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My Lockdown Project

Neale Hatherell

Those familiar with the works of Voltaire will know the last lines of *Candide*, “we must cultivate our garden”. These had been strange times and so it is now too. Voltaire had two estates, but we are blessed with a productive garden.

“We wanted another Acer ‘Sieboldianum’, and managed to track one down in North Wales. The delivery charge alone was nearly £200 so we settled on a little wand of a tree acquired via e-Bay for £10”

Latterly, we have been occupied by the removal and replacement of trees. Two very large *Acers* have succumbed to death by mistletoe and, after some deliberation, a large Lawson cypress has been felled. This latter step improves the vista and allows more light into the *Davidia involucrata*

and *Liriodendron*. We are delighted that we took this step.

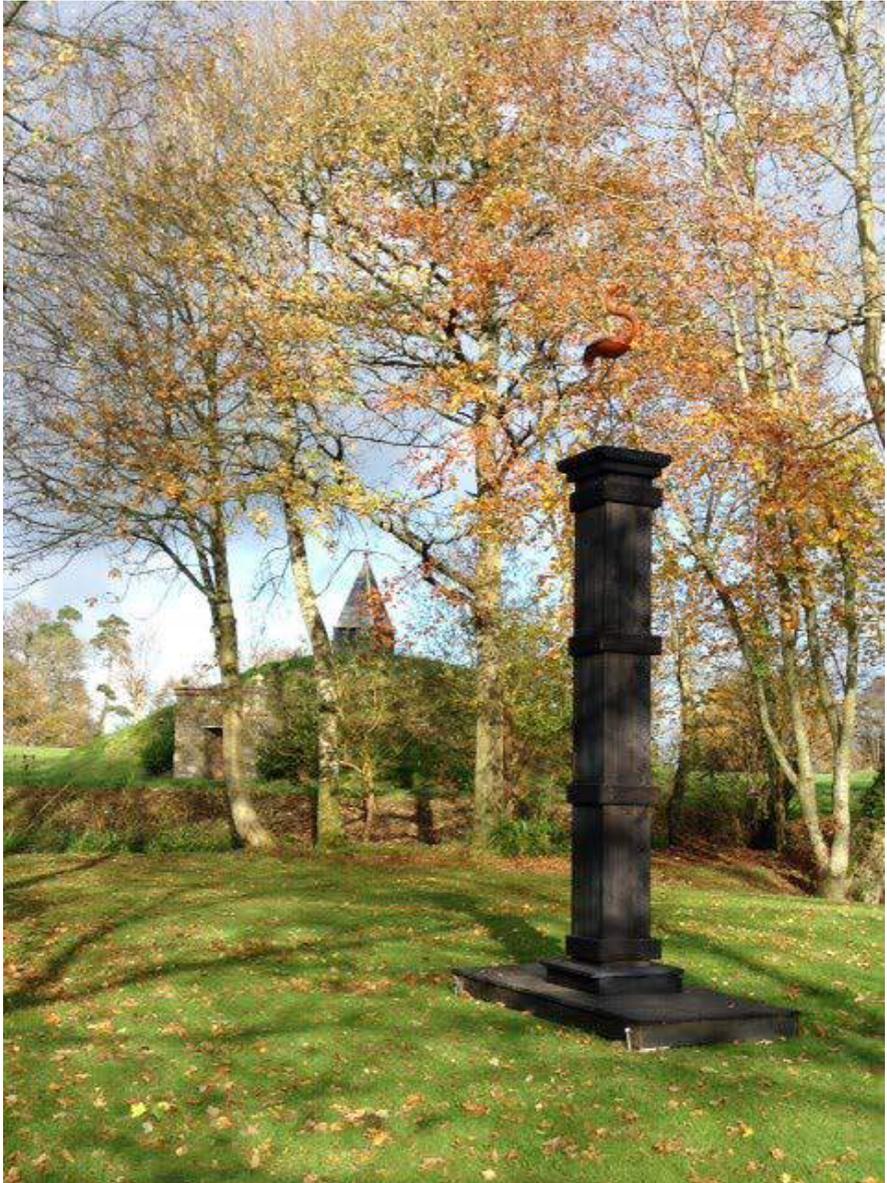
I was stimulated by Helen Senior’s article in the last edition and her love of *Lyonothamnus floribundus* var. ‘Aspleniifolius’ (Catalina ironwood). Her favourite tree. There are scarcely any growers, but I have been able to acquire one, at some expense, from Architectural Plants in Sussex.

The closure of Thornhayes Nursery in Devon was a keenly felt loss, but Perrie Hale Nursery, near Honiton, has proved to be extremely helpful. They have a large and expanding selection of trees and they have just delivered a small leaved lime (‘Greenspire’) and *Acer* x *freemanii* ‘Autumn Blaze’.

We wanted another *Acer* ‘Sieboldianum’, and managed to track one down in North Wales. The delivery charge alone was nearly £200 so we settled on a little wand of a tree acquired via eBay for £10. Roll on the Spring to see the first buds!

John Townson

Conceived 2 weeks ago and made, with the assistance of my talented neighbour, from the box that a flail mower shaft came in, the hay extension from an old trailer and a metal flamingo that someone put in my pond as a joke. Something of a Capriccio landscape is developing. [see opposite].



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Diana Hebditch

You may have read about my pumpkins in earlier editions. My pumpkin patch was my 2020 vegetable garden project. A piece of wilderness had been tamed over several years, and with the help of some young muscle, it was dug over and an inordinate quantity of farm yard manure incorporated. An over abundant amount of seeds had germinated; so all were planted. A beau-

“A beautiful patchwork of leaves hid some quite enormous though well-concealed fruits”

tiful patchwork of leaves hid some quite enormous though well-concealed fruits. The varieties were ‘Musquee de Provence’ (orange flesh), ‘Jaune Gros de Paris’ (golden flesh), ‘Marina di Chioggia’ (thick skinned and orange flesh) and ‘Squash Rugosa’. I am now on the last leg of making pumpkin soup.

In the flower garden, I continued my border inspired by our very own Penelope Hobhouse. In the North-West corner there was a bit of a wind tunnel and the wind was definitely winning over the shrubs. I also had a bird bath which was in the way of my planned outside sitting area (next year’s project). One afternoon, spade in hand, I set to work and cleared a path, found some stones and placed a stick where I thought the bird bath should go. After viewing from various angles, the site

was set. Thank goodness for sack trucks. It was trundled into place, filled with water and enjoyed by many more birds than before. I have planted *Helianthemum* in between the stones (‘Ben Fhada’ for one) which are also further along the border, divided a *Hosta* and moved in some bulbs (variety yet to be determined). As a backdrop I have planted two *Berberis* (‘Darwinii Compacta’ and *thunbergii* ‘Starburst’) which I hope will win over both the wind and the sheep. We shall see.

Christopher and Lindsay Bond

When we sold our house in the Countryside, we kept a small wood on the side of a hill, with amazing views, where we had started a woodland garden in a clearing with a hardy exotic theme (palm trees, bamboos, *Fatsia*, *Cordyline* etc.) This year we have seen ash die back disease creep inexorably along the valley towards us and we know we will lose most of the trees that were planted 75 years ago. Their death and the timing of their fall is

“This year we have seen ash die back disease creep inexorably along the valley towards us and we know we will lose most of the trees”

unpredictable and potentially dangerous. So we bit the bullet and cut down the 50 ash trees around the garden producing a

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desolate brown slope where nothing had grown under the dense tree shade.

We had spent 3 months planning what to plant in this arid but sunny slope knowing that if we don't, nature will take over. Who knows what seeds have lain dormant for so long and how long it will take the brambles to go for it! We waited impatiently

for Summer to finish so we could plant our strange collection of hardy exotics including *Eriobotrya* and even a banana (now wrapped up for Winter frosts). We know the real challenge will be watering off mains next Summer in their first year. Think of us struggling up the steep slope with watering cans – water is surprisingly heavy – while you use hoses at home.

A New Bed on the Wild Side!

Hilary Little inspires us to live our visions

Inspired by visits we had made in June and July to Keith Wiley's innovative and stunning garden, 'Wildside', near Buckland Monachorum in Devon, we decided to create a new, South-facing, well-drained bed measuring approximately 9m by 5m on the Eastern side of the upper lawn.

My Husband mowed a sinuous curve to delineate the outer, Northern and Western edges of the bed which I then staked out with small canes. Between us, we took out a narrow strip of turf to clearly define the edge for the contractor who came and stripped the turf, rotavated the soil surface and deposited 3 tons of topsoil and 1 ton of 5-10mm gravel in the centre, to make a low, teardrop-shaped mound. Subsequently, over a period of days, we hand dug the area around the mound removing bucket after bucket of roots and stones. Finally, my Husband spread well-composted bark over the area we had dug and made a path using coarse wood chippings between the Eastern edge and the existing *Arbutus* bed.

When all was finished the real fun began.

During lockdown, I had sown numerous seeds, not only from commercial

“Subsequently, over a period of days, we hand dug the area around the mound removing bucket after bucket of roots and stones”

seedsmen, but also from the Hardy Plant Society and the Alpine Garden Society. Keith Wiley's garden in Midsummer has *Agapanthus* in profusion amongst various grasses, interspersed with *Kniphofias*, other shrubs and herbaceous plants,, so a visit in August to Pan Global Plants at Frampton-on-Severn gave me the opportunity to purchase varieties of these genera. From the Rare Plant Fair at the Bishop's Palace, Wells in September, I bought *Asclepia tuberosa*, *Molinia caerulea* 'Edith Dudszus,' *Pennisetum setaceum*

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Our newly planted bed 'Skyrocket' and *Carex testacea* 'Prairie Fire'. Later, on a visit to the Nursery 'Blooming Wild' at South Cheriton near Wincanton, I acquired *Amsonia hubrichtii*, *Amsonia tabernaemontana* 'Blue Ice' and *Sporobolus heterolepis*. The latter I planted together with several *Echinacea pallida* raised from seed purchased from the Piet Oudolf Garden at Bruton. I also split various existing clumps of *Kniphofias* and blue *Asters* and transplanted some clumps of *Thalictrum dipterocarpum* 'Hewitts Double'. I had amassed a number of *Agapanthus* in pots, some of which I planted below the Western edge of the ridge. In front of them I put *Heleniums* and *Echinacea*. *Carex oshimensis* 'Evergold', which I had propagated earlier in the year, made a good edging plant as did *Stipa tenuissima*. I also took cuttings of the shrubby *Calceolaria integrifolia* and

C. integrifolia 'Kentish Hero' to plant next Spring.

Generally, the taller plants were placed on the highest and widest part of the mound including *Miscanthus* in variety, *Amicia zygomeris*, *Stipa gigantea*, *Astelia nervosa* 'Silver Shadow', *Eryngium yuccifolium* 'Kershaw Blue' and *Kniphofia rooperi*. Only two shrubs were planted, *Styrax japonica* 'Evening Light' at the Northern end and the purple-leaved form of *Zanthophyllum piperetum* at the Southern end of the bed. On the Eastern side, in the shadier area, I put *Liriope muscari* 'Ingwersen' and *L. muscari* 'Alba'. Finally, several groups of dwarf *Narcissus* and *Iris reticulata* were planted around the edges to give Spring colour as the majority of the plants will reach a peak in late Summer, but it will take a couple of years for the planting to realise its potential.



The Garden at Wildside in Devon

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Art and the Garden

Sheila Rabson looks at what Mediaeval pictures tell us about gardens

Much as I love art, my attempts at drawing are met with much hilarity from my friends. I am the one who cannot draw a circle and make the two ends meet! Fortunately, I have access to superb paintings in books, galleries or online – truly the World is at my fingertips. I am also lucky that I have completed some university art courses and attended lectures at the National Gallery. I have recently been looking at various paintings with garden themes and would like to share some thoughts with you.

“Fortunately, I have access to superb paintings in books, galleries or online – truly the World is at my fingertips”

A painting may include a garden, either in the background of a building, a statue or people, but it could also be the main subject. If it is a mediaeval artwork, the garden layout will not be as we know gardens today. They are usually very formal in design with paths and walkways, occasionally a mound to climb for a vantage point, beds are fairly small and form patterns and the use of water is limited. The area outside the garden tends to be more

wild in character unless it is cultivated for crops and other food. Occasionally the artist has used a real-life drawing of a plant and this will enable us to identify it botanically. This can then be used to determine when a plant first came into a Country. Charting a garden through a dateable artwork can help with any restoration work as well as supply the necessary history of its development.



Some paintings might show how agricultural work was done in the past e.g. grape harvesting, tilling the fields with hand ploughs etc. The artist may have taken direct observation or maybe they had undertaken this work themselves. These small vignettes of daily life may be found in

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some strange places. When scribes were decorating illuminated manuscripts of the *Bible* or for *Books of Hours*, they frequently filled the border with little scenes of daily life. We can then learn that they grew wheat, barley and rye for their daily bread and, along with eggs, milk and cheese, forming the basic protein for ordinary folk; we discover their diet. Peas, beans, onions and a few root crops are depicted regularly but meat and fish would only have been eaten in wealthy households or monasteries. We get a flavour of how people lived their lives from their art.

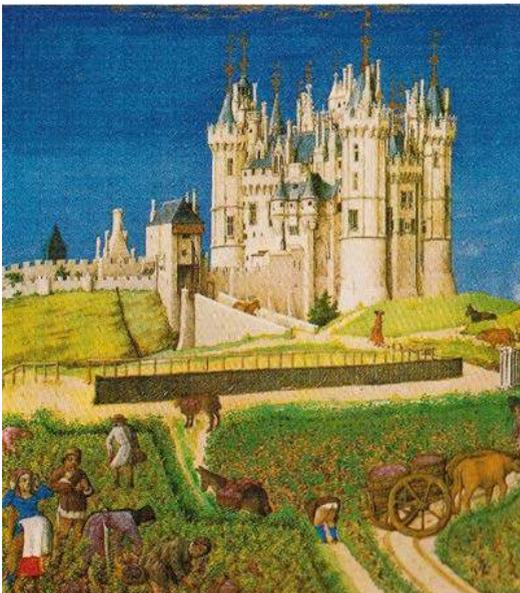
Tapestries were only seen in very well off households as they were richly woven



using silk and finely spun wool. The weavers had such skill that identification of individual species of plant is possible. If the hanging is of a woodland scene reaching to the floor, it can often give one the im-

pression that you are actually walking along a woodland path. The Cluny Museum in Paris displays the “*mille fleurs*” tapestries, which are allegories of the five human senses e.g. touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing. They are fairly well known, especially the one depicting ‘touch’ with the lady’s hand touching the horn of a unicorn. Whilst they are conveying this sense, the entire background of the tapestry is full of blooming flowers set on a red background.

Linking art, history and horticulture has been an interesting experience. There can be a lot more to art than you first thought, just as there is more to gardening than mowing the lawn, landscaping and weeding!



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My Garden

Sheena Loveday creates an enviable retreat

It's sobering to look back through old photographs and see how beautiful our garden was before we bit the bullet and built a contemporary house for our retirement on part of it.

Having previously been a pub in central Wells, the car park had provided us with a generous garden.

And so it was that we realised our long term plan, and despite its somewhat unpromising outlook as we are surrounded by houses on all sides, by Christmas 2013 we had achieved a new home with a new much smaller garden.

Through clever architectural design, the house is a delight. But the garden is a struggle. We levelled it with a retaining wall and replanted our existing yew and hornbeam hedging to provide Winter structure and privacy.

It's a South West facing garden, visible from all windows of the house. With structure from hedging and box balls, softness and summer flounce comes from grasses *Deschampsia*, *Tenuissima* and *Penisetia Alopecuroides* 'Hameln' underplanted with tall spires. Their colour palette varies through the seasons.

Despite digging in loads of grit, compost, and manure, the after effect of bulldozers is that the sub soil is compacted and drainage still poor. *Eremurus*



and tulips rot and even *Salvia* struggles.

Best performers are *Cosmos*, *Knautia mac-edonica*, *Echinacea* and *Acidenthera* in dryer spots. *Alliums* and Siberian Iris cope, just. *Persicaria Bistorta Superba* self seeds in the sun, as do *Persicaria bistorta* 'Hohe Tatra' in the shaded, heavy soil near the hedges. Love-in-the-Mist and foxgloves thrive, are rampant and romantically pretty.

Somehow surviving an area of polluted soil from pub days, around the high stone walls, are *Ceanothus*, *Rosa* 'Phyllis Bide' and 'Malvern Hills', *Campsis* and one lonely Cypress. A Stone Pine provides welcome shade to the South elevation. *Akebia* and *Holboellia* run riot unless I get really tough.

At times it's curiously beautiful, and with drink in hand, it provides a wonderful refuge from lockdown! Birds and wildlife love it. Sometimes it just looks a mess but there is always movement with iridescent light catching the grasses. It feels more like curating than gardening but then, I'm no gardener.

Editors Comment: Readers may disagree with the last comment!

“Through clever architectural design, the house is a delight. But the garden is a struggle”

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The Combe, Wells

Tom Rees discovers a hidden eighteenth century Pleasure Garden

A modest stone-pillared wrought-iron gate at the foot of Bristol Hill, on the main A39 out of Wells, is the anonymous entrance to one of Wells's most beautiful and unexpected gardens. Anonymous because no sign anywhere points you to it, no advertisement in a magazine, no website boasts of its attractions. A small sign fixed to the gate simply says 'Private Garden'. A determined push on the gate leads you via a shaded tunnel of trees to a long vista up the Combe which gives the garden its name. It is open to the public thanks to the generosity of the Tudway Quilter family of Milton Lodge, which sits a few hundred yards to the West of the exit to the Combe.

The beautiful garden at Milton Lodge (described in a recent issue of this Magazine) is listed as of Special Historic Interest at Grade II. This very brief summary is derived from the Historic England description, which is available online.

The Tudway family, who were prominent in the City of Wells in the C18th, began at the end of that Century to acquire land in the long narrow valley which led up the hill from the gardens of their mansion, The Cedars, which stood and still stands close to the Cathedral and now serves as the centre of Wells Cathedral School. Two generations of Tudways arranged for the valley to be laid out as a pleasure ground,

“Two generations of Tudways arranged for the valley to be laid out as a pleasure ground, completing the work in 1829”

completing the work in 1829.

The Combe is unsurprisingly reminiscent, though on a substantially smaller scale, of Hestercombe with high level walks either side and above the floor of the valley and



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a rill fed by a winterbourne. They overlook the closely mown floor of the Combe which, relatively wide at the foot of the hill, narrows progressively as it rises to the denser planting at the top where the path disappears into a thicket of bamboo. It lacks the architectural follies which adorn the Hestercombe valley, but more than makes up for them in the magnificent specimen oaks, beech, Scots pine, limes, and many exotics. On a recent visit a tall *Liriodendron* was lighting up a lower portion of the grassy valley with a blaze of gold, and towards the top of the valley, an *Acer* was on fire with scarlet.

The valley had become overgrown in the first part of the C20th, though not as badly as at Hestercombe. The present owner's Father came to the rescue of the Combe when he inherited the property in 1962. The current planting is skilfully contrived to wind up the hill in such a way as to reveal its beauties slowly, and in Spring one's route is flanked by a variety of

mature flowering trees and shrubs, most of these planted in the 1960s. Look out for a fine example of *Davidia involucrata* on the western terrace in May just beyond the towering *Sequoiadendron giganteum*; and in June the white blossoms of *Cornus* 'Porlock' and *Philadelphus* just beyond the main entrance.

The arboretum, since that is perhaps the best description, is immaculately maintained, and there was extensive replanting after the great storm of 1990, though many splendid trees had survived. Although the main A37 road runs up the hill at no great distance away, the bottom of the Combe is always peaceful and free from traffic noise, and when one emerges at the top, the main road has disappeared and the path leads through a quiet gate into an orchard before emerging onto a little lane above the hamlet of Walcombe.

The Combe is normally open from Easter to sometime in December, and is free to the public.



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The Quercetum

James Harris encouraging news on his oak tree trial

Recently we heard the news that after detailed research and tests, a vaccine to control Covid 19 had been produced which was showing promise. All of us gardeners like to plant new plants in our gardens. Likewise, we have to try. Several factors – the soil and the climate for example – have to be taken into consideration, but we hope that the new plant will do well and show promise. This inspired me, three years ago, to go ahead and plant a collection of oaks. In the Nursery I had been growing oaks – mostly in containers. So frequently I was asked by customers whether the oak was hardy; what sort of conditions did it need. Oaks can be found in several Continents but how would they succeed in our climate? I needed to try myself to see how oaks

“Oaks can be found in several Continents but how would they succeed in our climate? I needed to try myself to see how oaks would grow in Curry Mallet”

would grow in Curry Mallet. For example, the Eastern USA has a lot of acid soil and a continental climate. Here in Curry Mallet the soil is very alkaline and we have a maritime climate. Different conditions prevail in other places, for example in China and Japan.

For the planting, I chose a small field – about .080 of an acre, which is part of our garden. I planted out 48 oaks from three different Continents – Europe, Asia and America. No special preparation of the soil

was done. A little compost from the Nursery was added in and some general fertiliser spread on top. All oaks had to be fenced and protected (we have a serious problem from deer and rabbits). In order to make the area more attractive, some other trees were planted



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– *Magnolias, Euonymus* and some conifers. I did not want what one customer had done – that was to plant oaks out in lines. During the first Summer the plants were kept watered. In the second year we had a very dry Summer and the ground became very cracked. We only lost one oak. Two others did not grow as they were not compatible.

I faced a challenge but I have been

delighted with the results. Many of the oaks have grown well. Some are growing very slowly but I hope that they will come on. It has been very interesting to observe how compatible the oaks have been with our soil.

Now we have extended the Quercetum by taking in another field of about 2 acres. I shall plant out more oaks but also a wide variety of other genera. What fun it will be to watch all these plantings develop.

The Artists Eye

Sculptor Candace Bahouth looks out at her own very special garden

Come through the gate... and enter my secret paradise. It's enclosed, intimate, secluded, with a mill run and the soothing sounds of a brook. The stream moves across the garden, surrounded by trees, a hug of nature. It's another world, my personal world, an



Westonbirt Garden

*“It’s another world,
my personal world, an
ever-changing room,
another studio where
I can express myself
and present my work”*

ever-changing room, another studio where I can express myself and present my work. I have a great interest in colour. The garden is bright and fragrant with 16 different types of roses in pink and red. Peonies, hollyhocks, foxgloves, punctuated by tall yellow *Verbascum* and evening primrose

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– all looked over by the magnificent Pilton church.

My mosaic work accents the garden with texture and more colour. There are uplifting and joyous pillars, totems, obelisks and benches to sit upon.

Some gardens are contemplative. Others are tonal exercises. I wanted mine to be playful, a surprise, a delight for the senses. I was asked, a few years ago, to create a garden at Westonbirt arboretum – with the theme ART IN THE GARDEN – that

would be open to visitors for 3 months. How does an artist create a garden to last months? I used plastic... for the grass, trees, paths, and flowers accented with my mosaic work, benches, obelisks and urns. The garden was overwhelmingly successful. Three couples asked if they could be married there.

There are all kinds of gardens: formal gardens, wild gardens, monochromatic gardens, topiary gardens but mine is an artist's garden, a space created with my own particular vision.



My Garden



Readers Forum – My Garden Soil – Ugh!

Ian Anderson

When I started, I removed the lawn but the soil was very poor and full of couch grass. Without thinking I made matters worse by spreading the sub-soil from a pond-dig onto the veg plot. Bad mistake, nothing grew very well.

I had a cartload of horse manure delivered which the farmer deposited against the garage door so I couldn't open it. The horse manure and my garden compost slowly improved it. Copious waste plants and compost from the greenhouse were recycled onto the veg plot. So much so, that the plot is now two feet higher than it was, and I now need extra railway sleepers to contain the soil!

“So much so, that the plot is now two feet higher than it was, and I now need extra railway sleepers to contain the soil!”

No doubt I have spent hundreds of pounds over the years but my horrible garden soil now looks like commercial compost (with Perlite, of course) and I can grow almost anything without feeding. I still have the couch grass though!

Paul Cumbleton

When we moved here 5 years ago the garden was a blank canvas. We soon discovered that the soil was a heavy clay-loam,

“Our solution has been to build raised beds filled with a well-draining mix”

wet and sticky in Autumn/Winter and very dry in Summer. Complicating things further, it is shallow – only 10cm in places! – lying over solid rock. Fortunately, over much of the garden it is deeper, but still only 30cm at best, making the Summer dryness even more severe. We are forever watering!

We have yet to develop our main flower beds but we think many things will grow well as long as we pay attention to Summer watering. But we have particular interests in alpine and bulbs and these require better drainage than the soil provides. Our solution has been to build raised beds filled with a well-draining mix, resulting in a successful alpine crevice garden and a floriferous bulb bed.

Jeremy and Trish Gibson

As neither of us played tennis, we decided to create a garden out of the old hard tennis court we'd inherited at the Old Vicarage. One section was going to be a huge mound and so we needed to import trailer-load after trailer-load of

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“bindweed, couch grass, creeping thistle, docks – you name it, we had it. And some we even struggled to identify. It took quite some work and a lot of digging to clear them. Ugh!”

local ‘topsoil’ – the neighbours wondered where on earth it was all going. Maybe we should have been suspicious when we discovered a great chunk of silage in one bit of the soil but, for the first few months, it seemed as though we’d done well and all our new planting flourished. Trouble was,



we discovered, so did all those pernicious perennial weeds – bindweed, couch grass, creeping thistle, docks – you name it, we had it. And some we even struggled to identify. It took quite some work and a lot of digging to clear them. Ugh!

Patricia Gilbert-Davies

My garden is very dry as it is shally due to the fact that it was a Quarry and, when I first arrived here, my elderly neighbour remembered the horses and carts going down to double the depth of the stone face visible now. Then, when they were redoing the roads at Walford Cross ie the Glastonbury Taunton junction, the spoil was tipped into the Quarry, so I now have a garden and lawns near the Cottage and two paddocks. Instead of a hole in the ground!

Some of the flower beds and especially the veg garden has had roughly 40 years of stable and good compost spread over it. The fields have had horses, flocks of (Christmas) geese, goats and now sheep.

Susie Thorne

Sandy loam, pH 6.5 – not at all ugh! Unfortunately, a large area around our house was still covered in concrete yards when we moved in. We have also done quite a bit of earth moving, which in some areas has brought the underlying shellet closer to the surface.

A sea of claggy subsoil to the West was covered in bought-in



“A sea of claggy subsoil to the West was covered in bought-in topsoil which was quite clayey; luckily the oak leaves raining down on it each year have turned it into a delicious rich mix”

topsoil which was quite clayey; luckily the oak leaves raining down on it each year have turned it into a delicious rich mix. I followed this example where some of the cobble floor of an old building was removed – simply mixing leaf mould into the subsoil. Where I dug out shellet which was only six inches below the surface in a new bed, I replaced it with our own horse manure. This worked well, but I felt the soil was only really improved when I used home-made compost as a mulch.



Mulching with mushroom compost, horse manure, home-made compost or simply leaves stored in bags for a few months and spread around in the Spring, has improved the soil everywhere and saved a huge amount of weeding.

John Townson

When I moved into my farmhouse in 1980, I looked out onto concrete yards and hard-core tracks. There was one meagre flower-bed in front of the house, which the cows could browse on their way into milking. There were however attractive stone enclosures where I could make a garden in time. This entailed breaking up the concrete and digging out the ground to about two feet deep, down to intractable clay. With limited funds, I had to then beg, steal and borrow any type of material that plants might grow in, and on which I might make a lawn. I did buy two lorry loads of topsoil, but that was not a success as it has remained somewhat dead to this day, however much compost is added. Where I was lucky was that I had a very old dung heap to excavate and this filled in much of the hole. This area of my garden is therefore very sensitive to weather and the lawn can slump and crack alarmingly in dry conditions, even after thirty years. The art of managing my soil is therefore to remember where I put it!

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Why we should all consider flower essences

Manufacturer Saskia Marjoram explains what they are and why they are important

Have you ever noticed how plants affect how you feel?

We all know that being outside in nature makes us feel better and as gardeners we know that we are attracted to some plants rather than others but have you ever wondered why?

“Flower essences contain the unique energy vibration of the plant they come from”

As a professional gardener and florist for most of my working life, and as a flower essence producer and practitioner, I've thought about this A LOT! And like everything in life, the deeper you go, the more complex/interesting things become. But sticking to the basics ...if we are able to take the energy of plants inside ourselves rather than just being amongst them, they can affect us even more. And, as Edward Bach discovered in the 1930's, by doing this, we are able

to shift and change long standing behaviour and thought patterns.

Flower essences contain the unique energy vibration of the plant they come from. This might sound a bit 'woo woo', however no-one questions the fact that a record contains the vibration of someone singing many years ago and that we can access that vibration at any time we want to change how we feel. Flower 'Essences' work in a similar way. By taking them as drops under the tongue, the vibration or energy, of that plant, can be 'heard' by the water in our body to realign us and help us to respond to life in a healthier way.

So, for instance, taking the energy of an oak tree into your body (solid, stable, slow growing), can help you to slow right down, to take life at a steady pace and to remember to rest. This is a great Essence for people who rush and are workaholics. On the other hand, if you are in need of a bit of a boost and want to speed up a little, you might want to take the Essence of



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blackberry which, as you know, is very fast growing and finds it easy to root wherever it lands.

Each flower Essence helps with a different aspect of human behaviour and they are incredibly effective, sometimes even miraculous in their action. If you are new to them, you might want to look at an aspect of your life that isn't working, or a behaviour that you have outgrown and look to see which plants/Essences might help with that issue. From there you can work inwards shifting and changing patterns, sometimes from early childhood.

“And when you are out in nature, look around and see which plants you are most drawn to or keep noticing - invariably they are the ones that you need most at the moment”

And when you are out in nature, look around and see which plants you are most drawn to or keep noticing – invariably they are the ones that you need most at the moment.

Saskia Marjoram's website is www.saskiasfloweressences.com.



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Studying for RHS Qualifications

Neil Bond reviews his experience

“but the adventure of taking it from a wilderness of bare mud and overgrown shrubs to a space I love spending time in, has been an amazing experience”

Four years ago, I moved out of my third floor flat into a house with a small garden. Living in London, any outside space is valuable and despite what most estate agents seem to think, much more than just potential space for an extension. The garden may not be big but the adventure of taking it from a wilderness of bare mud and overgrown shrubs to a space I love

spending time in, has been an amazing experience. Looking back on this journey, I would have to say I learned more by trial and error than design. Though this is not a bad way to learn, I felt like I was missing a deeper understanding of both plants and gardening. So, it was with this in mind that I signed up for the RHS level two horticulture course at Capel Manor College around a year ago. It was a little daunting at first, not having studied for over fifteen years, but the study skills soon returned.

The course has three elements: two theory and one practical. The first theory course covers plant health and science and the second covers the basic elements of garden design and practice, both of these are examined at the end. The practical course covers first-hand experience ranging from operating garden machinery to propagation and growing fruit and veg. I should add a warning here to those of you who are allergic to Latin, there are a lot of plant names to learn. Never having studied Latin before I at first found this difficult, but I soon came to realise that Latin is the language of plants and knowing it gives you the ability to talk about



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them, as well as a deeper level of understanding of them. Sadly, while it may be the language of plants I have yet to get a response from my houseplants when I wish them a good morning! You need to pass both the theory courses and the practical to complete the Diploma, though many people choose to complete only one or two of the elements.

Managing the amount of



“I should add a warning here to those of you who are allergic to Latin, there are a lot of plant names to learn”

time you can give to the course is worth considering before starting. Working full time and studying one day a week, I have been able to complete the first theory course and almost finish the practical course, although it has not always been easy balancing all my commitments. There are a number of online providers for the theory courses and this can be a practical alternative if you have less time or do

not live near a college offering the course. I would advise shopping around and reading reviews for different providers if you are considering this option. I have started studying this way with Edinburgh Botanical Gardens and, so far, it has been a positive experience.

Although it has been hard work, it has been very rewarding. I would highly recommend the course whether you want to increase your gardening knowledge or use it as a springboard to take you onto something else. The best place to start is the RHS website which has a complete list of colleges and online providers offering the course.

The Countryside in Winter

Selena Mitford relishes her winter meadow

As the trees shake off their Autumn

finery, the work we have achieved, and the work still to do, is revealed. It has been a productive year: several willows were wrestled back to their central stem from where they had lolled across some useful

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“This was our first full year of cattle ownership and so much of the work to the land was in truth done by them, with us racing to learn about them and their relationship to the land”

bits of grazing for the Riggitt Galloway cattle. We only pollard the trees on the outskirts of the copses and find that their vigorous new shoots make a good windbreak both for the cattle

and the older willows within.

This was our first full year of cattle ownership and so much of the work to the land was in truth done by them, with us racing to learn about them and their relationship to the land. While we nursed the scrape on the bullock’s knee, carved the ground up with electric fencing to graze one part and rest another, and spent days training them to walk happily through the cattle crush, they were the ones extending the range of the Orchids up the valley; spreading the Devil’s Bit Scabious over twice the ground it covered before; and burying themselves all the way up to their hindquarters in the piles of willow brash. It turns out they like their salad slightly wilted.

As the frost cloaks the ground and my

“I can bury my fingers in their coats while they feed on their Winter breakfast of sugar beet pellets”



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fingers and toes begin to freeze, the cattle are content. The Summer flies are gone at last, their coats have thickened and their breath drifts lazily about them. I can bury my fingers in their coats while they feed on their Winter breakfast of sugar beet pellets. I'm happy to linger with these gentle beings, as to hurry to work as a

thatcher will mean ice on the sheets and ropes stiff, cold and hard to untie. Once the sun is up, it is good work for a few hours before the race to dusk begins and we wonder if we can get on just a couple more bundles.

Rainy days mean nothing to the cattle and, although it stops work for us, it does give us time to plan for the year ahead.

There is the pole barn to plan; more repairs to the flintstone and lime

mortar boundary wall; whether or not to let my partner's pig loose on a strip of the blue bell meadow as a trial to bring the brambles under some sort of control and calves.....we are expecting calves in the late Spring. There is much to look forward to.

Photographing Gardens

Ann Cook FRPS gives some professional guidance

Your Editors have asked me to write about photographing gardens. A wonderful subject as we all take photographs of gardens, from our own much loved plots, to the manicured designed magnificence of the National Trust, and in many of the glorious gardens which we have visited over the years with the SGT. We all have our favourite cameras, whether a hi spec DSLR, or one of the new sophisticated mobile

phones, all splendid and perfectly adequate for our needs in this digital age.

So avoiding boring discussion about equipment – much more interesting to consider what makes a beautiful or interesting garden photograph? Many of the most arresting garden photographs I have ever seen, have been taken in either the early morning or late evening, when the sun is low, illuminating trees, shrubs and flowers in the most dramatic way. Even better if there is a hint of frost accentuating shapes, particularly effective if topiary is

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“Many of the most arresting garden photographs I have ever seen, have been taken in either the early morning or late evening”

involved! I am no early bird, so have never discovered the delight of frost, but late afternoon into evening is a magical time and surely a garden should be magical and indeed romantic. Evening light has a glow, a warmth which a camera emphasises to great effect.

Needless to say that photography is all about light, whatever the subject, but another theme that it is wonderful to pursue, is recording a garden throughout the seasons, the amazing changes in colours, shapes and form. I moved nine years ago to the centre of Wells, and now have a small town garden, thankfully south facing, walled and mostly paved, ending with a wisteria coved pergola. I like to think of it as a “room”! I have always admired the “room” gardens at Cothay Manor, leading from one room to another to yet another. I am able, rather conveniently, to suspend belief and forget that my room leads into the car park! However, it is designed and planted as a “room” which has been a constant joy throughout the seasons. I have included examples here, and as mentioned, no frost, but I was utterly fascinated how snow dramatically and completely changed everything – a chilly romance. In my photograph taken at night, with my mobile

phone as it was handy! the lighting is obviously artificial, mostly from uplighters beneath trees, good lighting necessary as it is the way to my car! The Autumn photograph was also taken with my mobile phone – often necessary for immediacy, as the light through the leaves of the tree, and dahlias (‘Bright Eyes’) was so short lived,

but backlighting is absolutely wonderful as it illuminates and creates a glowing opacity. I first discovered this at the Keukenhof Gardens in Holland when photographing tulips – the sun shining through them creating a dramatic transparent effect.

Also included here to illustrate different seasons, Spring and Autumn at Stourhead, same place same time of day, slightly different light – but mostly backlit, emphasising the glowing colours

So briefly to sum up! Let us think of and look for light, different times of the day, different seasons, but also not yet discussed, different angles, close ups, framing using an arch or pillars, but above all, using our eyes, the camera only takes what we see!

*So briefly to sum up!
Let us think of and
look for light, different
times of the day,
different seasons*

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My garden in winter



My garden in July



Stourhead in Autumn



My garden in Autumn



Stourhead in Spring

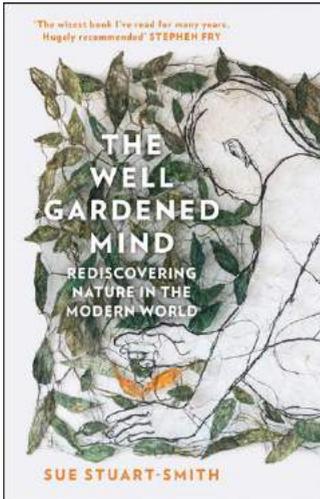
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Book Review – ‘The Well Gardened Mind’ by Sue Stuart-Smith

Anne Wood explains why she wants us all to read it

It is not often that I want to go back to the beginning of a book as soon as I have come to the end. In fact it is not often I read a book these days. I have macular eye degeneration and mostly read on a Kindle.



‘*The Well Gardened Mind*’ was given to me as a hardback by a friend this Summer and both the print and the space between the lines made me think it might be possible to have the joy of reading a hardback again. And what a joy it proved to be. This is such a positive book.

Sue Stuart-Smith read English Literature at Cambridge and then decided to train as

a doctor. She worked for many years in the National Health Service, and is now a prominent psychiatrist and psychotherapist. Among other appointments, she teaches at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Her Husband, Tom Stuart Smith, is a leading garden designer, and together they have created a garden in Hertfordshire where they have lived for over 30 years.

Sue Stuart-Smith writes about the therapeutic effect of gardening and getting back to nature. Her research comes from worldwide sources, not only from doctors and gardeners, but also from philosophers and poets, scientists and saints.

There are stories of children in inner city areas whose lives have been transformed by working in gardens and growing vegetables and plants. Incidentally this is an area that Gilly Drummond, founder of *The Gardens Trust*, identified with.

“There are stories of children in inner city areas whose lives have been transformed by working in gardens and growing vegetables and plants”

We hear about work in prisons both in this Country and overseas. The ‘Green House Project’ in New York has shown that prisoners are much less likely to re-offend when they have been given the

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opportunity to work in a green space during their time in prison. There is a moving story about one prisoner for the first time having something to talk about to his Mother when she visited him in prison.

There are examples of war veterans recovering from physical or mental wounds as they learn to work with nature. It is known that trauma in many forms can be helped in this way.

Hospitals find that patients recover more quickly by something as simple as having a view out of a window of trees and plants. 'Horatio's Gardens' for spinal injuries have

“There is a moving story about one prisoner for the first time having something to talk about to his Mother when she visited him in prison”

shown the benefits to patients who can be moved on their beds out into the garden.

The subtitle of the book is '*Rediscovering Nature in the Modern World*'. In these strange and horrid times of Covid 19, we can all benefit from its message.

Creative flower arrangements

Toria Britten of Wildly Beautiful Flowers inspires us to do it

The natural beauty of flowers and foliage can transform your home, bring a room alive and give you the opportunity to get creative.

If you are a keen gardener, which I'm guessing you are, you can always find something in your garden or hedge to make something beautiful for your table or mantelpiece. You may think you have very little in your garden at this time of year, but you can create an impact with just a few flowers and foliage. Creating an arrangement is like planning what to plant in your garden, really

look at the shape of the flowers and the leaves, the way they grow, search out those quirky stems and look at textures, then consider what will work well together, how they all enhance one another. The



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“but you can create an impact with just a few flowers and foliage”

sculptural shapes of seed heads, such as *Ammi* ‘Visnaga’, ‘Malope’ or ‘Nicandra’, will add drama to your arrangements, add in some large branches of rosehips, spindleberry or catkins, and you have instant interest.

Colour is important too. Choose single colours for the greatest impact or a harmony of colours to give a more subtle look. Harmonious colours are those that naturally relate to each other, if you look closely at the arrangements here, you will see that the centre of the *Alstromeria* has a golden tinge that connects with the *Physocarpus* leaves, the peachy pink links naturally with the roses, the dahlia and the chrysanthemum. The flowers for these arrangements were all picked on a soggy November day, but would happily grace your dining table or mantelpiece, add in a few candles in charity shop candlesticks and you have instant atmosphere! Select interesting

containers, let them inspire you when you are choosing your plant material, whether it is from your garden or local flower grower/florist. You could use a row of simple vases and jars down the centre of your dining table, on your sideboard or mantelpiece, with just a few flowers in each. Scale up the size of the containers according to the size of your table or



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“if you look closely at the arrangements here, you will see that the centre of the Alstromeria has a golden tinge that connects with the Physocarpus leaves”

fireplace, the principles are the same. Use a simple cereal bowl for the table arrangement, add a pinholder and some scrunched up chicken wire and you won't need any of

that nasty green floral foam! A mass of one type of foliage, such as *Eucalyptus* or gorgeous glossy ivy with berries in a large glass vase or an urn, look dramatic

and luxurious too. Have a play, explore new ideas – the flowers will guide you!

www.wildlybeautiful.co.uk

Obituary - Sylvia Ray

Sylvia Ray (née Acland-Hood) was born in Richmond in 1944 and was educated, along with her two sisters, at Cheltenham Ladies College. There she excelled at sport and consolidated her love of singing and music - she played both piano and organ. After school she lived and worked for a while in London and then as a Matron at the Dragon School in Oxford. Following the death of her Father, Sylvia moved to live with her Mother at Wootton House. There she became involved with a variety of local and regional organisations, and along with her Mother, became an energetic and accomplished gardener, ensuring the freezer was always full of fruit and home grown vegetables. In 1991 she married Robin and became the very best kind of partner for a clergyman, throwing herself wholeheartedly into parish life, first in Taunton and then on Exmoor, where

she made a garden where one had hardly existed before. There too she was able to rekindle her love of horses and riding.

Sylvia was involved with the Somerset Gardens Trust from its earliest days and was appointed its first Secretary with David Tudway Quilter as Chairman. She held the post for several years, and then served on the Committee for many more.

Retirement took her back to a house on the Butleigh Wootton estate, where she was the key player in the establishment of another beautiful garden. During these years she and Robin travelled widely in Europe visiting many of the Continent's most lovely gardens, and meeting many of the people who had created them.

Sylvia was an instinctive gardener and a wonderful hostess. Full of energy and sound common sense, together with a highly developed sense of fun. She lived her life well and will be much missed.

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Fruit Trees

David Clark on why we should treasure them

As a retired person for more than twenty years, I have had the benefits of living in a rural County where each day I am made conscious of the weather and the changing season of the year – and the interest and appeal and wonder of the local Countryside around us. All this I can annually enjoy through going out for a walk or a drive to exercise myself, but in my small garden I also have this feature I can enjoy by observation.

“the company provided, in each garden, three fruit trees for Summer fruit”

Over twenty years ago, I lived near to Bournville in Birmingham, where I enjoyed a tour not only of its chocolate factory, but also of some of the housing and amenities provided for its workers. These included an attractive house with a long garden where the company provided, in each garden, three fruit trees for Summer fruit of apples, plums and pears. This suggested to me the idea of my growing a small cluster of such fruit trees, which remain fruitful to the present.

I enjoy not only having them, but also seeing them in my garden because it keeps a



‘Bon Chretien’

link with the past of our village, when the land on which our house stands was for several centuries, an orchard.

And certainly this year, my garden fruit trees have not only provided me with plums and apples but also pears. These can be eaten ripe or cooked, over a seven week period and their tastiness enables us to share them widely with neighbours, callers, pub owners and schools!

We have had several species of pear trees, one early one with little fruit, another ‘Bon Chretien’, a late pear with a great taste, and the most successful species this year, ‘Conference’, a cooker pear which signified its readiness to be eaten by synchronizing its fall from our tree with a prepared carpet of leaves driven by the Autumn winds.

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Kelway's Peonies

Caroline Stone is trying to put together a National Collection of herbaceous peonies bred by Kelway's Nurseries. They are an important part of our national horticultural heritage. Very few of these plants are still available commercially however, and people don't realise that peonies they may have bought are now impossible to find. Even some varieties that Caroline

thought should be easy to locate are still eluding her. Have you got peonies that she might be looking for? See www.glebegarden.co.uk for a list of some of the plants she is after; there are many more but these were available in the recent past. Caroline is also building a database of information on the peonies and is keen to find old Kelways catalogues. Do you have any she could borrow and scan?

My Robot Mowing Machine

Cicely Taylor explains their joys

I've always enjoyed mowing lawns: one of those deliciously mindless jobs like ironing, where the results are visible and satisfactory and if mowing, a combination of exercise and fresh air. Unfortunately, my Husband Max doesn't share my enthusiasm and soon after we moved here, 22 years ago, he nipped off and bought a 'Husqvarna' robot machine.

It has a computer inside and is guided by a wire which you have to lay round the

perimeter of the lawn. The boring part is digging a shallow trench for the wire and as we have two big lawns connected by a slope, it took a long time.

The good thing about it is that it is silent, you can leave it on all night, and as long as you keep it going pretty regularly, you don't have to rake up the grass cuttings.

The only drawback is that you don't get those lovely straight lines that we would get if I were mowing with a proper machine.

Editorial Comment. She is not alone – at least one other member has one.

Stirling under Lockdown

Catherine Smith-Mason discovers hidden beauty

I do not have a showcase garden, but I do have a camera. I keep a garden diary which reminds me when I ought to buy

spring bulbs to pot on the pathway. But I am no gardener. All I do is try to ensure that in some corner of my tiny field, for as many months of the year as possible, there exists at least some tiny spot of uplifting colour. Mostly, though, I rely on the work of other people and of nature. Since

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“in some corner of my tiny field, for as many months of the year as possible, there exists at least some tiny spot of uplifting colour”

childhood I have loved wild flowers, and on each walk sought them out, but never succeeded in learning names. At times I did watercolours of single specimens. My eyesight finds grand gardens impressionist, so I was never one for garden visiting even when going to grand buildings, instead I saw their interiors. Then Covid came and life changed. My leisure focus gone, forced back on walking in the



neighbourhood only, I realised I must look in detail at every flower I saw.

I began to take photographs, perhaps to paint some later. That I never did, for I realised instead I should share the best with others stuck in cities.

I started with a small emailing to family and a few friends, but the positive response to *“light in the darkness”* made me expand the mailing – though much less frequently for those on the wider circles, so as not to be junk mail. I had guessed that Lockdown would be long, tedious and for some lonely, and might not be once-off. Like prisoners in the Tower, a regular bunch of flowers might help people put a score on the wall for each week passed, and so not lose track of time. This would allow each to focus on our individual Lockdown task lists. But all I had was an obsolescent 2008 digital camera – a Sony Cyber-shot with Zeiss Vario-Tessar 2.8-5.2/6.3-18.9 lens with auto-focus and manually adjustable tele-photo, set to macro-on at normal light sensitivity. (In other words basic!! A modern mobile phone is



more sophisticated.) I had no software to edit photos. My pictures are as the camera records them raw. But taking photos

“But taking photos taught me to look much more closely than I had ever previously done, and even to see beauty in the flowers of weeds in gutters”

taught me to look much more closely than I had ever previously done, and even to see beauty in the flowers of weeds in gutters.

Autumn came, and Winter too, and the dreich of Scotland descended – so I then had to search under every hedge and fallen leaf, to seek out what might, in the eye of the camera, become beautiful. Sunshine was key, I knew – for I was born in blitzed Clydebank, where the only beauty was the willow herb. Visiting Naples, one time, the sky was overhung, and I realised that Capri loses much of its beauty when the sun is gone. So even the dreich town of my birth, if bathed in sunshine, could turn up beauty in the wonderful details of flowers.



*Front Cover, Courtesy of
Jan Stanton*

*Back Cover, Courtesy of
The Editors*

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