

Gardening is the new normal

So, feeling as I was, quite despondent about the Current Situation, I decided to browse my previous Garden Girl articles for some inspiration. This time last year I was exploring the vagaries of fashion in horticulture. How frivolous that all sounds now. It's obvious, isn't it, that I'm going to write about the virtues of gardening during self-isolation and social distancing, but it also occurs to me that I'm not just writing this piece for confirmed gardeners. And not all of us are fortunate enough to have their own outside space to escape to. So how can we all benefit from Spring 2020?

Well, I am writing this on the Spring equinox; the clocks have Sprung Forward and we are able to enjoy an extra hour of daylight for a start! And nature does not know that we are in the grip of a pandemic. By now, shoots are greening up, blossom is out, the birds are singing and pairing up. Here is a sense of anticipation of the positive kind. I find



Erysimum

this particular unstoppable progression very comforting, summer will come, the sun will shine, life goes on.

Simply being in your garden, or perhaps taking an early morning walk over the Heath, will bring you in touch with nature. With so little noise pollution from vehicle traffic, bird song proliferates. We have time on our hands, deadlines don't apply in the way they did before. Somehow, admitting that you are enjoying this hiatus brings an uneasy guilt. Get over it! Grasp feelings of wellbeing with both hands, they are the antidote to these challenging times!

As I can only speculate on life in April 2020, I've decided to write about the measures that I am taking to try and inject some normality and positivity into my world, and in doing so, I hope to strike an optimistic chord with some of you reading this. As someone who has suffered from anxiety for decades it is very important for me to create some sort of normality to counteract the uncertainty of our daily lives.

We have installed fourteen bird feeders into our garden over the last couple of years, and this Spring it seems to have finally paid off. In order of size, regular visitors include five parakeets, two jackdaws, a pair of jays, eight feral pigeons, a great spotted woodpecker, thrushes, blackbirds, chaff-chaffs, goldfinches, all the tits, blackcap, wrens and dunnocks. We also have



Parakeets

several squirrels who have learned to use their own feeders. The larger birds frequent the peanut and suet feeders under our rose arbour and the smaller birds favour the feeders sheltered by the patio. Frogspawn is prolific, newts are swimming in the rill. What's more, our cats pose no threat to the wildlife, happily ensconced in their very own open air, mesh enclosed catio. All are co-existing happily.

So, every morning I wake to bird song and for a few moments I can forget the coronavirus. I'll sit in our sunroom with my breakfast cereal, and watch the wildlife going about its daily business, creatures twittering and chattering amongst themselves, not a care in the world, and I am calm. Following the announcement of Lockdown, my husband and I spent the day working in our garden: David,

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devising and assembling his new water feature, and me, planting out my overwintered perennials. The sun shone, and in that warmth and quiet, we didn't once think of the risks awaiting us all in the outside world. The air felt clean and we felt invigorated.

They say that necessity is the mother of invention and I think we're all falling back on untapped resources now! My greenhouse has been spring cleaned to within an inch of its life. I've never been very successful at seed sowing, but through sheer boredom I have resorted to trying my hand at all the free seed packets from gardening magazines: anything from tomatoes to tithonia! The patio has been swept, container plants have been repotted, borders fed and mulched. Even my plants supports are in situ before the

mad dash to install them once the plants have fallen over!

My heart goes out to all the plant nurseries at the thought of their carefully nurtured summer annuals withering and dying. Some have switched to mail order services to maintain some much-needed revenue. Usually, by now, I am eagerly anticipating the upcoming rare plant sales, horticultural society shows and all the horticultural society coach trips to the beautiful gardens of the South East. All cancelled. So thank goodness for BBC2 Gardeners World I say, still broadcasting at the time of writing, offering timely advice and empathy to its horticulturally starved viewers so as gardeners we can enjoy our plots and gardens in splendid isolation.

CAROLINE BROOME



Epimedium

Suburb rainfall

The year 2020 has started as a year with all sorts of strange happenings but not all weather-wise. It has been mild, with only three sub-zero temperatures recorded over the whole period from January 1 to the time of writing (April 3). While there were gales around the middle of February, there have been long periods of high pressure with accompanying wonderful sunsets,

continuing the phenomena reported in the last Suburb News. Another result of the high pressure has been a lack of rainfall in January and March. As this followed a very wet autumn, we were probably mostly very glad of it. Now, however, a little rain would be nice for the garden.

The coronavirus outbreak is, of course, the strangest of the current strange happenings. It

is very tempting to search for some causal correlation with climate change.

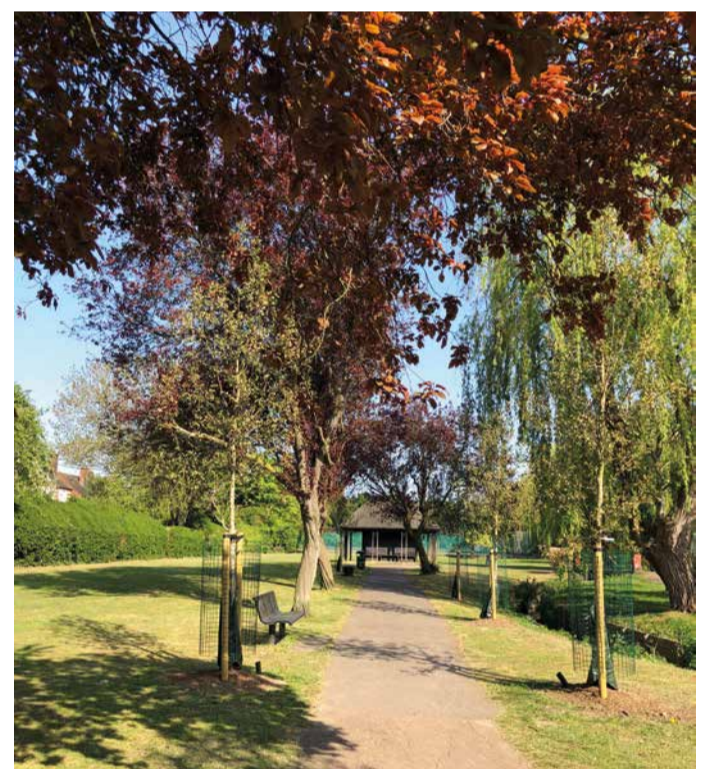
We are supposed to have March winds and April showers to bring forth the flowers we hope for in May. Is it climate change that has raised the pressure unusually high and so made winds weaker and less able to blow away the virus?

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY

Trees & Open Spaces

The RA Trees and Open Spaces Committee continues to be active during the current lockdown. Emma Howard, RA Chair, and Colin Gregory, Chair of the Committee, have been in touch with the Superintendent of Hampstead Heath about the measures taken on the Heath Extension, particularly the consequences of staff reductions and the need for social distancing. All litter bins and dog bins have been removed (because the City do not have the resources to empty them), and visitors are urged to take all litter and dog poo home with them. Barnet have not removed bins from parks but are monitoring the position. Playgrounds and outdoor gyms are closed and as the weather warms up and the urge to go outside increases it's important to remember to keep your distance – and we've been reminded that picnics are not allowed.

Before the lockdown, the Trees & Open Spaces Committee was working closely with Barnet to bring about various improvements. It is still intended to plant an orchard in Lyttelton Playing Fields in the autumn (see article on back page) and install a table tennis table next to the outdoor gym. We were delighted that Barnet replanted six purple plums (*Prunus cerasifera nigra*) to replace those felled in the avenue across the brook from



the tennis club in Northway Gardens. Barnet have also just finished planting 55 new street trees across the Suburb to replace those that have been cut down, including seven paid for by the RA.

We continue to monitor proposals to remove trees, both those in gardens (for which Barnet and Trust permission is needed) and Barnet's own trees. Sometimes these are related to tree health, but often they are

because the tree is implicated in subsidence nearby. Barnet's policy is to resist removal of trees wherever possible and take mitigating steps instead, but the legal position is not favourable to tree owners. We are working closely with the Council to try to minimise the loss of trees due to subsidence claims.

Fresh air and exercise is vital for our wellbeing and we hope we will soon all be able to enjoy it to the full on the Suburb's wonderful open spaces.

The delights of growing your own

In those long lost days before coronavirus took over our lives, at the turn of 2020 Chris Page, Chair of HGS Horticultural Society, wrote the following, presciently, in his introduction to the new members' handbook: "2020 will bring its pleasures and delights. In a few weeks, snowdrops will be pushing through the soil, the winter shrubs will be in full scent and the days will be getting longer. Soon we will be frantically sowing, planting, staking and harvesting..."

Throughout the UK, while so many of us are confined to our homes for much of the day, people are suddenly discovering, or re-discovering, the mental relaxation and freedom from stress that growing our own food and enjoying the sights, scents and sounds our gardens can bring, if we are lucky enough to have them. Sales of seeds have hit new highs, and garden centres, though closed to face-to-face customers, are continuing to provide an amazing assortment

of plants and compost through home deliveries. If you are a new gardener and need advice, check the Horticultural Society's contact page at hortsoc.co.uk and we will try to answer your questions.

Sadly, all the members' events, outings, garden openings and the three-day trip to the gardens of north Devon that were due to take place over the next few months, have been cancelled or postponed in line with government advice. Previously, since its foundation in 1909, only the Second World War managed to call a halt to the Society's flower shows, but this year it seems very likely that the June Show, and even possibly the September Show will not happen. We hope you are continuing to grow the potatoes you were given for the 'Grow a potato in a bag' competition. Maybe we will have to ask you to count and weigh your own and your family's potato crop on 13 June and report your results to the Horticultural Society (we trust you not to cheat!). At the very least, you will have a bag or two of delicious new potatoes to eat, perhaps with a little fresh mint.

MARJORIE HARRIS



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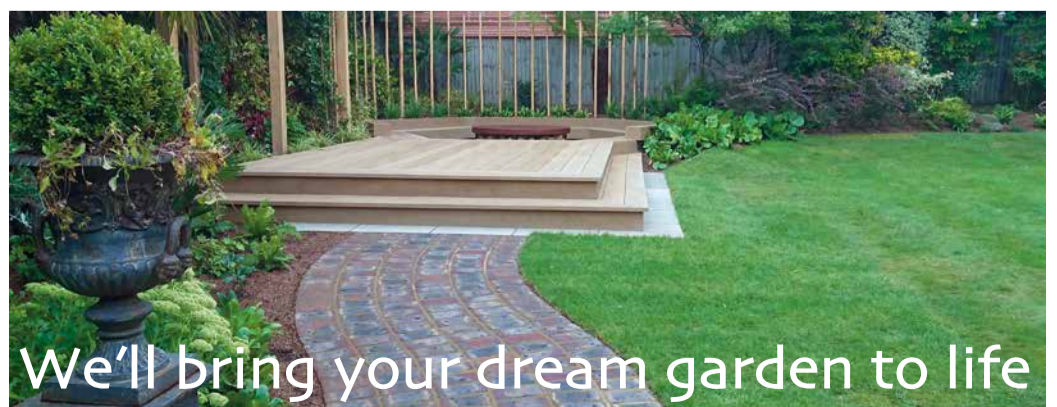
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