

Follow your garden's natural rhythms

One thing I have noticed, working as a plantswoman within the gardens of The Suburb, is that Mother Nature has Her own unstoppable rhythms and cycles. She doesn't recognise boundaries as we do; it's just one big nature reserve to Her. As the seasons come round again and again, almost every week is characterised by particular plants and flowers. As I return to work in the New Year I am welcomed back by the flaming stems of cornus, willow and acer. The chill of late winter is laced with the fragrance of witch hazel, daphne and winter-sweet. Snowdrops and aconites fill the soul with optimism even as it snows.

As I potter away in the borders I am aware of seasonal bird song: In spring blackbirds and blue tits flitter around me industriously gathering nesting

material and food for their young. At the peak of the summer foxes stroll nonchalantly past me, neither of us bothered by the other. As autumn comes, the sound and feel of gentle rainfall soothes me. In winter, a robin, twittering away gently, head cocked, looks for rich pickings in my wake.

Spring for me is blue and yellow; early summer lime green; mid-summer white, pink and lilac; high summer red, orange and yellow; late summer burnished bronze, gold, purple and magenta.

The first mow of the year usually coincides with the spring solstice, when the tempo hots up along with the temperature. Just as I've battled, and lost, with the spread of wild garlic in early April, returning home every day smelling like an Italian restaurant,

by the end of the month I find myself on hands and knees prising out sycamore seedlings from every nook and cranny.

During May I can almost set my spring watch to Spanish Bluebell Week, followed by aptly named Forget-Me-Not Week, when every hair on my head and every layer of my clothing is peppered with seeds.

By June I am looking askance at the yellowing leaves of the daffs, tugging them gently to see if I can get away with pulling them up before their allotted six week span. The lime green flowers of euphorbia amygdaloides Robbiae fade roughly around the summer solstice. Philadelphus has celebrated its floral fortnight; by July 1st it's time for its annual prune.

There are several markers that herald the end of early

summer. Having flowered their hearts out, hardy geraniums, trailing bellflower and alchemilla mollis are sprawling lazily all over lawn edges and paths, the flowers of perennial erysimum Bowles Mauve have reached the tips of their etiolated stems, the first flush of roses has come and gone. Spent blooms hang onto their hosts for dear life. The garden fades to Shabby Chic.

July is the time when many gardeners lament the hiatus of high summer. No need. Judicious pruning will restore the vigour of the garden. But be ruthless, don't wait for a total fadeout: cut back now and fresh new foliage will start to emerge after about a fortnight. Early flowering evergreen shrubs can have a trim now for restoring a hint of discipline amongst the blowsy blooms of summer. I always

mark the transition between early-to-mid and again mid-to-late summer by shaping up the pittosporums and euonymus. Dainty seedheads are not for me. I'm always chasing the next wave of flowers. All through July I'm constantly playing Catch Up: On the one hand, twice daily watering just to keep everything from losing vigour, and don't even think about going on holiday! On the other hand, especially if it's been hot and sultry, keeping a machete handy to stop everything from growing into a jungle!

Ah, and then we are into August. The tempo slows. The bees buzz. A breather at last! A bit of gentle deadheading every day, feed the containers once a week, wander around enjoying the peace and quiet of the school holidays. You might find yourself

wondering what's happened to this or that plant, it was there this time last summer surely. The strong urge you had in June and July to fill every gap with a new plant suddenly doesn't seem so urgent after all. Mail order catalogues will be plopping onto your mat with monotonous regularity now, warning you to order your Spring flowering bulbs Before It's Too Late.

Savour this lackadaisical respite, because come September, the long steady autumn tidy up starts in earnest. Before you know it, it will be the winter solstice; seeds of anticipation will be sown as the garden goes full circle. I find the ebb and flow of it all very reassuring: Whatever the weather, world events, personal dramas, it all just keeps rolling along in its own time.

CAROLINE BROOME



Spring



Summer



Autumn



Winter

THE GARDEN GIRL • 79 CHURCH LANE, EAST FINCHLEY, LONDON N2 0TH • M: 07757 016287 T: 020 8444 2329 EMAIL: CAROLINE@THEGARDENGIRLS.BIZ • LONDON GARDENS SOCIETY: BEST SMALL BACK GARDEN 2017 & 2018

Summer Show with added spuds

At their summer flower show on 16 June, Horticultural Society committee members were thrilled to bits with the success of their brand new 'Grow a Potato in a Bag' competition, launched last February. In the dark days of winter, ninety adults and children had queued up to pick up a special small black sack and a 'Lady Christl' potato. All they had to do was chit (sprout) the potato, fill their sack with compost, plant the potato on 29 March,

provide a bit of water and TLC, and bring the results of their labours for judging on 16 June.

Obviously, not everyone who had entered originally was able to come to the show. But when it opened, another queue formed in the garden of the Free Church Hall, Northway, as 16 children and 29 adults lugged their now heavy bags to the hall to have their crops weighed and assessed. A large, excited crowd formed as the rain held off, and society

Chairman Chris Page tipped all the potatoes out in turn to see who had grown the heaviest single potato and the heaviest crop of potatoes in the months of peculiar weather since 29



(Top and above) Prize winning vegetables and cactus

March, before handing them to Ruth Beedle, who was operating the digital scales.

Of the children entering, the potato crop grown by Sebastien Eames, aged three, tipped the scales at 933 grams, and he also had the heaviest potato, weighing 145 grams. Erin Hodgson and Charlie C came second and third. Adult first prize went to Anthony Hewstone, with a crop weighing 980 grams, but the heaviest potato prize was won by Jane Herbert, whose single potato weighed in at 102 grams. Second and third were Yvonne Oliver and Marjorie Harris.

Meanwhile, in the Free Church Hall itself, the show was ablaze with row upon row of roses giving off wonderful perfume,

as well as lots of other flowers, fruit, veg, jams and marmalade, cookery and photography, with Horticultural Society members vying for first, second and third prizes in many categories.

The 286th flower show will take place on 8 September, when Grimsdyke Brass will be paying a return visit to play live music in the Free Church Hall garden.

MARJORIE HARRIS



Sebastien Eames (aged 3) hands over his crop for weighing

Calling all Suburb photographers

The HGS Horticultural Society would love you to exhibit your photos at their next Show on 8 September 2018—the photographs add an extra dimension to an already beautiful show.

The categories for the show for adult entries are 'Friends

Forever' and 'Seeing Double', while for children from 9-11 years old it is 'Wild Flowers', and for those who are 12 years old and more, 'Summer Holidays'.

If you are not a member of the Society it is very easy to join, just contact David Broome, 8444 2329.



Suburb rainfall

At the time of writing this we are in a dry heat-wave and

those of us with gardens are, no doubt, praying for rain or

wondering how to do a rain-dance that works. June's rainfall, at 0.02 inches, is the lowest recorded for that month since these records began in 1980. June is normally an average sort of month for rainfall, with a rather higher total than the three preceding months. This year, April was reasonably wet but May was well under average. So a very dry last quarter of 2017 has been followed by a distinctly dry first half of 2018.

We now have the possibility of thunderstorms. Those that

did occur nearby at the end of May were away to the north west, giving us little rain, but a little lightning for those who like watching it. By the time readers get this, they will know whether there really was some excitement in July. The ground is so hard with the lack of rainfall that there may well be some local run-off and mini-flooding. Gardens will be easier to dig and weed, but do we really want to be back to the rainy weather we all know and love?

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