

## A sense of winter



Bare bones



Skeleton trees

And here we are in February. Festive lights and holly wreaths are so Yesterday already! It's going to be two months before you can truly sense spring in the air. But our gardens are never truly dormant; they are just tuned into a different frequency in winter.

If you walk into your garden right now, what is your first thought? I can't wait for spring? Words to that effect I'll bet. Well that's January and February wasted then isn't it! But if you want to appreciate your garden now, not just next June, you need to fully engage with your senses. Sight, sound, smell, touch, taste.

Forget snow OK. White landscapes, frosted seed heads, see your breath. A day or two of picture perfect winter followed by slush and slime isn't enough to sustain me through the colder months. Take a typical dull damp day and go with the flow!

So what do you see when you go into your garden today? Ways to improve its appearance later in the season? Jobs that need doing? No, I'm talking about what you can truly see now.

The bone structure of your garden: Contorted branches of hazel and willow, coloured dogwood stems, the symmetry of your hedges. Richly mulched borders contained within neatly clipped lawn edges. A subtle colour palette of ferns, hellebores and epimedium. Dried hydrangea seedheads and the feathery plumes of ornamental grasses. Many trees have colourful bark, less saturated than the colours of summer, but the effect can be quite dramatic.

And if you're lucky enough to back onto one of the Suburb's woods, the borrowed landscape beyond, stripped of its leaves, gives the garden a scale far larger than at any other time of the year. Subdued light levels created by the low hanging sun cast atmospheric shadows and reflections all around.

What do you hear, or indeed, what don't you hear? It always seems quieter to me in the winter. The absence of lawnmowers or hedge trimmers. Bird song is a melancholy echo. Hear the rain falling. There's a certain stillness in the air. A sense of peace.

Almost like the garden is practicing its yoga breathing!

Any fragrance is welcome in the winter garden, none so much as Viburnum bodnantense 'Charles Lamont', sarcococca or Christmas Box, Daphne Bholua and vastly underestimated Coronilla Glauca Citrina. It is widely acknowledged that the sense of smell is closely linked with memory, probably more so than any of our other senses: a fresh catch in the air can bring to mind brisk woodland walks, or, as in my case, being dragged reluctantly around Kenwood to blow away the cobwebs!

So to Touch. Now there is no such thing as bad weather just inappropriate clothing. With this in mind don't shy away from stepping outside in bad weather. Feel the rain on your face, the push of the wind on your skin. Run your fingers down the catkins of hazel, Kilmarnock willow and garrya elliptica James Roof, As well as their visual impact, trees with outstanding peeling bark are very tactile, whether peeling, patchy, shiny or dull: the paperbark maple,

river birch, paper birch make their presence felt.

Of the five senses surely Taste poses the greatest challenge to the ornamental garden at this seemingly barren time of year. I suppose you could harvest rose hips for syrup or tea, but that's a tall order even for me! And there's always herbs.....

Some say texture is a sensory perception of our environment, much more subliminal than colour or form. During the winter, the garden loses much of its bright colour and leafy abundance, so the texture of winter plants becomes much more apparent. Well that's winter from the technical viewpoint. But for me there is an Other Worldliness to the winter garden that defies definition. As I stroll around my garden in a world of my own, pausing to absorb the stillness, I feel a sense of release, freedom from responsibility; the garden is taking good care of itself, and at its most stripped back, is still a joy to behold with so much to offer the soul.

CAROLINE BROOME



Winter tidy borders



Bigwood backdrop

## Suburb rainfall

There is a perception among some weather commentators that 2017 was a very wet year, and in some parts of the country this is very likely to be true. There have been storms and floods, which have caused considerable damage. Also, July, August and September, the real summer months when community

picnics and fairs are organised, received well over the normal rainfall. This could well have left an impression that summer was no longer to be relied on.

However, as so often is the case, in the Suburb the picture looks rather different. While, as elsewhere, the summer was wetter than normal, the annual

total of 24 inches is only 80% of our average amount. At the time of writing (early January '18), the 1.4 inches so far this year, added to the above average 3.2 inches for December, may give hope that the winter precipitation will, as usual, refill the soil's groundwater before the spring growth really needs it.

Strong winds have brought down one or two trees at the end of the year. Also, there was snow in December. From the 9th to the 11th there were sleet and snow flurries, with some wonderfully large snowflakes. However, the real winter weather is probably still to come.

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY

Fallen tree blocks Northway on Thursday, January 18



GODFREY & BARR

## Prizes from the Horticultural Society

On Tuesday, November 14 the Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society held their Annual General Meeting and prize giving at Fellowship House. There was a good turnout of members to see the prizes for the year awarded.

The Horticultural Society's chairman, Chris Page, summed up a very successful year for the society. In June members of the society opened their gardens and allotments to the public raising

an astonishing £5600 for charity through the National Gardens Scheme. This was the largest amount raised at any opening in the London area this year.

The society continues to put on their popular flower shows mixing traditional horticultural skills with digital photography and domestic economy classes. As always the events are a chance to sample some of the most impressive cakes the skilled bakers of the Suburb have to offer.

Members of the society were able to find out the details of next year's exciting programme of events including a visit to see snowdrops in February, and talks about tropical gardens in the autumn. Next year's Autumn Show will for the first time include a pot-grown potato competition (see below), so you won't even need a garden to take part.

For details on any of the society's upcoming events go to [www.hgs.org.uk/hortsoc/index.html](http://www.hgs.org.uk/hortsoc/index.html) or email [HGSshortsoc@mail.com](mailto:HGSshortsoc@mail.com).

JAMES ROBBINS



Marjorie Harris



Rosa Coury-Reid



Diane Berger

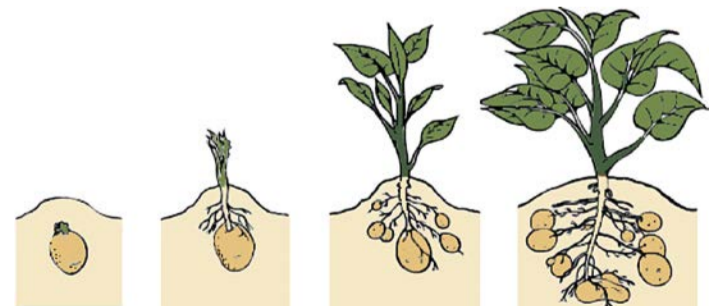
## Potato growing competition

This Spring, the HGS Horticultural Society is setting a challenge that even people without a garden can take part in. It is open to all ages with no entry fee. All you have to do is grow a potato.

Nothing beats the taste of home-grown potatoes and growing them is easy; it can even be done on a balcony in a grow bag. The Society will be distributing seed potatoes and grow bags around the Suburb on February 3 & 4 (venues to be confirmed). You will need to grow and care for the potatoes as best you can and bring your grow bag to the Horticultural Society's flower show on June 16, where they will be emptied out and each crop will be counted and weighed. The heaviest crop wins.

### HOW TO TAKE PART

1. Contact the Horticultural Society (Yvonne Oliver: 020 8455 8741 or [yvonne.oliver17@gmail.com](mailto:yvonne.oliver17@gmail.com)). Only the seed potatoes and grow bags supplied by the Society may be used.
2. Entries from more than one member of a family are permitted, but only one entry per person.
3. Seeds should be planted on or around March 29. Any soil or compost may be used as the growing medium. There are no restrictions on adding extra nutrients to the soil.
4. Complete bags as growing should be brought to the weigh-in at the Free Church Hall by 3.15pm on Saturday, June 16. Leaves (haulms) may be cut off.
5. The judges' decisions is final.



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