

August 2018



Glad of the cooler days/nights or are you missing the searing heat? Having experienced a very hot summer recently you can understand why those living in other European countries such as southern Spain, France and Italy, take siestas in the afternoon. Life in the garden centre has definitely been quieter in the afternoons than the mornings as, I expect, our customers have been snoozing away somewhere in the cool shade!

be coming in after Christmas. How were your Sweet Peas this year? I had an early good flush of long stemmed, strong fragrant flowers but as the season went on the stems got shorter and the crop faded quickly. On discussing this with my colleagues at the garden centre, we believe this was due to the calcium in the water that we had to use after our rainwater butts ran out.

I have to say, I enjoy the heat. As you may recall, I feel the cold and have to wear several items of clothing in the winter. So for me, sunshine and warmth suits me fine.....and so do the flowers I have been growing in my allotment this summer, especially the Helianthus (sunflowers). I am now picking for flower arranging the varieties 'Claret' which is a dwarf variety with reddish flowers, 'Ms Mars' and 'Sonja', but my favourite cut flowers this year are Antirrhinum majus 'Appleblossom'. I just love it especially arranging it with Dianthus 'Green Wicky' which is a lime green, ball-like dianthus, wonderful. All of these annual seeds will

Just a last note on the Gold Club summer Illyria's performance of Dr Dolittle which much have been held on one of the hottest days of the year. It was a terrific performance by the players and boy, did they work hard in that heat with all the running on and off stage, changing costumes and oh...acting at the same time. A great afternoon!

Nicky



Dates for your diary

Christmas Display Opening

- ◆ At Poundbury Gardens 3rd October
- ◆ At Brimsmore Gardens 10th October
- ◆ At Castle Gardens 18th October

Cutting of the ribbon all at 7.30pm. Please join us for drinks and nibbles

Flowering bulbs are now coming into stock

Membership meeting dates

It has come the time to book a meeting with Anita or Nicky to discuss plans for 2019 and to book your discount shopping visits as well as your free speaker. Seasonal vouchers will also be ready for collection when you attend.

Please select your preferred chosen centre and call Anita on 01935 814633 to reserve your time slot.

Poundbury Gardens

Monday
12th November
9am - 1pm

Brimsmore Gardens

Monday
19th November
10am - 3pm

Castle Gardens

Monday 19th November - Friday 23rd
November
10.30am - 2.30pm

If you are unable to attend between these dates at Castle Gardens please contact Anita - 01935 814633

Greener Gardening

I am delighted to have been offered a little space in The Gold Club newsletter. As a speaker I have been privileged to meet many of our members and would like to think that I have been able to contribute a practical suggestion or two that helps subtly shift gardening practices to a more sustainable level.

So, which of my many favourite subjects do I want to pick up on for this article? I have a number of messages I am trying to share at the moment, including the need develop

more Winter gardens, better and more wildlife friendly lawncare regimes and choosing alternatives to the more destructive garden products (pesticides, weedkillers and fertilisers in particular). Today's choice has to be—peat free composts. Why peat free? I seldom touch on this aspect these days as the gardening world has been saturated with the messages about habitat destruction and species extinctions. Peat is a great growing medium and far more convenient than the (probably slightly better) medium we used before it was readily available—leaf mould.

If you are unable to dedicate the time and space to create your own leaf moulds and composts then buying bagged compost is a reasonable investment to support your favourite plants.

I was talking to a lady very recently who assumed that our best priced multi-purpose compost was peat free—in fact she assumed all composts were already peat free. Sadly Jack's Magic is a great compost BECAUSE it has a very high peat content. Why do we still stock it? Our place is to offer gardeners choices and try to gently educate—not to enforce. If we didn't offer a competitively priced multi-purpose compost many of our customers would buy it elsewhere and we would lose the opportunity to talk to you about the virtues of modern peat free options

We have trialled and stocked a number of different brands and carefully watched the development of the peat free market over the years. The early ones were pretty rubbish!

We currently offer the fairly decent, not badly priced New Horizon peat free multipurpose compost (on a long term offer, 3 bags for £15) alongside a wonderful alternative from a Melcourt called Sylvagrow.

Sylvagrow is a professional quality growing medium which we aim to adopt for all of our home-grown plants in 2019. This would greatly increase the volume we buy, reduce the price we pay and therefore enable us to offer it for sale to you at an even better price than we currently can!

Steve

Company Environmental Champion

Yeovil Literary Festival

welcomes Adam Frost

to Brimsmore Gardens, Yeovil



Monday 22 October at 7pm (Doors open at 6pm for light refreshments in The Apple Tree Restaurant)

TICKETS AVAILABLE | Octagon Theatre, Yeovil / Brimsmore, Castle and Poundbury Gardens

PRICE | £12 per person or £10* per person

(*YCCA members, Footlights, Waterstone's card holders and The Gardens Group Gold members)

Brian's Gardener's Question Time

1. Now is a good time to treat your lawn against moss, which chemicals element is represented by the initials FE?
2. Which popular garden narcissi is named after a king of the southern Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex?
3. Which pungent edible bulb comes in both 'hard neck' and 'soft neck' varieties and can be planted in the Autumn as well as the Spring?
4. Which Autumn flowering bulb provides saffron?
5. What is the name for a traditional sweeping broom usually made from birch twigs and a hazel rod that is ideal for sweeping leaves and wormcasts from your lawn?

ANSWERS FROM LAST TIME—

1. Hydrangea
2. Bell Shaped
3. 2001
4. February
5. Celeriac

ANSWERS WILL BE REVEALED IN OUR NEXT NEWSLETTER!

The Gardener's Stock Pot



This is a time of year when many gardeners become overwhelmed with produce. The trick is to be prepared! Here are a few tips to help you cope with the abundance of your garden and make lots of home-made presents for Christmas.

Pickled shallots: Here's a great tip for peeling them – top and tail them and then plunge into boiling water for 3 minutes. Rinse with cold water and squeeze them to make them pop out of their skins in a most satisfying way! Sprinkle with salt and leave them overnight. Rinse. Warm 800ml cider or malt vinegar in a pan with chilli flakes, mustard seeds, peppercorns and 100g sugar, stirring until the sugar is melted. Pack the onions in jars with the vinegar and leave for at least six weeks.

Cider vinegar: stick your chopped windfall apples in a bucket with boiling water to cover, then put a cloth over it. Keep it somewhere warm and stir it daily. Add a packet of cider or wine yeast if it doesn't start fermenting. After a week, you can transfer the strained liquid to a demi-john with an airlock and leave it to do its thing for a couple of months.

Jams and jellies: collect jam jars and make sure you have a muslin cloth or jelly bag to hand. It's so easy to boil up your fruit, strain the juice through the muslin and add 400g sugar to every pint of juice to make delicious home-made preserves for Christmas gifts.

Vodka: you can use damsons, plums, raspberries or even walnuts to make a delicious flavoured vodka. I put the washed fruit into a kilner jar or jam jar, add vodka to cover and put in a dark cupboard for two months, not forgetting to shake the mixture at least once a week. Then strain the liquid through a sieve or muslin cloth, add sugar syrup to taste and bottle it. (You can make a sugar syrup on the stove by melting two parts water to one part sugar).

Hopefully these ideas will inspire you – there are lots of recipes out there so experiment, try variations and always make notes, as that way you will be able to repeat your successes next year.

Victoria

Hardy Plants Assistant
Castle Gardens

Meet the team

You will find me in either the Houseplants or the Gift Department at Brimsmore Gardens in Yeovil. I spend most of the year here at Brimsmore, although I also have a role for Christmas. Along with other colleagues, I buy for and plan the displays throughout the year to ensure it exceeds your expectations. My role as Houseplant Supervisor lets me indulge in my love of indoor plants.

Although it is incredibly difficult to choose just one plant as a favourite, for this exercise I will say it would be an Aeonium, I'm not going to restrict it to a variety.

I love working in this environment as it is so varied, it keeps me in touch with the seasons and the world outside. One day I can be repotting an orchid or bringing in the next delivery of plants and the next building a Christmas display. I get to listen to my colleagues and learn from them which is invaluable for my own garden.

At home we grow our own vegetables organically, but also are building a collection of trees and shrubs.

I enjoy visiting gardens but most recently my favourite has to be Burrow Farm Gardens near Axminster. A wonderfully peaceful garden with stunning views and wildlife.

My favourite time of the year is Autumn, I love the colours, the early morning light in the mist and the excitement of what is around the corner.

Alexa

Houseplants Supervisor
Brimsmore Gardens

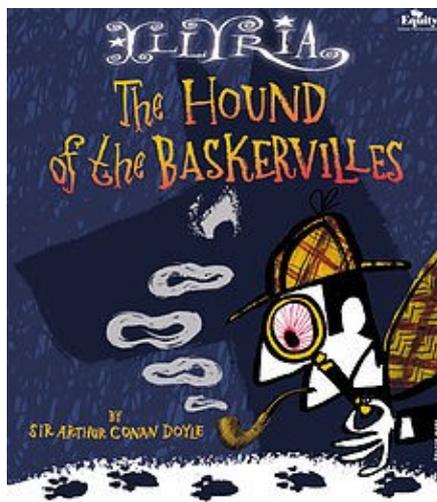
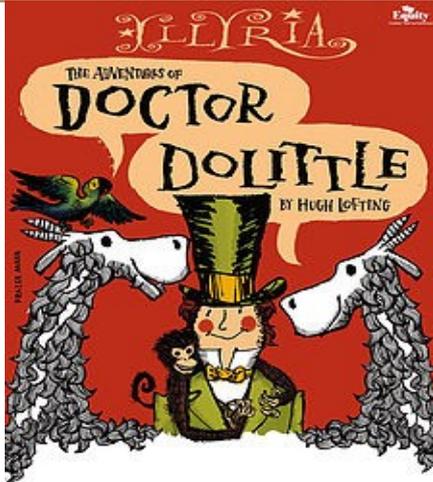
Tales from The Potting Shed

What an extraordinary few months we have had! From the Siberian blast in March and early April through the heat wave and drought of the last few weeks and in between those almost perfect Spring growing conditions!

Trade was hugely affected in March particularly and we were of course closed for at least a day at each site. Some of this was due to the amounts of snow but also the effects were magnified because the Met Office now have a policy of giving out amber and red warnings meaning that everyone hunkers down, daren't go out and as a result there's no traffic on the roads to keep them clear!

May and June though were almost perfect and although we could have done with some relief with a few more showers at night it was a very busy spell and we caught up all that had been lost earlier in the year. We are at full capacity in these months as it is and so to be 25% up meant that all systems were at full stretch but the teams dug deep and coped well. The watering teams had no respite and kept all of the plant stock on top form.

The cold of the Spring didn't cause as many problems for plants as might have been expected. This may well be due to plants properly going into dormancy and staying there whilst the weather did its worst. Because it was cold and got gently colder there were no sudden shocks. Once out of the cold spell it warmed up steadily and there was (at that time) plenty of water for good growth and very few late frosts.



As I write we have had some rain but lawns are looking very dry and a number of plants have lost their healthy look. However, its really important that we do our bit by watering only what needs it, to water in the cool of the early morning or evening, to mulch well to keep the water in the ground and to recycle as much as we can, to use what is a finite resource, wisely.

In the lead up to the iconic drought of 1976 my Father decided to plant 30,000 brassica plants which needed watering by hand – and I really mean by hand as it was buckets and jam jars. This was only possible because I have three brothers and three sisters and so

we all remember that summer and the drought. In those days we were told to use washing up water to flush the toilet or to water the plants and there isn't anything wrong with that in my opinion. In fact the small amount of soap helps to rehydrate the bone-dry soil.

We are coming to the end of the Illyria open air theatre season. Last year it rained on every performance but so far we have been lucky. The first three productions, Merchant of Venice, The Pirates of Penzance and Doctor Dolittle where very well attended. To finish off we have "The Hound of the Baskervilles" on 30th August. Remember you'll need to bring a chair and a picnic.

We have the usual array of building projects going on over the summer. In the Walled Garden restaurant, the heating has just been upgraded with the addition of some larger radiators, at Poundbury the lean-to area in the planteria has been re-roofed and extended and at Brimsmore work begins soon on the toilets ready in time for the opening of the Christmas displays!

And finally I realise that we are looking towards the Autumn as I have seen Brian and Mark picking out bulbs display racks as have John at Poundbury and Andrew at Brimsmore – the warm weather has speeded up their availability. It will be perfect time in a few weeks to come and make your selections but whether the soil is ready for planting then remains to be seen!

Mike

Managing Director
The Garden Group