

Ringling the changes



Pulmonaria Diana Claire



Erysimum Sweet Sorbet



Pulmonaria Trevi Fountain

The urge to get outside into the garden is very strong at this time of year. You can almost hear the plants growing in the borders. Every day reveals something new and exciting – instant gratification! This is the ideal time to make adjustments by enhancing your existing displays with new and exciting alternatives.

We are creatures of habit, often more comfortable sticking to the tried and tested and perhaps not confident enough to try out new ideas. I know that I can worry over an ailing plant for a whole season before changing it, and once replaced, I don't even miss it. Subtle changes can be very effective without altering the overall theme of your borders.

By now everything should be showing signs of new growth, even shrubby salvias and hardy fuchsias. To those of you who have the patience to wait and see, I say there is no hurry, they

have until the end of May to redeem themselves. For myself, I like to hedge my bets by digging up and potting on any *doubtfuls*. That way you still have the option of replanting if they recover whilst freeing up space to replace with new additions.

Take advantage of the numerous local and regional spring plant fairs to revitalise your planting schemes and don't be afraid to ask the nursery folk about suitability for local conditions, such as semi-shade and clay soil.

We are all guilty of hope over experience. Lavender never seems to live up to expectations. Considering its natural habitat is the thin stony soil of the Mediterranean it's not surprising it sulks in our heavy clay soil. The bushy fragrant shrub of last summer inevitably degenerates into a brittle leggy specimen with wispy stems and sparse flowers by the following spring.

If you must have lavender then plant it in a pot in a sunny aspect, and opt for a more suitable alternative for the border such as nepeta Walkers Low (catmint) or Prostanthera cuneate (Alpine mint bush).

And then there are hostas. Hostas in borders are not for the faint hearted. Pulmonarias and brunneras, whose marbled and veined silvery grey leaves and long-lasting spring flowers, make far superior substitutes, with new varieties being introduced all the time.

If you know that semi-hardy agastache returns as a mere shadow of its former self or penstemons put on new growth only to wither at the first sign of a late frost, why persevere? Be ruthless! If you simply Must Have them then treat them as annuals. Of course, there are exceptions to every rule: whilst small shrubby salvias are readily available and generally hardy,

giant salvias are semi-tender and too cumbersome to lift for overwintering, so I am prepared to put in the extra effort to keep them going.

I take cuttings in the autumn as insurance against loss, leaving the parent plant in the ground, top growth intact, with a thick protective ring of mulch. In milder winters it's worked, this year not so well. That's the thing about gardening – no two years are ever the same. And instead of mourning the loss of a beloved plant try and see it as an opportunity to try something else.

Some plants can be more trouble than they are worth. I love heucheras for their seemingly limitless range of colours, their evergreen foliage and surprisingly decorative flowers, but their neat habit tends to be short lived. Heucheras remind me of cabbages run to seed; after a year or two their crowns protrude whilst surrounding leaves become sparse

and worn. Now, you can chop out their elongated central crowns and hope that this encourages regeneration, or you can bin them and buy new varieties.

At this time of year, garden centres sell young plants in 4" pots at around £4.99, which fill out quickly and often establish better than more mature specimens at upwards of £14.99.

Fancy trying something new but with similar habits? Then opt for francoa and tellima grandiflora, whose mound forming foliage is topped with sprays of tiny flowers on tall, upright stems.

The all-time *Good Doer* erysimum Bowles Mauve, perennial wallflower, is another favourite but again, short life span. After a couple of years it gets leggy and so we dig it up and replace it – with exactly the same thing. Why? Because there's always been one there probably.

Why not replace it with a newer variety like Sweet Sorbet

or something entirely different, such as a small evergreen dwarf hebe; Silver Dollar or Purple Pixie are just two examples with grey leaves and purple flowers.

Go on, I urge you to have a go: "A change is as good as a rest!"

CAROLINE BROOME



Semi tender Salvia Confertiflora

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Horticultural Society News

This spring, the Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society has a calendar packed full of events for you and your family to enjoy.

On Saturday May 12 from 10.30-12, at Fellowship House, we have the ever popular annual plant sale. There will be discounted annual plants for your summer displays, perennials for your borders and vegetable and herb seedlings for your allotment or garden plot. Bring your own bags if possible.

On Saturday June 16, from 3-5pm, at the Free Church Hall we will be holding the 286th Flower Show including our inaugural 'potato in a bag' competition. We were astonished by the number of contestants who collected their potatoes and grow bags this spring, so we can't wait to see how our green-fingered contestants have



Summer Flower Show 2017

done. Our June show is renowned for the impressive displays of roses, soft fruit and spring flowers on show. There will be a raffle, and some of the best tea and cake the Suburb has to offer. Members free, non-members £2.

If you are looking for a bit of inspiration for your own garden, several of our members will be opening their gardens for charity over the next few weeks. 48 Erskine Hill will be open on Sunday June 3; 18 Park Crescent

on Sunday June 17; 74 Willifield Way on Sunday June 24 and both 18 Dorchester Gardens and 121 Erskine Hill on Sunday July 1. All of the gardens are open from 2-6pm and entry to each is £4, which will go to the charities supported by the National Garden Scheme. For more details go to www.ngs.org.uk.

We are always keen to accept new members in to our growing community. If you are interested in joining the society contact our membership secretary at membership@hortsoc.co.uk. Members get free entry to talks and shows as well as a 10% discount on plants at local garden centres including Moyses Stevens in Temple Fortune Lane, Finchley Nurseries in Mill Hill and for gardening products at Shutlers in Bridge Lane, NW11. We are

always looking for people who would be interested in taking on roles in the committee. Our society survives by the commitment of its members and next year, being our 110th, we are looking to make

it our best one yet. If you'd be interested in taking on a role on the committee or helping out in any way, please contact the society at HGSHortsoc@mail.com.

JAMES ROBBINS



Open Garden Marjorie & David Harris 2017

Suburb rainfall

Spring seems to have lost its way this year. In January's report it was suggested that the real winter weather was still to come and it was certainly much colder than average in February and March. The rainfall which was needed to refill the soil's groundwater obliged in January and March,

though there was still a shortage in February and the six winter months as a whole were much drier than usual. There was snow at the end of February and again in mid March. However, it did not really cause much disruption here and the threatened slippery pavements never really materialised.

October is normally the wettest month of the year, followed by January. This October, at 0.64 inches was the second driest since these records began. However, October has also, in the past, been the month with the highest rainfall, at 7.44 inches. November and December, at 3.1 and 2.72

on average, are the next wettest months and so it is nice to think we may be coming up to the drier, as well as the warmer, part of the year. Hyacinths, daffodils, primroses, and other spring flowers are brightening the gardens in the usual splendour.

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