

Let nature do the work



Creeping bellflowers, forget-me-not and borage

I wonder sometimes, is it the same robin that follows me around The Suburb as I work from garden to garden? The plants certainly do! Do the birds transfer forget-me-not and Welsh poppy or is it, in fact, me?

Truth is, as far as nature is concerned The Suburb is just one vast horticultural patchwork. There is a certain synergy to the planting that has nothing to do with fashion. I'm not talking about the Must Haves, such as hydrangea Annabelle, adorning gardens throughout. Rather the ones that pitch up of their own volition. Weeds I suppose you could call them, *wild flowers* would be kinder. After all, as George Washington Carver once said, "A weed is (merely) a flower growing in the wrong place."

Even more pertinent perhaps, in an age where we are seeking to encourage biodiversity, "A flower is merely a weed growing in the right place."

Let's take Lady's Mantle, or *Alchemilla mollis*, as an example: There is not a single garden that I

have visited that doesn't have some somewhere. Whilst some can't get enough of it, others can't dig it up fast enough. Campanula or creeping bellflower, very obliging, it flowers, you pull it up, it flowers, you pull it up again and again! Erigeron karvinskianus, or Mexican fleabane to thee and me, is another one. It took me two years to nurture a handful of seedlings resilient enough to grow in the cracks of a retaining wall in Meadow, and now, three years later, it's gone rogue, happily seeding itself in every paving crack in the courtyard garden.

Whilst many of these self-sown residents are welcomed with open arms, others claim squatters' rights. Spanish bluebells and wild garlic can choke a garden if left unchecked. You've got to admire their tenacity, spreading themselves by seed and bulb, so deeply embedded that only monotonous and judicious digging will shift them.



Self seeding erigeron

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Last year's dry summer left a legacy of drought tolerant invaders, which should be avoided at all costs: Oxalis, or creeping wood sorrel, and Potentilla reptans aka *creeping cinquefoil* (the clue is in the name!). Preceding damp years encouraged Soleirolia soleirolii - baby's tears or Mind Your Own Business (oh, how I wish it would!) Whilst it makes an attractive and maintenance-free alternative to grass as ground cover in moist, shady areas, it can't be confined, and is resistant to the rake.

It would however be churlish of me to blame nature entirely. Having discovered that the charming chartreuse annual lysimachia nummularia 'Aurea', or golden creeping Jenny, was in fact a hardy perennial, I introduced it as deciduous ground cover into several borders. Turns out, Rapunzel could have successfully substituted her hair for this trailing menace. Guilty as charged, m'lord!

Mind you, nothing defines the month of May quite like cool drifts of forget-me-nots. And its seed colonises at an amazing rate by hanging on to anything that moves. No single item of clothing in my working wardrobe during June is immune. I am a walking pollinator.

And the reason these interlopers seem to survive, nay flourish, where cultivars that we plant often fail, is simple. Self-preservation! Nature invented the adage, "Right Plant, Right Place", not the late lamented Beth Chatto. (Passionate about working with the natural world rather than against it, she realised that if you can't beat 'em, join 'em!)

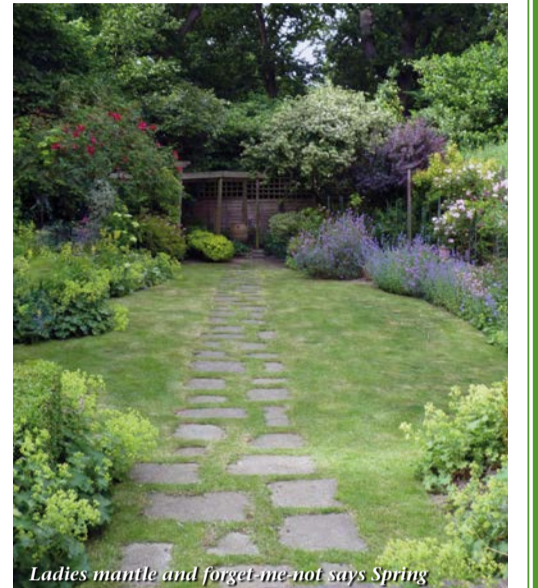
It's also a numbers game; mostly annuals or biennials, their seeds flood your borders,

ensuring germination in all sorts of bare nooks and crannies we've overlooked. Very obliging! Most self-seeders are blessed with blooms that beneficial insects find irresistible, welcoming pollinators into your garden.

The secret to achieving the right balance is prompt action then regular intervention. Keep the colonies you like and weed out the rest. If you don't want them to spread then remove them before their flowers run to seed.

By the way, my prediction for the next big thing to colonise in the Suburb? Wild borage. Watch this space.

CAROLINE BROOME



Ladies mantle and forget-me-not says Spring

An invitation from the Horticultural Society

Nearly 200 people visited the recent Autumn flower show of the HGS Horticultural Society in the 110th year of its existence. Visitors were captivated by the wide range of exhibits in the floral, fruit and vegetable, cooking and photographic classes. They enjoyed chatting to friends, neighbours and others as they consumed one of the delicious home-made cakes and were then royally entertained by the music of the Grimdyke Brass Band. It all worked so well – and has become an iconic centre-piece of Suburb life.

Visitors would probably, however, not have been aware of the huge amount of work involved for the enthusiastic team that made the event possible. That team, many of whom have been helping with the show for over a decade – and some for more than double that – are finding it increasingly difficult to accomplish the myriad of tasks involved. As they get 'less young' they are finding it

more challenging to maintain the high standards they set themselves.

We know that the shows are valued by the members, and a wider community. We know that people want them to continue and we know that people are often pleased to be asked to help but reticent to put themselves forward. I am asking each and every member if they would be prepared to make a contribution to the shows and the Society. Whether your skills are administrative, IT, culinary, liaising with press and publicity or more general, you would be



much welcomed. The workload would not be large, you would not need to join the committee unless you wished to, and the relevant training would be given.

The rewards though would be great – both personally and to the community – to ensure the continuity of the shows, maybe for the next 110 years.

Please give this invitation serious consideration. Thank you. CHRIS PAGE, CHAIR, HGS HORT. SOC.



Suburb rainfall

Yet again the rainfall has been way under average in recent months. However, the last two weeks (at the time of writing at the beginning of October) have seen salvation in the form of nearly 4 inches of rain. In the past quarter (July to September), there were 6.5 inches compared with an average of 7.1 inches. However, this mostly fell in September, specifically the last

week or so. Precipitation for the year so far has been 16 inches, compared with an average of nearly 21 inches. In only four of the last thirty years has the figure been lower, and the last of those years was 2005. So, perhaps, there is no need to worry on the Suburb about a long-term lack of rain yet.

The past three months have seen some interesting weather,

as always. As mentioned above, the necessary rain to keep grass green and plants alive came in short bursts and resulted in flooding. On the other hand, from mid-August till the fourth week in September, there was hardly any precipitation. In mid-August there were gales, which brought down trees, but resulted in very little rainfall. Then, in mid-September, the spell of high

pressure brought an unusually long four or five days of almost unbroken sunshine and clear nights. The pleasure at being out in it more than made up for the need to carry cans of water for the thirsty plants. So, maybe, in regard to weather, the old Chinese curse, "may you live in interesting times" isn't quite such a curse after all.

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY

Cake - a Suburb event ubiquity



Barbara Perry's plea for help in the June 2016 HGS newsletter stated, "We have the reputation for the best teas and cakes in the Suburb... We are a jolly fun team and you get paid in tea and cake!..." Hmm, a mere puff you might say (and not the cream variety), but, I can tell you from personal experience, Barbara wasn't exaggerating. It has been an absolute joy to be a part of the HortSoc teas team and be involved in this wonderful HGS tradition.

The HortSoc teas are a definite highlight of the HortSoc Flower Shows and September's show was no exception. The quality and assortment of cakes, so obviously baked with love and so kindly donated to the HortSoc tea table, was simply staggering. Victoria sponge, coffee and walnut, cheese-cake, apricot tart, pecan pie, lemon drizzle, chocolate gâteau, fairy cakes, scones, brownies and various gluten and dairy free options were just a few of the homemade baked goods on display.

And what a display it was. The HortSoc tea table was groaning under the weight. Some, spoilt for choice, opted for two different slices when they just couldn't decide which

to have. The September show's high attendance (the fabulous Grimdyke Brass Band and good weather proving a winning combination) meant we were run off our feet and, with still half an hour to go, we had run out of cakes (and hot water!). There were a few disappointed customers and even the tea team had to forego their usual perk of leftover cake takeaways.

A huge success then.

Of course, a big thank you must go to Barbara Perry, the HortSoc teas supreme and cheese-cake queen, who has organised the teas and drummed up cake contributions for almost ten years. Barbara has now decided it is time for her to step down and she is handing the reins over to Caroline Broome, a well-known member of HortSoc (also our regular gardening column writer, Ed), and who Barbara describes as "a lot of fun and a great organiser."

Having volunteered alongside Caroline at a number of HortSoc teas, I can certainly vouch for this. Caroline will undoubtedly continue the high standards of the HortSoc teas everyone has come to expect. After all, as

Barbara says, "There is a reputation to uphold."

All future cake contributions will be very much welcomed and if anyone would like to join the 'teas team' list (the baking of cakes is not a prerequisite) please contact Caroline Broome at carosgarden@virginmedia.com

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