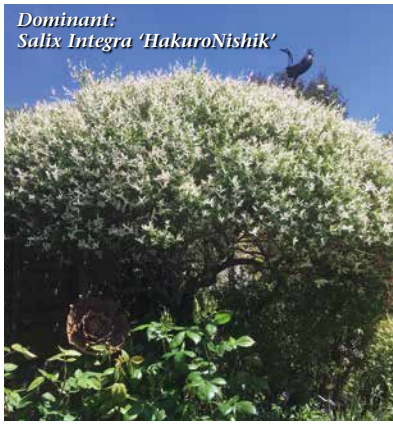


# Adapt or Die



Dominant:  
*Salix integra 'Hakuro Nishiki'*

So, is it this overriding optimism that keeps us from downing tools? What do those most celebrated gardens have that keep us revisiting them year after year? The ability to adapt. If you listen to any head gardener, from Trebar in the South to Scone Palace in the North, they always talk of the need to update planting schemes whilst still maintaining the core spirit of its original design. Boil this down to our own more modest plots and you will come to realise that, rather than aiming for some static perfection, the joy is in its evolution.

My dear, late lamented 106-year-old friend Ethel swore by the adage adapt or die; in fact, I would go as far as to say that her ability to adapt was partly responsible for her longevity. Well, as in life, so it is in the garden.

Unlike home decorating, plant décor does not stay the same until you redecorate a decade later! A carefully designed mixed border is likely to reach its peak after about three years then, well frankly, it's downhill all the way. Plants have a really annoying habit of either growing like Topsy or dying like Camille, after that, often the one resulting in the other. When I asked my great friend Diane, doyenne of the Suburb garden, why, when we spend half the time moaning that the garden doesn't do as its told, do we love it so much, she replied sagely, "We are ever hopeful of creating perfection."

You start with a blank canvas. So you plant a couple of trees for stature, surround them with shrubs for year round structure, create an understory of perennials for seasonal colour. Within five years the tree canopies have extended, the shrubs have doubled in size, all but obliterating the etiolated perennials beneath. Where once there was full sun there is now dense shade, spreading roots have sucked all the moisture out of the soil, nothing flowers any more. Time to adapt. In an ideal world you will have been pruning, lifting and dividing after the first couple of years to keep ahead of the game, but in the words of John Lennon, "life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans".

First of all, decide if you want to be custodian of your own garden or would rather hire someone in. Too busy

bringing up your family or forging your career? No longer physically capable? Horticulture just not your thing? Then you need to adapt to your own circumstances. If you don't wish to employ a gardener then keep it simple. Evergreens, lawn or paved terrace; doesn't have to be boring, there are some stunning low maintenance plants out there. In my opinion the only way to tend a garden successfully is to enjoy it. But be realistic. If you know you are only going to have a couple of hours at the weekend don't go all high maintenance exotic! If you live on the edge of a wood, overlooked by a dense tree canopy, don't go all American prairie. And here's the thing: How many times have I been asked to create a garden for year-round interest, with an attractive array of shrubs and flowers that is relatively maintenance free? Sorry folks, it doesn't exist! Think about it: you wouldn't expect to renovate your home and then never have to carry out cleaning and maintenance, would you?

It's probably no surprise to you, readers, that I've chosen the high maintenance route for my own garden. A definite case of do as I say, not do as I do. I will quite happily cram in far too many perennials per square metre knowing full well I'll have to lift and divide half of them within a year or two as they've outgrown their allotted space, but I must have them, you see! Instant impact over organic

development every time! You could say that I've adapted to change a tad too readily perhaps, embraced it in fact! These days, anything that starts to look a bit off colour is OUT.

One of the first shrubs we planted when we moved into our house in 1997 was a lollipop pruned viburnum tinus Eve Price. Twenty odd years later saw it towering to six metres. We topiary pruned into a cone shape. About four years ago it started to die back from its base, so I skirt pruned it, exposing its trunk up to about 5ft from ground level, creating a brand-new planting opportunity for attractive ground cover. Trouble is, it wouldn't stop growing. The more we pruned it, the more it grew, overshadowing the

parched understorey. So on the hottest day of 2019 we dug it out and replaced it with a multi stemmed white birch sapling. The amount of light and space created has transformed the entire garden. The ground cover is thriving. Chances are in about 10 years' time we'll be pruning the birch but, oh, it will have been worth it. And as soon as this summer moves into autumn our salix integra Hakuro Nishiki will receive the very same treatment. What was once a dainty little standard now has an 8ft canopy that requires pruning half a dozen times a year just to stay the same! I rather fancy replacing it with a feathered amelanchia lamarckii...

CAROLINE BROOME



Before: Towering Viburnum



After: Multistemmed Birch

THE GARDEN GIRLS, 79 CHURCH LANE, EAST FINCHLEY, N2 0TH. M:07757 016287, T: 020 8444 2329, EMAIL: C.BROOME.GARDENGIRL@GMAIL.COM. LONDON GARDENS SOCIETY: BEST SMALL BACK GARDEN 2016, 2017 & 2018

## Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society first ever virtual show



Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society's very first flower show was held on Central Square in 1909. So in 2020 could we let Covid-19 do what only the Second World War had managed to achieve for five years – stop the annual Summer show going on? The answer was a resounding 'no'.

A few weeks before, membership secretary David Broome had created hortsoc.blogspot.com where members could post photographs of their gardens or any other horticultural news or gardening questions they wished to share, keep up to date with the society's activities and also find a direct link to the society's

website. If we couldn't hold the real flower show as usual, why not have a virtual show that anyone could enter on a non-competitive basis and display the results on the blogspot?

With no previous experience, it was a bit of a challenge for the small committee working on it to draw up rules that would work and make it fun to enter. There were 17 classes, all but one of which had entries. 75 photos were submitted in both the adult and junior categories. The two rose classes were the most popular with the class for the (delicious) Bara Brith tea bread following close behind.

On a wet weekend in February, long before the lockdown, streams of adults and children had collected potatoes and bags for a competition to see who could grow the most from a single potato in a bag, and who would have the heaviest crop by 13 June, the scheduled date of the Summer Flower Show. Now, the judging for this competition would have to be virtual too, so the entrants emptied out their own bags at home, photographed, counted and weighed their potatoes and sent in their pictures to David Broome in time for the virtual show. In the adult group, William Glendinning grew a massive 32 potatoes from his original one in a bag, while Kate Bailey's 18 potatoes were the heaviest at 514g. The Junior winner, Alex Cattini, harvested an amazing 25 potatoes and shared the prize for heaviest crop at 400g with his twin, Charlie Cattini.

Nothing can beat the real flower shows in the Free Church Hall, with the scent of lovely flowers, displays of home-grown fruit and vegetables and the sight of people sitting together in the small hall over tea and home-made cake, enjoying the company of friends and family. We hope that the virtual show proved to be a positive distraction



from our strange lockdown reality and hope against hope that the Autumn Show might take place on 5 September. But if not, watch out for a virtual Autumn show. We did it once; we can do it again, even better.

MARJORIE HARRIS

## An apple a day

In a letter dated 2 March 1909, and held at Hampstead Garden Suburb's Virtual Museum, Dame Henrietta Barnett is offering an apple tree to a new tenant of the Suburb. She writes "I know it is not usual to present tenants with gifts, but if you think well to accept, then you will, I feel sure, do so in the spirit in which the gifts are offered, and because it is necessary that we should all work together to make our Suburb really a Garden one." (<https://hgs.heritage.org.uk/Detail/objects/HGSHS18>.)

The fact that so many have survived is a testament to her vision. It does however cause a glut of apple. Perhaps you could send sububnews@hgsra.uk your favourite apple recipe, ready for the autumn harvest.

MARIE-CHRISTINE O'CALLAGHAN

"I know the look of an apple that is roasting and sizzling on the hearth

on a winter's evening, and I know the comfort that comes of eating it hot, along with some sugar and a drench of cream... I know how the nuts taken in conjunction with winter apples, cider and doughnuts, make old people's tales and old jokes sound fresh and crisp and enchanting."

MARK TWAIN



## Suburb rainfall

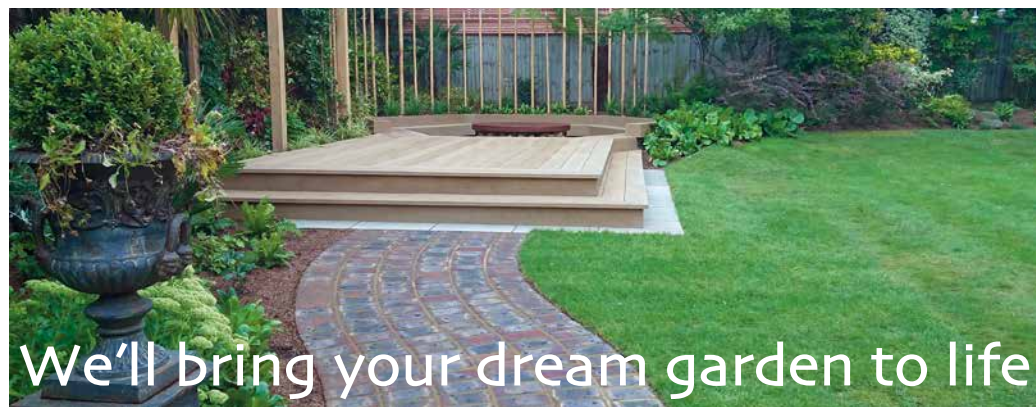
Weather again! We're always talking about it, aren't we? That's what the English (or, to be more politically correct, as usual, in the west, the British) are known for. However, just at the moment the weather as a topic of conversation, has been rather superseded by coronavirus. This is a pity as the weather is certainly

more fun. There have again been more 'red sky at night' evenings, with one particularly spectacular sunset in late June. There have also been fascinating larger pinkish clouds – more to the south east than, as usual, in the west.

Then, there have also been gales or, perhaps more accurately, fresh winds gusting to gale force.

These might be cold, or a little scary, but to see the very tall poplar tree with its leaves blown around in the high wind and sun is wonderful compensation. So, yes, rain would be welcome but, for anyone shielding, being in quarantine, or just able to go outside, it's good to be dry!

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY



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