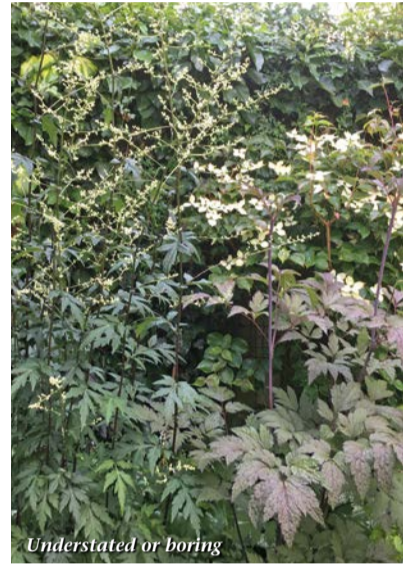


# Is good taste just a question of fashion?

Lately I've been musing on what is considered *good taste* in the garden. One dictionary definition of good taste is, 'satisfying generally accepted social or aesthetic standards', while bad taste is, 'something that is offensive and is inappropriate for the situation'. The Union of Beauty and Functionality.

But surely Taste is purely subjective? When I think Good Taste, I visualise The White Garden at Sissinghurst, box balls and neatly clipped lavender hedges. Understatement, sophistication and simplicity. But it's not exactly challenging, is it? Dare I say boring even. Christopher Lloyd was the first renowned horticulturalist in my lifetime



Understated or boring

to push the boundaries and say To Hell with convention, when he ripped out his mother's prized rose garden in favour of an exotic extravaganza! Swap *outrageous* for *eccentric* and you're considered a trend setter. *Beyond the pale* or *pushing the boundaries*? Justify your *unconventional* combinations as *experimental* and you become avant-garde.

The Chelsea Flower Show is renowned worldwide for showcasing innovative garden design and extravagant floral displays. In many ways it can be compared to London Fashion Week: cutting edge creations that gradually filter down to the high street and ultimately into the domestic setting.

Up until the 1970s gardening was considered by the majority to be an elite hobby, but that was about to change: In 1972 influential designer John Brookes' showcased his minimalist space-saving designs at Chelsea, and kickstarted a national trend for socialising in the garden. And by 1979 the popular TV show 'The Good Life' sparked off a new gardening trend throughout the UK. Funny how growing fruit and veg on the allotment, once the preserve of the retired – dare I say it – working classes, is now the ultimate go-to hobby of every aspiring young family in the land!

Have you ever wondered why purple is the new black, last year's kitten heels have conceded to this year's flat pumps? It's Fashion my dears, Fashion! Is it



Vibrant or vulgar

that different from the introduction of the prairie planting style by Dutch nurseryman Piet Oudolf in the late '90s? Numerous Gold Medals surely denote the pinnacle of good taste. Ground breaking at the time, now twenty years later, some form of ornamental grass is almost compulsory in your herbaceous border.

So is good taste just a question of fashion, or is it a class issue? Discuss!

If it were merely a question of championing new trends, then why is Sissinghurst, created in the late 1930s, still lauded by the majority for its tastefulness? And why do some trends become *passé* while others remain timeless? Annual bedding schemes, showcased by the elite as the pinnacle of style and opulence in the Victorian era, have become synonymous with

municipal carpet bedding displays, sniffed at as kitsch and gaudy by the Taste Police. One can only assume that the newly discovered exotic bedding plants of the mid-to-late 19th century, such as heliotropes, pelargoniums, petunias, verbenas and salvias, raised in state-of-the-art conservatories and greenhouses, are now so mainstream that it's a case of 'been there, done that, got the t-shirt'.

Certain plants are denounced simply on the basis that they are very commonly used. I raise my hand to this: 'Begonias', I exclaimed, referring to bedding semperflorans, 'nasty little things!' In my case it was ignorance that caused me to decry all begonias, that is until I discovered the exuberant, voluptuous, citrus coloured begonias of the Hanging Basket.

So is it ignorance that is responsible for stereotyping? (Mind you, I still don't like semperflorans.) Now, hanging baskets, there's a subject that divides opinion! I'm guessing that a single variety of foliage plant in a sustainably sourced coconut shell will win hands down in the taste stakes against a rattan basket crammed full of multicoloured, trailing annuals.

Surely we, the gardening public, are discerning enough to adopt relevant new trends such as biodiversity, organic culture, sustainability, compost heaps, wild flower meadows, whilst disdainfully shunning other less practical fads –

James May's plasticine garden of 2009 & Dermot Gavin's Colourful Suburban Eden, with its sea of brightly coloured lollipops in 2004 spring to mind – in the name of good sense rather than good taste.

My embroidery teacher used to shudder at the sight of red and yellow together, so for years I kept them apart in the garden. That is, until I combined red salvia confertiflora, yellow rudbeckia Goldsturn and red, orange & yellow rudbeckia Prairie Glow. Oh the liberation! One of the joys of maturity, in my opinion, is that you no longer seek validation from your peers.

CAROLINE BROOME



Salvia confertiflora and Rudbeckias

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## Allotment walkabout

On Saturday March 23 eight representatives of the Allotments Committee took part in an early season walkabout of the Suburb allotment sites. Traditionally termed as a 'walkabout', the visit in essence is aimed at carrying out an inspection to ensure that the sites are in good order and that the tenants of the plots are abiding by the obligations of their contracts. The group's observations and recommendations are duly passed on to the Trust.

This particular visit was the first to have taken place in springtime and will be followed by a second in the summer. The decision to have two annual inspections follows a period of concern over the neglect of some plots and the consequent condition of some sites.

The aim of the summer visit, as well as choosing the winner of the best plot award, will be to assess the high-season condition of the sites and plots, and to measure progress in those areas where recommendations have been made.

The group concluded its tour with expressions of satisfaction that there had been improvement



TERRY BROOKS

in the appearance and general condition of most sites, benefitting from the Trust's various hedging and tree work as well as from the attentions of the site secretaries, and the enthusiasm of a core of newly-arrived allotmenters.

A campaign of publicity has led to an upsurge in interest with many newcomers filling vacancies, and creating a demand, which in turn puts pressure on those existing tenants whose adherence to their contract terms may have faded. Some sites now have waiting lists.

After its tour the group put forward its opinions to the Trust on the state of hedges, trees and pathways, as well as making recommendations regarding general tidiness and those plots which were clearly not being worked.

It was felt that a simple document detailing the principles and duties of plot-holding could be presented to new tenants as a way of re-enforcing the contract, and emphasising the pleasures and privilege of having an allotment on the Suburb.

PETER HODGSON



PHOTOS: TERRY BROOKS



## Open Gardens for charity

Sunday, July 7 is when 14 Suburb residents will be participating in the National Garden Scheme Open Gardens. Readers are advised of the following key attractions:

- 14 Open Gardens, 4 of which are new and several are award winners, plus one allotment site.
- Every visitor will receive a free packet of seeds donated by Marshalls (while stocks last) and an NGS bookmark.
- At least a dozen raffle prizes, including a subscription to Garden News, David Austin Roses gift vouchers, and national garden gift vouchers donated by local nurseries.
- Two local professional plant nurseries selling unusual, seasonal perennials – Essex based Rose Cottage Plants, and The Plant Specialist from Buckinghamshire.
- Home propagated plants for sale in various gardens.

• Award winning afternoon teas served at Fellowship House, with a piano accompaniment, as well as refreshments at 15 North Square.

• A party to join on the Willifield Way allotments, where drinks and cake will be available, and home grown veg & herb plants will be on sale.

## Suburb rainfall

The first three months of 2019 have continued the trend towards lower rainfall noted in the last two years. Over the period, a total of just under 5.5 inches compares with a norm of 6.8

inches. Similarly, for the winter months of October to March, 12.6 inches compared with an average of 16 inches. Certainly, the gales that caused so much havoc in the first half of March

seem to have given way, by the time of writing in early April, to some wonderful days with unbroken sunshine. These then merged into so many really glorious sunsets. Even the red sky at night seemed to cover a much greater area than used to be normal. It is, of course, wonderful to enjoy this and the fact that we can walk on the Heath without changing into wellies or go down to the shops without taking an umbrella.

But, if climate change means that we no longer get the level of rainfall we used to, this will become a very different country to live in.

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY

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June 16th
Central Square
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Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association

## Sunday Summer Fun Day

What's On

Music from **Sound of the Suburb** · Face Painting · Punch & Judy · Fizzie Lizzie Children's Arts & Crafts · Cakes · Donkey Rides · Fire Engine Display  
**Raffle** · Plant Sale · Refreshments

All Dogs Matter

After last year's phenomenal success, **All Dogs Matter** are back with a new competition. Why not try again! Watch your beloved four-paws win one of this year's champion rosettes. [www.alldogsmatter.co.uk](http://www.alldogsmatter.co.uk)

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