

If you've only got two hours

By now, in late Spring, the garden is getting into its stride, new treasures emerging every day. It's a pleasure to meander around with a cup of tea, delighting in the wonders of nature – until, that is, you spot the scruffy lawn edges and that rose you keep forgetting to prune. That gentle feeling of wellbeing can quickly turn into yet another bullet point on your To-Do list!

With evidence on the benefits of gardens and gardening for health and wellbeing, it seems a shame that our own green spaces, which are supposed to bring calm and tranquillity into our busy lives, can often produce the opposite effect. So with this in mind I hope to offer you some tips to guarantee that your garden is well

maintained with the minimum of effort and time.

With the exception of those garden obsessed amongst us who actively look for things to do in the garden at every opportunity, you only need spend 2-3 hours a week max on the basic upkeep of your plot. If you have a lawn, but don't want to mow it every week, then keeping the edges neatly trimmed creates instant orderliness. That's probably half an hour. Whilst you're at it, it doesn't hurt to get the broom out for a quick sweep of the paths and patios. Using a besom broom gets into all the corners too. Another 15 minutes.

Little and often goes a long way to maintaining the garden's status quo. If you like to stroll around your garden to unwind at the end of a busy day, you



Neat lawn edges, swept paths

can deadhead as you go: Drink in one hand, secateurs in the other and a receptacle looped over your arm. A few minutes every day and you're done. Do get a lightweight long handled hoe; no more reaching into the flower beds risking life and limb, to get at that errant weed right at the back of the border. By often I only mean a few minutes each week. Unchecked weeds go on to flower and set seed, which will colonise your borders in a flash, so it makes sense in the long run too.

"Now what about pruning all those flowering shrubs?" you ask, "It's alright for you, you know what you're doing!" If you follow nature's timetable, gardening goes in cycles. What's more, as it's unlikely that every shrub in your garden will flower

simultaneously, you should only have to prune one or two at a time. I prefer to say there are certain guidelines rather than rules when it comes to pruning times:

- Climbing roses between December and February.
- Clematis early February
- Shrub roses & buddleias mid to end February.
- Traditional mop head and lace-cap hydrangeas should be lightly pruned end March.
- Hydrangea Annabelle however, so popular on the Suburb, can be cut back quite hard to a pair of buds about 12 inches from ground level early April.
- Ditto early April for fuchsias and shrubby salvias.
- Evergreens such as pittosporum, grown for foliage rather than flowers, should not be pruned until the risk of frost has passed,

around mid-May here in London.

• Spring flowering deciduous shrubs, such as forsythia, philadelphus & weigela, should be pruned straight after flowering, end May to end June.

Hopefully you have started to get the idea.....

If on the other hand you prefer the belt and braces approach, then I can guarantee from my experience tending some of the loveliest gardens in the Suburb (you know who you are!) that a three hour session will allow for enough basic maintenance from week to week. Although reluctant to admit it, it's not all that different from cleaning your house! Firstly, progressing from one end of the garden to the other, my failsafe routine consists of deadheading & light weeding

(dusting), mowing, lawn edging and lastly sweeping (vacuuming), including any major pruning on the way round.

Having been a professional gardener for six years it never fails to amuse me how each month follows certain common characteristics, give or take a week or two's grace from year to year. After all, Mother Nature doesn't respect garden borders: As far as She is concerned it's all one large pasture. So, for example, first mow of the year early-March. Sycamore seedlings start springing up end-March. Wild garlic rears its ugly head second week April. Spanish bluebells take over mid-May, and at the end of every May I come home covered in forget-me-not seeds.

CAROLINE BROOME



Centenary Bed - Slip shape



Well pruned and band box neat

Horticultural News



Diane Berger's Open Garden

This Spring the HGS Horticultural Society has an exciting programme of events planned to satisfy even those of you with the greenest of fingers.

On Saturday, May 13 from 10.30am until 12, the society's ever popular, annual Plant Sale will be held at Fellowship House, 136a Willifield Way, NW11 6YD. Come along and choose from hundreds of expertly grown and great value flower and vegetable plants to fill your garden with all manner of delights. Come early as the plants sell out very quickly.

On Saturday, June 17 from 3 to 5.30pm the society will be holding its 283rd Flower Show at the Free Church Hall, Northway, NW11 6PB. The entry night is on Tuesday, June 13 from 7 to 8pm at Fellowship House. Make

sure your roses and sweet peas are in tiptop condition to be in with a chance of a rosette.

For the first time ever on Sunday, June 25, to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the National Gardens Scheme, nine members of the society are opening their gardens for charity.

Their beautiful gardens and one allotment site will be open on the same day, along with plant nursery stalls, a treasure hunt for kids and plenty of tea and cake. This will be a unique opportunity to explore some of the best gardens our area has to offer.

Details of the Open Gardens will be posted on the Society's website, www.hortsoc.co.uk, and on the National Gardens Scheme's website at www.ngs.org.uk.

JAMES ROBBINS



Blooming flower beds in Northway Gardens. The Northway Gardens Organisation would like to thank Streathers Solicitors and Ellis and Co for their generous support, as well as the Residents Association for their grant, and the over 250 Suburb residents without whom these beds would still be a jungle.

Suburb rainfall

The winter of 2016/17 has been dry, although at times it has been so grey that dry was not how we saw it. If we can take winter as being the months of October to March, this winter has received 11 inches of rainfall, compared with an average of 15.4 inches.

Unfortunately (for those who can still enjoy childish things) there was no snow, apart from some very half hearted flurries on January 13. Also, the just over five inches of precipitation in the first three months of the year was two inches short of the

average. This may be good news for the suppliers of automatic watering systems, but is bad news for those who try to garden organically.

There may not have been quite as much rain as some gardeners would have liked, but there have been compensations in wonderful sunsets, and, in late February, only one serious gale. At the time of writing, in early April, the lengthening, very sunny, days are much to be enjoyed.

DIANA IWI
FROM MEADWAY

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